A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE CAREER PATHS
OF FEMALE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS
IN VIRGINIA

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine how three female superintendents attained their positions given the notable underrepresentation of women in superintendency positions. The research questions to be investigated were: (1) What are the forces or factors that have assisted those three women who have become superintendent? (2) What are the forces or factors that have served as barriers in the process those three women went through in achieving appointments as superintendents? (3) What strategies did they use in overcoming barriers to their achievement of appointment as superintendent? (4) What situations or events have been beneficial to their achievement of appointment as superintendent?

A multiple-case study design and multiple data gathering methods were utilized in this study. The career paths of three women employed as public school superintendents in Virginia were investigated.

A questionnaire was developed to collect data for the study. The instrument consisted of twenty-five questions with open-ended responses. Data were collected through interviews and document analysis to determine
the barriers these female superintendents perceived, the strategies they employed to overcome barriers, and the factors which had an impact on their obtaining the position of superintendent.

Material gathered during the interviews were transcribed and coded using the Ethnograph software program. Common patterns, themes and concepts emerged, and key statements and important stories shared by the participants were summarized. The researcher presented a descriptive narrative case study profile of each superintendent. Recommendations for further research were provided.
DEDICATION

For my mother, Odessa Armstrong,
who helped me believe in my dreams.
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I am indebted to a great many kind people who have graciously given of their time, and assistance. May your kindness be returned in abundance.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1909, Ella Flagg Young, the first female superintendent of the Chicago Public School System, predicted a female monopoly of educational leadership. She stated:

Women are destined to rule the schools of every city. I look for a majority of big cities to follow the lead of Chicago in choosing a woman for superintendent. In the near future we will have more women than men in executive charge of the vast educational system. It is woman's natural field, and she is no longer satisfied to do the greatest part of the work and yet be denied leadership. As the first woman to be placed in control of the schools of a big city, it will be my aim to prove that no mistake has been made and to show critics and friends alike that a woman is better qualified for this work than a man (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 18).

However, the reality of Young's prediction was never realized as a seventy-one year period transpired before another female was elected or appointed to the position of superintendent in Chicago. Shakeshaft (1989) noted that in 1980, Ruth B. Love became the second female superintendent of the Chicago Public School District. This second superintendent's belief was less exuberant and hopeful than Ella Flagg Young's. Ruth Love believed that in 1980, women were quietly making history as top leaders in the educational institutions of the country. However, in spite of the
progress which had been made over the years, Love still saw some glaring inequities which cried out for a remedy. Less than one percent of school superintendents were female in 1980.

"But I'm not worried. I know we will learn whatever we need to learn to open the doors of the nation's executive suites and to ride through them with confidence and competence... I am convinced that we will institute a whole new form of management, a feminine form that is rooted in solid human values that nurtures everyone connected with it, that accomplishes practical results with no loss of idealism" (Love, 1980, p. 13).

Nearly three quarters of a century passed between the appointment of the first two women who served as Chicago school superintendents. As history reflects, males dominated the higher administrative positions in public schools, additionally women are underrepresented in leadership positions in all segments of our society (Heid, 1989; Hyle, 1991; Whitaker & Lane, 1990). Consequently, this male leadership was striking particularly in public schools when compared statistically to women who represented seventy percent of all teachers. It was from this very population that school administrators were selected (Chase, 1994).

Looking at the history of schools, Hansot and Tyack (1981) described a distinct pattern (over the last 100 years) of male hegemony in school administration. In a study of school superintendents for the American Association of School Administrators, Cunningham and Hentges (1984), concluded that American school Superintendents continue to be
overwhelmingly white and male. Feistritzer (1988) further supports the notion of male hegemony describing the school administration as an "old boys club," overwhelmingly male, over 45, and predominantly White. In commenting on education's top leaders and their heirs, Kaplan (1985) argued that:

The lamentable absence of women, Blacks and Hispanics from the top of the hierarchy of leadership is a commentary on how real power transposes into leadership in education (p. 15).


Statement of the Problem

The bias toward men in textbooks and in graduate education during the 1900s helped to further promote the many inequities against women administrators (Dardaine-Raggiue, Russo and Harris, 1994). The percentage of women teachers increased in the late 1800s and the early 1900s, but men still held a disproportionate number of administrative jobs. Ortiz and Marshall (1988) pointed out how early policies and initiatives such as the Committee of Ten of 1892 established proposals on the superintendency that included only men. Similarly, the Draper Report (Callahan, 1967) stressed the importance of managing schools as "businesses," with the supervision of instruction as a fundamental task for
superintendents, all of whom were men. It was the efforts of a few strong women—such as Mary Abigail Dodge, Kate Kennedy, Margaret Haley, and Ella Flagg Young—who worked hard for equity within the administrative school system. However, it was not until the late 1960's that significant and substantial access to these higher positions was actualized by women (Thomas, 1986). Despite the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 coupled with existing statutory protections, progress for women in administration has not materialized as predicted by Ella Flagg Young. In 1990 only 5% of 11,346 school districts reported female superintendents (AASA, 1990). Given the current statistics, and the legal right to equal employment opportunities, the representation of women in superintendent positions remains disproportional given their dominant presence in public school education.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to ascertain how three female superintendents attained their positions given the notable underrepresentation of women in superintendancy positions. This study investigated (1) the career paths of female public school superintendents in Virginia, (2) the barriers they perceived, (3) the strategies they employed to overcome barriers, and (4) the factors or forces which enabled them to obtain the position of superintendent.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What are the forces or factors that have assisted those three
women who have become superintendent?

2. What are the forces or factors that have served as barriers in the process those three women went through in achieving appointments as superintendents?

3. What strategies did they use in overcoming barriers to their achievement of appointment as superintendent?

4. What situations or events have been beneficial to their achievement of appointment as superintendent?

A case study design will be used to accomplish the purposes of this study. Participants will be recruited from school districts in Virginia.

Significance of The Study

Women have long been well represented in the teaching profession. Yet, traditionally, there has been an inverse relationship between the number of females qualified to serve in administrative positions in the schools and the rate at which women actually fill these jobs (Ginn, 1989; Kuh & McCarthy, 1989; Ortiz & Marshall, 1988). Although the number of women principals and central office administrators in urban settings seemingly has increased in recent years, a "glass ceiling" has been virtually impervious to challenges thereby preventing many qualified females, especially minority women, from assuming leadership roles (Mertz & McNeely, 1987).

Women have been excluded from the administrative ranks and other positions of authority in education. Attempts to solve this underrepresentation and to explain the experiences of the few women in administrative positions had led to an interest in the impact of the formal

The traditional literature in school administration largely ignores women. It tells us little about their past or present lives, nor do we hear of their struggles (Shakeshaft, 1987). Much of the historical research in educational administration has been dominated by the male experience and perspective. However, research on women in administration, management, and leadership has received increased attention, due primarily to social changes in the past decade. For example, the number of females in the workforce has increased substantially, and more women than ever before are pursuing advanced degrees (Dardaine-Ragguet, 1994).

Definition of Terms

Below is a list of relevant terms and how they are defined to describe important actions and attributes in this study:

**Line administrative positions** refers to the superintendent, deputy or associate superintendent, assistant superintendent; high school principal; high school assistant principal; middle school or junior high school principal; middle school or junior high school assistant principal; elementary school principal; elementary school assistant principal (Mertz and McNeely, 1994).

**Career** is defined as a "pre-established total pattern of organized professional activity, with upward movement through recognized preparatory stages, and advancement based on merit and bearing honor" (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 64). According to Carlson & Schmuck (1981), a
career is an orderly and logical sequence of jobs one holds over a period of time.

**Internal barriers** stemmed from the personal conflicts experienced by women and the personal qualities associated with them. They include aspects of socialization, personal aspiration levels, individual beliefs and attitudes, motivation and self-image (Shakeshaft, 1989).

**External barriers** are obstacles, hinderances, or impediments that precludes a credentialed female from attaining a leadership position; external barriers include societal attitudes, family responsibilities, discrimination, inability to relocate, no available job security, lack of encouragement, lack of on-the-job visibility, and no professional network contact (Pavan, 1986).

**Gender** refers to the socially imposed dichotomy of masculine and feminine roles and character traits; sex was psychological, while gender was cultural (Kromaroe & Treichler, 1985).

**Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited to three women employed as district superintendents in public school systems in the state of Virginia. Data pertinent to the career paths of these female school superintendents were obtained directly from the subjects through in depth-interviews.

**Organization of the Study**

This dissertation will be organized in five chapters:

Chapter One contains the introduction, the background of the problem, statement of the problem, and the purpose of the study. Also,
included in this chapter are the research questions which will guide this study, significance of the study, definitions relating to the study, and limitations of the study.

Chapter Two will provide a review of the literature relevant to the overall research scheme and theoretical framework as outlined in Chapter One.

Chapter Three will focus on the research method, design, sample population, selection procedures, and techniques used to gather data. The study has a multip! case study research design.

Chapter Four will present the research findings generated by the study. A description of developed explanations, and demographic data will also be contained therein.

Chapter Five will draw key conclusions to the research that will be derived from the literature review, description of the research methodology, and summary of the findings. The discussion of findings, summary, recommendations for future research, and conclusion will capture the essence of this study.

The reference section will include a list of books, articles, dissertations, and other writings referenced in the study.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A review of the literature related to career paths of female superintendents is presented in this chapter. It is organized into the following five sections: a historical perspective of women in school management, the present status of women administrators in education, internal and external barriers encountered by women, the methods or strategies which were utilized by women in education administration in overcoming barriers, and various career paths or patterns of women in administration.

Historical Perspective

Throughout American history, the role of women in education has been imbalanced and filled with obstacles. Ortiz and Marshall (1988) described how history has perpetuated the underrepresentation of women in administration, whereby schools are structured such that males serve as administrators and females act as instructors. Men were first put into supervisory roles while women remained in teaching positions for many of the same reasons that women were first hired as teachers. It was felt that women were superior at understanding children and needed to remain in the classroom because they were willing to work for cheaper wages, because they were willing to do what they were told and because they were considered to be transient (waiting for marriage) (Ginn, 1989). Although women dominate the pool of workers in education, it is common knowledge that women often have been excluded from the administrative ranks and other positions of authority in education.
During the colonial period, men dominated teaching and continued to dominate the profession well into this century (Tyack & Strober, 1981). According to Ginn (1989):

The reason for this inequality of female representation is woven into the history of the social structuring of this country. It is embedded in the history of male and female participation in the economy, in changes in cultural norms for women's behavior, in the development of the family, and in the evolution of social organizations such as schools (p. 2).

In the nineteenth century, with the emergence of the publicly supported common school, women finally began to gain real admittance to public education (Loomis, 1978). Women were hired in great numbers because there was a high demand for literate and moral teachers at cheap prices, because teaching came to be seen as a legitimate part of women's sphere, and because women would work at lower wages than men (Ginn, 1989). Since the latter part of the nineteenth century, women have predominated as elementary school teachers. Female teachers represented 66 percent of the teaching force in 1870, and their representation grew to 85 percent by the 1930's (Schmuck, Carlson & Charters, 1981).

During the late 1800's and the early 1900's, the women's rights movement created an awakening in millions of women. Women discovered new potentialities within themselves and within society. Some women fought for women's suffrage, others battled the conditions which adversely affected women and children, while others entered institutions of higher
learning. Gribskov (1980) indicated that this movement produced a college attendance among women which was not equaled until the 1970's.

During this first women's movement, more opportunities were available to women educators in the Midwest and Western sections of the country. Lathrop (1922) pointed out that "there are more women state superintendents at the present time than ever before in the history of the country... The advancement of women in administrative positions is nowhere more evident, with the exception of grade school principalships, than in the county superintendency" (p. 418-419). Gribskov (1980) stated:

The special attitudes of Westerners and Midwesterners toward women's role in education reinforced the burgeoning feminism of the times and created more opportunities for women in school management than seems to have been available elsewhere (p. 83-84).

However, for over three centuries, American women were barred from positions of public authority. Until the early twentieth century, gender disqualified women from participating in political affairs, and for a long time their ability to collaborate for political and social action was stifled by their own acceptance of society's narrow definitions of women's roles and abilities (Bilken and Brannigan, 1980). Between 1900 and 1930, women began to make an impact in administration through political activism and social reform. This period of time is sometimes referred to as the golden age for women in school administration (Hansot & Tyack, 1981).
However, women achieved only modest success. As Shakeshaft (1989) points out:

Between 1900 and 1930, women primarily occupied elementary principalships and county and state superintendencies. By 1928, women held 55% of the elementary principalships, 25% of the county superintendencies, nearly 8% of the secondary school principalships, and 1.6% of the district superintendencies. These advances are not as significant as they might seem. Unlike the higher paying secondary principalships and district superintendencies held by men, elementary principalships and county and state superintendencies were low-paying, low-status, low-power positions (p. 34).

Following World War II the balance changed as many men returned from the armed services and sought employment in school settings. Women steadily lost administrative ground in public schools. "In the 1940's, throughout the United States approximately 41% of elementary principals were women; in the 1950's, 38%; in the 1960's, 22%. By 1980 the figure dropped to less than 20%" (Paddock, 1980, p. 20). Chase (1994) found that "female district superintendents were also underrepresented. The male dominance of the occupation is striking because superintendents rise from the ranks of teachers, 70 percent of whom are women"(p. 36). According to Shakeshaft (1989), "in 1928, only 1.6% of superintendents were women, in 1950, 2.1%, in 1972-73, 0.1%, in 1982-83, 1.8%, and in 1984-85, 3.0%"
(p. 20). The number of female superintendents continued to increase. As reported in The Executive Educator (1994), in 1990, 3.4% of superintendents were female, in 1991, 5.6% (in other words, 594 of the nation's 10,683 K-12 superintendents were women in 1991), and in 1994, 10.2% of superintendents were female. These statistics indicate that women are gaining administrative ground, although slowly. In 1994, 14.5% of high school principals were female, 21.4% of junior high--middle school principals were female, and 44.2% of elementary school principals were female (p. 21).

**Status of Female Administrators**

As reported by Mertz & McNeely (1994), speculation regarding the status and progress of women in school administration has run the gamut of opinion from "the situation has grown steadily worse rather than better" (WEEVA, 1990), to "low and in some cases decreasing (numbers)" (Valverde, 1980), to "in the last decade women have made only minimal gains" (Edson, 1987) to "a small but consistent increase" (Yeakey, Johnston, & Adkison, 1986) to "significant gains [although noting that females and minorities were still grossly underrepresented]" (Jones & Montenegro, 1985).

The gains women have made in moving into line positions in urban districts are substantive, and have put them into the traditional pipeline for upward mobility in administration. Nearly 50% of the current school administrators in urban districts are female, and if the trend of the last 20 years, and especially of the last 10 years continues, their representation will continue to increase (Mertz & McNeely, 1994).
There have been several studies conducted which documented the underrepresentation and career development of female school administrators. A study conducted by Mertz & McNeely (1994) showed that women have made significant progress in moving into administrative position. Fifty-six of the largest urban school districts (in student enrollment) were asked to provide data about the gender of line administrative officeholders, by position, for three points in time: 1972, 1982, and 1992. The data were analyzed by position in the years 1972-1982 and 1982-1992, using t-tests to determine statistical significance. Forty-three of the districts provided complete data for the three periods in time.

The numbers show that over the 20-year period and in each of the time periods 1972-1982 and 1982-1992:

1. The number of women holding line administrative positions increased, and the increases were statistically significant.

2. The number of female officeholders increased in each of the 43 districts, and the increases were statistically significant.

3. The number of female officeholders increased in every position, and the increases were statistically significant in each position.

Despite the notable gains women have made in urban districts, it is important to recognize that women are still underrepresented in the top line positions. Only 17% of the superintendents of urban school districts are female, 31% of the deputy superintendents are female, and 35% of the assistant superintendents are female. (Mertz & McNeely, 1994).

In their study, Chase & Bell (1986, 1989, 1991), conducted intensive interviews with female school superintendents. According to Chase & Bell (1994) the interviews consisted of a series of questions about the tasks and
problems women superintendents face in their current positions, the 
professional and interpersonal contexts in which they work, their work 
histories, the relationship between their personal and professional lives, 
and the differences that gender and race or ethnicity have made to their 
work experiences. The sample consisted of twenty-seven female 
superintendents in cities, towns, and rural areas across the United States. 
Of the thirty women contacted, twenty-seven agreed to participate in the 
study. The researchers were interested in the experiences of these female 
superintendents, the similarities and the differences of their experiences 
as compared to male educational leaders, as well as the similarities and 
differences of those women in other male-dominated and white-male 
dominated professions.

In their study, Jones and Montenegro (1982) sought to assess the 
status of females in school administration, therefore, they inquired about 
more than the superintendency. They asked for information regarding the 
deputy, assistant and associate superintendents and also principals. Since 
it was reported in this manner, aggregated for the two categories rather 
than divided by level and position, the use of the results for comparatives 
purposes was limited. The researchers reported that only 41 states plus 
the District of Columbia had provided useable data and four states had 
provided samples rather than totals. A few years later, Jones and 
Montenegro (1985) traced changes in these categories.

There have been a variety of explanations provided to explain the 
lack of advancement of women in administration. Those reasons range from 
bias against women at one end of the continuum to belief that women are 
emotionally weak at the other end of the continuum. The explanations
include discriminatory practices against women, limits placed upon women by themselves or by others because of traditions, career expectations, and social norms, and the changing nature of school administration (Thomas, 1986). Many researchers have developed theories that attempt to explain the absence of women in education administration. Role expectations for women denote them as less serious candidates for important or powerful positions (Martin, Harrison, & Dinitto, 1983). Women were often regarded as workers with short-term commitments who were expected to leave the educational field for marriage. These negative attitudes and opinions were constant roadblocks for advancement. As Loomis and Wild (1978) succinctly summarize, the education system in the United States is generally structured like a traditional home: men run the schools and women nurture the learners.

Stockard (1980) stated that women's underrepresentation in school administration may be seen as a result of limited opportunities to attain such positions. Men currently hold the balance of power and are reluctant to allow women access to administrative positions (Harder and Waldo, 1983). Shakeshaft (1989) stated:

Where administrators were not elected by popular, vote women seeking administrative positions still had to confront the ever present bias of local school board members, most of whom were men. Then, as now, schoolmen tended to hire those most like themselves, white middle-aged Protestant males. Not surprisingly, they chose those with whom they felt most comfortable,
and most members of school boards did not feel at ease with women (p. 40).

The following three views or models have been used by Estler (1975) to analyze the underrepresentation of female administrators: (1) the women's place model, (2) the discrimination model, and (3) the meritocracy model (Bilken and Brannigan, 1980).

The women's place model acknowledged different socialization patterns for young boys and girls that were institutionally reinforced. These patterns continued in adult life. The women's place model was based on the assumption that the absence of women in leadership positions was due to the different socialization patterns of men and women. As they grew up, women were taught to be the family caretakers and nurturers and that a woman's place was at home. Society did not admire the pursuit of a career requiring planning and many long hours of hard work that took women away from their families.

The discrimination model suggested that preferential hiring and promotional practices explained the sexist imbalance in educational administration. This model is supported by an examination of the number of years it takes women to achieve the rank of principal or superintendent (Lyman and Speizer, 1980). This number is determined by the number of years in constant service in education. Estler's (1975) analysis shows that almost the same absolute number of female and male teachers hold the credentials to become administrators. However, "the median number of years in teaching before appointment to the elementary principalship is 5 years for males and 15 years for females" (Estler, 1975, p. 363).

The meritocracy model assumes that we live in a world in which
people are promoted according to their ability. Therefore, it implies men must be more competent than women because they are chosen so often (Bilken and Brannigan, 1980).

When linked together, Estler's (1975) concepts provided an argument that demonstrated the existence of sex roles and occupational stereotypes. Considerable evidence supported the argument that sex role stereotypes and sex role socialization reduced the probabilities that women will actively seek leadership positions and that organizations will be responsive to those who do (Adkisson, 1981).

**Barriers Encountered by Women Administrators**

In order to reach the top position in school administration, women have had to overcome many hurdles. The literature categorizes these hurdles as internal and external barriers. Internal barriers consist of the feelings women have about themselves and their roles (Waddell, 1994). These barriers can be controlled through individual changes. External barriers are the institutional structures and practices that restrict women's access to administrative positions (Waddell, 1994).

These enduring structural and cultural barriers which block the movement of women into educational administration, can be grouped into the following major areas: mobility (placeboundedness), family anchors (traditional family arrangements), subtle and blatant forms of sex and racial or ethnic discrimination, and white men's control over gatekeeping positions (Chase, 1994).

Ortiz (1980) found that women were reluctant to openly acknowledge their aspirations for fear of reprisals. To verbalize any desires or to
identify any administrative goals could prove to be disastrous. Ortiz (1980) found that women who expressed an interest in administration risked negative sanctions as indicated in the following story:

When I first started teaching, I knew I wanted to be an administrator. Like a fool, I told everyone how anxious I was for tenure so I could apply for an administrative position. During my third year at the school, the principal called me in. He said, "I know you'd be happier in a different working situation than teaching, so I'd like to tell you that you are not expected to get tenure this spring" (p. 58).

In a study conducted by Edson (1987), it was noted that many of the respondents were concerned that females frequently failed to support other female administrative aspirants. A coordinator explained:

I'm concerned about the harm I see women who have made it are doing to other women in this district. The men are supportive; it's the women who are jealous and sabotaging. Now that a few women have made it to the higher levels, they have the opportunity to "do in" other women. At least the men who are in power before were more innocent about it (p. 272).

The importance of sponsorship and female role models cannot be overstated (Estler, 1975; Weber, Feldman & Poling, 1980). Shakeshaft (1989) points out that the lack of opportunity to see other women in a variety of administrative positions, to hear how these women describe their lives, and to compare themselves with women just one step farther up the
hierarchy have been cited as reasons why women have not moved into administrative positions in larger numbers (Davis, 1978; Gasser, 1975; Schmuck, 1976).

Another major obstacle for women was lack of support, encouragement, and conflicts with job demands and family responsibilities (Paddock, 1981). These obstacles often made career advancement difficult, if not impossible.

Studies conducted by Chase and Bell (1994), Andrews (1984), Gasser (1975) and Schmuck (1976) document the existence of overt sex discrimination. Women often experienced sex discrimination, but denied the fact that school boards, boards of trustees, departments of educational administration and educational administrators continued to participate in this discriminatory practice against women. The denial of discrimination is a survival mechanism used by women. Acknowledging and directly confronting discrimination might prove to be harmful to a woman's career. So she "ignores bias, heightens her social sensitiveness, and moves forward" (Erickson, 1984, p. 101). Research and statistics indicate that sexual discrimination does exist in hiring practices in educational administration (Lang 1983). According to Moran (1992):

Job patterns suggest discrimination. Although women account for more than half the students working toward Ph.D.s in education administration, fewer than 5 percent of the nation's 15,557 superintendents are women. And although more than two-thirds of public school teachers are women, nearly 80 percent of
principals are men. Clearly, there is a glass ceiling for women in education. It begins in the school building, and it blocks the way to the central office (p. 39).

Timpano (1976) maintained that sex discrimination was practiced through "filtering methods" that filter out qualified women. These filtering methods include:

1. "Recruiting filters" included limiting the announcement of a job opening to "within the district" when the district had few, if any, women certified as administrators.

2. "Application filters" included downgrading an applicant for a top administrative position by suggesting that she apply for a lesser administrative or teaching position.

3. "Selection criteria filters" included applying dual selection criteria by allowing men to skip one or more rungs on the career ladder but requiring women to climb each step.

4. Included in "interview filters" were questions such as, "Aren't you concerned about returning home alone late in the evenings from meetings?"

5. Lastly, "selection decision filters" included rejecting a woman because she was aggressive, but hiring a man because he was.

After reviewing existing dissertation research, Shakeshaft (1989) identified additional roadblocks to achieving the superintendency, they include:

- conflict with husband's career
- organizational structure that limits opportunities
• androcentrism
• lack of formal preparation
• few administrative learning experiences
• lack of support by male faculty (graduate school)
• sexist curriculum materials in graduate school
• lack of finances
• expectation of traditional roles for women
• socialization and sex-role stereotyping
• emp'-yers' negative attitudes toward women
• access to formal and informal networks
• lack of geographic mobility
• mentors

According to Dardaine-Raguet et al. (1994), passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 (The Glass Ceiling Act which is part of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 is designed to combat gender-based discrimination) coupled with existing statutory protections (Title VII which prohibits employment discrimination based not only on gender, but also on race, religion, and country of national origin, and also Title IX, which prohibits discrimination based on sex in any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance) may help to alter the deplorable situation of women in administration by shattering the glass ceiling thereby making leadership positions more accessible to qualified female educators.

Formal and informal job contact practices are dimensions of contemporary employment discrimination, particularly as these practices prevent women from obtaining public superintendencies. Women are often excluded from formal and informal networks; therefore, they do not hear
about available administrative positions, they are not known by others, and they have few people to approach for counsel (Davis, 1978; Gasser, 1975; Schmuck, 1976; Stevenson, 1974). In order to obtain an administrative position, women must have access to a network that provides them with information on job openings. According to Granovetter (1974), regardless of competency or merit those without the right contacts are penalized in the job market. Granovetter notes:

Personal contacts are of paramount importance to connecting people to jobs. Better jobs are found through contacts, and the best jobs, the ones with the highest pay and prestige and affording the greatest satisfaction to those in them, are most apt to be filled this way (p. 22).

Women who aspire to leadership positions face barriers today that are not much different than the barriers that prevented women from becoming high school principals in 1900 or superintendents in 1930. As stated by Marshall (1986), "given all the barriers both internal and external, given the issues of role prejudice, and benign neglect, given the societal context within which women are constantly working and the apparent presence of a "glass ceiling," there are women who are seeking the superintendency" (p. 12).

**Strategies**

A review of the literature indicates that mentoring (Bova and Phillips, 1984; Daresh and Playko, 1990; Dodgson, 1986; Fleming, 1991; Kram, 1985; Mertz, 1987; ) and networking (Davis, 1978; Gasser, 1975;
Schmuck, 1976; Stevenson, 1974) are strategies used most often by women to overcome barriers.

Ashburn, Mann, and Purdue (1987) defined mentoring as "the establishment of a personal relationship for the purpose of professional instruction and guidance." Lester (1981) noted that mentoring is an important part of adult learning because of its holistic and individualized approach to experiential learning, defined by Sheehy (1976) as "one who takes an active interest in the career development of another person . . . a non-parental career role model who actively provides guidance, support, and opportunities for the protege."

Using mentoring relationships to enhance personal and professional growth is not a new idea. It is a classic concept which has existed since ancient times. During the past few years, there has been a dramatic rebirth of mentoring as a practical and effective method for developing personnel (Fleming, 1991). A mentor can be an important ally to a female's career. Women need mentors to help them gain greater access to administrative positions. Dodgson's (1986) study on whether women in education needed mentors suggested that women in education could benefit from mentors at two particular times in their career. The first time is when a woman is advancing from teacher to vice-principal. The second time a mentor would be helpful is when the woman is progressing to a senior administrative position.

Fleming (1991) stated:

As a training and development tool, mentoring is not new. It has its origins in Homer's epic poem, The Odyssey. Odysseus entrusted the education of his son
Telemachus to his trusted friend and counsellor, Mentor. The foresight of Odysseus using an older experienced person to guide and train an inexperienced person has not been lost throughout history and today, more and more, it is seen as an essential tool to assist the newcomer upon his or her entry into a profession. With the expert help of older people, the younger aspiring worker will be able to move up the career ladder more quickly, have more job satisfaction, and will therefore be a better asset to the organization (p. 28).

Mentoring functions help shape and guide the lives of younger colleagues through personal growth, and professional advancement. Mentors provide motivation, support, shares their expertise, recommends, promotes growth, acts as a role model, gives relevant information, counsels and advises, acts as a sponsor, offers encouragement, arranges administrative experiences, acts as a listener, serves as a confidant, acts as a communicator for the protege and helps the protege establish strong formal and informal networks.

Bova and Phillips (1984) concluded that "mentoring relationships have been found to be critically important to developing professionals. They are especially important in overcoming reality shock--the conflict that arises when the difference between what one thinks a job is all about and what it is really all about" (p. 18).

Networking is a powerful career enhancement strategy used by women to overcome barriers. Welch (1980) defines networking as:

...the process of developing and using your contacts
for information, advice, and more support as you pursue
your career...it's linking the women you know to the
women they know in an ever-expanding communications
network...it's helping each other to become more
effective in the work world--with more clout, more
money, more know-how, more self-confidence...in sum,
it's getting together to get ahead (p. 15).

Traditionally, women have been outside the informal, unconscious
and private male system of communication. The consequence of this
exclusion has been the denial of relevant information about what is
happening, or about to happen, in the organization as well as advance
that there needed to be a system that could compete with the Old Boy's
Club, a common vehicle for providing women with both contacts and
information; that system was an informal and a formal communications
network operating within and across organizations.

Informal networks among administrators are important sources of
information, support, and sponsorship (Adkison, 1981). Administrative
organizations provide formal networks for women. They can be found on
the national level, statewide level, district-wide level, and on the
interdistrict level. Women are provided with opportunities to network with
other women by becoming members of these organizations and actively
participating in the following organizations: National Council for
Administrative Women in Education, The Women's Caucus of the American
Association of School Administrators, the National Coalition of Women
School Executives, and the National Association of Women Deans,
Administrators, and Counselors (Shakeshaft, 1989). Organizational hierarchies in school systems should be flattened in order to provide women with more opportunities for career advancement. According to Fennel et al. (1978) the structural arrangements of organizational settings deprive women of legitimacy in leadership positions. Sergiovanni (1992) indicated that modern management is a male creation that replaced emphasis on family and community with emphasis on individual ambition and other personal considerations. As Kaufman and Richardson (1982) explain, "Most contemporary social science models [of which modern school management is one]--the set of concepts that help social scientists select problems organize information, and pursue inquiries--are based on the lives men lead" (p. XIII). Kanter (1977) advocated organizational change to improve the opportunity structure for all employees. Kanter's theory was applied to public schools by Wheatley (1979). She argued that the professional structure of school organizations severely restricts opportunities for women. She also indicated that the professional bureaucratic structure provided a clear career ladder, however, it had few positions that provide entry to administration. As stated by Shakeshaft (1989):

The organizational context in which women work and in which hiring occurs must be changed. Ways of changing this hiring context that have proven successful have included providing support systems and networks for women, offer consciousness-raising groups that allow women to analyze the culture in which they work, teaching women the male world, altering the structure of traditional professional education organizations while
developing ones specifically to meet the needs of women, and finally creating jobs for women that change the balance and nature of the internal administrative context (p. 135).

Additional tactics used to increase the number of women in administration include: the active recruitment of women for administrative programs, providing women with financial aid in the form of scholarships and stipends which would enable them to pursue full-time graduate work and to attend university summer sessions, workshops, and training programs, and internships which would provide actual experience in administrative situations.

**Career Paths**


Research regarding the career paths of women in administration is modeled upon male-generated assumptions of careers. The very notion of talking about career paths for women administrators is colored by the definition, generated from male experience, of career (Shakeshaft, 1989). Carlson and Schmuck (1981) define a career as an "orderly and logical sequence of jobs one holds over a period of time" (p. 117). Whereas men visualize a career as a progression of jobs on a path leading upward with recognition and reward implied, Hennig and Jardim (1976) indicate women see a career as personal growth, self-fulfillment, satisfaction, contributing to others, and doing what one wants to do. The difference in career
definition between men and women may account for some of the differences in roles of women and men in education administration (Crandall, 1988).

A career pattern in education administration would most likely begin with entrance in the teaching profession and include several years as a vice principal, a principal, a central office position, and lead to the superintendency. The hierarchical structure of a career pattern in school administration typically involves a straight line from teacher to principal to superintendent (Schmuck, 1976). Carlson (1972) described the typical career pattern of a public school superintendent as relatively short: the principalship to the assistant superintendent to the superintendency.

Shakeshaft (1989) indicated that:

Women generally moved into school administration through one of two types of positions: the elementary principalship or a position as a subject matter specialist, particularly in reading, language, or fine arts. The typical woman in administration remains at this level; if she moves, the woman administrator will be promoted to a supervisory position in the central office, as director or coordinator of curriculum or some other district-wide program. And there the majority of women in administration stay (p. 87).

In their studies, Gaertner (1981), Stockard (1984), and Ortiz (1982), found three common career paths generally used by women to move into school administration. These paths included specialist positions, supervisory posts, and elementary principalships.
Schmuck (1976) has suggested that the career patterns of women administrators may be quite different from men's since they may hold many staff positions between their tenure of customary line positions. Paddock (1981), found women administrators generally have career patterns that are similar to their male colleagues, with the exception of later entry to administration and career discontinuities.

In research conducted by Ortiz (1982), two distinct types of career patterns for women in education administration were noted: the career patterns of women who occupy the specialist, supervisory, and elementary principalships and the career patterns of women who occupy the secondary principals, associate, assistant, and deputy superintendencies and superintendencies.

In a study conducted by McDade and Drake (1982), questionnaires were sent to 142 women superintendents of public school districts. Responses from 102 superintendents were received. The researchers requested information regarding career paths among other data.

Six career paths for female superintendents were identified, four of these career paths contained career interruptions, and two of the career paths did not contain career interruptions. A content analysis of career path data resulted in the following career paths:

1. Noninterrupted/line: moved directly from teaching or counseling to line positions such as assistant principal, principal, director of elementary or secondary education, assistant superintendent, and superintendent.

2. Noninterrupted/specialization: moved through one or more specialized positions as well as one or more line positions in
arriving at the superintendency. Specialization included
language arts, remedial reading, psychology, special
education, library, media, curriculum, instruction, research,
and federal programs.

3. **Interrupted/family/line:** one or more interruptions in a direct
line to the superintendency because of family responsibilities.

4. **Interrupted/family/specialization:** interrupted a career path
for family responsibilities; otherwise, the path was
specialization.

5. **Interrupted/other/line:** interrupted a direct line to the
superintendency because of reasons other than family,
including returning to graduate school as a doctoral student,
graduate assistant, research assistant, or intern, or becoming
a secretary.

6. **Interrupted/other/specialization:** interrupted the career path
for reasons other than that of family responsibilities.

   Specialization was primary the reason for the interruption
   (p. 214).

Shakeshaft (1989) indicated that "women have attained positions of
every type in the administrative hierarchy. They are superintendents of
big city schools, they are education commissioners, they are presidents of
universities, and principals of elementary schools. Some manage large
systems with thousands of employees and budgets of millions. Others still
preside over one-room schools. Wherever there are public schools, there
are women holding positions of leadership" (p. 66).
Summary of the Review of Literature

This review of the literature has examined the historical role of women in educational administration, the status and progress of women in school administration, the barriers encountered by women administrators, the strategies used most often by women to overcome barriers, and the specific career paths used most often by women aspiring to administrative levels beyond the principalship.

There is no shortage of literature concerning women in educational administration. Research that has been conducted can be categorized into the following four themes: (1) the history/status of women administrators, (2) characteristics of women administrators, (3) career patterns/career decisions, and (4) the attitudes of teachers, administrators, and school board members toward women in their roles as educational administrators.

The review of literature on women in public school administration has attempted to explain the absence of women in educational administration in terms of socialization and sex-role stereotypes.

The literature provides numerous suggestions for improving women’s access to leadership positions. Several programs, projects and professional organizations and associations have been established to help support women seeking administrative positions. Studies that investigate strategies for increasing the number of women administrators are needed.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the research method utilized in this study, the selection of the sample, the interview protocol used for inquiry, the method of data collection and the procedures used for data analysis. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the validity and reliability of the research methods.

Research Design

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to ascertain how three females superintendents attained their positions given the notable underrepresentation of women in superintendency positions. The study profiled three female public school superintendents in Virginia. The study investigated the career paths of female public school superintendents, the barriers they perceived, the strategies they employed to overcome barriers, and the factors which had an impact on their obtaining the position of superintendent.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

Research Question 1: What are the forces or factors that have assisted those three women who have become superintendent?

Research Question 2: What are the forces or factors that have
achieving appointments as superintendents?

**Research Question 3:** What strategies did they use in overcoming barriers to their achievement of appointment as superintendent?

**Research Question 4:** What situations or events have been beneficial to their achievement of appointment as superintendent?

**Design of the Study**

The research design used in this study is the case study approach. The case study is an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group (Smith, 1978). According to Guba & Lincoln (1981, p. 371) one of the purposes of the case study is to "reveal the properties of the class" under investigation. Anderson, et al. (1975) find that the case study lends itself to "an intensive, detailed analysis and description of...a phenomenon in the context of its environment" (p.46). Franklin and Osborne (1971) argue that the case study provides "a method of organizing data for the purpose of analyzing the life of a social unit" (p. 23).

This study of the career paths of female school superintendents incorporated the multiple-case study design since "the evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling (than that of single-case design) and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust" (Yin, 1984, p. 48). Yin (1984) describes this approach as follows:

> Each individual case study consists of a "whole" study, in which convergent evidence is sought regarding the facts and conclusions for the case; each case's conclusions are then considered to be the information
needing replication by other individual cases. Both the individual cases and the multiple-case results can and should be the focus of a summary report.

Sample

A list of current public school superintendents was obtained from the Virginia State Department of Education. According to this listing, Virginia had 135 district school superintendents during the 1995-96 school year. Of the 135 school districts, 94 were county school systems, 39 were city school districts, and 2 were town school systems. Fifteen of these school districts were led by female superintendents. Purposeful sampling was the method used to select the population for the study. According to Wiersma (1991), purposeful sampling is selection based on the characteristics of the individuals relevant to the research problem (p. 265). The researcher selected three women as the sample for this study. The final selection of participants was based on the interviewees' availability and willingness to participate in the study. The population included one African American, and two Caucasians. The female superintendents came from rural districts, small-town or suburban districts, and urban districts with student enrollments ranging from six hundred to twenty-six hundred. The women's ages ranged from 45 years to 58 years. At the time of the interviews, two of the participants reported that they were married, and one participant was widowed. One participant did not have children, and two of the participants had adult children.

Three female superintendents freely elected to participate and to be interviewed by the researcher. This number represents a sample of the
population. Ethical concerns for privacy and confidentiality were addressed in the study. As indicated by Best & Kahn (1993), the ethical researcher holds all information that he or she may gather about the subject in strict confidence, disguising the participants identity in all records and reports (p. 46). In order to gain consent for the interview, the participants were assured that all data collected would be treated confidentiality.

**Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol used in this study is a modified version of the original questionnaire developed and administered by Castro (1992) in her state-wide study of twenty-five female public school district superintendents in Illinois. In her study, Castro examined the opinions, and the feelings of these superintendents as they related to their career path. The questionnaire used by Castro (1992) was modeled after those used in similar studies which were conducted by Temmen, 1982; and Wideman, 1987.

The interview protocol contained twenty-five open-ended questions. A standardized format was used in order to elicit as much information from the superintendents, and also to generate as much spontaneous narrative as possible.

During the interview, an interview guide was used to ask consistently the same questions of each superintendent. Patton (1990) indicated that the interview guide keeps the interaction focused, but allows individual perspectives and experiences to emerge. He also stated that:

The general interview guide approach involves
outlining a set of issues that are to be explored with each respondent before interviewing begins. The issues in the outline need not be taken in any particular order and the actual wording of questions to elicit responses about those issues is not determined in advance. The interview guide simply serves as a basic checklist during the interview to make sure that all relevant topic areas are covered (p. 280).

The interview consisted of a series of questions related to experiences and specific behaviors, opinions and values, feelings regarding various issues, knowledge questions, biographical and background information, information regarding the demographics of school districts, information related to career paths, mentors, barriers encountered, and strategies used to overcome barriers.

**Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted prior to the administration of the actual interviews. Wiersma (1991) suggested that the items of the questionnaire be tried out on a small group before preparing the final form of the questionnaire. The pretesting of the questionnaire could uncover deficiencies that were not apparent when reviewing the items, it could help to identify misunderstandings and ambiguities, and also indicate to the researcher those items which are useless or inadequate. The interview protocol was pilot tested on a female superintendent who adequately represented the individuals who composed the group under
investigation. This individual provided feedback in relation to the length of the interview, the sequence, validity, thoroughness, and clarity of the questions, and the overall format. Suggestions from the pilot study participant was included in the final version of the interview protocol.

Data Collection Techniques

More than one data collection technique was used as suggested by the technique of triangulation. Interviewing was the primary data collection technique used in this study. In addition to the interviews which were conducted with the superintendents and the chairpersons of the school boards, publicly available information regarding the school districts were collected. The researcher read local newspapers for clues regarding the relationship between the community and the schools, and for public attitudes toward the superintendent.

According to Patton (1990) "the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in or on someone else's mind" (p. 278). The purpose of open-ended interviewing is not to put things in someone's mind (for example, the interviewer's preconceived categories for organizing the world) but to access the perspective of the person being interviewed. Best & Kahn (1993) indicated that interviews are used to gather information regarding an individual's experiences and knowledge; his or her opinions, beliefs, and feelings; and demographic data (p. 202). Interview questions which help to determine past or current information, as well as predictions for the future, should also be included in the interview protocol.

The researcher began collecting data in the Spring of 1996 through
personal interviews. The data collection process was completed during the Summer of 1996. Each superintendent and each board member was first contacted by letter which introduced the researcher and the research project. The mailing also included an interview appointment card, and a letter of endorsement from the Executive Director of The Virginia Association of School Superintendents. The letter was followed up with telephone calls.

The researcher requested permission to record each interview. Each interview was recorded on tape and later transcribed. This procedure eliminated the necessity of notetaking during the interview which could be distracting to both the interviewer and the interviewee.

The superintendents' formal interviews were conducted by this researcher and were approximately one hour to two hours in length. The school board member's interview was approximately twenty minutes in length. The interviews contained open-ended questions. These questions addressed issues that were relevant to the research questions considered by this study.

Data Analysis

According to Patton (1990), the first step of qualitative data analysis is "organizing the data." Data obtained from interviews may be organized into domains or categories according to individual responses or by grouping answers together across respondents. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) indicated that data analysis should begin with a review of the proposal or plan with which the work began.
The next stage of data analysis reported by Patton (1990) is known as "description." Various aspects of the study are described by the researcher. These aspects include the setting, both temporally and physically; the individuals being studied; the purpose of any activities examined; the viewpoints of participants, and the effects of any activities on the participants. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) noted that the second step of data analysis involves scanning. This step involves rereading the data. According to LeCompte and Preissle (1993), "rereading has two purposes: one is to check the data for completeness, and the second is to reacquaint the researcher with territory previously covered" (p. 236).

The final phase of data analysis as described by Patton (1990) is "interpretation." As Patton stated:

Interpretation involves explaining the findings, answering "why" questions, attaching significance to particular results, and putting patterns into an analytic framework. It is tempting to rush into the creative work of interpreting the data before doing the detailed, hard work of putting together coherent answers to major descriptive questions. But description comes first. The discipline and rigor of qualitative analysis depend on presenting solid descriptive data....in such a way that others reading the results can understand and draw their own interpretations (p. 375).
Coding the Data

After all interviews were completed, the tapes were transcribed and analyzed. The researcher organized and coded the material using the Ethnograph computer software program. Strauss & Corbin (1990) "define open coding as the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data" (p. 61). The transcripts were coded by questions. The researcher reviewed the transcripts, identified common patterns and themes, key statements, and important stories shared by the participants regarding their experiences along the career paths. From this data, conclusions were drawn regarding the underlying reasons for the underrepresentation of females in top level administrative positions in Virginia.

Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the researcher is interested in persuading his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, and worth taking account of. Lincoln and Guba indicated that the conventional criteria used to establish trustworthiness includes "internal validity", "external validity," "reliability," and "objectivity." The criteria used within the conventional paradigm is not appropriate to the naturalistic paradigm. The naturalist’s equivalents for these conventional terms are "credibility," "transferability," "dependability," and "confirmability".

Techniques used to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research were described by Lincoln and Guba. These techniques used to establish credibility include prolonged engagement, persistent observation,
triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, member checks, collection of referential adequacy materials.

The researcher implemented the following techniques which were used to establish trustworthiness for this study:

The interview protocol was reviewed by the pilot study participant. The participant was asked to provide suggestions regarding the sequence, validity, thoroughness, and clarity of the interview questions, and the overall format of the instrument.

Another technique used to establish credibility was the repeated examination of the interview tapes. The researcher replayed the tapes several times and made notes in the margins of the transcripts regarding emotions displayed, interactions, and anything else which impressed the interviewer as being important.

The last technique used to establish credibility was peer examination. Colleagues commented on findings as they emerged. Upon completion of the study, a summary of the research findings will be shared with the participants.

**Summary**

A multiple-case study approach was utilized in this study which addressed the underrepresentation of female public school superintendents. Three female administrators, who served as superintendents in the state of Virginia, were selected to participate in this study.

The researcher used standardized open-ended interviewing as the
data gathering technique to determine the career paths of these female superintendents. The interview protocol, the instrument of inquiry, was modified by the researcher. The original questionnaire was administered in a previous study.

Qualitative data were collected and analyzed to answer the four research questions of the study. Steps were taken in the design to insure that ethical concerns and issues of trust were addressed.

In Chapter IV, the narrative accounts of personal experiences, viewpoints, beliefs, feelings, concerns, understandings, and perceptions of the participants, are presented. Chapter V will summarize the study, discuss the conclusions and provide recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to ascertain how three female superintendents attained their positions given the notable underrepresentation of women in superintendency positions. The study focused on one group of females in a single occupation. It profiled three female public school superintendents in Virginia. The study investigated the career paths of female public school superintendents, the barriers they perceived, the strategies they employed to overcome barriers, and the factors which had an impact on their obtaining the position of superintendent.

The purpose of this chapter was to present the information obtained through personal interviews. The case study analyses in this chapter have been structured as follows: the first section contains a profile summary of the superintendent. The second section contains a narrative summary and the major themes that emerged from the transcribed interviews and the coding regarding the following: (1) the forces or factors that assisted those three women who have become superintendents, (2) the forces or factors which served as barriers for those three women who were striving for the superintendency, (3) the strategies which were used by those three women to overcome the barriers to their appointments as superintendents, and (4) the situations or events which have been beneficial to their achievement of appointment as superintendent are presented.

The women in the study remained anonymous because of the personal nature of the reported data. Narrative accounts offered by the female
superintendents were used at various times to illustrate points and to
describe their experiences.

The participants in this study were assured of the confidentiality of
their interviews. Only pseudonyms are used to identify the participants
and their districts.
PROFILE SUMMARY

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Name: Carolyn Crosby
Age: 45 years
Birthplace: Virginia
Ethnicity: Caucasian
Marital status: Married
Number of children: 2 (step-children)
Education: Doctorate

SCHOOL DISTRICT INFORMATION

Type of school district: Suburban/Rural
Student population: 16,000
Socio-economic make-up of the community: middle-class
Board composition: Seven members (four males, three females)
NARRATIVE SUMMARY

CAROLYN CROSBY

At the time data were collected for this study, Carolyn Crosby had completed her second year as superintendent in a small rural school district which included three schools, serving a student body of nearly 1,600. After serving two successful years in this county, Carolyn made a decision to pursue another personal goal. She accepted her second position as superintendent in a neighboring school district following a national search. Carolyn could be considered as a trend setter, she was the first female superintendent in both school districts.

Carolyn's successful years as a superintendent in her former school district paved the way for another female to move into the top administrative position. Her belief was that, "I was replaced by a woman in that district, so I must have done a good job" (Appendix E, p. 143).

In Carolyn's eyes, the hiring of another female as superintendent confirmed the school board's belief that women can be effective leaders. This belief is illustrated by the following comment which was expressed to Carolyn by a school board member:

You won't believe the comments I've been getting since it became public that we hired a woman. I said, "Probably people are saying, I can't believe you hired another woman." And I laughed, and she said "No, what I'm hearing is thank heavens you hired another woman" (Appendix E, p. 158).

Community members supported the school board's decision to hire
another female as superintendent as reflected in the positive comments shared by a school board member.

**Research Question #1: What are the forces or factors that have assisted those three women who have become superintendent?**

**Leadership Characteristics**

When Carolyn was asked to share her leadership characteristics which enabled her to move into a top leadership position, she put it this way, "Perseverance, resilience, which I would define as the ability to bounce back from setbacks, flexibility and determination" (Appendix E, p. 151).

Carolyn's strength and determination to reach her goals played a major role in her efforts to obtain a superintendent's position.

**Dynamics of the Community**

In discussing the political forces in the second school district in which Carolyn was superintendent, she explained that:

My perception is that we have opposing political forces. We have on one hand, conservative people who have been here a long time, and would prefer not to see the tax rate go up with all of the money necessary for debt services to build all of these new schools. So you have the old-time people who would prefer to see less spending by the schools, then, you have the people who are moving here. Many of these people who are moving here come from Metropolitan areas where they were used to certain types of sophisticated services by county
government, and they are willing to pay for it
(Appendix E, p. 141).

Many changes occurred as the population continued to change. These changes had an impact on the school district. The people in the community were concerned with providing children with an education, however increased taxation became an important issue to the portion of the population whose children have completed their education.

**Population Within the District**

The school district was experiencing a rapid growth rate. The total student enrollment consisted of approximately 16,000 students. When asked to explain why this area was experiencing such a rapid growth rate and why this area had suddenly become so popular for so many people, Carolyn replied:

> As far as I can see, is that more and more people are choosing to commute from here to Washington, DC. and for families who might happen to have one person that works in Richmond and one that works in Washington, this would be the ideal thing. The commuter rail keeps extending through the south, and there is still a favorable tax rate here and so forth. It is, as I said, one of the fifty fastest growing counties in America (Appendix E, p. 140).

This environmental factor was a characteristic which helped to enhance Carolyn's access to the superintendency. The community was experiencing a social change. Younger professional families were moving
into the area. These individuals brought new ideas and attitudes into the community.

The rapid growth rate in the student population dictated a need for additional schools. As Carolyn indicated, "We are currently in a capital improvement plan that would open four new schools in the next four to five years" (Appendix E, p. 141).

These new schools would require additional administrative positions which could provide more opportunities for women. These positions could provide women with the experiences needed to travel the route to the superintendency. Carolyn commented on the number of female participants which took part in the recent search for superintendent in which she was one of the top three finalists. "Two of the three finalists were women. That's the only place I know of that the majority of finalists were women" (Appendix E, p. 142-143).

**Environmental Changes**

Many changes occurred as the community's population continued to expand. The community and the school system were moving in a new direction. As Carolyn stated, "It's sort of a new day, a new Board of Supervisors, and the first elected Black candidate, and a lot of people moving in from other areas" (Appendix E, p. 142). Carolyn goes on to explain:

My predecessor who retired, was retirement age, male, and sometimes people will tend to look for maybe the opposite of what they had when they are ready to go in a new direction (Appendix E, p. 143).
Support Groups

Carolyn credits family members and colleagues for providing her with the encouragement and support she needed in order to pursue her goal of becoming superintendent of a school district. Carolyn summed up her feelings when she stated:

"The other thing to which I attribute my success has been family support and advice and help of mentors. My family support, I mean that, I went back to childhood and I had my grandmother and my mother who encouraged me to achieve (Appendix E, p. 147-148).

Not only did Carolyn have the support of her mother and grandmother, she also had the support of her husband. Carolyn's husband played a vital role in assisting her in the pursuit of her goals. In her eyes, there has never been any question of her husband not valuing her career as much as she does. He has accompanied her from school district to school district. After relocating, both found opportunities for job satisfaction wherever they went. Everything she has been able to accomplish has been because of her husband's support. Carolyn said, "What's been critical, helpful to me, is my husband's totally open attitude toward moving where I needed to move. We'll do what we need to do" (Appendix E, p. 148).

Relocating did not cause any problems in their marriage. Carolyn's husband has been willing to relocate in order for Carolyn to advance in her career. She indicated, "Fortunately, he works in a nearby school district. I haven't really inconvenienced him that much" (Appendix E, p. 148).
The community had various civic and professional organizations which provided opportunities for women to assume leadership positions. Women were also represented on the school board. This provided an environment that was conducive to females being hired in leadership roles. Carolyn's membership in the following civic and professional organizations provided support for her as she pursued her goal: Alpha Delta Kappa Sorority, American Association of School Administrators, Virginia Association of Superintendents, and the Rotary Club. She said:

"Alpha Delta Kappa, which is a professional women's educational honorary sorority, it's mostly teachers. We have 2,000 members. We have two new chapters here in this county. That's been a group that has been a real nice support group to belong to" (Appendix E, p. 156).

These organizations provided many benefits for Carolyn, especially when she attended professional conferences.

**Research Question #2: What are the forces or factors that have served as barriers in the process those three women went through in achieving appointments as superintendents?**

**Barriers**

The barriers which emerged from the analysis of the data were grouped into three categories. The first category could be described as gender related barriers. The second category of barriers were related to the lack of opportunity for administrative experiences, such as experience in finance, and budgeting. Finally, the third category of barriers were described as stereotyping or career role socialization.
Gender Related Barriers

in our society, gender plays a major role in reaching one's aspirations and achievements. In a discussion of what Carolyn sees as the major barriers she faced while seeking the position as superintendent, Carolyn shared the following experience:

It was harder for me in a rural school district to get a job as an assistant principal. It just didn't happen. It was very difficult. That was the most frustrating time in my career. It was harder to get an assistant principal's job that it was to get a job as superintendent, in terms of when I first started looking until I was successful, when I first started trying to get a job. I think, as I mentioned to you earlier, that the prevailing notion of an assistant principal in that part of the country at that time, they needed a male. Of course, you needed someone to be tough and gruff with the kids, that had to be a man. In a middle school, you had to be there with the kids, so that couldn't be a woman. You had to be able to stay late and have keys to the building which might be disadvantageous to a woman because she might get hurt locking up the building. You had to have the strength to roll around the handtruck with textbooks on it and the soft drinks for the drink machine and that's what assistant principals
did. I had a very hard time breaking into that
(Appendix E, p. 152-153).

In spite of these barriers, Carolyn was determined to reach her goal. She stated: "I did not let the fact that I had to apply for superintendent sixteen times before I got one, I did not let that bother me. I did not become negative about it" (Appendix E, p. 160). After conferring with a search firm regarding the format for writing her resume, Carolyn revised her resume so that it focused on those qualities, skills and characteristics that school boards are seeking in a superintendent.

When asked if she felt whether it was now easier for women to get jobs as superintendents, Carolyn commented:

At this point in time, it's still somewhat harder for a woman to get a job as a superintendent than it is a man. Because today, twenty-five, thirty years later, people are having a little difficulty with the concept of a woman in the superintendent's role similar to what I am talking about thirty years ago (Appendix E, p. 154).

The top level administrative positions are still dominated by men. Many school boards are still of the mindset that men should be the leaders and women should be the teachers. The "glass ceiling" is still a barrier that women face as they seek top level administrative positions. Although they possess the credentials, the difficulty of acquiring these positions continue to exist.

**Lack of Opportunity**

According to Carolyn, the second major barrier that women
encounter is the lack of opportunity to acquire the needed experience in areas pertaining to financial planning, the budgeting process, facilities management and personnel management.

Experience is a barrier. The problem with getting experience is somewhat gender related and somewhat that all people go through. It's hard for a man to get his first administrative job too, I am sure (Appendix E, p. 152).

Women candidates for the superintendency must have strong qualifications, which includes concrete job experiences. They must have excellent leadership skills in order to be considered as a viable candidate for the position.

**Stereotyping and Career Socialization**

A major problem in education is that people perceive men as the ones who should be the leaders in administrative positions. As Carolyn stated:

The men were the assistant principals, the women were the curriculum coordinators and the supervisors who were not in the line authority, but the staff authority (Appendix E, p. 153).

The perception that women know children and curriculum makes it easier for them to obtain positions such as curriculum coordinators and supervisors. These positions alone do not provide the wealth of experiences needed to become superintendent.

Another example of stereotyping can be found in the different interpretations of the same management styles used by men and women.
The following comment illustrates this point:

It's not a sign of weakness that you consult others first. Although I do think that we could be stereotyped and if a man consulted others he was practicing good management, if we consulted others, we are indecisive, we don't know what to do. I think it's a sort of stereotype when a man is assertive where a woman is aggressive. I think those things are still there (Appendix E, p. 159-160).

Carolyn expressed a strong desire to involve the community and staff members in the decision making process of the school district. She defined her approach to leadership as participatory management.

Everything that I am thinking of is some form of collaboration, inclusive leadership, and participatory decision making. You don't feel the need to be the one who makes all the decisions (Appendix E, p. 159).

As Carolyn began her first year as superintendent in this school district, she knew that she had the appropriate leadership skills and management skills needed in order to effectively guide the school district. She empowered other staff members and welcomed their involvement in the decision making process through the school based management concept. The school community found this style acceptable because of the opportunities created through shared decision making.

**Research Question #3: What strategies did they use in overcoming barriers to their achievement of appointment as superintendent?**
Strategies

Carolyn developed and used various strategies to overcome the barriers which are faced by female school administrators. Her responses are discussed in the categories of mentors, networks and preparation for the position of superintendent.

Mentors

Carolyn's mentors played an important role in her development as an administrator. These shared relationships provided her with invaluable benefits such as friendship, acceptance, counseling, information, advice, accessibility, feedback, technical assistance/resources, a sounding board/listener, experience, challenging assignments, exposure, visibility and security. These mentors encouraged and supported her in her endeavors. She states:

I had very important mentors, they were all males interestingly enough, because there were no women role models or mentors available in the administrative ranks that I was aware of or that I knew. I had a principal under whom I taught for nine and one-half years. He was an administrative mentor for me. I did an internship at the school. There was a professor in graduate school, actually two, that were very much a mentor who encouraged me when I was having so much trouble getting a job as an assistant principal
(Appendix E, p. 149).

Carolyn indicated that developing positive, strong and trusting
mentoring relationships is essential for women and men who are interested in becoming superintendent of a school district.

**Networks**

The visibility that is experienced as a result of active participation in professional organizations can be used as a strategy for gaining access to the superintendency. Carolyn stressed the importance of belonging to professional organizations. She said:

> Women's Caucus of AASA is a good group. We have a newsletter that is kind of intermittent, but at AASA national conventions, we'll have women and minority affairs breakfasts, and a speaker every November. You meet a lot of good people. It's a good networking opportunity (Appendix E, p. 155-156).

Carolyn suggested that women should network just as often as men. Networking is a strategy which is often used to gain access to higher level positions. Networking offers the following benefits: provide an additional support system, new professional acquaintances who can share time, experiences and mutual problems, friendships, training, opportunities to grow professionally, and new insights.

**Preparation**

Carolyn commented on the importance of having the preparation one needs in order to qualify for the position of superintendent. Candidates for the superintendency are required to have two kinds of preparation. In addition to solid on-the-job experience as an administrator, a high level of academic preparation (a university degree beyond the bachelor's) is
needed for the position of superintendent. Also, candidates must be eligible for state superintendent certification. Carolyn’s plans included both kinds of preparation for the position of superintendent. She explains:

I was working on my doctoral degree in education administration. Near the end of program, about 1983, and I would have been 32 years old, a classroom teacher, I had finished all of the course work for my six-year degree and also for the doctoral program. But, looking into various licensing, I discovered that I needed two more courses to qualify for a superintendent's license. I elected to take the classes, although I did not need them for the degree

(Appendix E, p. 143-144).

Carolyn knew that having expertise in fiscal management and budgeting was often a requirement of the position. She also knew that school boards expected candidates to have training and experience in areas such as curriculum and instruction, experience in school facilities (new construction), and expertise in handling increasing or decreasing student enrollment. She stated:

I thought, if I were a school board member, what is it that I would think that a woman might not know or be able to do that's important for a superintendent to do.

First thing that come to my mind was finance. So, I
made it my business to learn everything I could about school finance (Appendix E, p. 154).

Carolyn also strived to strengthen her skills in school law, the implementation of policies and networking with businesses/industries. She reached her goals through adequate planning and preparation. With the proper credentials in hand, she knew she would be considered a serious candidate for a superintendency. By 1996, she had received her second appointment as a superintendent of a school district.

**Research Question #4: What situations or events have been beneficial to their achievement of appointment as superintendent?**

**Career Path**

There is not a traditional career path that must be followed in order to become a superintendent. Various career paths can provide the necessary leadership skills, knowledge, real-life experiences, and political know-how needed to lead a school system. During her career, Carolyn held various positions at the school building level and also at the central office level. These positions helped to provide her with concrete job experience. These valuable experiences helped to strengthen her qualifications to become superintendent. Her career path consisted of five steps to the superintendency. These steps included the following positions: a junior high school teacher, an elementary school assistant principal, an elementary school principal, the director of special services, an assistant superintendent, and the superintendent. She described her career path in the following manner:

I was a teacher at a junior high school for ten and one-
half years. I taught ninth grade social studies, language arts, and whatever anyone didn't want to teach that year. My principal could always come to me and ask me to take one more class and I always would. I enjoyed that immensely, and I stayed at that school, the only school I ever taught for ten and one-half years. During that time, I did the majority of work on my doctorate in administration. Then, in the same school system, I got my first administrative experience. I was promoted to assistant principal in the middle of the year and became an elementary school principal. During that semester that I was assistant principal, I finished my doctorate, received my doctorate. I had an application on file with a school district in Virginia for the previous two years. During that spring both an elementary principalship and also a music supervisor's, (my husband is an educator, music educator), position became available in that school district. We applied for it and we both got the positions. So, we moved up in 1985, moved up to Virginia, and I have been in Virginia every since. I was with that district for eight years beginning in '85. In the first three years, I was an elementary principal and then I moved to central office as Director of Special Services, a position that I held for three years that involved supervising special education, gifted and
talented, guidance, other student services, suspensions, expulsions, the business partnership program, and some of the things that weren't such fun. In my last two years, I was in a position called the Dean of Instructional Leadership, which was an unusual title to have to use. It was equivalent to the position of assistant superintendent. They have recently changed the dean part to assistant superintendent. In that, I picked up the responsibility for secondary and high school supervision, some of the things that I had before. It was director of special services plus more. It involved a great deal of budget work which turned out to be invaluable preparation for the superintendency. The county instructional budget was for half a million dollars and myself and one other person did most of the budgeting for instruction. So, that was the biggest factor in helping to prepare me to work with budgets in a small school district. So, after two years in that position, that was the end of my eight years in this county. This was a system which grew from 10,000 students to 13,000 while I was there. So that was a period of growth also. Then I went to another school district in Virginia as division superintendent for three years. The enrollment went from 1,500 to 1,600 while I was there. I had a very small staff, five people in the
central office. I had more people reporting to me in my former school district as the Director of Special Services, than I had reporting to me as superintendent in this district, but it was a very good experience. I enjoyed it very much. Because of the small staff I had to do a little bit of everything. I had to be very involved in construction, very involved in the budget, and very involved in all of the business matters and affairs. It was a very good place for me to be at the right time (Appendix E, p. 145-146).

Carolyn held one teaching position in the same junior high school. She enjoyed being in the classroom, and decided to remain in that position for ten and one-half years. After a period of time, however, she decided she was ready for a change. Her mentors were aware of her goals. They encouraged and supported her in her endeavors. She knew she was ready to take the next step. That step would take her into the administrative world. While serving as an elementary school principal, she had many opportunities to develop her leadership skills, to develop valuable expertise in curriculum and instruction, and in program development. These experiences helped to prepare her for the superintendency and helped a school board to take her seriously.

In Search Of... 

One of the most important and most difficult tasks that any school board must undertake, is the selection of a new superintendent. When hiring a chief executive, school boards must identify those leadership
abilities, management skills, and personal characteristics they are seeking in a superintendent.

While discussing the superintendent search process, Carolyn indicated that: "I was actually invited to apply. They probably sent out two or three hundred applications, so it is not like I was hand picked, one of fifty" (Appendix E, p. 152). The school board reviewed the applications of fifty candidates. Seven candidates were invited to the school district for an interview. After the interviews were conducted, three finalists were selected. Carolyn was one of the top three finalist. The school board members made a site visit to her school district. They spoke to a full spectrum of people who worked with her. After this visit was made, the school board voted unanimously to hire Carolyn as their new superintendent. School board members were interviewed by various reporters. The following comments which indicated why Carolyn was selected as the new superintendent, appeared in the local newspaper. One school board member stated:

The board was impressed by Crosby's strong instructional leadership, her commitment to school improvement and her demonstrated record. We saw Dr. Crosby as putting together a total package.

Another board member described her as:

An organized administrator who has the ability to figure out what a school system needs and make it happen.

Still another board member remarked:

In her two years in the 1,500 student system, she is
credited with improving communications with parents, school board members, and the Board of Supervisors.

Carolyn's ultimate goal had been to become an assistant superintendent or a superintendent by July 1, 1996. By her targeted date, she had received her second appointment as a superintendent. When asked what set her apart from those females who had not been successful in obtaining the superintendency, she replied, "My good fortune in having the mentors that I had, family support that I had, the role models that I had, and probably attitude" (Appendix E, p. 150).

Carolyn indicated that the following characteristics are needed in order to be successful: determination, patience, confidence, and a sense of humor. She realizes that the job of a superintendent is extremely difficult, challenging and demanding. Today, school leaders are faced with increasing demands, eroding resources, and all of the social problems of society (drugs, violence, integration and immigration). When asked how she coped with intense job stress and public scrutiny, Carolyn responded: "I always enjoyed challenges, particularly if it's something that someone tells me that I can't do. The more challenging it is, the more satisfaction I have afterwards" (Appendix E, p. 150).
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Name: Satoria Stills
Age: 58 years
Birthplace: Virginia
Ethnicity: Caucasian
Marital status: Married
Number of children: 0
Education: Doctorate

SCHOOL DISTRICT INFORMATION

Type of school district: Suburban
Student population: 14,700
Socio-economic make-up of the community: middle-class
Board composition: Five members (four males, one female)
NARRATIVE SUMMARY

SATORIA STILL

At the time data were collected for this study, Satoria Stills had completed her second year as superintendent in an urban/suburban school district. There were twenty-seven schools located in this school district. There were seventeen elementary schools, four middle schools, four senior high schools, one vocational-technical school, and one alternative education center. Approximately 14,700 students were enrolled in the schools.

When Satoria accepted the position of superintendent, she held the distinction of being the first female superintendent in the school district's history. The school district was founded in 1870. Since that time, the school board had a history of hiring men for the top leadership position. In the one hundred and twenty-seven years of the school district's existence, there were only eleven individuals who were appointed as superintendent of schools. The average tenure of a school superintendent is decreasing. Rapid turnover of superintendents has long been a problem especially in cities. However, this factor was never an issue for this district. The leaders of this school district remained in their positions as superintendents for many years. During a superintendent search, school board members in this district carefully evaluated each candidate. They were looking for the best candidate who would fit the profile needed for the district. When the school board hired a superintendent, they looked forward to a long-term relationship. According to Satoria, "The man who was superintendent before me had served fourteen years and the man before him had served sixteen years."
Research Question #1: What are the forces or factors that have assisted those three women who have become superintendent?

Leadership Characteristics

When Satoria was asked to identify the leadership characteristics which she felt helped to propel her to a top leadership position, she said, "I am persistent, optimistic, and confident." She was persistent in pursuing her career goals. She was always optimistic about attaining her ultimate goal which was to become superintendent. When the position of superintendent became available in her school district, she knew that she had a good chance of being considered seriously for the position. She was confident in knowing that "people in this community have great respect for me as a leader."

Dynamics of the Community

In discussing the political culture of the school district, Satoria explained that:

It is a culture that values schools. Part of the political culture is that this county is one of the few school divisions anywhere that has a real history of hiring superintendents from within. That was valued and respected in the community.

The school district developed its' own pool of candidates. Satoria worked in this same district in various capacities during her entire educational career. She was able to gain the experience and educational training needed in order to be considered a viable candidate. As the school board chairperson indicated: "She came up through the ranks and knows
about the schools." Satoria explained, "I love this school system. I know it and I enjoy working with its people." As a homegrown candidate, she was viewed by her colleagues as a person of substance, and recognized as an educational leader in the community.

**Population Within the District**

The school district experienced a decline in their student population before Satoria became superintendent. The researcher asked Satoria to explain this situation. She replied:

Our school system went through, in the ten years prior to, a decline in population of about 5,000 students. The people who were having babies, just didn't have them any more.

The community was aging. The area was not attracting families with children. The school district became smaller and smaller. Concerned about the declining rate of students, the school district decided to explore various ways in which they could increase their student population. The district decided to implement an open enrollment plan which would attract students from neighboring school districts. Satoria goes on to explain how the plan would operate:

We opened up a choice plan and so 700 children come to us from other districts by choice. It is very limited choice in that it is on a space available basis, first apply, first opportunity. It works well for all of the districts. People are happier when they go where they want to go.
As a result of this plan, the district experienced a slight increase in enrollment over a five-year period of time.

**Support Groups**

Satoria indicated that women undergo more scrutiny than men undergo once they decide to become a superintendent. Because women remain a minority in the profession, they often have smaller professional networks to call upon for support. Thus, the support of family, friends, and colleagues has added importance to these women. Satoria's husband is one of her strongest supporters. His constant encouragement has played a key role in her success. It has allowed her to freely respond to time demands, to focus on career matters, and to rely on his understanding and interest in her job. As she indicated: "You must have the support of your spouse to be successful in this job. My husband is very supportive."

She also credits her colleagues for providing her with the help and support she needed while pursuing her goals. She stated:

> They have always been very generous, not in a monetary way, but in emotional support and in allowing you a lot of freedom in how you schedule your job. My colleagues, who were males, were helpful.

**Research Question #2: What are the forces or factors that have served as barriers in the process those three women went through in achieving appointments as superintendents?**

**Barriers**

While talking with Satoria about the barriers confronting women in administration, she indicated that she had not been confronted with any
barriers. She said, "I don't think there were any." She did indicate however, that she is aware of the many roadblocks which still exist for many women when they are seeking leadership positions. These include a school board's biases, the profession's lack of attention to succession and mentoring, societal attitudes, a growing disenchantment with the superintendency as a career aspiration, and selection criteria that are unduly limiting. Satoria stated that many of the barriers women face are not all external barriers. Various roadblocks are internal, self-imposed barriers. She remarked:

I don't believe as many women want administrative positions as they think they want them. I say that because out of at least six years having been greatly involved in searching for people to fill key administrative roles, I find that women are much more selective in that they only want instructional roles or the key school roles and the men who are ambitious are willing to take anything to stay on the moving track.

Satoria suggested that women should plan for their career advancement and not eliminate those experiences which would prove to be beneficial to them in the future. She said, "You have to get yourself in the pipeline. You have to be in the right position to take the next step. Very few people can leap frog from a to z. You've got to go in turn."

**Gender Related Barriers**

Satoria informed the researcher that she had not encountered any gender related barriers during her career in the school district. She
describes her experiences in the following way:

I was the first female director in this division. There had been no other females in the cabinet level. None of the males ever put me down, or made me feel less intellectual. I was always accepted as one of them. They were very helpful. They opened a lot of doors for me.

As the first female leader in the district, Satoria was a role model for other females. She paved the way for others to follow. Satoria reflected: "Young women in this district remark when I come and visit their schools and classrooms say to me, it's great to have a woman superintendent."

**Lack of Opportunity**

Satoria worked in the same district during her entire career. When asked if "the lack of opportunity" was ever a barrier for her, she indicated that she did not consider it as a barrier. During her years in the system, she had traveled through the ranks of the school system and had many opportunities for growth and many job experiences. Her success as a teacher and mid-level administrator was the spark which ignited her desire to become a superintendent.

**Stereotyping and Career Socialization**

Although the top level administrative positions are held primarily by men, school boards and school districts have discovered that female superintendents are competent and successful in this male-dominated arena. Satoria adds:

I think that there are fewer women who are driven to
leadership roles. When women want it enough, they will go get it. It seems to me that some of the cultural things have made it easier. One thing I think about is the evening news. Now, we are back to having primarily male anchors. None of us in this area think about women anchoring the evening news. The first time anybody had a woman anchor on the news, you listened to her voice and you noticed her hair and not it's just as normal and natural as can be. So, whether you like them or not, the Barbara Walters and the Connie Chung's make people comfortable whether it was ten o'clock at night or six o'clock at night. Seeing them in authoritative looking roles paves the way in people's minds.

Women who are interested in becoming educational leaders need to see other women in leadership positions. As Satoria remarked: "Just seeing a few role models helps them have different aspirations."

Research Question #3: What strategies did they use in overcoming barriers to their achievement of appointment as superintendent?

Strategies

Satoria used various strategies to help her achieve the appointment as superintendent of schools. Her strategies included the following: (1) being a homegrown candidate, (2) developing relationships with mentors, (3) networking opportunities, and (4) educational preparation and certification for the superintendency.
Homegrown Candidate

Satoria had been employed by her district for thirty-six years. She never entertained the thought of relocating to another school district. She loved this area, and wanted to remain here. She explained that:

I knew that I didn't want to relocate. This was home, we were happy living here. I had never applied for any job in another school division. I would not have relocated to any of the systems next door.

This was a very stable community which had a history of looking within its own ranks for qualified leaders and selecting candidates whom they felt would make excellent administrators. Satoria indicated to the researcher that:

There was not an expectation that the person would necessarily be hired from within, but as I understand it, there are a lot of divisions where it is pretty well understood that they won't be considered from within. There was certainly an expectation that someone from within would have a fair chance.

Internal candidates went through the same screening process as out-of-district applicants. Among the eight finalists who were invited to be interviewed for the superintendent position, four of the candidates came from within the county system. Satoria Stills was one of the eight finalists.

Mentors

Satoria was successful due to the help, support and encouragement from a number of key people in her life. These individuals were the
mentors who coached her, provided her with opportunities to showcase her talents, and took a personal interest in her career advancement. Her role models included two professors from the University and two administrators who worked in her school district.

**Networks**

Satoria felt that networking was an important function for women who were interested in pursuing a top leadership position. She indicated that those women who are unsuccessful in their pursuits, are usually the ones who have not developed their networking skills.

Through careful planning, Satoria used networking as a major strategy in achieving her goals. It was important for her to belong to community organizations and also to be recognized as a leader in the community. She suggested that women join, become active, and be highly visible in professional associations. She recalled: "I got pretty systematic about being visible in the community, not in any aggressive or high-profile kind of way, but just shmoozing." She also suggested that women should work hard to be seen in the places that impact children, including community circles.

Satoria is involved in many community affairs. She belongs to the following organizations: The United Way Board, American Red Cross, The Methodist Church, Phi Delta Kappa. When asked if she received any support from these organizations, she indicated that they provided her with great networking opportunities, important contacts, and good ideas.

**Preparation**

Satoria indicated that administrators should be articulate and
knowledgeable about educational issues. Prior career planning and educational preparation were the two components which helped her to reach her goal of becoming superintendent. She shared this thought with the researcher:

I was always happy in every job I had, but I was always figuring out where it would be fun to go next. I've always been looking for what's the next step on the ladder.

Satoria brings to the job a wealth of experience including a bachelor degree in secondary education - history, master's degree in liberal studies - history concentration, and a doctorate in education administration. She indicated that:

The doctorate was not a requirement for the position, but it certainly made me more of a person that the board absolutely had to consider.

**Research Question #4: What situations or events have been beneficial to their achievement of appointment as superintendent?**

**The Search**

When the current superintendent informed the school board of his retirement, the school board contacted a search firm and started the search procedure for a new superintendent. The school board members were interested in attracting the best possible candidates available. This search identified top female candidates as well as male candidates. When asked about the past tradition of hiring all men for the superintendent's position, Satoria commented on the new direction the community was taking:
I think we are certainly in many ways a conservative community, and probably a little more liberal in accepting women in leadership roles. One had not been seen before so, I think that for sometime people knew that I might apply and I think they accepted that at face value.

**Career Path**


She indicated that she had never served as a school principal before becoming a superintendent. She did not view this as a missing rung on her career ladder.

When asked why did she think the school board selected her, she replied: "School board members wanted new vision and leaders who display a high energy level. I have always been an achiever, and I am highly competitive."

When asked what was the one factor which set her apart from those females who had been unsuccessful in obtaining a superintendent's position, she replied: "I've been more focused."
In Search Of... 

The school board must sell the community as a good place not only to work, but also to live. This wasn't necessary in her case because she had worked in this community for her entire career. She loved the system and had no desire to relocate.

I think you have to realize that when you get this close to the top of the pyramid, there are a lot of people trying to fit into the same narrow niches. It just takes time for the right position to work out for you. Some of the encouraging things are that women are moving on now to do the step-up deal. They took a very small school division as a starting point, now they are moving up to larger ones. At one point last spring, four were open, and two were filled by women. So, I think there are a lot of signs out there that demonstrates what I believe, that the openings are there.

During an interview with the school board chairman, it was stated that:

We chose her for a combination of several things. She is a visionary person, someone who can persuade others to buy into her ideas. She can get others to work together. She has an overriding concern for all of the children. It became apparent that she is concerned about the welfare of every child. I would say these were two of the main reasons we chose her. School board
members interviewed applicants from inside and outside the county system. They selected Stills, saying she was the top candidate.

The community was very comfortable in working with Satoria. Her years of service as their Assistant Superintendent enabled the community to see her as an effective leader. The school district was operating smoothly, and they did not feel the need to experience change that could occur with the hiring of a superintendent who was not familiar with the district. Due to her excellent track record, there was a comfort level in hiring Satoria as superintendent.
PROFILE SUMMARY

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Name: Natalie Nash
Age: 54 years
Birthplace: Alabama
Ethnicity: African American
Marital status: Widowed
Number of children: 2
Education: Doctorate

SCHOOL DISTRICT INFORMATION

Type of school district: Urban
Student population: 28,000
Socio-economic make-up of the community: lower-economic
Board composition: Nine members (five males, four females)
NARRATIVE SUMMARY

NATALIE NASH

At the time data were collected for this study, Natalie Nash had completed her first year as the superintendent in an predominantly African-American urban school district that was truly cosmopolitan in nature and makeup.

Natalie was the third female superintendent employed by the school district. The retiring superintendent was also an African-American female. The school board did not have a preference regarding the gender and race of a superintendent. The school board searched for the best qualified candidate to fill the position of superintendent. The last two candidates that were hired as superintendents were African-American females.

The district operates 30 elementary schools, eight middle schools, nine high schools, seven exceptional education facilities (students with special needs, between the ages of 2 and 22 are served through a comprehensive program of exceptional education which includes programs for all handicapping conditions), three vocational education schools (vocational and adult education opportunities are offered through these three centers), a nationally recognized arts and humanities centers and participates in a regional Governor's School for international studies and a regional mathematics and science center which houses the Challenger Space Center. Each school features innovative partnerships and mentorships with agencies, area colleges and universities, area corporations, and
cultural and professional organizations. The district serves a student body of nearly 28,000.

**Research Question #1: What are the forces of factors that have assisted those three women who have become superintendent?**

**Leadership Characteristics**

Natalie's drive, vision, determination and faith helped her to achieve her goals. She spoke about her vision:

"I have a very clear vision. I'm focused on whatever goal I'm working toward, and I disregard barriers." Her vision statement for the school district reads: "To make our public schools the standard by which all other urban school districts are measured, demonstrating high student achievement, peaceable schools and a supportive learning community."

Natalie had pledged to improve the school district. She articulated that: "I came here on a mission. That God-given mission is to see that students will succeed. I knew there would be barriers. None of that matters. We're going to move forward."

In an interview with the school board chairperson, it was stated that:

The schools have major problems--not all of them caused by the system, but problems nonetheless. Ms. Nash has arrived with some good ideas about how to fix them, and she is moving forward with resolute expeditiousness.

Natalie's main objective was to help children and to provide the best education possible for them. She reflected:

I had seen so many children badly educated, or really
not educated, but shunned to the side and placed in remedial classes and given what I call pablum education, not a full rich diet. I had seen too many cases of school districts priding themselves on educating a few children well and not caring what happened to the rest of them. I thought, if I could get to be a superintendent, I would be able to change that.

After accepting the position of superintendent, she was in a position in which she could make her dream become a reality.

*Dynamics of the Community*

The school district goals include improving academic performance, fostering safer schools, enhancing the school division's image, and involving parents and the community. Natalie stressed the importance of community involvement. With increased community involvement, every school could have three kinds of partnerships: business, church and a civic organization or college/university. She also believed that part of a child's education involves spiritual and moral guidance. To that end, she sought the involvement of area congregations. At a program held at Fifth Baptist Church which attracted about 60 area clergy, she informed her audience that:

I am seeking 5,000 mentors from the churches. I want them to work with the children on a regular basis. Mentors are needed to serve as advocates for children who may not get the support they need at home. About 25 churches already are working closely with a dozen
schools, many of them are elementary schools.

A school board member indicated that:

The partnerships are a necessary entity that's needed in our schools. I'm looking forward to it being one of the strongest support systems that the community can provide. Many churches have members who are educators and they have the influence to provide certain services to the children and the community. This collaboration will impact our communities like none before.

As a result of Natalie's efforts, the school system gained 24 new school-community partnerships, and expanded homework centers at city libraries.

**Population Within the District**

When asked to comment on the school district's history regarding student enrollment, Natalie explained in this manner:

Over the years, after desegregation, enrollment declined dramatically. I understand they once had 50,000 children. We are starting to see slight increases in enrollment. We now have 28,000 students. The projection is that it will either remain stable or increase slightly over the next few years.

**Changes**

Natalie's predecessor was a "homegrown superintendent." She was an "insider" who had worked in this district during her entire educational
career. She was well known and respected in the community. Natalie goes on to explain:

The district had a series of superintendents who stayed for short periods of time. They were basically change agents. This district is a very traditional place. In each case, there was a political furor of one kind or another, and they opted to choose an insider who had been here for all of her career as a superintendent just prior to me. She was superintendent for four years. The board felt that things had gotten a little too stagnant, so they decided they wanted another change agent, and that's me.

When she was appointed as superintendent, she pledged to improve the school district. Natalie considered herself as a "change agent." After surveying the school district, she felt that a few changes needed to be made. Her initiatives were part of her efforts to reform the school district. It was reported in an article which appeared in the local newspaper, that the officers of the Education Association felt that she was moving too fast, causing confusion and fear among the staff members. She assured the association that many of the changes she was seeking would increase the accountability of teachers and administrators, and promote community involvement in the schools.

"One of the biggest changes is an employee appraisal system that moves from input based to a results based approach" she said. "I'm not interested in evaluating on the basis of effort, but results." Those results
include student behavior, suspensions, attendance and grades. The appraisal system will begin with principals. This marks the first time in recent years that principals report directly to the superintendent.

The absence rate of students and teachers was an area in which Natalie felt needed improvement. She indicated that:

The schools are dogged by poor attendance, poor attendance translates to dismal student achievement, and teacher attendance affects student attendance.

Natalie targeted the sporting, social or cultural events that took teachers away from their classrooms. She explains:

There was a big controversy over a custom that I challenged in this community. The custom of teachers taking three days off, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, to go to a sporting tournament involving historically Black colleges. Most of the teachers graduated from those colleges. They had been going and using sick leave, and I said "No."

Instruction virtually shut down in some schools for three days. Schools could not hire substitutes because the substitutes were also at the games. Her clampdown on sick and personal leave so angered teachers that at least 900 teachers filed a mass grievance against her. Teachers also approved a resolution denouncing her method and manner of addressing staff attendance. The resolution said she used "threats and intimidation that resulted in a biased and thoughtless indictment of all school employees, especially teachers."
Natalie remarked:

They told me I was destroying a Black tradition. I reminded them of our more ancient tradition, as a people, traditions around caring for our children. I went all the way back to Africa. Now let's lay these traditions side by side. When you do that, there's not a lot people can say. People have entrenched customs that are detrimental to children's welfare. When you encounter them, it's a problem. What we are after is a cultural change to demonstrate to children that we value education.

The changes in the attendance policy caused conflict between various school board members and the superintendent. Natalie and the school board chairperson clashed publicly on this issue. She reflected:

This was a most stressful period. There were many times when board members, based on their constituency, were more willing to go with the flow, the old customs and traditions. Certain board members aligned themselves with the teachers' union because they wanted the teachers to vote for them. Elections were coming up.

Natalie received a great deal of community support for the stand that she took. She commented: "Were it not for community support saying, yes, she is right, I would have encountered significant challenges."

After remaining silent for awhile, Natalie said:
Judging from the past, this is the first year that test scores were up substantially, teacher absenteeism went down, students were in school more. I think all of those things are good indicators that the decisions that I made were good decisions. That was a very interesting period, but we got through it.

Support Groups

Natalie's considers her family members as her support group. They have always been very influential, encouraging and supportive of her.

My parents, and grandparents, and other family members are supportive. They were people who infused in me the idea that you should move in the direction that you think God wants you to move in. I had two family members precede me at Harvard. I would say that I come from a high-achieving family. That was a motivator for me. We were expected to do well.

Research Question #2: What are the forces or factors that have served as barriers in the process those three women went through in achieving appointments as superintendents?

Barriers

Natalie experienced barriers within her school district. She did not receive the type of cooperation and support she had hoped for when she decided to attend graduate school. She indicated:

My school district would not give me a sabbatical to go back to school despite the fact that I had worked for
them for twenty years and I had never requested a sabbatical before. They lost my paperwork asking for leave four times. After awhile, it just became almost like slapstick comedy, except that it was serious to me. I know that no matter what various people feel, it you are meant to do something, you have to do it.

So, she decided to leave the system and enroll in graduate school. "It took me three years, full time. I didn't go back to work except to do some part-time consulting."

_Lack of Opportunity_

She commented on the reasons why some women find it difficult to advance in their field:

I've been talking to women in other organizations, not just in education, and someone told me who works for a law firm, that they had read about me and admired me. They said, "You realize we can't do this in private industry. The glass ceiling is definitely there. If anybody spoke up the way you spoke up, they probably would be destined not to get a promotion." Because the profession is still primarily dominated by men, the only women they promote are women who will smile, and be nice, and not rock the boat.

_Stereotyping and Career Socialization_

"Calm," "direct," "inclusive," and "no nonsense," is the way in which Natalie described her management style. She stated:
I cling tenaciously to principle. There are very few women that I know (I've met some while I was in New York), who will stand up to people. Most women buckle under, and compromise and give in. They think they have to do that in order to sustain themselves. That's the way we have been socialized. A lot of women don't believe women should be men's bosses just like men don't believe that. A lot of women still do not believe that and many believe that if they are in that position, that they still must be very soft and feminine. They don't see how they can be both. You must understand that you are there to support people, not to boss them around.

Natalie was an individual who stood by her principles. This helped her to be strongly considered for the superintendent's position because the district was seeking candidates who exemplified this characteristic.

**Research Question #3: What strategies did they use in overcoming barriers to their achievement of appointment as superintendent?**

**Strategies**

The strategies Natalie used to help her achieve her ultimate goal of becoming superintendent included the following: the help and assistance of mentors, networking opportunities, and her preparation (education and experience) for the position.

**Mentors**

Natalie is a very spiritual individual. During her career, she received help from various individuals. However, she gives credit to God
for being her spiritual mentor.

My mentor, a superintendent in Philadelphia, was very helpful. She is a woman of principle, a very strong woman who always worked on behalf of children. Long before I met my mentor, my faith, not a person, was my mentor. I pray and meditate everyday. I am spiritually guided.

**Networks**

Being a member of various organizations provides Natalie with many networking opportunities. She is in constant contact with superintendents who are located around the country.

I just came back from the Superintendent's Work Conference at Columbia. The sixty superintendents in attendance will be networked on the internet so that we can talk to each other. This is a good support system.

She also belongs to the Kiwanis Club, and participates in the Leadership Mentor Training Program located in her county. These organizations also provide networking opportunities.

**Preparation**

Natalie's experiences and educational training provided her with the credentials she needed in order to present herself as a viable candidate for the superintendency. She stated that:

I've got two masters, one from Harvard and one from the University of Maryland. I had decided earlier on, that in addition to having the superintendency as my career
goal, that I was going to get my doctorate from Harvard.

**Research Question #4: What situations or events have been beneficial to their achievement of appointment as superintendent?**

**Career Path**

When Natalie first entered the educational field, she set her career goals. She said:

I decided that (when I was in my twenties) if I was going to work in education, I wanted to work in a position where I could affect a large number of students, larger than I was able to affect in a classroom. So, while I was working, I went back and got my masters. I really did not use a lot of energy to move up. I was not aggressive in terms of my career until my children were much older.

Then I decided to pursue some promotions.

Her career path included the following positions: junior high school teacher, high school teacher, department head, assistant principal, mini-school director, principal of elementary school during the summer school session, staff development and curriculum development at central office, superintendent intern, deputy superintendent, and superintendent.

Natalie spent twenty-six years of her career working in the Washington, DC school district. She completed her internship in Philadelphia. This internship was part of the educational program at Harvard. She then traveled to Rochester, New York as a deputy superintendent for instruction and accountability. After serving in this capacity, she was appointed as superintendent.
In Search Of...

After the school board was informed of the superintendent's upcoming retirement, the members decided to conduct a national search for a new superintendent. They interviewed various candidates for the position, and they decided to hire an outside candidate as their new superintendent. Natalie Nash was the new educational leader of the school district. When asked why did she want to become superintendent of this school district, she replied:

One of the reasons I wanted to become school chief in this district was to improve pupil achievement in a predominantly African-American district. About 88 percent of the district's 28,000 pupils are black and 68 percent are eligible for free and reduced cost meals.

Natalie had achieved her ultimate goal. The school district saw a need to make various changes that would increase the standards and expectations for students as well as staff. In their search to hire a candidate, who could lead the district in a new direction without preconceived ideas, the board decided that an outside candidate would offer the leadership that was needed.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to ascertain how three female superintendents attained their positions given the notable underrepresentation of women in superintendent positions. This study investigated (1) the career paths of three female public school superintendents in Virginia, (2) the barriers they perceived, (3) the strategies they employed to overcome barriers, and (4) the factors or forces which enabled them to obtain the position of superintendent.

The results are discussed in relation to the four research questions on the career paths of female school superintendents that guided the study.

Research Question One: What are the forces or factors that have assisted those three women who have become superintendent?

The superintendents reported that the forces or factors that assisted them in becoming superintendents included the dynamics of the community, the political culture of the school district, their leadership characteristics and professional skills, and their support systems.

The experience of the study subjects is that women are being hired as superintendents, which means that school boards in this study recognized women as viable candidates for the superintendency. The numbers remain minimal and the underrepresentation of female administrators continues to exist. That women are underrepresented in top level administrative positions in education is supported by Grogan (1996),

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Chase and Bell (1990) and Shakeshaft (1989). The review of the literature stated that women were qualified, competent administrators, obtaining the necessary credentials and training, psychologically and emotionally ready to assume administrative positions, and seeking positions in educational administration.

**Research Question Two:** What are the forces or factors that have served as barriers in the process those three women went through in achieving appointments as superintendents?

The study superintendents identified barriers which prohibit women from achieving top level administrative positions, although they were not in agreement about them. The barriers could be grouped into three categories which include gender related barriers, the lack of opportunity for administrative experience, and stereotyping or career role socialization.

Many of the same barriers faced by women years ago still exist today, but are played out in more subtle forms. Women encounter persistent barriers when aspiring to top level administrative positions. While the internal barriers such as low self-image, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation or aspiration, can be controlled and changed by the individual, the external barriers such as discrimination, lack or role models, lack of mentors, and lack of networks, require societal and institutional change.

**Research Question Three:** What strategies did they use in overcoming barriers to their achievement of appointment as superintendent?
The superintendents who were interviewed reported that the strategies they used in overcoming barriers to their achievement of appointment as superintendent included mentors who helped, promoted, sponsored and supported them in their endeavors; taking advantage of opportunities which enabled them to network with other professionals and community members; pursuing advanced degrees; obtaining needed certification; aggressively pursuing promotions; and formulating a plan to become superintendent.

These strategies are often used by women as they pursue administrative positions. According to the literature, various studies conducted by, Daresh and Playko (1990), Ginn (1989), Shakeshaft (1989), Edson (1987), Weich (1980), and Sheehy (1976), offered strategies which could be used to counteract barriers and to enhance opportunities for career advancement.

**Research Question Four: What situations or events have been beneficial to their achievement of appointment as superintendent?**

The career paths of the superintendents who were interviewed were similar. They were building level administrators, and they held various positions at the central office level. Although the literature indicates that the principalship is a part of the career path to the superintendency, one of the participants found it was not a necessary role to fill in order to be considered for a superintendent position. This was the first superintendency for two of the females, and the second superintendency for the third female. Their varied administrative experiences proved to be most beneficial when they decided to apply for the superintendency. They
were selected by their school boards from a group of qualified candidates because they best fit the needs of the community which had reason to have confidence in leadership abilities.

Since there were only fifteen female superintendents in Virginia during the time in which the study was conducted, the selection of a sample was limited. Three female school superintendents participated in this study. The participants were recruited through referrals and informal requests. Pseudonyms were used and any identifiable information regarding their school districts were changed to maintain participant confidentiality and anonymity.

Each superintendent was interviewed at her office. The interviews lasted approximately one hour. The questionnaire contained open-ended questions which focused on the following: (1) biographical information, (2) background and demographic information concerning the school district, (3) career experiences, and their (4) opinions and feelings. Each superintendent was asked the same questions concerning her career path to the superintendency. Selected segments of the superintendent's interviews were used to illustrate their thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences. Each interview was tape recorded, transcribed, and coded using Ethnograph computer software.

The data were analyzed for recurring themes and similarities and differences between the literature and the data. The themes that emerged from the data came from the interviewee's words or from the researcher's understanding of their words.
Conclusions

An analysis of data collected from this study supported earlier research and assumptions. After interviewing these women and listening to their views regarding the superintendency, the following conclusions evolved.

**Conclusion 1:** The women in this study have made it to the superintendency. This factor makes the career related information they shared important to females aspiring to the superintendency and to others in the field of education.

**Conclusion 2:** Age and marital status may not be prohibiting factors for those females aspiring to the superintendency.

The superintendent’s ages ranged from 45 years to 58 years. The youngest female superintendent obtained her first superintendency at the age of 41. The oldest female superintendent obtained her first superintendency at the age of 55. Two of the females were married, one was widowed.

In all levels of administration, women are older than men who are in similar positions. They have moved into leadership positions later in their careers. Literature regarding the life stages of females indicate that their careers become their focal point during midlife.

**Conclusion 3:** Females aspiring to the superintendency may need to obtain higher degrees and certification.

The three female superintendents were credential oriented. Each one had pursued advanced studies and held a doctorate degree. All three superintendents indicated that women should be prepared educationally.
The literature reports that more aspiring women administrators are working for advanced degrees. A study of graduate education programs by Marshall (1984) documented that 71% of the Ph.D. and 63% of the Ed.D. aspirants were women.

**Conclusion 4:** Gender bias continues to be a barrier for aspiring women administrators.

One superintendent concluded, "Everything relates to gender. It's still harder for a woman to get a job as a superintendent than it is for a man." Women continue to experience sex discrimination, however it is played out in more subtle ways. There are women who deny that it still exists, as one of the study subjects did. Erickson (1984) found that the denial of discrimination is a survival mechanism for women.

**Conclusion 5:** Networking is an important strategy for female administrators.

The females in this study emphasized the value of belonging to and participating in professional organizations. Maintaining high visibility in the organizations and actively networking with others was also emphasized as a valuable strategy for women.

**Conclusion 6:** Aspiring female administrators need the help and support of mentors.

Each female superintendent in this study had the help and support of a mentor. Two superintendents indicated that their mentors were males. These mentors played dual roles of advisor and sponsor. They were instrumental in promoting the careers of these females.
Conclusion 7: Each female had aspirations and a plan for becoming superintendent.

Each female in this study planned for a career as a superintendent. All three females earned advanced degrees and obtained the appropriate certification needed for the superintendency. Two of the females advanced their careers through several different school districts; the third female spent her entire career in the same school district. Only two females had experience as a principal. All three females obtained experience at the central office level working in various administrative positions.

Two females in this study had no interruptions in their career advancement. They followed the noninterrupted/line career path. This path moved them from teaching to assistant principal, principal, director, assistant superintendent, and superintendent.

One female had two interruptions (maternity leave) in her career. She followed the interrupted/family/line career path.

Conclusion 8: The number of women superintendents remain consistently small. Very few women obtain this prestigious top position in education.

Recommendations For Further Research

Based on the review of the research and the research findings that evolved from the data collected in this study regarding female school superintendents, the following recommendations are offered for further study:

1. A replication of the present study could be useful if there are
significant increases or decreases in the number of female superintendents hired in Virginia.

2. A study of the community's role in the selection of a superintendent.

3. A study of the interplay between the characteristics of the candidates and the needs and interests of the school board.
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(University Microfilms No. 77-30)
Address
City, State, Zip Code
Date, 1996

Name
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear :

I am currently a doctoral candidate majoring in Education Administration at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia. My advisor is Dr. Joan Curcio. Also, I am employed by Prince George's County Public School System as a Vice Principal. As part of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree, I am conducting a research study entitled, "The Career Paths of Female School Superintendents in Virginia." The purpose of this study is to determine how female superintendents attained their positions given the notable underrepresentation of women in superintendency positions.

I would be grateful if you would agree to assist me by participating in this study. The study will involve a telephone interview in which you will be asked questions about your career. The interview will be tape recorded. Your answers will be kept confidential and anonymous. You will not be asked to give your name or any information that would identify you as an individual. Participation in the study will take approximately one hour. I realize that this request adds to your heavy workload, however, I hope that by participating in this study, you will benefit from the opportunity for reflection and introspection that it provides.

Please sign the enclosed interest form, and return it to me in the self-addressed, stamped envelope. Upon completion of the study, I will be pleased to send you a copy of the summary of the research.

Thank you so much for your assistance in this endeavor. Your willingness to participate in this research activity will be deeply appreciated. I will follow up with a telephone call in approximately two weeks. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to call me at (area code) phone number.

Sincerely,

Barbara J. Atwater

Enclosure
A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE CAREER PATHS
OF FEMALE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS
IN VIRGINIA

by

Barbara J. Atwater

Please check one of the following selections:

_____ Yes, I am interested in participating in the research study.

_____ No, I am unable to participate in the research study.

Name

________________________________________

Address

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

Please return this form to:

Ms. Barbara J. Atwater
Address
City, State, Zip Code
Dear Dr.:

I would like to thank you for your willingness to participate in my research study, "A Qualitative Examination of the Career Paths of Female Superintendents in Virginia." It is only through your help that I will be able to obtain the needed research for my dissertation. I will contact you within the next few weeks to arrange a convenient date and time for the interview.

Once again, my sincere thanks for your help with this significant project. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call me. My home telephone number is (area code) phone number.

Sincerely yours,

Barbara J. Atwater
April 2, 1996

Dear Colleague:

As you know, I am always interested in research studies that will enhance our knowledge base. I am asking for your support of Ms. Barbara J. Atwater's research study. Ms. Atwater, a Doctoral Student in Education Administration at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, is conducting research for her dissertation entitled “A Qualitative Examination of the Career Paths of Female School Superintendents in Virginia.”

Your assistance in this study will provide valuable information that will assist other candidates who are seeking the position of superintendent. Ms. Atwater will be happy to provide you with a summary of her research findings.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Vincent C. Cibarelli
Executive Director
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I have several questions I want to ask you about your career path to the superintendency. Some of these questions are knowledge questions about your school district, background and demographic data, some are about your experiences, your opinions and/or values, and feelings concerning your career in administration.

A. Biographical Information: background information about the female superintendents.

1. I would like to ask you some questions about your personal life.
   a) What is your age?
   b) Where were you born and raised?
   c) How many siblings are in your family?
   d) What is your marital status?
   e) How many children do you have and what are their ages?
   f) What are your parents' educational backgrounds and professions?

B. Knowledge Questions: background and demographic data concerning the school district.

2. I would like to discuss issues regarding recent district history (last 5-10 years). Regarding each of the following, what is the recent history in your district?
   a) type of school district (urban, rural, suburban, unit, elementary)
b) socio-economic make-up of community
c) enrollment pattern
d) superintendency
e) board composition

3. What is your perception of the political culture of your school district?

4. Describe how the political environment of your district affected your access to the superintendency?

5. Did other women precede you in the superintendency?

C. **Experience/Behavior Questions**: what a person does or has done.

6. When and why did you decide to become a school superintendent?

7. Starting with your entrance into teaching, describe your career path to the superintendency.
   a) What positions have you held on the way up?
   b) What is the length of time in each position?
   c) At what age were you principal and superintendent?
   d) To what do you attribute your success?
   e) If you could have changed anything along the way of your career path, what would it be? Do you have any regrets?
8. To get where you are now in your career, you obviously developed a specific plan for yourself.
   a) At what point did you formulate the goals to become superintendent?
   b) What did your plan include? Time lines, relocation, size of school district?
   c) What motivational factors contributed to your success - internal and external?
   d) What types of support did you receive - personal and organizational - from your district?
   e) What personal "drives" do you feel are necessary to become successful?
   f) What was your professional preparation for the position of superintendent?
   g) Who has been influential in your career advancement?

9. If any, what were the interruptions in your career?

10. Were you recruited to this position or did you solicit employment yourself?

D. **Feeling Questions:** emotional responses of people, their experiences and thoughts.

11. What do you feel were barriers to your advancement?
   a) Internal?
   b) External?
12. What did you do to overcome these barriers?

13. At what point in your career did you feel the most stress?

14. What formal or informal support systems, if any, do you feel were most helpful to you?
   a) Mentors? Family mentors?
   b) Training programs?
   c) Support groups?
   d) Organizations (professional or civic)?

E. **Opinion/Value Questions**: Understanding the cognitive and interpretative processes of people. Answers tell what people think, their goals, intentions, desires, values.

15. What factors/characteristics do you feel had a positive effect on your career?

16. What factors/characteristics do you feel hindered your career?

17. In your opinion, what do you feel is keeping women from obtaining more administrative positions?

18. In your opinion, what changes can be made in the male-dominated organizations to promote women in leadership positions?

19. How can the school district change itself to fit the aspirations of women?

20. In your opinion, what particular skills, strengths, or attributes do women bring to school administration?
21. What sets you apart from those other females who have not been successful in obtaining the position of superintendent?

F. Knowledge Questions: factual information - not opinions or feelings.

22. What policies and procedures has the school district implemented to support women in administration?

23. What kinds of informal practices are in place to support women seeking to enter and advance in administrative careers?
   a) committee memberships?
   b) mentors at district levels?
   c) talking with women with administrative potential?
   d) informal recruiting practices?

24. What social/professional organizations do you belong to? How do you gain support from these organizations?

25. Is there anything important that we have not covered? Anything you would like to add?
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

FOR

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

1. Are the members of your school board elected or appointed?

2. What is the gender and racial makeup of your school board?

3. What were the educational issues that were prevalent at the time the superintendent was selected?

4. How did these issues influence your decision in the selection of the superintendent?

5. Has the school district ever hired other female superintendents?

6. What is the relationship between the board and the current superintendent?

7. Why was this individual selected as superintendent?
INFORMED CONSENT

I agree to participate in a research study being conducted by Barbara J. Atwater and advisor, Dr. Joan Curcio, as part of her requirements for her doctoral degree in the Department of Educational Administration, at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

The purpose of this study is to examine the career paths of the female superintendents of Virginia public schools. Research will be obtained concerning barriers encountered, strategies used to overcome these barriers, and factors which had an impact on their obtaining the position of superintendent.

Participation in this study will take approximately one hour. I understand that the study will involve a personal interview which will be tape recorded. The study will deal with my experiences, feelings, and opinions concerning my career path.

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I would otherwise be entitled to, and that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

I realize that all of my answers will be confidential and anonymous since I will not be asked to give my name or any information that would identify me as an individual.

All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I also understand that if I later have any additional questions concerning this project, I can contact Barbara J. Atwater at (area code) phone number.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects and Review Board of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The Board believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject's privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The Chairperson of the Board may be reached through the Graduate School, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The telephone number of the Office is (703) 698-6039.

I have read the material above, and questions regarding the project been answered to my satisfaction. I understand I will receive a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this activity, realizing that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time.

Subject or Authorized Representative
APPENDIX D

CODE NAMES AND ABBREVIATIONS
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APPENDIX E
SAMPLE OF CODED TRANSCRIPT
EXCERPTS OF THE FIRST CASE STUDY
CAROLYN CROSBY
was listed in a March 1996 article in US Today, as one of the fastest fifty growing counties in America.

:\: Why is that so? Do you have any ideas?

#: It's that the popularity here, as far as I can see, is that more and more people are choosing to commute from here to Washington, DC, and for families who might happen to have one person that works in Richmond and one that works in Washington, this would be the ideal thing. The commuter rail keeps extending through south and this is still a favorable tax rate here and so forth. It is, as I said, one of the fifty fastest growing counties in America.

R: As I look out of the window, I can see a lot of fields. Is that corn?

#: Well, that used to be, that reminded me, that (pointed towards an area) was all fields too until just recently. Now, there is a shopping center there.

R: There is a lot of growth, I can see.

#: Now, there is the school district, which as I told you, we are both suburban and rural. From here down is the rural, from here up, is the suburban. You are right on the dividing line because from here up would be our other two high schools in our attendance area and they are very much the suburban, and from here down is going to be rural.

R: I noticed that there is a big difference between the number of students who were enrolled in your former school district and the...
Well, I guess that's one of the first things that you try to make yourself aware of. My perception is that we have opposing political forces. We have on one hand, conservative people who have been here a long time, and would prefer not to see the tax rates go up with all the money necessary for debt services to build all of these new schools. We are currently in a capital improvement plan that would open four new schools in the next four to five years, completing a million dollar high school, and with that, of course, comes debt service and a possible increase in property taxes. So, you have the old-time people who would prefer to see less spending by the schools, then you have the people who are moving here. Many of these people who are moving here come from metropolitan areas where they were used to certain types of sophisticated services by county government, and they are willing to pay for it. So, those are two kinds of opposing forces that you have. The other forces that I see at work are not necessarily opposing forces, because everyone wants the same thing. Bottom line is the best possible education for all children, even if it might be a particular segment they are interested in. They are still interested in the big picture, what's good for everybody. Even though they might be a support group for a smaller group, I had a group of citizens from this week who were particularly interested in minority children, but they were also interested in all children. I am meeting soon with some parents who represent the best interest of special education students. They are also interested in what's good for all.
children. So, those types of political forces, I don't necessarily see as opposing. They might be interested more in one part of the picture than another, but I don't see them as really competing with each other, although many would disagree with me. Special interest groups are actually competing with each other and therefore are opposing forces. but I tend to think of them as not necessarily opposing. The first example I gave, the people who wanted improved services versus the people that think when we had the good old days, I see those as more opposing. I see it as a politically very challenging climate. We have a new Board of Supervisors, as of the last election, and I think that also makes it a very favorable climate because people are ready for a change and it is a good time to have a new superintendent. The superintendent who left, left in good standing. He retired and that also makes it not quite such a political challenge to step in behind someone in some type of high profile firing. He served a seven year tenure, did a really nice job and that is another thing that makes it a favorable climate.

R: Please describe how the political environment of your district affected your access to the superintendency.

P: Well, I didn't know it at the time, let me reflect back. First of all, I think one thing that influenced the access for me is that I mentioned it's sort of a new day, a new Board of

#-GEN

Supervisors, first elected Black candidate, and a lot of people moving in from other areas. I think the first thing that affected my access, was being open to women candidates. Indeed, two
of the three finalists were women. 356
That's the only place that I know 357
of that the majority of finalists 358
were women. Now, it could have 359
been the same situation in others, 360
and I just didn't know it. This 361
has been the only one that I know 362
to be the case. I think that I 363
knew from the very beginning that 364
it was not a case of "we need to 365
say we have interviewed women." I 366
never felt that it was any type of 367
tokenism operating. So, I think 368
the fact that this school division 369
would be open to candidacy by 370
women was partly influenced by the 371
political climate that I talked 372
about earlier. I think also, even 373
though this is a negative thing, 374
my predecessor who retired, was 375
retirement age, male, and 376
sometimes people will tend to look 377
for maybe the opposite of what 378
they had when they are ready to go 379
in a new direction. I think that 380
could have possibly been a 381
political factor. 382 -#

R: Were there other women who 384
preceded you in this particular 385
district? 386

#-GEN

P: No, I was the first woman 388 -#
superintendent in this county and 389
I was the first woman 390
superintendent in my former school 391
district. However, I was replaced 392
by a woman in that district, so I 393
must have done a good job. That 394
district was the first rural area 395
in Virginia, that I am aware of, 396
that hired a woman to replace a 397
woman. 398 -#

R: The next set of questions are 400
experience/behavior questions. 401
When and why did you decide to 402
become a school superintendent? 403

#-CPH

P: I was working on my doctoral 405 -#
degree in educational 406
administration. Near the end of 407
the program, about 1983, and I would have been 32 years old, a classroom teacher. I had finished all of the course work for my six-year degree and also for the doctoral program, but looking into various licensing, I discovered that I needed two more courses to qualify for a superintendent's license. I elected to take the classes, although I did not need them for the degree. I had already taken all of the courses I needed for the degree. So, at that point, after five years of coursework, for me to take two more courses that did not need, except for superintendent's license, that's the earliest time that I can identify that I can acknowledge in terms of money, time and effort that I wanted to be a superintendent. When I began to take the two classes, a couple of my colleagues, who knew that I had finished all of my course work, said "Why are you taking classes," and I said, "Well, I need them for the superintendent's license." They thought it was a joke and they both laughed. When they saw that I wasn't laughing, they said, "You're not really taking these for a superintendent's license?" and I said, "Well, yeah." One friend said to me, "Do you think you'll ever going to need that?" Not in a hurtful way, but sort of like why are you wasting your time and money taking these courses and I looked at him and said, "Well, you know, I think I just might." So, the earliest time I can trace it back to is when I was 32, a classroom teacher in a middle school.

R: Let's start with your entrance into teaching. Please describe your career path to the superintendency.

#-CPH
I was a teacher at a junior high school for ten and one-half years. I taught ninth grade social studies, language arts, and whatever anyone didn’t want to teach that year. My principal could always come to me and ask me to take one more class and I always would. I enjoyed that immensely, and I stayed at that school, the only school I ever taught for ten and one-half years. During that time, I did the majority of work on my doctorate in administration. Then, in the same school system, I got my first administrative experience. I was promoted to the assistant principal in the middle of the year and became an elementary school principal. During that semester that I was assistant principal, I finished my doctorate, received my doctorate. I had an application on file with a school district in, Virginia, for the previous two years. During that spring, both an elementary principalship and also a music supervisor’s (my husband is an educator, music educator), position became available in that school district. We applied for it and we both got the positions. So, we moved up in 1985, moved up to Virginia, and I have been in Virginia every since. I was with that school district for eight years beginning in ’85. In the first three years, I was an elementary principal and then I moved to central office as Director of Special Services, a position that I held for three years, that involved supervising special education, gifted and talented, guidance, other student services, suspensions, expulsions, the business partnership program, and some of the things that weren’t such fun. In my last two years, I was in a position called the Dean of Instructional Leadership, which was an unusual
title to have to use. It was 515
equivalent to the position of 516
assistant superintendent. They 517
have recently changed the Dean 518
part to Assistant Superintendent. 519
In that, I picked up 520
responsible for secondary and 521
high school supervision, some of 522
the things that I had before. It 523
was director of special services 524
plus more. So, I kept the special 525
education and those things and 526
picked up the responsibility for 527
supervising the middle and high 528
schools. It involved a great deal 529
of budget work which turned out to 530
be invaluable preparation for the 531
superintendence. The county 532
instructional budget was for half 533
a million dollars and myself and 534
one other person did most of the 535
budgeting for instruction. So, 536
that was the biggest factor in 537
helping to prepare me to work with 538
budgets in a small school 539
district. So, after two years in 540
that position, that was the end of 541
my eight years in that county. 542
This was a system which grew from 543
10,000 students to 13,000 while I 544
was there. So, that was a period 545
of growth also. Then I went to 546
another school district in 547
Virginia as Division 548
Superintendent for three years. 549
The enrollment went from 1,500 to 550
1,600 while I was there. I had a 551
very small staff, five people in 552
the central office. I had more 553
people reporting to me in my 554
former school district as the 555
Director of Special Services, than 556
I had reporting to me as 557
superintendent in this district, 558
but it was a very good experience. 559
I enjoyed it very much. Because 560
of the small staff, I had to do a 561
little bit of everything. I had 562
to be very involved in 563
construction, very involved in the 564
budget, very involved in all of 565
the business matters and affairs. 566
It was a very good place for me to 567
be at the right time. I learned a 568
to achieve the goals and go forth. 621
I don't know who that person was. 622
whether it was my grandmother, my 623
mother, but someone was doing that 624
subconsciously. So, if I wanted 625 -

to be in the All State Band, I 626
knew that I had to practice. If I 627
wanted to be in the Youth 628
Symphony, you had to have that 629
discipline to practice the 630
clarinet and you could play in the 631
Youth Symphony. I have always 632
enjoyed challenges, particularly 633
if it's something that someone 634
tells me that I can't do. Like my 635
first band director told me I 636
would not be able to play the 637
clarinet, and five years later, no 638
eight years later, I was the only 639
person in Virginia to be in the 640
All Virginia Band five times and 641
play in both the Youth Symphony 642

#-TRA
just in high school. So, I 644 -#
enjoyed doing unusual things that 645
seemed to present somewhat of a 646
challenge. 647 -#

R: Did you have an opportunity to let 649
that band director know of your 650
accomplishments? 651

P: His colleagues let him know. He 653
continued to teach there in that 654
particular town and I told other 655
people, and his name came up. I 656
mentioned he was my first band 657
teacher and they said, "Oh well, 658
he must have done a great job." I 659
said "As a matter of fact, he told 660
me to take the clarinet home and 661
leave it because I would never be 662
able to play it." It became kind 663
of a joke. They brought it to his 664

#-PER
never be able to play. The other 666 -#
thing to which I attribute my 667
success has been family support 668
and advice and help of mentors. 669
My family support, I mean that, I 670
went back to childhood and I had 671
my grandmother and my mother who 672
encouraged me to achieve. Another evidence of family support. I mentioned the difficulty of graduate school, and for one who aspires to a job as the superintendency. what’s been critical, helpful to me, is my husband’s totally open attitude toward moving where I needed to move. We’ll do what we need to do. One time when I had reached an impasse with my dissertation committee, I went home and announced "This is it, I quit." I’m not going to finish this dissertation. "The committee is upset with each other and they’re taking it out on me." I just announced that I’m quitting. I’m not writing this dissertation. There was very little discussion about it. About a month later, my husband said. "I haven’t seen you upstairs writing your dissertation." and I said, "I told you I quit." R: You mean you stopped working on it? P: Yeah. For about a month, I didn’t work on it and I said "I told you I quit." I’m not writing a dissertation. He very uncharacteristically replied, "I have been patient for the last six years when you took all these courses. I haven’t complained. I had to do the cleaning, cooking and the housework, all of the errands. When you were never available to visit family and holidays and weekends, and you are going to go upstairs and write that dissertation." He was serious, and I went upstairs and wrote the dissertation. He’s always been very open when we had to move and fortunately he works in a nearby school district. I haven’t really inconvenienced him that much.
R: That worked out very well. 726

#-SCS

P: That's been very well, all three 728 -#
school districts are very close to 729
one another. My school district 730
borders on his school district. 731 -#
So, it's been very convenient for 732

#-MEN

him. And mentors I mentioned, I 733 -#
had very important mentors, they 734
were all males interestingly 735
enough, because there were no 736
women role models or mentors 737
available in the administrative 738
ranks that I was aware of or that 739
I knew. I had a principal under 740
whom I taught for nine and one- 741
half years. He was an 742
administrative mentor for me. I 743
did an internship at the school. 744
There was a professor in graduate 745
school, actually two that were 746
very much a mentor who encouraged 747
me when I was having so much 748 -#
trouble getting a job as an 749

#:ROL

assistant principal. It was very 750!
difficult to do in my first school 751

#-GEN

district because the role is 752 -#
traditionally male oriented. 753
career assistant principals who 754
carried textbooks and had a big 755
wad of keys to unlock the 756
building. To me, it was a 757
custodian with a degree. So, I 758 -#

#-MEN

was lucky to have those mentors. 759 -#
One mentor the superintendent of 760
my first school district, was a 761
mentor for me during the eight 762
years that I worked there. One 763
other item to which I attribute my 764
success, in addition to the 765
determination, hard-work thing 766

$:RMD

that I said, the mentors and 767 -$-8
support, I did have successful 768
women role models that were very 769
important to me. My mother was 770
the breadwinner of the family. I 771
had a cousin, first cousin, 772
female, who was an elementary 773
principal whom I knew and admired 774
What motivational factors contributed to your success, internal and external?

Motivational factors, I'm intrinsically motivated. I just have a high desire to achieve. That just goes back to childhood and again, I don't know where that came from. I can only think that my mother and my grandmother always encouraged me to excel and do my best. I enjoy challenges, that is an intrinsic award for r^2. The more challenging, the more satisfaction I have afterwards. I am intrinsically motivated by problem solving. If there is something there that needs a problem solver, I like to go in work with that. I usually perform very well in a crisis situation. In a crisis is when I am the calmest person there. My husband could never believe it, how calm I am in a crisis. Because in a non-crisis situation, you might think that I was hysterical. In a crisis, I'll be the calmest person in the room. For example, on a small scale, right now, if a snake were to come into the room, you and I would probably go ballistic. But, if I were in my principal's chair, and you were a student, and a snake came into the room, I would act like I loved snakes, and you would never know that I am scared of snakes. I had that happen to me while I was an elementary principal. Other kinds of motivation, extrinsically, of course, in education, it's long been known that if you want a higher paying position, unfortunately, you have to leave the classroom, which is regrettable. But, that's what we have in our field and various terms of salary also play the part.
in my leaving a smaller division 1032
to come to a larger one, because 1033
larger divisions typically pay 1034
more. The salary is not as 1035
important to me as the sense of 1036
satisfaction that I get out of 1037
achieving and handling challenging 1038
situations. 1039 -#

R: What personal drives do you feel 1041
are necessary to become 1042
successful? 1043

#-TRA
P: Perseverance, resilience which I 1045 -#
would define as the ability to 1046
bounce back from setbacks, 1047
flexibility and determination. 1048 -#

R: We talked about your professional 1050
preparation for the position of 1051
superintendent, the extra courses, 1052
the doctorate. Who has been 1053
influential in your career 1054
advancement? 1055

#-SUP
P: The mentors, and the Virginia 1057 -#
School Board Association, the 1058
people there, once they became 1059
aware of me, were helpful. I 1060
would say one of our former 1061
university professors. Those 1062
people became aware of me at the 1063
National Superintendent’s Academy 1064
that I mentioned. 1065 -#

R: Where was this? 1067

#-PER
P: The National Superintendent’s 1069 -#
Academy, the year that I went in 1070
1992, was held at George 1071
Washington University in 1072
Washington, DC. It was a two-week 1073
institute, and one day was devoted 1074
to resumes, and job interviews, 1075
and so forth. Two of our former 1076
university professors were the 1077
consultants for resumes rewriting 1078
and revising and also for 1079
interviewing. One of our former 1080
professors gave me some very good 1081
advice about rewriting my resume, 1082
been addressed to me as an individual because my secretary opens the mail at the office and so I didn’t see the envelope and I assumed that they sent it to every superintendent in Virginia. I did not know that they did not send it to every superintendent in Virginia later on. Who did they send it to, I don’t know, but they had sent one to me. So, I was actually invited to apply. They probably sent out two or three hundred applications, so it is not like I was hand picked, one of fifty.

R: That’s still good, it’s somewhat being hand selected.

P: Well, on the other hand, you’ve got to remember they probably invited two hundred, a large number.

R: The next set of questions are feeling questions. What do you feel were barriers to your advancement?

#-GEN

P: Gender, that’s capital G-E-N-D-E-R (she spelled this word). Everything else I tell you relates to that. Experience is a barrier. The problem with getting experience is somewhat gender related and somewhat that all people go through. It’s hard for a man to get his first administrative job too, I am sure.

#-CPH

But, it was harder for me in a rural school district to get a job as an assistant principal. It just didn’t happen. It was very frustrating time in my career. It was harder to get an assistant principal’s job than it was to get a job as superintendent, in terms of when I first started looking until I was successful, when I first started trying to get a job.
I think, as I mentioned to you earlier, that the prevailing notion of an assistant principal in that part of the country at that time, they needed a male. Of course, you needed someone to be tough and gruff with the kids, that had to be a man. In a middle school, you had to be there with the kids, so that couldn't be a woman. You had to be able to stay late and have keys to the building which might be disadvantageous to a woman because she might get hurt or something locking up the building. You had to have the strength to roll around the hand-truck with textbooks on it and the soft drinks for the drink machine and that's what assistant principal's did. I had a very hard time breaking into that. It's not that way there anymore. They have a lot of women administrators there now, but at the time, in the early seventies, it was the exception. The men were the assistant principals, the women were the curriculum coordinators, and the supervisors who were not in the line authority, but the staff authority. I had a lot of friends who said, "Well, why do you want it, why do you want to be a principal." But those times, they're gone. I'm glad to say. At this point in time, it's still somewhat harder for a woman to get a job as a superintendent than it is a man. Because today, twenty-five, thirty years later, people are having a little difficulty with the concept of a woman in the superintendent's role similar to what I am talking about thirty years ago. They're having difficulty seeing a woman, why she would want to be this person that fusses at the kids, and fusses at the bus drivers, and I think that's the key. We don't want to
fuss with anyone. We use a different style. We're not going to use intimidation to get the job done. I think that's one reason that the gender barriers are lessening and since I capitalized everything awhile ago, let me go back and say, I really do think that those gender barriers, just like the racial barriers are coming down. Not that they are not still there to some extent, but it's a lot better than it used to be, and it's only going to get better. I think people are more open to diversity in leadership.

P: What do you do to overcome these barriers?

#-BAR

P: One thing that I mentioned to you earlier is that I made a list of perceived barriers to myself and I thought if I were a school board member, what is it that I would think that a woman might not know or be able to do that's important for a superintendent to do. First thing that came to my mind was finance. So, I made it my business to learn everything I could about school finance. One

#-MEN

of the mentors that I mentioned earlier was the superintendent. He knew what I was trying to do. He let me present the budget one year so I could say I presented it, not the entire budget, but a portion of it. He never let anyone but himself do that before. But he let me do it so that I could say that I helped prepare and present to the school board and that kind of thing. I worked for areas that I thought women would be perceived weak in and whatever the interview question was I would always work it into finance to show how much I knew about it. It was prepared for the questions. I didn't always come back to finance, that was a joke.
R: At what point in your career did you feel the most stress?  

#-BAR
P: Probably when I was trying to get a job as an assistant principal because what I would see was younger men who had been on the job for less period of time, but who were coaches, were continually promoted to assistant principals and I was not. That was the most frustrating time for me. Even in some cases, I know a man who didn’t have his masters in administration, didn’t have a certificate, and was still selected.

R: I still see that today.

P: That was very frustrating for me.

R: What formal or informal support systems, if any, do you feel were most helpful to you?

#-SIP
P: I think I talked about it before, family, work associates. Women’s Caucus of AASA is a good group. You would enjoy belonging to that.

R: Do you have regular meetings?

#-NWK
P: We have a newsletter that is kind of intermittent, but at AASA national conventions, we’ll have women and minority affairs breakfasts, and a speaker every November. They have a Women’s Conference, matter of fact, it’s coming up this November. I’ll tell you when it is, I can’t go this year. It’s in San Antonio. You ought to go if you can. I wanted to go, but I have a previous commitment. It’s the weekend of November 8 through 10. The reason I know is because my other commitment is written in. I would have gone. I love San
Antonio any way. That’s a real good conference. You meet a lot of good people. It’s a good networking opportunity.

R: How about training programs?

P: Well, I mentioned the National Superintendent’s Academy, and, of course, I have my doctoral degree.

R: What organizations, professional or civic do you belong to?

P: State President Elect of Virginia, Alpha Delta Kappa, which is a professional women’s educational honorary sorority. It’s mostly teachers. We have 2,000 members. We have two new chapters here in this county. I belong to a chapter down in another county. That’s been a group that has been a real nice support group to belong to. The Rotary Club before I moved up here. That was an interesting civic group, active, good group.

R: Now, we’re ready for opinion and value questions.

P: I’ve been giving so many opinions all along. I don’t know if I have any left.

R: What factors/characteristics do you feel had a positive effect on your career?

P: At the risk of being repetitive, determination and vision, to create a vision and go after it and a sense of humor. Those are the main things, can’t talk too much about those.

R: What factors/characteristics do you feel hindered your career?

P: I’m very tolerant of other people’s mistakes, but not mine.
R: In your opinion, what do you feel is keeping women from obtaining more administrative positions? 1445

P: Well, that's changing just in the brief time that I have been 1449

#-GEN
Numbers have almost doubled. I think perceptions that women can't handle the management end, what I talked about earlier, finance. You know, the work force, they want you to be able to manage and lead a large work force, because people want that paternalistic father figure. I think people are getting away from that now. One 1461

#-BAR
barrier has been that people are not necessarily encouraged by their family and friends to do it, just as my friends, those were my friends who told me I didn't need the courses, not people making fun of me. My friends advised me not to waste my time. Families, every husband is not like mine, where I'll move wherever you move, that's uncommon. I think the family barriers and one that I did not have to contend with was the child bearing years and the responsibility for young children. Although, I think that's lessening now, because I see men are more willing to take their share of the child rearing duties. That's a 1480

#-ROL
step forward for humankind. I see men more interested in doing that. I think men are more socially responsible and more cognizant of their family roles now. I think that's going to open doors for women. Men and women are more likely to share those things now. So, I think that's going to help. I think that, just as I said, the women have doubled during my tenure in Virginia. I think that the fact that women are superintendents and the place 1494
didn't fall apart is making people see women in those roles. Just as I mentioned my former school district replaced me with a woman. One school board member said to me "You won't believe the comments I've been getting since it became public that we hired a woman." I said "Probably people are saying, I can't believe you hired another woman." And, I laughed, and she said "No, what I'm hearing is thank heavens you hired another woman." 

R: Is that ri. ci.  

#-GEN  
P: So I guess. That was very good, and very interesting in a rural area. "Thank heavens you hired another woman." That meant a lot to me personally. I felt good but I think that some of those barriers are lessening in the future. It's good news.  

R: Yes it is. Another question, in your opinion, what changes can be made in the male-dominated professions to promote women in leadership positions?  

#-SUP  
P: During the time I have been a superintendent, I have found my male colleagues very supportive and seemingly nonthreatened by me and my presence. I have always felt accepted on full equal footing by the great majority, and the minority, you don't worry about. I have seen, for example, the Virginia Association of Superintendents, which is a male-dominated organization. I saw that group do things such as for the Board of Directors, they allotted us some slots just for minority presence at one time. There was a woman at-large member just so there would be women on the board, and there was a Black at-large
experience for their resume. In that way, we are able to take teachers and make sure we get diverse representation, minority women, men, everybody. Through those intern positions, that helps us groom our on internally for administration. So, that's a nice thing. I think a lot of other school divisions have something similar.

R: We don't have interns, can you create those positions?  

#-TRN  
P: Yes, you can do that. You can have interns at the school level if you wanted to take someone and give them a lighter teaching load, even if it was just two periods to work in the office. You could call them an administrative intern. It would be good for you and be good for them. It would be good on a resume for getting a full-time administrative position.

R: That's a good idea. In your opinion, what particular skills, strengths, or attributes do women bring to school administration?  

P: Collaboration, everything that I am thinking of is some form of collaboration, inclusive leadership, participatory decision making. Many of those things are, I don't want to say innate to women, but you don't feel, and I don't want all of my comments to sound like I am against men. You don't feel that need to be the one who makes all the decisions, and it's not a sign of weakness that

#-ROL  
Although, I do think that we could be stereotyped and if a man consulted others he was practicing good management, if we consulted others, we are indecisive, we don't know what to do. I think it's a sort of stereotype when a
Coded Version of: CROSOY

man is assertive where a woman is aggressive. I think those things are still there. I think that collaborative style, nonconfrontational style, is more common to women.

R: I think so too. Next question, what set you apart from those other females who have not been successful in obtaining the position of superintendent?

#-MEN

P: My good fortune in having the mentors that I had, family support that I had, the role models that I

#-PER

factors and probably attitude. I did not let the fact that I had to apply for superintendent sixteen times before I got one, I did not let that bother me. I did not get negative about it. I didn’t get a bad attitude about it.

R: Next set of questions are knowledge questions. What policies and procedures has the school district implemented support women in administration?

#-TRN

P: As I mentioned, we have the internship positions that are open to all persons, of course, but because women are a high percentage of the teaching work force, naturally, women are going to be in some of those internships.

R: What kinds of informal practices are in place to support women seeking to enter and advance in administrative careers?

#-MEN

P: Probably, informally, people adopt other people for mentoring. Just as I mentioned, I’m using adopt, there are several men and women that I consider myself a mentor.
### VITA

Barbara J. Atwater  
1306 Bloxham Court  
Upper Marlboro, MD 20774

**Place of Birth:**  
Cincinnati, Ohio

**Education:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Institution</th>
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| 1974 | MEd.   | Curriculum and Instruction  
Cleveland State University  
Cleveland, Ohio |
| 1970 | B.S.   | Business Education  
Central State University  
Wilberforce, Ohio |

**Professional Experience**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year Range</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1993 - Present | Vice Principal | Prince George's County Public Schools  
Bowie, Maryland |
| 1989 - 1993 | Coordinator | Academy of Finance Program  
Prince George's County Public Schools  
Oxon Hill, Maryland |
| 1986 - 1989 | Coordinator | Cooperative Office Education Program  
Prince George's County Public Schools  
Oxon Hill, Maryland |
| 1986 - 1984 | Business Education Teacher | Prince George's County Public Schools  
Oxon Hill, Maryland |
| 1974 - 1984 | Coordinator | Cooperative Office Education Program  
Mayfield Heights Public Schools  
Mayfield Heights, Ohio |
| 1972 - 1974 | Business Education Teacher | Maple Heights Public Schools  
Maple Heights, Ohio |
| 1970 - 1972 | Business Education Teacher | Cincinnati Public Schools  
Cincinnati, Ohio |
Professional Membership:

Phi Gamma Nu Professional Business Sorority
Association For Supervision and Curriculum Development
American Association of School Administration
National Association of Secondary School Principals