

Gardner-Webb University

Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

Doctor of Education Dissertations

College of Education

Spring 2022

The Importance of Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Politics for Women of Color Who Aspire to the Superintendency and Other School Leadership Roles

Cicily McCrimmon

Gardner-Webb University, cmccrimmon@gardner-webb.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education-dissertations>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), and the [Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McCrimmon, Cicily, "The Importance of Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Politics for Women of Color Who Aspire to the Superintendency and Other School Leadership Roles" (2022). *Doctor of Education Dissertations*. 91.

<https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education-dissertations/91>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Education at Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Education Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. For more information, please see [Copyright and Publishing Info](#).

THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORSHIP, SPONSORSHIP, AND POLITICS FOR
WOMEN OF COLOR WHO ASPIRE TO THE SUPERINTENDENCY AND OTHER
SCHOOL LEADERSHIP ROLES

By
Cicily A. McCrimmon

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University College of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University
2022

Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Cicily A. McCrimmon under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

Benjamin Williams, EdD
Committee Chair

Date

Stephen Laws, EdD
Committee Member

Date

Amanda Moran, EdD
Committee Member

Date

Prince Bull, PhD
Dean of the College of Education

Date

Acknowledgements

I want to begin by thanking God for the patience and strength to complete this long journey. This dream has come with sacrifices from each of the people whom I love dearly. My children, Mama, brother, and father, whom I lost on this journey, have played a vital role in seeing this dream come to pass. I want to thank them all for their unfailing support by way of loving words, praise, time, and commitment. Each one of them means more to me than they will ever know.

Abstract

THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORSHIP, SPONSORSHIP, AND POLITICS FOR WOMEN OF COLOR WHO ASPIRE TO THE SUPERINTENDENCY AND OTHER SCHOOL LEADERSHIP ROLES. McCrimmon, Cicily A., Spring 2022: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

The purpose of this study was to determine if mentorship and sponsorship could help identify the potential political pitfalls or “hidden rules” of senior-level leadership to increase the identification, recruitment, and retention of minority women, specifically African American women in the role of superintendent or executive at the school and district level. This phenomenological study explored how leadership expectations for women of color have changed over time; however, the narratives illustrate that perceptions related to women of color in senior-level leadership have largely remained unchanged. The absence of the narrative for minority women in leadership, including the limited number serving in senior-level leadership roles, remains problematic. At the time of this research study, of the 115 school districts in North Carolina, six African American women currently served in the role of superintendent in the state. The significance of the number highlights not only the limited pool of minority female superintendents for our state but also a limited network of mentors and sponsors for a grossly underrepresented group, who may aspire to senior leadership positions at the school and district levels in the future. The research suggests that the inclusion of marginalized voices, specifically African American women in senior-level leadership as part of mentor programming and sponsorship design, would positively impact retention and longevity rates for future women of color in leadership roles. Taking intentional steps to mentor and sponsor

women of color in leadership could increase the number who pursue superintendent positions in North Carolina.

Keywords: marginalized, phenomenological research, sponsor

Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem.....	7
Purpose.....	10
Research Questions	11
Significance of the Study	11
Setting	12
Role of the Researcher	15
Definition of Terms.....	17
Summary	22
Chapter 2: Literature Review	24
Overview	24
Theoretical Frameworks	27
History of African American Female Leadership.....	31
Importance of Mentorship and Sponsorship for African American Women in Leadership.....	32
Navigation of Politics in Leadership.....	37
Exercising Voice and Agency.....	40
Robust Sense of Self	42
Summary	44
Chapter 3: Methodology	46
Research Design.....	46
Participants.....	48
Procedures.....	50
Instrumentation	50
Data Collection and Analysis.....	52
Summary	56
Chapter 4: Results	58
Description of Participants and Districts	58
Research Questions	68
Overview of Survey Responses	98
Overview of Interview Responses	98
Chapter 5: Discussion	100
Emerging Themes	101
Summary of Findings.....	106
Supporting Theory	107
Implications for Practice.....	110
Summary of Implications for Practice	113
Delimitations and Limitations of the Study	115
Suggestions for Further Research	117
Conclusion	117
References.....	119
Appendix	
Survey Participant Letter and Consent	125

Tables

1	Participant Response to Interview Question 1	72
2	Participant Response to Interview Question 14	74
3	Participant Response to Interview Question 15	76
4	Participant Response to Interview Question 18	78
5	Participant Response to Interview Question 2	80
6	Participant Response to Interview Question 4	82
7	Participant Response to Interview Question 10	86
8	Participant Response to Interview Question 17	88
9	Participant Response to Interview Question 20	97

Figures

1	Data Related to PhD Awards by African Americans.....	6
2	Robust Sense of Self	44
3	Demographic Data for Principals by Race Rural School District 1.....	59
4	Demographic Data for Principals by Gender Rural School District 1	60
5	Principal Data by Gender Urban School District 1	62
6	Principal Data by Race Urban School District 1	63
7	Principal Demographic Data by Gender Urban School District 2.....	66
8	Principal Demographic Data by Race Urban School District 2.....	67
9	Survey Question 4.....	69
10	Survey Question 5.....	70
11	Survey Statement 1	90
12	Survey Question 2.....	91
13	Survey Question 3.....	92
14	Survey Question 6.....	93
15	Survey Question 7.....	94
16	Survey Question 8.....	95

Chapter 1: Introduction

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man – when I could get it – and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman? (Truth, 1851, para. 2)

D'Agostino (2020) wrote,

It is a strange existence, navigating these spaces as a Black woman. It means being reminded at any given moment that your presence is dubious—an abnormality. It is the chance that, among the small victories and major milestones, someone will go out of their way to discount or minimize your success, cutting you down and tempering whatever delight and self-regard that follow hard-earned triumphs. (para. 11)

These words represent the lived experiences of African American women who manage to navigate spaces most minorities seldom occupy. While this dissertation discussion primarily focused its attention on the experiences of African American women in senior-level leadership roles in North Carolina public school districts, it is noteworthy to add that while both White and Black women have increased their presence at the supervisory and middle management levels, their numbers are far less representative than

those of men as elite leaders and top executives (Eagly & Karau, 2002, para. 1).

The exclusion and marginalization of women and people of color are woven into the fabric of our country's history. The draft document of the Emancipation Proclamation, written by President Abraham Lincoln on September 22, 1862, issued a preliminary declaration to end slavery; and on January 1, 1863, Lincoln made it official that "slaves within any State, or designated part of a State...in rebellion, ...shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free" (Wickham, 2014, para. 8). The Emancipation Proclamation ended decades-long slavery in the southern portion of the United States for men and women of African ancestry. Unfortunately, however, during the years 1863-1865, life for many African Americans, who were now "free" was also fraught with peril.

Freed from the bonds of slavery, many African Americans were effectively left to fend for themselves following slavery. Newly found freedom created an existence that was harsh and difficult; however, despite the myriad challenges endured, African Americans recognized that in order to be fully freed from bondage, they had to be educated. For this reason, the Freedmen's Bureau worked collaboratively with the federal government to establish schools in many parts of the South. These schools would educate not only African American children but also adults who yearned for a life beyond the margins. Indeed, according to Smith (2000), following the war between the states, both southern and northern Freedmen's Bureaus opened schools throughout the South. During Congressional Reconstruction, public school systems were established in the South with separate (segregated) schools for White and Black students (Smith, 2000). Of sad note, however, is the fact that although there were few exclusions for Blacks during the

Reconstruction Period in America in terms of public spaces—schools, hospitals, and churches—people of color continued to contend with separate but unequal accommodations and second-class citizenship based solely on race. Smith (2000) stated that race, once dictated by an informal caste system, was now required by law, as part of Southern Jim Crow legislation, which would create segregated boundaries in race relations for the next century.

Newly appointed Howard University professor Nikole Hannah Jones (2019) wrote a “love letter” of sorts as part of the 1619 Project that earned her a Pulitzer Prize in journalism. Jones discussed the historical importance and impact of education in this country for people of color *and* poor Whites who benefited from the strides made during the Reconstruction Period following the Civil War. According to Jones, public education in this country emerged as a by-product of the Reconstruction Period. Once established, it went on to become a formidable institution predicated on providing all students with access to education. Due primarily to the work of Black legislators, public education, once it became a state-funded entity, allowed for the creation of this country’s first compulsory attendance laws and made learning for students a constitutional right (Jones, 2019).

Fast forward nearly 100 years later and the period of the 1950s through the end of the 1960s is one that can be characterized as a highly racialized and separate United States. Many activists in the Civil Rights Movement struggled to end segregation in the Jim Crow South, and the more insidiously divisive de facto racial segregation in the North (Smith, 2020). Given America’s history with African Americans, is it no wonder that fully integrating women of color into leadership roles within White, male- and

female-dominated school systems continues to prove challenging, even today.

Statistics regarding Black leadership in the 21st century speak for themselves: 2.4% of executive committee members, 1.4% of managing directors, and 1.4% of senior portfolio managers are Black. Only 1.9% of tech executives and 5.3% of tech professionals are African American. African American congressional senators account for 9% of the U.S. Congress, and the average Black partnership rate at U.S. law firms from 2005 to 2016 was only 1.8%. In the field of U.S. higher education, only 7% of its leadership is Black; and in the nonprofit sector, only 8% of its leaders are Black. Finally, just 10% of U.S. businesses are owned by Black men and women (Roberts & Mayo, 2019).

In addition to corporate leadership disparities, statistical data taken from the American Association of School Administrators--The School Superintendents Association (Kowalski et al., 2010) indicated the following:

- Non-minority group respondents more often entered the superintendency before the age of 46 than their peers in the minority group.
- Minority group respondents were more than twice as likely as their peers in the non-minority group to report that they had encountered discrimination in their pursuit of the superintendency (para. 3).

According to “Doctoral degree awards” (2006), 2 decades of progress made by African Americans in the field of doctoral studies is demonstrative of consistent growth over time. Indeed, in the year 1987, only 787 African Americans had earned doctoral degrees. Data from 1990 points to 2.4 times as many as in the year 1987, or a total of 1,869 earned doctoral degrees among African American scholars. This number has now

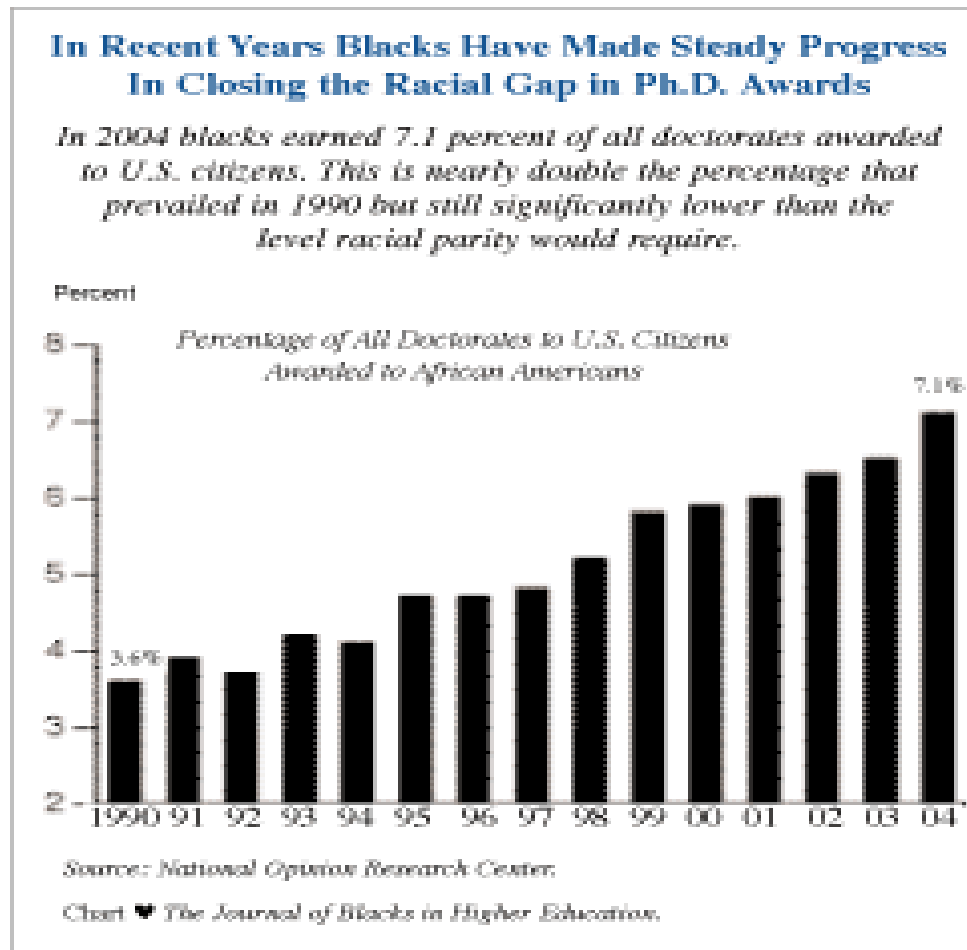
grown by 7.1%, indicating significant growth in a short period of time (“Doctoral degree awards,” 2006).

As stated in the article, there are differences in terms of Blacks and Whites who hold doctoral degrees in the field of education. African Americans continue to earn 41.3% of all doctoral degrees in education, while Whites earn 19.1%. Most Whites earn doctoral degrees in the field of science. According to statistics, large numbers of African Americans have obtained a doctoral degree in the field of education for decades, with only a few variations in the data collected (“Doctoral degree awards,” 2006).

In Figure 1, the data display the number of doctoral degrees awarded to African Americans, including the significant gains made since 1990 in terms of obtaining higher education degrees by minorities in education.

Figure 1

Data Related to PhD Awards by African Americans



Based on the data, there have been substantial increases in closing racial gaps in PhD awards, especially among women of color. The data suggest consistent gains over time in terms of acquiring the credentials necessary for leadership.

Though these data are promising, it is disconcerting to note that equally qualified women and people of color remain largely outnumbered in positions of school leadership when compared to their White male colleagues. Moreover, they are far less likely to hold superintendent positions (Schmitz, 2017). This means that most women who are in positions of senior-level leadership are often left to navigate their initial experiences

without the guidance of a mentor, specifically male mentors who could also serve as allies capable of reframing the narrative regarding a minority woman's ability to lead. Indeed, the role of the mentor becomes even more critical when a woman of color breaks through the "glass ceiling" of senior-level leadership to serve in the role of school superintendent.

According to de Brey et al. (2019) and based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics and the American Institutes for Research, elementary and secondary schools in 2015-2016, that were more racially and ethnically diverse in terms of their student populations, typically had more racial and ethnic diversity among staff. Minority teacher percentages were 55% at schools with student populations that included 90% or more minority students in attendance. Conversely, minority teacher percentages were lowest at schools with 10% or less minority student attendees. Schools with minority student populations of 10% or less had only 2% of minority teachers on staff (de Brey et al., 2019). A more diverse student population will typically reflect a more diverse teaching and administrative staff.

Statement of the Problem

Leadership Assumptions Regarding Race and Gender

Often lost in the discourse regarding accessing the superintendency and senior-level leadership roles for African American females is the importance of sponsorship and mentorship in terms of how to navigate the milieu politics of the position as a female and a person of color.

According to Smith (2020),

This challenge lies in what is known as the Theory of Intersectionality, which is

described as, “the way multiple oppressions are experienced” by women of color. Indeed, “Black legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw coined this term in her insightful essay, “De-marginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-Discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” Based on Crenshaw’s research, Black women are: “Discriminated against in ways that often do not fit neatly within the legal categories of either ‘racism’ or ‘sexism’ but as a combination of both racism and sexism.” (p. 1)

Because of the duality of oppressions often experienced by African American women in leadership roles, specifically in the role of superintendent, it becomes urgent that school districts establish systems of support that include both mentorship and sponsorship for those aspirants in pursuit of the executive school leader position of superintendent. Further, without established systems of support, this underrepresented group of leaders will continue to experience attrition at a rate that surpasses that of their White counterparts.

Colbert (2009) solidified the argument related to perceptions regarding minority leadership by citing Valverde (1974), who asserted minorities were typically barred from being promoted to upper-level leadership roles due to their nonconformity to expectations related to White male leadership. While society and its embrace of diversity in leadership have certainly evolved, faulty thinking and current data suggest that in spite of having overcome a majority of the biases associated with race and ability, glass ceilings remain intact for minority women in pursuit of senior-level leadership roles.

Limited Minority Female Representation in Leadership Roles

“Doctoral degree awards” (2006) indicated that superintendents tend to fulfill obligatory contracts for a period of 5 to 6 years, and the rate of turnover for most superintendents is between 14% and 16%. While these data are valuable, they do little to capture the narrative experiences of female superintendents of color who have shared experiences that have shaped and impacted their work as well as the districts they lead. This lack of qualitative data also leaves a void in terms of wisdom and insight that would be useful to those who intend to pursue the role of superintendent or any school- or district-level leadership position in the future.

Colbert (2009) cited a 2004 survey conducted by the American Association of School Administrators, which revealed minority superintendents were typically hired if school boards were demographically diverse. Based on the data, 58% of minority women serving as superintendents shared that when hired, the school board included two or more persons of color, whereas only 12% of White women superintendents and 9% of White male superintendents experienced similarly diverse boards of education when hired (Colbert, 2009).

Ospina and Foldy (2009) introduced three questions for further exploration as part of the emerging narrative regarding minority female leadership:

1. How does race affect the perception of leadership?
2. How does race affect the ways leadership is enacted?
3. How do leaders grapple with the social reality of race?

These broad questions were used as a guide for the interview questions that shaped the discussions held with respondents as part of the research used to center this

dissertation narrative. According to Ospina and Foldy (2009), the research in their study focused on literature that highlights Critical Race Theory and began with the idea that race not only shapes individuals' psychological makeup but is also inherently part of their "collective identity and of the larger social structures within which leadership emerges" (p. 3).

Further research questions that guided this dissertation narrative included the profile and work history of each respondent; their pathway to their current leadership role (district or building level); challenges they faced (anticipated or unexpected); personal interpretations of how race has impacted their professional experiences; mentorship in their former or current role (district-sponsored vs. organic); recommendations for other women of color in similar leadership roles; professional goals for the future; and finally, any advice they wished to offer their current district in terms of how to provide mentorship and sponsorship experiences for women of color in the future.

Purpose

The overarching goal of this study was to highlight the importance of diverse support systems for women of color who serve in senior-level leadership roles. An additional goal was to begin to establish a set of identifiable codified norms that may emerge to frame future discussions regarding the importance of mentorship programming, sponsorship, and the navigation of politics for women of color in leadership positions. I am also hopeful that once identified, minority women in leadership can begin to establish networks of support, which will allow increased numbers of African American women serving in the role of superintendent to thrive. Finally, the inclusion of the African American female perspective as it relates to leadership in schools

and districts gives voice to the importance of marginalized communities. Who better to assert the needs of this underrepresented group than those who have waited patiently in the shadows for their opportunity to shine?

Research Questions

The goal of this set of research questions was to determine whether common themes or experiences occur within a similar group of respondents. Ideally, guidelines regarding how districts and schools can become more inclusive in identifying, recruiting, retaining, and advancing African American female leaders may emerge from these discussions as well. Research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What impact, if any, do district-sponsored mentor programs have on the longevity rates of African American women serving in senior-level leadership roles or in superintendent positions in the state of North Carolina?
2. What identified resiliency factors contribute to the long-term success of African American women serving in senior-level leadership roles or in superintendent positions in the state of North Carolina?
3. What impact, if any, do sponsors, formal or informal, have on job promotion and on retention rates for African American women serving in senior-level leadership roles or in superintendent positions in the state of North Carolina?
4. To what extent do these collected narratives (qualitative results) support the survey (quantitative results) of this research?

Significance of the Study

The objective of this research was to highlight the marginalized experiences of African American women in leadership roles, specifically in school- and district-level

senior leadership positions. Based on current data for the state of North Carolina, there are only six seated superintendents in this state, which includes 115 school districts. The data suggest a need for increased diversity in leadership roles, especially for those individuals who have historically been excluded from positions of authority. The use of phenomenological research as part of this study was considered a qualitative strategy that would allow for an examination into the lives of these women and provide a platform for them to share stories about their leadership experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, para. 3). It was my hope that from these shared narratives, strategies regarding how district- and school-level leadership could become more inclusive in their efforts to identify, recruit, and retain minority females would emerge.

Setting

Rural School District 1

A select group of participants for this study currently serve in a rural school district in the state of North Carolina. Based on current census data, the county statistics are as follows: The median age range is 46.9 years, which is comparatively 20% higher than the state of North Carolina and 25% higher than the average age range in the United States. Fifty-two percent of residents are female; 48% of residents are male. Seventy-two percent of residents are White; 11% of the population is African American; <1% of the population is Native American; 2% of the population is Asian; <1% of the population identifies as Island Native; 1% of the population identifies as other; 2% of county residents identify as being of two or more races; and finally, residents of Hispanic descent make up 12% of the overall population.

The district has 21 schools: one early college, five high schools (four traditional,

one alternative), three middle schools, five K-8 schools, six elementary schools, and one Montessori school. Just under 9,000 students are enrolled in kindergarten through 12th grade.

Educational statistics related to the county are as follows: 90.5% of residents are high school graduates as compared to North Carolina's rate, which is 88.2%. The percentage of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher is 45.1% as compared to the state of North Carolina, which is 31.9%. Data related to poverty as taken from the Census of 2018-2019 is as follows: 9% of the residents were living in poverty, according to 2018-2019 data. Comparatively, 14% of North Carolina's residents were living in poverty and 13.1% of U.S. citizens were living in poverty, according to 2018-2019 Census data. Final data used as part of this research revealed the following statistics: 78% of students reside in English-speaking-only households, 20% of students reside in Spanish-speaking-only households, students in Asian/Pacific-speaking-only households make up 2% of the student population.

Urban School District 1

The second set of respondents for this dissertation research study currently serve in an urban school district in North Carolina. It is comprised of three high schools, four middle schools, 11 elementary schools, an alternative high school, as well as a school for young people being treated at UNC Hospital. The district currently serves more than 12,000 students daily.

Of the 60,998 residents in the county, 71% are aged 18-64, with the median age range being 28.8 years. Demographics for the county are as follows: 68% are White, 11% are Black, 11% are Asian, 7% are Hispanic; 54% of residents identify as female, and 46%

of residents identify as male. The per capita income of residents is \$44,223, with the median household income being 1.3 times the amount of most North Carolinians at \$73,612. Despite those figures, 17.6% of the county's population lives below the poverty line; a rate that is 25% more than the rate of most citizens in the more rural portions of the county and 1.3 times the rate of North Carolina.

There is a total of 32,833 households in the district. Of that number, 56% are married couples. Ninety-one percent of units in the county are occupied, with 53% of those units being owned by the occupants. The median individual value of the properties is \$422,200.

According to U.S. Census data, languages spoken in households include the following: 81.7% are English speaking, 5.1% are Spanish speaking, 5% are Indo-European speaking, and 6.9% are Asian/Islander speaking households. In terms of educational attainment, 96.6% of the population includes high school graduates, and 76.7% have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. Finally, 14.8% of residents in the county are foreign-born as compared to the state of North Carolina with a foreign-born population of 8.4%.

Urban School District 2

The third school district in the state that included respondents for this study is an urban school district made up of 321,488 residents. According to the district's website, the "school district is one of the top 10 largest in the state, serving more than 32,000 students in both the city and county."

The median age range for the county is 35.7 years, with 66% of the population ranging in age between 18-64 years. Fifty-two percent of the population is female, and

48% of the population is male. Demographics for the county include the following: 42% White, 36% Black, 5% Asian, 3% two or more races, and 13% of the population identifies as Hispanic.

The per capita income for the county is \$36,195, which is 10% higher than the state of North Carolina. The median household income is \$65,317, which is 10% higher than the state of North Carolina. Some 14.1% of the population in this county live below the poverty line, which is slightly higher than the state of North Carolina, which has a current poverty rate of 13.6%. Twenty-one percent of the population is school-aged, with 8% of the citizenry identifying as seniors aged 65 and older living in poverty. Of the 131,140 households in the county, 51% are made up of married couples.

There are a total of 142,012 housing units in the county, with 55% being owned by the occupants. The median value of the housing units in the county is \$248,900. Educational statistics for the county include 89.2% of residents being high school graduates and 49.3% of residents having obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. Finally, of the 16% foreign-born residents in the county, 50% are from Latin American countries of origin.

Role of the Researcher

Several years ago, as part of my work towards a master's degree in school administration, I had the honor of interviewing my grandmother about her school experience. Her recollections of that time period were at once lucid and surreal. She spoke about the one-room schoolhouse and having to gather coal to light the fires in the mornings before classes began. She spoke with great pride about her teachers and principals, individuals who chose to share what they knew in an atmosphere that, though

segregated, was rife with danger and hostility. I candidly recall my grandmother sharing how she felt when she was told that she could no longer attend school because as the eldest child in the family, she was expected to begin working. She would have been approximately 12 years old at that time.

As a result of my grandmother's difficult childhood and adolescent marriage in a rural community, her school experience only included formal education up to about sixth grade. Consequently, during her lifetime, it would be with great shame that she acknowledged that she could neither read nor write. For practical purposes, she could recognize and sign her name to documents. In fact, according to my mother, despite my grandfather's work ethic and industry, he only went to school up until Grade 3. He had to, like most African Americans in the South, begin working at an early age to supplement the income of his parents in order to ensure the survival of the family. Both my maternal grandmother and grandfather managed to survive the Jim Crow South. They were able to raise children who went on to achieve some measure of this country's American dream. Each of their children was also a product of segregated schooling in the South. Despite this reality, according to my mother, these schools were sacred places. These community schools were, in fact, safe havens for the African American community. These adults taught African American students not only content knowledge but life skills that would later enable them to positively impact their communities of color.

I, too, am the product of rural education in the South. As a former student and current teacher in a rural community, I have, like many, had a multitude of racialized life experiences. I have been a classroom teacher for a number of years, a professional

development coordinator, a curriculum coach, and a middle and high school principal. Each of these professional experiences afforded me an opportunity to grow and learn. In spite of challenges, I feel teaching students and leading professionals in their work toward providing equitable, high-quality instruction is an undertaking of both the heart and the mind. It is no secret that as a country, we have a long way to go towards equalizing educational outcomes for students. In fact, we have in some instances, lost ground because of legislation and policy changes. Schools are currently facing the reality of inequitable access to resources and a pervasive culture of “low expectations” for some students; however, school administrators and teachers can make a significant difference in the lives of students by ensuring each receives rigorous daily instruction as part of their school experience.

Definition of Terms

Acting Participants

An African American female leader who feels responsible for speaking up and out because there are so few African American women in a selected field of study. The women understand that their “engaged presence” is necessary for change to occur in the academy (Roberts et al., 2019).

Asserting Personhood

The ways participants demand or expect to be recognized and respected as individuals; despite race and gender (Roberts et al., 2019).

Black Feminism

A theory in support of the political, economic, and social equality of the African American woman (Smith, 2020).

Codified

The standardization of expectations regardless of race or gender (Merriam-Webster, n.d.a).

Collective Self-Determination Theory

The theory that Blacks should unite and work together because they are an oppressed people, a people with their own distinctive racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or national identity; and as a people, Blacks have interests that are best served by their becoming a self-determining group (Shelby, 2002).

Common Oppression Theory

The theory that Blacks should unite and work together because they suffer a common oppression (Shelby, 2002).

Critical Race Theory

Refers to a field of intellectual inquiry that reveals legal systemic racism in America using law and history as the primary source of codified racism in America (Bell, 2020).

Cultural Group

The customary beliefs, social norms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group (Smith, 2020).

De-marginalization

Elevating individuals to important or powerful positions within a society or group (Jones, 2019).

Diversity

The inclusion of different types of people (such as people of different races or

cultures) in a group or organization (Merriam-Webster, n.d.b).

Double Jeopardy

Considerable danger or trouble from two sources (Patrick et al., 2002).

Emancipation Proclamation

A presidential proclamation and executive order issued by United States President Abraham Lincoln on September 22, 1862, during the Civil War (National Archives Association, 2002).

Facades of Conformity

False representations created by employees to appear as if they embrace organizational values (Hewlin et al., 2016).

Feminist Thought

The act of speaking is a way that women come to power, telling our stories, sharing history, engaging in *feminist* discussion (Smith, 2020).

Grounded Theory Methodology

A sociological design in which the researcher creates a general “abstract” theory of process, action, or interaction based on the viewpoint of the participants in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Group Relations Theory

“The view that behavior is influenced not only by one's unique pattern of traits but also by one's need to conform to social demands and expectations” (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

Hidden Rules

Rules that are part of an organization or group that are covertly acted upon by

specific individuals who are in positions of real or perceived power within that organization (Roberts et al., 2019).

Impacting

This property reveals the multitude of ways African American women scholars understand their impact on the academy (Merriam-Webster, n.d.c).

Integration

Incorporation as equals into society or an organization of individuals of different groups, such as races (Merriam-Webster, n.d.d).

Interlocking

To become locked together or interconnected (Bell, 2020).

Intersectionality

A description of the way multiple oppressions is experienced (Smith, 2020).

Interest Convergence

People with power will support ideas that may serve others when there is some benefit for their own privilege embedded within (Bell, 2020).

Jim Crow

Ethnic discrimination especially against Blacks by legal enforcement or traditional sanctions (Jones, 2019).

Mentorship

The influence, guidance, or direction given by a mentor (Allen, 1995).

Oppression

Unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power (Merriam-Webster, n.d.e).

Practitioner

One who practices a profession (Merriam-Webster, n.d.f).

Responsibility to Students

This property reveals a deeply felt responsibility to students. Participants recognized the embodiment of that responsibility as central to their ability to affect their environment. Acting for students in some ways means acting on behalf of themselves (Roberts et al., 2019).

Segregation

The separation or isolation of a race, class, or ethnic group by enforced or voluntary residence in a restricted area, by barriers to social intercourse, by separate educational facilities, or by other discriminatory means (Merriam-Webster, n.d.g).

Sponsorship

One who assumes responsibility for some other person or thing (Allen, 1995).

Superintendent

A person who directs or manages a place, department, or organization (Merriam-Webster, n.d.h).

Tenure

A status granted after a trial period to a teacher that gives protection from [summary](#) dismissal (Merriam-Webster, n.d.i).

Triple Jeopardy

Considerable danger or trouble from three sources (Smith, 2020).

Valuing Rigor

Data that included participant discussion about their love and dedication to

rigorous inquiry in their own research and in the classroom (Roberts et al., 2019).

Summary

This research study discussed the narratives of senior-level leaders at the school and district levels, including principals and central office executives who are African American females in high-profile positions within specified school districts, both rural and urban. The overarching goal of the research was to connect these experiences in order to promote the importance of mentorship and sponsorship to improve the rates of retention, recruitment, and promotion for underrepresented women in the field of education. Further goals of the research were to provide participants with an opportunity to network, advise, and influence policy and program changes within school districts in North Carolina. Chapter 2 of the dissertation provides a framework for the discussion as well as theoretical reasons for the lack of representation of minority women in leadership. Chapter 3 presents the methodology used to conduct the research, including an interview and a survey for respondents to complete. Chapter 4 of the research unpacks the collected narrative data (interviews and surveys) and begins to connect the theoretical frameworks, including common themes to the lived experiences of African American women in senior-level leadership roles. Chapter 5 summarizes the research and provides recommendations for the current and future work of school districts in terms of minority female leadership.

The final goal of the research dissertation was to add to the emerging body of data related to the leadership experiences of minority females, specifically African American women who are currently serving in school districts in the state of North Carolina. Through the use of mixed methods research, this study compiled their narratives;

established common themes; and based on quantitative and qualitative data, relayed their lived experiences into a narrative to inform districts about the importance of developing mentorship and sponsorship programming for minority women. It is my hope that this study will help establish recommendations regarding a framework that will inform and influence school districts regarding how to best recruit, support, and retain underrepresented African American women leaders in senior-level leadership positions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

The purpose of this literature review was to document and analyze the sources that served as the framework for writing my dissertation. My research posits that mentorship and sponsorship in terms of senior-level leadership are integral to the success of African American women who aspire to these positions, either in public or private K-12 institutions. This study was important because schools continue to face challenges involving equity and opportunity for many students and leaders of color. Typically, there are quantitative data that can be used as a guide for school and district planning; however, without the narrative and expertise that people of color bring to the review of said data, the urgency for change may be negatively affected. The narrative for women of color has been missing from discussions involving leadership for a number of years. Collectively, African American women have been either forced to lead as typified during the antebellum period in American history or encouraged to lead as illustrated during the Civil Rights era in this country.

Without formally allowing African American women to be included in the executive decision-making process, i.e., leading these discussions as either an assistant superintendent or as the superintendent for a district, all students are negatively affected by the loss of their collective narrative. Further, the issue as discussed by a number of scholars who have previously studied trends in attrition rates for women of color in leadership positions, as well as the limited body of research based on the percentage of African American women in such positions, defines the problem as a complex one. Concerns include a number of challenges involving preparation, recruitment, aligned

leadership and vision (between boards of education and the superintendent), and finally, longevity in the position. One scholar identified longevity in the position as being a minimum of 5 years (Appendix; Stoneton, 2018).

Longevity and experience in leadership roles were the primary factors used to select participants for this research study. Identified African American female superintendents, district-, and school-based leaders were eligible to participate in subsequent interviews as part of qualitative research methods that were used in this study. My research further identified the key perceived character traits that led to the overall success of long-serving African American female leaders in public schools. These identified resiliency traits trended across several respondents and led to conclusions that may help school districts identify viable candidates of color for executive leadership positions. Further, this study may also allow districts to begin to groom and prepare minority female leaders in their districts for future senior leadership roles.

The age of the literature used as part of this review varies by date, with the oldest source being documented from the year 1990 and the most recent source being from 2020. There were much older sources of information that could have been used as part of this initial literature review; however, it should be noted that the older sources typically contained fewer female respondents. It became clear that in order to get a range of reliable responses, it would be vital to use more current research in terms of the data reviewed. The primary sources for my research included qualitative responses to a prescribed set of themed interview questions. In addition to this methodology, I also used the following framing theories to serve as a guide for my dissertation writing: Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality, and Dissatisfaction Theory.

Each of these theories was examined from a number of perspectives that identified patterns in terms of why the problem in recruiting, attracting, and retaining African American female superintendents and those in senior-level leadership continues to persist. It should be further noted that research from the business community was also used as part of framing this narrative. These sources primarily focused on organizational theory as it relates to the idea of corporate racism as one aggravating factor that hinders the promotion of African American women in the role of superintendent.

Due to the limited number of African American women serving in the role of superintendent and in senior-level leadership roles in schools and districts, the importance of mentoring experiences and identified sponsors for promotion purposes becomes more vital and compelling. One respondent described her mentoring experience as one in which the mentor encouraged her to pursue her career aspirations. Others shared that sponsors often provided resources they needed as they prepared to pursue leadership opportunities. Though mentors and sponsors each have a positive impact on minority female leaders, their visibility and presence in such roles is limited (Allen, 1995, para. 43). Individuals who did not have sponsors confirmed that while these individuals were critical to their professional development, few were available to serve in the role of mentor and sponsor (Allen, 1995, para. 44). Without formalized systems of support, specifically mentorship and sponsorship, there will continue to be limited representation in superintendent and senior-level leadership roles for minority women of color in North Carolina. More importantly, however, when those who aspire to these leadership roles are promoted and prepared to lead, they may find themselves feeling isolated and without the support needed to be successful. In fact, according to Allen (1995), African American

leaders often feel challenged in their leadership roles due to assumptions related to Affirmative Action policies and promotion. Because a majority of teachers are White and female, minority leaders often face questions regarding their legitimacy in terms of decision-making. In some cases, teachers may even doubt whether an African American leader has been properly prepared for the role. As specifically stated in Allen's research,

The majority of teachers are White, and I think it's difficult because White teachers are going to look at you and say, "Does she know what she's doing?" I don't think they'd give a White educator as hard a time. (p. 49)

Finally, as discussed in Allen's (1995) research, there is a difference between mentors and sponsors. Mentors can assist with helping people remain motivated to achieve their goals, while sponsors have the professional connections to open the doors of accessibility for one's goals. The absence of sponsors leads many to fear that they too would hit the proverbial glass ceiling; that is, they would be able to see the goals they want to reach but be unable to attain them (Allen, 1995).

Theoretical Frameworks

Conceptual Framework Theory 1: Critical Race Theory

In the case of female leaders of color, Critical Race Theory suggests that despite the limitations placed on African American women as a result of systemic racism, these lived micro-aggressions also reinforce agency, which allows these women to move beyond their perceived limitations and re-culture their work environments (Ospina & Foldy, 2009).

Critical race theory refers to a broad social scientific approach to the study of race, racism, and society. Crenshaw and Bell popularized the notion of Critical Race

Theory within the subfield of critical legal studies in the 1980s (Bell, 2020). Both Crenshaw and Bell referenced that despite Civil Rights legislation in the U.S., social and economic conditions for African Americans did not improve once the movement ended. Through the concept of “interest convergence,” Bell (2020) asserted that the reason Civil Rights legislation passed in the first place was largely because it served the interests of America’s White elite (para.1).

This research study demonstrates that despite an organization’s best efforts to alleviate tensions that may arise when people of color serve in senior leadership roles, due to racial disparities and inherent racism as part of American culture, issues related to race and perceived leadership inadequacies often exist within systemically racialized organizations; more specifically within school districts where disparate gaps in disciplinary data and academic performance for students of color continue to persist.

Yosso (2005) declared the notion of capital can be measured beyond economics. Cultural wealth can include aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, as well as various forms of resistance. Each of these relies on the “wealth” students of color bring to school with them from their homes and communities. This dissertation explored how these same cultural capital exemplars prevail in the lives of women of color who aspire to leadership roles in White, male-dominated arenas.

Critical Race Theory as discussed for this dissertation suggests race and racism impact social structures, practices, and discourses both implicitly and explicitly. It is a social justice framework for emancipating the potential for schools. Finally, Critical Race Theory asserts the inherent contradiction of education; a system that simultaneously oppresses and marginalizes, while also maintaining the ability to empower and liberate

(Yosso, 2005).

Conceptual Framework 2: Black Feminism and Intersectionality

According to Smith (2020), after Crenshaw introduced the term “intersectionality” in 1989, it was widely adopted because it managed to encompass in a single word the simultaneous experience of the multiple oppressions faced by Black women. But the concept was not a new one. Since the times of slavery, Black women have eloquently described the multiple oppressions of race, class, and gender, referring to this concept as “interlocking oppressions,” “simultaneous oppressions,” “double jeopardy,” “triple jeopardy,” or any number of descriptive terms (Smith, 2020).

How does this theory impact the experiences of African American female school and district administrators, specifically those who may aspire to the role of school superintendent? This research study used current narratives collected from interviews and surveys as a basis for the argument that despite the gains African American female leaders have made, for example, the first woman elected to serve as vice president of the United States is a woman of color, the absence of our collective minority female narrative makes that appointment not only an anomaly but also an aberration.

Conceptual Framework 3: Dissatisfaction Theory

Perry (2008) noted the phenomenon of superintendent replacement as recognized in 1970 by Iannaccone and Lutz is known as Dissatisfaction Theory. Studies have documented that when relationships are strained among dominant stakeholders--i.e., boards of education, communities, and superintendents--voters will replace school board members, who will then be charged with replacing superintendents with individuals who are more reflective of the community’s values (Perry, 2008). Perry went on to assert that

within organizations, dissatisfaction among constituency groups can occur at all levels and will ultimately lead to the termination of the superintendent.

How does this theory impact the longevity and success of historically marginalized members of society? Indeed, given the supposition of this theory, it becomes urgent that universities, school districts, and boards of education that seek to develop continuity in leadership and equity at all levels create systems of support for hires who may not mirror the demographics or ideals of their communities.

My hope was that at the conclusion of this study a set of identifiable codified norms would emerge to frame future discussions regarding the importance of mentorship programming for women of color in leadership positions. I am also hopeful that once identified, minority women in leadership can establish networks that will allow for increased numbers of African American women serving in superintendent or executive leadership roles to thrive. This literature review was organized as follows: historical background and perspectives regarding African American leadership in schools, specifically related to African American female leaders; and the importance of mentorship and sponsorship for African American women in leadership, including research previously done regarding the African American male or female in executive leadership positions. In addition, the literature review discusses and unpacks the necessity of navigating the politics of leadership, specifically for African American women serving in school- and district-level leadership positions. Finally, discussions regarding the implications for existing and future research as compelling conclusions are explored as part of the gathered research narrative.

History of African American Female Leadership

As discussed by Walker (2014), African American women have a long history of service in education, starting with the antebellum period and ending with the Civil Rights Movement.

Based on the data presented thus far regarding women in superintendent positions, it should be noted that data exist for the leadership group, which is predominantly White and female. As indicated by a number of scholarly articles, there is very limited evidence regarding the African American female school superintendent experience. The earliest literature focused predominantly on African American males in school leadership. The National Alliance of Black School Administrators (Jackson, 1999, as cited in Colbert, 2009) cited four pioneers in history in terms of superintendent appointments: Lillard Ashley (1956) in Boley, Oklahoma; Lorenzo R. Smith (1956) in Hopkins Park, Illinois; E.W. Warrior (1958) of Taft, Ohio; and finally, Arthur Shropshire (1963) of Kinloch, Missouri. The Reconstruction Period immediately following the Civil War resulted in five states appointing African American superintendents, including Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina (Moody, 1995, as cited in Colbert, 2009).

Sadly, as of 1999, there were so few African American female superintendents that it was noted in the literature that the number was fewer than 50 most years (Jackson, 1999, as cited in Colbert, 2009). In 1993, a concerted effort was made by Effie Jones and Dr. Xenia Montenegro to uncover information related to African American female superintendents (Colbert, 2009). During the years 1993-1994, African American female superintendents served in districts that had students who numbered as few as 1,300 in Oberlin, Ohio, and as many as 409,730 in Chicago, Illinois (Colbert, 2009). The data also

suggest that from 1993-1994, African American superintendents served in the following districts: Berkeley, Cleveland, Memphis, San Diego, Denver, and Chicago; each of which had student populations of more than 60,000 (Jackson, 1999, as cited in Colbert, 2009). As chronicled in the history of African American women in the educational system, we know that even during slavery, Black women defied laws in order to teach the enslaved to read (Colbert, 2009).

Colbert (2009) stated that the earliest noted African American superintendent was discovered in the research of Amie Revere in 1985, who determined that in Boley, Oklahoma, Velma Dolphin Ashley served as the superintendent in an all-Black community from 1944-1956. Her term of service was followed by the leadership of her husband, who served until 1976. From 1973-1975, Barbara Sizemore was the first African American woman to lead a major urban school system in Washington, D.C. Dr. Beverly Hall, who served as superintendent of New York City's 32 Community School district and later as deputy chancellor of New York Public Schools, was also appointed the state superintendent of New Jersey. Lastly, in 1997, Dr. Rosa Smith was named the 1997 Superintendent of the Year from the state of Wisconsin, the first Black woman to receive that honor (Jackson, 1999, as cited in Colbert, 2009).

Importance of Mentorship and Sponsorship for African American Women in Leadership

Based on research data culled from predominantly White work environments, leaders of color often encounter constraints based on the perceptions of others. Attributed entirely to race, leaders of color are often considered illegitimate representations of leadership within predominantly White organizations (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Colbert

(2009) asserted that though little research exists regarding minority women superintendents, existing data suggest that women are more likely to be hired for top school jobs in urban school districts. Typically, they also represent the first female leader in those districts (Vail, 1999, as cited in Colbert, 2009).

Colbert's (2009) statement supports the urgent need for mentorship for women of color in superintendent positions. Limited networking opportunities and mentorship often lead to an increased sense of isolation and, sadly, higher attrition rates in terms of longevity for African American superintendents and senior-level executives, especially those who are the first or are new to their positions. McDade and Drake (1982, as cited in Colbert, 2009) identified several barriers women often encounter as they ascend to the executive leadership roles:

- the expectation that women will be better than their male counterparts
- the belief that women who are successful are an exception, not the rule
- the reality that women typically do not receive equal compensation in terms of salary, title, and status in senior-level leadership roles

Women are often unwilling to compete for top-level positions because they do not want to encounter the discrimination inherent in leadership assignments (Colbert, 2009).

Shakeshaft (1989, as cited in Colbert, 2009) discussed the models of Estler (1975) as the cause for the lack of female representation in the superintendency as directly tied to the following: (a) Women's Place Model, which "assumes that women's non-participation in administrative careers is based on social norms" (p. 24); (b) the Discrimination Model, which posits that "institutions perpetuate patterns of behavior that result in the efforts of one group excluding the participation of another" (p. 24); and (c)

the Meritocracy Model, “which assumes that the most competent people have been promoted and thus women are incompetent (p. 25). Colbert (2009) cited the work of Tallerico, which suggested that limited representation is related to the assumption that women who tend to have more aggressive leadership styles are considered unacceptable in general, while others are simply uncomfortable when women are in authoritative positions.

Ironically as noted in the research, when women fail to function effectively within male-dominated, patriarchal systems, specifically in the role of school superintendent, their lack of longevity in the role adds to the myth that they are unsuited for such positions. Colbert (2009) ascertained that those who believe women are incapable of leading have those biases confirmed when women in leadership experience failure.

To further highlight the importance of mentorship to women of color in leadership, Allen (1995) cited the conceptual model of Expectancy Theory as first posited by behaviorist Vroom in 1964, which connects the career aspirations of African American women to their behaviors and their ability to attain the rewards they pursue. It further supports the importance of mentors and sponsors to African American women in educational administration.

Expectancy Theory focuses on three areas of motivation that connect rewards to one’s intrinsic and extrinsic behaviors. The concepts are best described as (a) expectancy, which is described as one’s ability to successfully engage in an activity; (b) instrumentality, which is the subjective perception of how one’s behavior is connected to work outcomes; and (c) valence, or the attractiveness of the rewards (Jacobson, 1987, as cited in Allen, 1995).

Allen (1995) suggests that a mentor is an individual who provides counsel and moral support for someone who aspires to be an administrator. A sponsor is an individual capable of providing opportunities for career advancement and increased networking opportunities. In Allen's work, which references Shakeshaft (1987), mentors and sponsors prove invaluable to those who wish to advance in educational administration. A lack of mentorship or sponsorship can often stand in the way of promotion.

Experienced administrators will often select individuals who mirror their ideals and philosophies when grooming prospective candidates for career advancement (Coursen et al., as cited in Allen, 1995). Because school administrators are predominantly White and male (Jacobson, 1990, as cited in Allen, 1995), African American women confront a "double-bind" of race and gender bias as they seek mentors and sponsors from among traditional "old-boy" networks (Doughty, 1980, as cited in Allen, 1995). As concluded by Shakeshaft, African American women are often penalized twice in the area of sponsorship because White men tend to advance other White men (Allen, 1995). Men who do sponsor women in leadership roles typically select women who are either passive and nonthreatening or at least appear to be so (Adkinson, 1981, as cited in Allen, 1995).

Based on these assertions, a small body of research speaks to the importance of mentorship for women of color in leadership roles. Mentorship is vital in addressing the need for positive self-concept, which succinctly means the ability, knowledge, and skills that are critical to one's success. Specifically, the promotion of self-concept is vital for African American women enrolled in programs that prepare them for administrative positions. Such programs appear to lead to positive academic and professional relationships for African American women, especially when relationships are developed

between them, other students, and faculty members, including their advisors (Payne & Jackson, 1978, as cited in Allen, 1995).

These positive relationships deeply impact the overall success of women of color as they pursue administrative positions. According to the work of Bulls (1987, as cited in Allen, 1995), “Broad networks of support and central office work experience are necessary for African-American female administrators who wish to attain an appointment as superintendent” (p. 413). Research conducted by theorist Frazier (1962, as cited in Allen, 1995), asserted that because of their experiences in church leadership, Black women often do not consider leadership positions synonymous with men. Due to leadership responsibilities most women of color assume as a result of their work in their respective churches and communities, many learn to develop nontraditional support systems and networks that help develop their leadership skills (Frazier, 1962, as cited in Allen, 1995).

While this may be true, as noted by Rawlings-McDowell (2018), an individual’s future career path and pattern of success are often influenced by the guidance they receive from role models, mentors, and sponsors. As part of further research conducted by Smith and Crawford (2007, as cited in Rawlings-McDowell, 2018), lacking the influence of a mentor does not mean a leader will be incapable of achieving success; however, it does mean they may lose access to resources and opportunities a mentor may be able to provide. Effective mentors often provide career counseling, advice, and information to prospective leaders who seek advancement (Smith & Crawford, 2007, as cited in Rawlings-McDowell, 2018).

Navigation of Politics in Leadership

According to Rawlings-McDowell (2018), many African American professionals will often focus their efforts on finding the ideal work assignment, changing jobs, seeking advanced degrees, and exerting more time and effort than required, all in an effort to be promoted; when the reality for improving one's chances for career advancement is the ability to align one's career goals with those of the organization.

The North Carolina Public School system is made up of 115 school districts. Of those 115 school districts, only six school districts currently have African American female superintendents serving at the helm. The districts led by African American women serving in the role of superintendent include Edgecombe County Schools, Dr. Valerie Bridges; Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, Dr. Nyah Hamlett; Scotland County Schools, Dr. Takeda LeGrand; Granville County Schools, Dr. Alisa McLean; Orange County Schools, Dr. Monique Felder; and Lexington City Schools, Dr. Anitra Wells.

It is not surprising to find that the state of North Carolina has such a small number of female African American superintendents. What is surprising is that despite the changes we have seen enacted in districts in our state as related to persons of color, including the establishment of equity teams and diversity training in public schools, our efforts to ensure equitable practices in senior leadership assignments and, more specifically, superintendent appointments continue to fall miserably short of representing the student populations many school districts in North Carolina currently serve.

As discussed by Ospina and Foldy (2009), the following is notable: Unfortunately, when people of color are given access to leadership positions, many continue to face inequities and hardships that result from their interactions with

colleagues and subordinates largely due to the power inequities that privilege Whiteness. While affirmative action policies are important, they are insufficient in terms of advancing leaders of color to positions of authority. Genuinely inclusive work environments tend to value diversity and are accepting of multiple perspectives and backgrounds (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). This is especially true for those who could serve as “lightning rods” for the career advancement of African American women in leadership roles.

According to Ball (2018), the following data have been disaggregated based on student demographics and teacher representation. Students of color make up 50% of the American K-12 population according to Census data from 2014-2015. The American teaching force is roughly 80% White. Pervasive gaps in diversity representation as evidenced by demographic data for the American school population are as follows: 25% of students are Hispanic, while only 9% of American teachers are Hispanic, which represents a diversity gap of approximately 16%; 15% of American K-12 students are African American and only 6% of American K-12 teachers are African American, which represents a diversity gap of approximately 9%. Despite research that strongly suggests a Black teacher can have a profound effect on educational outcomes for Black students, a lack of diversity in the teaching population exists. Further data estimate that by the year 2060, the “diversity gap” between Black student enrollment and Black teachers will remain at 9%, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau; while projections in diversity between Hispanic student enrollment and Hispanic teachers in the year 2060 is projected to be at 22%, resulting in an even greater diversity gap for Hispanic students (Ball, 2018).

No less daunting are current data which suggest approximately 1.5 million students attend North Carolina public schools. Fifty-one percent of the student population is White in North Carolina (Ball, 2018). Roughly 26% of African American students attend North Carolina public schools, and approximately 14% of North Carolina public schools are attended by Hispanic students. Finally, 3% of Asian students currently attend North Carolina public schools (Ball, 2018). According to the data, this means on average, most minority students will continue to be taught and led by individuals who, though well-meaning, do not look like them.

Finally, in addition to having the task of attracting qualified persons of color as candidates for central office and school-level leadership, districts are also faced with the issue of retaining said individuals once they assume the role of superintendent. As a result of systemic racism, African American leaders often struggle with feeling inauthentic at work. According to research conducted by McGill University's Patricia Faison Hewlin, many minorities feel compelled to create "facades of conformity," which necessitate the suppression of personal values, views, or attributes to fit in with organizational ones (Hewlin et al., 2016).

However, despite their conformity efforts, Black leaders are more likely than White ones to leave their organizations. "It is clear the norms and cultural defaults of leadership in most organizations create an inhospitable environment that leaves even those Black employees who have advanced, feeling like outsiders—and in some cases, pushes them out the door" (Roberts & Mayo, 2019, para. 18).

Under the best of circumstances, school-level leadership can be described as unpredictable and, at its worst, may include a series of "landmines" one is often forced to

navigate. What makes serving in the role of executive school- and district-level administrator more tenuous are the “unspoken rules” that impact all leaders. I would posit that these “hidden rules” of senior-level leadership affect women of color to an even greater degree.

Ospina and Foldy (2009) confirmed this assumption in their research, which maintained that people of color face the duality of their racial identity being both a constraint through superficial judgments imposed by others and also a benefit that can result in opportunities to lead across racial differences. It would be beneficial for leadership development programs to infuse a reflective component that encourages participants to explore when and how their race constrains or enables their leadership (Ospina & Foldy, 2009).

Glaringly absent from discussions regarding the minority leadership experience is how one can best understand and prepare for the political ramifications of serving as a leader from an underrepresented, minority group. Typically, minorities in leadership roles are left to fend for themselves in terms of establishing viable networks that assist with promoting their success; however, most leadership gurus, specifically female business leaders, will attest to the fact that once networks of support are made clear and can be tapped into, while work experiences may remain challenging, they are not insurmountable.

Exercising Voice and Agency

In Roberts et al. (2019), African American women scholars serving in formal and informal leadership roles on predominantly White campuses discussed the “ways in which African-American women’s presence through action affects the environment of the

academy” (para. 1). It is important to parallel the experiences of these women serving in academia alongside those of African American women who serve in leadership roles in school districts. Research interviews with minority women on university campuses revealed,

The need to take action by speaking out against the embedded nature of the injustices noted in the academy. This was a strong theme in all of the interviews. It was clear that for these women, this was not just a choice but in fact an imperative. (Roberts et al., 2019, para. 7)

It is particularly interesting that despite the micro-injustices these minority women endured, they recognized that their presence on campus served as an informal system of support for those students who look like them. Further, it has been noted in this research that “although committed to all students they teach, participants understood the potential impact their presence had on African American students in particular” (Roberts et al., 2019, para. 7).

Respondents shared that while they cared about all students to an equal degree, they recognized the responsibility they had to serve the needs of minority students who may be navigating extraordinary circumstances in White academia because of their race. Leaders spoke about the importance of being available to talk about their respective struggles because of a shared narrative related to race and, at times, both race and gender (Roberts et al., 2019).

This dialogue is also common among minority leaders in school systems; however, the external and internal stakeholders present within school organizations make serving in these capacities more tenuous and difficult for African American women who

typically “make a direct connection between their identity as African-American women and the strain and taxing weight on their spirit that they experience” (Roberts et al., 2019, para. 10).

Our emotions and spirits are always at stake, if we don’t respond properly. If you respond positively, then you’re rewarded; and if you don’t respond positively, then you’re not rewarded. And so, either you’re the kind of go-to happy Negro, or you’re the person to avoid. Either you’re the angry Black woman or the nurturing nanny figure...so I can’t really think about the impact because I feel disposable and replaceable. (Roberts et al., 2019, para. 10)

According to researchers, crucial for the psychological health of African American women is the dimension of exercising voice and agency, “which is ‘liberating’ when one is faced with the convergence of multiple oppressions as discussed in the Theory of Intersectionality” (Roberts et al., 2019, para. 10).

Robust Sense of Self

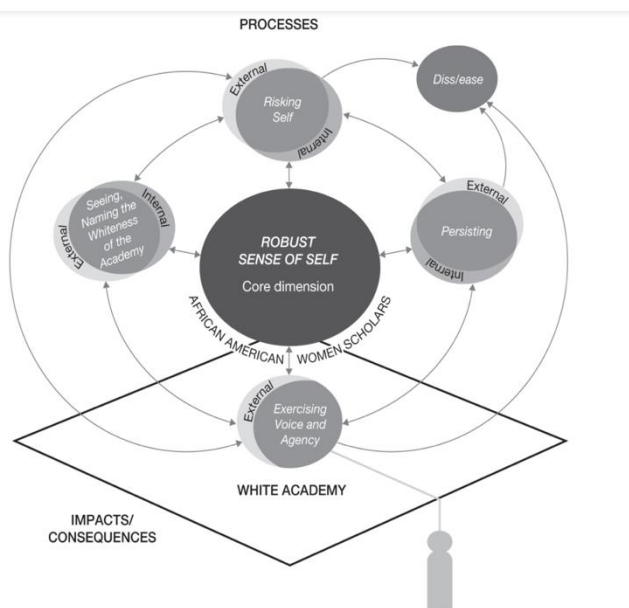
Based on the work of Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2005, as cited in Roberts et al., 2019), the construct known as “Robustness supports an individual’s ability to give voice to lived realities” (p. 107); it is the process of becoming as opposed to “becoming everything to everyone, and becoming less of someone to themselves” (p. 107).

Robustness acts as a buffer between the realities of work experiences and the safe space African American women create for themselves in order to remain as authentic as possible in arenas where they may feel unwelcome. Robustness allows the African American woman to nurture herself, recover from the microaggressions she experiences, and continue to critically look at the environment or world around her (Roberts et al.,

2019).

The invisibility that I feel as an African American woman in institutions, the hypervisibility that I feel also sometimes simultaneously in institutions because I'm outspoken. So, I'm one of those people that has spoken back when I see an inequality. And when I see people acting out in ways that to me say this is more about my race and what your stereotype about me is than it is about you really listening to me. Outsider status can ultimately result in dismissal or an individual making the choice to leave the institution and ultimately the academy. (Roberts et al., 2019, para. 14)

The Robust Sense of Self is described as a “condition of living in the White academy; it is the sturdiest dimension” (Roberts et al., 2019, para. 11). As noted in Figure 2, it is within the dimension of the Robust Sense of Self that African American women learn to withstand the “load” of operating in predominantly White political institutions.

Figure 2*Robust Sense of Self*

As illustrated in Figure 2, the African American woman’s ability to withstand and negotiate the pressure is at the core of this dimension. It is a social and psychological condition or characteristic the African American woman scholar brings to the narrative of the White academy. It is the knowledge of oneself that includes a clear definition of who she is as reflected by Lorde’s (1984) assertion that “If I didn’t define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people’s fantasies for me and eaten alive” (Roberts et al., 2019, para. 11). Indeed, as asserted by Robinson and Ward (1991, as cited in Roberts et al., 2019), it is the ability to believe in yourself beyond the disbelief of others.

Summary

The metaphor of the kitchen table aptly summarizes the theories and discussions regarding oppression present in much of the literature surrounding African American female leadership. Historically, according to researchers, the kitchen table “provided a

space within which Black women during and after slavery transformed their oppression into resistance and transformed an institution of White dominance” (Roberts et al., 2019, para. 10).

This kitchen table space is similar to the space bell hooks invites us to as she distinguishes between being marginalized and recognizing the power that conscious location at the margins can bring. She names the margin a space for radical openness...a profound edge...[a] site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. (Roberts et al., 2019, para. 10)

Indeed, when viewed through a lens of “opportunity,” it becomes apparent that not only are African American women uniquely positioned to lead in schools and districts, they bring with them a multitude of experiences that would benefit any organization.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

A mixed methods approach was the research design utilized to convey and connect the narratives of the lived experiences of African American female leaders serving in senior-level leadership positions in the state of North Carolina. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a mixed methods research design is defined as “research that may contain a theoretical framework within which both quantitative and qualitative data are collected” (p. 49). The research lens for this study included a participatory-social justice framework, from which data related to race, class, and perspective were analyzed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Further, the variables that were used to identify participants for the study included gender, race, and current and prior leadership experiences.

For the quantitative portion of this research, the following hypothesis was broadly explored: “The higher one’s rank, the greater one’s conformity” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 54). As such, the research proposed that less authenticity in leadership resulted in higher turnover in senior-level leadership roles, which in turn led to fewer mentors and sponsors who mirror the common background and experiences of underrepresented groups in predominantly White spaces.

In addition to convenience sampling to select interview respondents, I used the oral history database for North Carolina administrators as a guide for identifying potential commonalities related to minority female leadership narratives. Finally, this mixed methods research concluded by utilizing surveys to establish common themes in perspectives and leadership experiences. Once common themes related to work experiences, specifically professional development and mentor and sponsorship

opportunities were identified, the intended outcome demonstrated that these persistent themes often emerged as part of the minority female leadership experience. These commonalities therefore can be addressed in systemic ways by the intent of school districts to promote women of color to leadership roles.

The use of convenience sampling as part of the qualitative research process was the primary component of respondent selection employed as part of this dissertation research. Through the use of established relationships with minority female school leaders, I conducted interviews that revealed trends in leadership experiences regardless of location, educational background, or prior administrative experience. Further, the research demonstrates that when informal or formal networks of support are established, minority women feel compelled to remain wedded to the work of school and district leadership. Through the use of phenomenological research, I illustrate that the lack of mentorship and sponsorship potentially impacts the overall work experiences, longevity, and promotion of African American women in senior-level leadership positions.

The most effective methodology used as part of capturing the myriad perspectives of African American female leaders was through the use of the interview coupled with the use of a survey tool that highlighted common themes among respondents. As part of the requirement for participation in the study, potential respondents completed an informed consent acknowledgement authorization document. Due to persistent safety concerns, the method for capturing narratives included the use of Zoom platforms and phone calls. A virtual platform for most interviews was utilized for safety reasons to meet with participants and record their responses to a specific set of questions that included district demographics, U.S. census, and survey data as collected from respondents and

public source documents.

The use of the survey, specifically the Likert scale as part of this mixed methods research design as described by Creswell and Creswell (2018), “Provided a quantitative description of trends, attitudes, and opinions of the population” (p. 147). Using a representative sample in addition to interview participants in the survey portion of this research created a more balanced representation of the female African American leadership population. It was the goal of this study to identify trends in terms of support mechanisms that have been found most helpful in sponsorship and mentorship experiences. This was best determined by including a survey in conjunction with interviews that established a “relationship between variables” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 147) that are often part of the minority female leadership experience. The survey used was cross-sectional, with data collected at one point in time to economically gather data in a span of time that was short and succinct (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 149). It should be noted that this dissertation study is a continuation of previous research conducted by others and simply adds to the existing body of knowledge related to minority female leadership experiences.

Participants

The overall population sampled as part of this research included former and current African American female leaders serving in senior-level leadership positions at the school and district levels in the state of North Carolina. For this study, I used convenience sampling to access potential respondents through a current network of colleagues from current and former work relationships as part of this study. Potential respondents in the study currently serve in the southeastern region of the United States,

specifically the state of North Carolina.

Convenience sampling coupled with a single-stage sampling procedure was used as the method for identifying participants for the interview and survey portion of this research. Though described by Creswell and Creswell (2018) as, “less than desirable, it is often used because of its convenience and availability” (p. 150). According to Creswell and Creswell, “A single-stage sampling procedure is one in which the researcher has access to names in the population and can sample the people (or other elements) directly” (p. 150). Due to the limitations of this study related to time and the availability of limited respondents, I capitalized on established relationships with minority female leaders who are currently or were previously serving in leadership positions in this state and included their narrative perspectives as part of this discussion.

To increase the validity of this study, I also relied on an established database provided by the state of North Carolina as a method for identifying respondents for the survey portion of this research. The data provided by the state identified minority women currently serving in superintendent positions or in senior-level leadership roles. Respondents were contacted via email to include a participant letter with informed consent and provided with the background information related to the purpose of this research. An established timeframe for respondents to notify me of their intent to participate in this study was included with the letter so the research could be conducted and completed in a timely manner.

Research Personal Narrative and Assumptions

The research assumed that there was a correlation between the limited number of African American women in leadership positions directly related to the lack of

sponsorship and mentorship in the educational profession. These limitations proved to be impactful in that minority women often lack the support, encouragement, and mentorship of other minority women in school- and/or district-based leadership positions who could serve as role models. These assumptions were based on current data related to the number of African American female superintendents in the state of North Carolina. While the research sought to highlight the limited number of minority female leaders in the role of superintendent, it highlighted the lack of promotion, retention, and therefore support for those individuals who may currently serve in or aspire to senior executive leadership roles.

Procedures

Mixed Method Research Design

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), “Mixed methods researchers use theory as a framework informing many aspects of design as they collect, analyze, and interpret quantitative and qualitative data” (p. 72). The research design for this study included a “participatory-social justice theory as a framework that has emerged in recent years” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 72). Participatory social-justice theory is defined as, “a lens for looking at a problem recognizing the non-neutrality of knowledge, the pervasive influence of human interests, and issues such as power and social relationships” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 72).

Instrumentation

To gain participation from potential respondents, email inquiries were sent to a number of potential participants with the goal being that one third of contacts would participate in the study. I gathered email addresses and contact information for

respondents and forwarded an initial email describing the goals of the research, informed consent for participation, and a survey link that included the questions related to the study. Research questions included a combination of open- and closed-ended questions. I was able to use closed-ended questions as a method for determining whether there were common themes in terms of participant leadership experiences. Open-ended questions allowed participants to share more of a personal narrative related to how their lived leadership experiences have influenced and impacted their work in the field of education. The value of this research methodology allowed me to fully examine the experiences of minority female participants through a set of commonalities and differences among participants who may share similar leadership experiences based on race and gender.

The primary purpose of the mixed methods research design was to provide a framework for mentorship in terms of preparatory programs for minority women intent on pursuing senior-level leadership roles in their respective school districts. One additional goal of the study was to include multiple perspectives in terms of the experiences of African American female leaders in various leadership roles in the state. Ultimately, the most visible role in any school district is that of superintendent. This research will speak to the perceived challenges, barriers, and degrees of resilience required to reach this leadership summit based on the perspectives of participating respondents. The data further revealed a set of codified norms or expectations for those who aspire to serve in executive leadership roles in their respective districts in the future. Using a set of survey questions related to a common set of variables or questions regarding minority female leadership assisted with establishing a rationale for districts to create professional development programs that include a mentorship and sponsorship

component as part of preparatory planning for prospective district leaders.

The use of qualitative data collection was the primary form of research conducted for this study, including a survey that asked specific closed-ended questions from which a common set of themes emerged as part of the minority female leadership experience. In addition to these data, I used the posted narratives from the North Carolina collection of interviews conducted with administrators around the state as a guide to examine historical trends regarding minority experiences. I specifically reviewed the collected interviews of minority administrators in the state of North Carolina as part of this qualitative study to serve as a guide for determining a common set of themes that could emerge based on shared experiences due to minority and gender status.

Data Collection and Analysis

Research Limitations

Limitations associated with this research study included the number of anticipated participants for the study. Given the limited number of African American female superintendents nationally, there was little collected research related to their experiences that could be used as part of this narrative study. Instead, the dissertation relied heavily on research previously conducted by scholars in the field in order to frame the collected narratives for minority female leaders in North Carolina. Due to the lack of availability and limited responses from African American female superintendents in the state of North Carolina, this study is based on interviews and surveys of minority female leaders serving in school and district senior-level leadership roles as the basis for the collected narrative data. Interview questions for respondents include the following:

- the demographic profiles of African American women currently serving as

school and district senior-level leaders

- the perceived barriers, challenges, and strategies for accessing their current senior-level leadership role in a school or district
- any perceived differences that exist among African American women in executive leadership roles based on age, degree, location, and years of experience in their current positions

Research Delimitations

Limitations of the study included respondent availability to participate in the study. Six respondents participated in the study and increased the reliability of the data collected. Common themes across participating respondents created a narrative based primarily on race, gender, and executive school leadership status. These collected narratives could potentially impact how districts support, mentor, and sponsor minority female leaders in the future. Finally, the use of a survey to collect several respondent perspectives increased the credibility of the findings due to the number of participating interview respondents.

Scope of the Research

The research encompassed the lived experiences of African American women in leadership positions in school districts in the state of North Carolina. Though the initial goal of the research was to highlight the experiences of minority women currently serving in the role of superintendent, I determined that in order to increase the validity of the study and due in large part to the limited participation of minority female superintendents in the study, the inclusion of minority women leaders at both the district and school levels serving in senior leadership roles would best serve to foment this

research study. I used a mixed methods phenomenological research framework, described by Creswell and Creswell (2018) as, “a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants” (p. 13). As part of the dissertation design, one goal was to collect the accounts of these women such that increased support networks for future minority women in pursuit of leadership positions in their respective districts and at the state level could emerge.

Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative data were also collected using a survey, including a Likert scale which respondents were asked to complete as part of this research study. Additional data collection included the use of the recorded interview with a common set of questions, both open- and closed-ended, to create the basis for the narrative experiences of African American female school leaders at both the building and district levels. Trends related to work experiences emerged as part of these collected interviews to establish a common set of themes based on minority female work experiences in schools and districts in the state of North Carolina.

Data Analysis Procedures

As described by Creswell and Creswell (2018), the analysis of the data as part of mixed methods research includes three steps:

Data analysis in a convergent design consists of three phases. First, analyze the qualitative database by coding the data and collapsing the codes into broad themes. Second, analyze the quantitative database in terms of statistical results.

Third comes the mixed methods data analysis. This is the analysis that consists of

integrating the two databases. (p. 219)

This study specifically utilized the explanatory sequential design (two-phase design). It consisted of the following sequential steps: Phase 1, quantitative data are collected and analyzed, followed by the identification of results for follow-up. In Phase 2, qualitative data are collected and analyzed, followed by the interpretation of results, which includes how the collected qualitative data explain the quantitative data.

Collected data were analyzed with a focus on creating a comprehensive narrative from a set of common themes related to the African American female leadership experience in the Southeastern United States, specifically in the state of North Carolina. These common narratives may prove useful to schools and districts as they explore methods to create equitable systems of support for mentor program design in order to increase the recruitment and retention rates of African American female leaders in the state.

Validity of Interpretation (Applicability, Consistency, Trustworthiness)

The validity of the study primarily relied on the consistent review of interview questions as well as reconciling noted patterns in survey responses, which emerged as part of the mixed methods research conducted. As described by Creswell and Creswell (2018), “The basic mixed methods approach was an explanatory sequential design with an initial survey, a quantitative phase, followed by an interview, qualitative phase” (p. 243). It was my hope that commonalities in experiences may lead to a set of recommendations regarding how districts can best mentor, support, and prepare African American female leaders in the future. This was accomplished through the use of the individual narrative based on a common set of research questions, i.e., relaying the

challenges and success stories of current leaders, which in turn may potentially lead to increased longevity in leadership positions, specifically for African American female leaders.

Finally, one long-term goal of this study is to influence decision makers who are responsible for providing and designing mentor programs for minority female school leaders across North Carolina School districts as well as university leadership preparation programs. Establishing a set of specific recommendations as part of these captured recorded narrative experiences for this demographic could fundamentally change how African American women are prepared to lead in some of the most challenging arenas in education.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations related to this study included ensuring my past leadership experiences did not unduly influence the narrative experiences shared by interview respondents. For this reason, I was careful to allow participants to share their individual stories without influencing these narrative discussions during the interview process.

To conclude, in order to ensure ethical practices were adhered to as part of the research and dissertation process, I was guided by the following recommendations as outlined in Creswell and Creswell (2018): “Researchers need to protect their research participants, develop trust with them; promote integrity of research, guard against misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on their organizations and institutions, and cope with new, challenging problems” (p. 88).

Summary

This dissertation study was organized to include demographic information

regarding the respective districts in which selected minority female leaders are currently serving. Data regarding student achievement, the student populations served, the number of staff members currently working in the district, and any relevant U.S. Census data related to their respective school districts were included before the dissection of responses to interview questions. As part of the review of district data, demographic information related to education, income, poverty levels, and racial demographics were included to provide a quantitative perspective as part of the district data related to respondent leadership experiences. Following the review of subsequent district data and respondent interview analysis, the responses were reviewed and dissected along with surveys to determine trends and themes related to respondent leadership experiences. The study should be used to determine how mentorship and sponsorship could positively impact the longevity and leadership experiences of African American women serving in executive leadership roles in the state. Suggestions related to future minority leadership studies include a comparative analysis between leadership experiences prior to *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) and how minority leadership was impacted following the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision.

Chapter 4: Results

Chapter 4 of this dissertation study unpacks the data associated with the lived experiences of African American women in senior-level leadership roles in the state of North Carolina. As part of this phenomenological study, information regarding mentorship and sponsorship experiences, including their subsequent impact on the recruitment, retention, and longevity rates of participants, was explored through the completion of interviews and surveys.

The data contained in this portion of the study include narratives from six seated senior-level building and central office administrators in three very distinct school districts in the state. Chapter 4 also addresses survey data that support the narratives shared by respondents as part of the interview process; indeed, these results highlight the experiences of women of color in senior leadership roles across the state of North Carolina and make a strong case regarding the importance of mentorship and sponsorship in terms of leadership preparation and development.

Description of Participants and Districts

Rural School District 1

African American women in Rural School District 1, currently lead in the central portion of the state of North Carolina. They work in a district that includes 21 schools, specifically one early college, five high schools, three middle schools, five schools with a K-8 configuration, six elementary schools, and one Montessori school. Of the 21 schools identified in Rural School District 1, two are also charter schools. The community is primarily made up of generational farming families, with 90.5% of the overall population having received a high school diploma and 45.1% with conferred bachelor degrees.

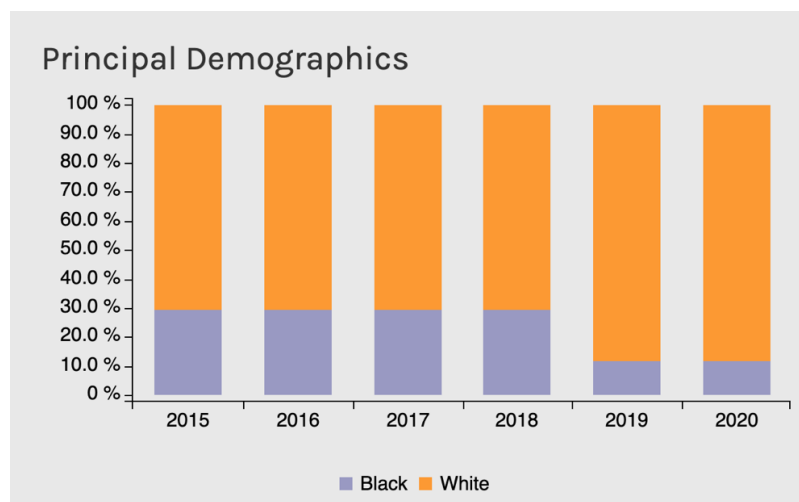
Poverty data reflect that as of 2018, 9% of residents were living in poverty. That being said, the poverty rate in the county is significantly lower than the state's average of 14%.

Data for district leaders by race and gender can be found in Figures 3 and 4.

Attrition rates for leaders of color are most notable for the years 2019-2020.

Figure 3

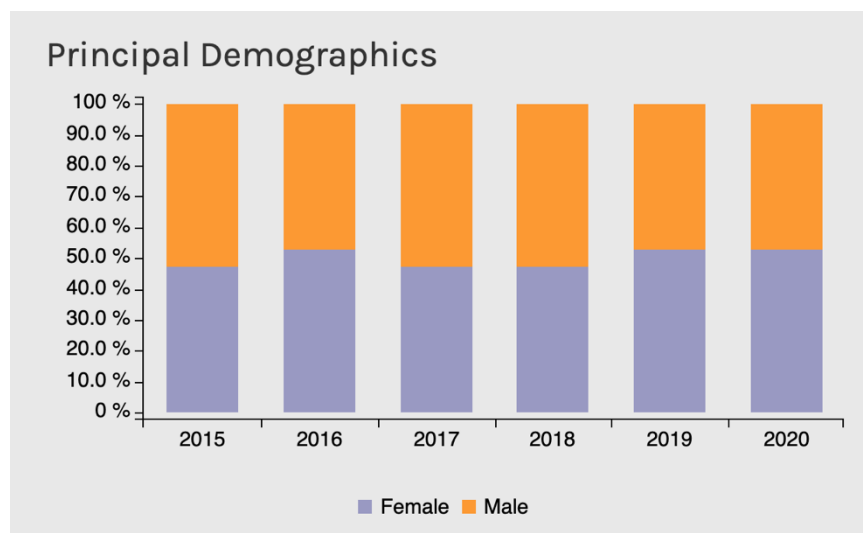
Demographic Data for Principals by Race Rural School District 1



Data related to race show that during the years ranging from 2015-2018, 29.4% of school-based principals were African American and 70.6% of principals were White.

There has been a notable decline in leadership diversity among principals in the district since that time, with 11.8% designated as African American in the years 2019 and 2020, while White principals in the district during 2019 and 2020 are at 88.2%.

Figure 4 illustrates gender data for the district for the years 2015-2020. According to the data, there are slight differences in the numbers between male and female principals in the district. Most notable in the review of gender demographic data is the fact that there have been few variations in the percentages between male and female leaders in the district over a 4-year span of time.

Figure 4*Demographic Data for Principals by Gender Rural School District 1*

Based on the data, gender at the school leadership level is as follows: In the year 2015, 47.1% of school principals were female and 52.9% were male. In 2016, 52.9% of school principals were female and 47.1% were male. The years 2017 and 2018 found 47.1% of school principals were female and 52.9% were male. While current data for the years 2019 and 2020 reveal that 52.9% of school principals were female and 47.1% of school principals were male.

Rural School District 1 Participant Data

Participant A. Participant A currently serves as an elementary school principal at a Title I school in Rural School District 1. She has worked in education for approximately 25 years. She previously worked in the Piedmont area as a teacher before matriculating to Rural School District 1, where she has worked as a teacher, curriculum coach, and assistant principal.

Participant B. Participant B currently serves as a high school principal at an AVID Demonstration School in Rural School District 1. She has worked in education for

approximately 24 years. She previously served as a high school principal, assistant principal, and Exceptional Children's teacher in the Triangle area before returning to the county. She also served as an assistant principal at High School C before assuming the role of principal nearly 4 years ago.

Participant C. Participant C currently serves in the central office as an executive director for Rural School District 1. She has been in education for approximately 33 years. During her career, she has been a high school guidance counselor, assistant principal, and high school principal.

Urban School District 1

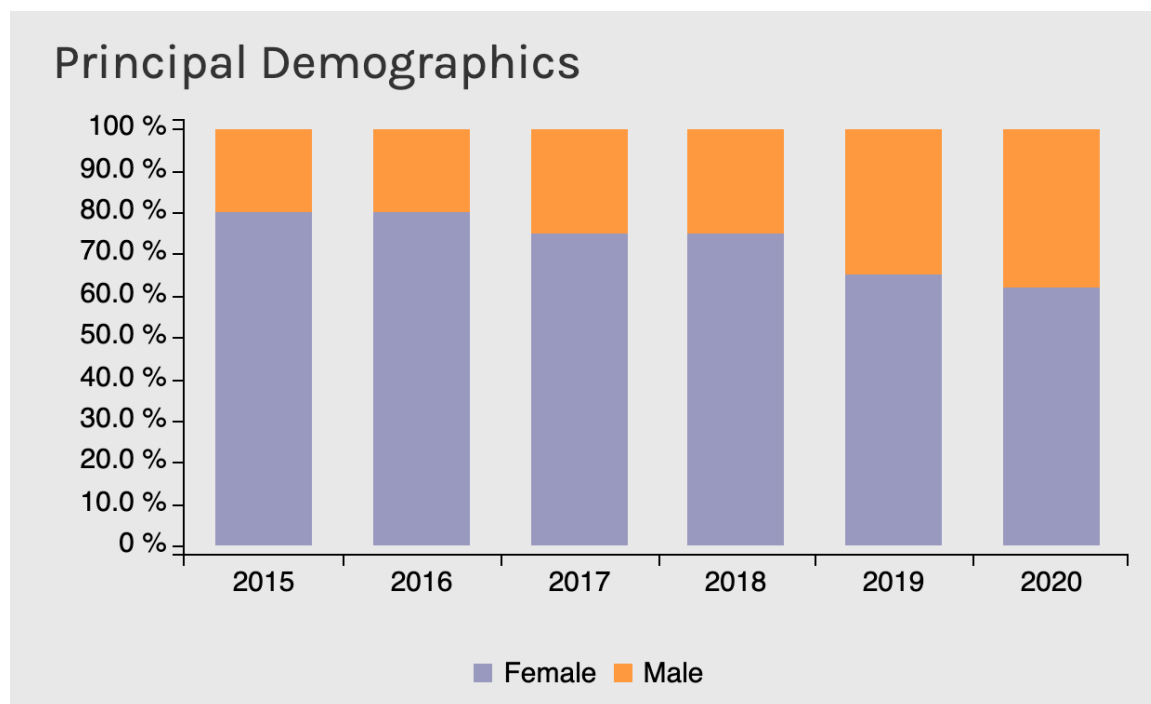
Leaders serving in Urban School District 1 are centrally located in the state of North Carolina. The community boasts an engaged community with 92.7% of the population having obtained a high school diploma and 59.7% of the population earning a bachelor's degree or higher. The population comprises 148,696 citizens with an overall male-to-female percentage of 48.7% and 52.3% respectively. Demographic data by race are as follows: 11.8% of the population is African American, 0.6% of the population is American Indian, 8.1% of the population is Asian, 0.1% of the population is Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 2.6% of the population is two or more races, 8.6% of the population is Hispanic/Latino, and 69.5% of the overall population of Urban School District 1 is White. Though the median per capita income of most members of the community is \$44,223, the median household income with two working adults is \$73,612, with the poverty rate for Urban School District 1 being 17.6%.

In the area of school-based leadership, data for the district can be examined in Figures 5 and 6, which disaggregate principal demographic data based on race and

gender.

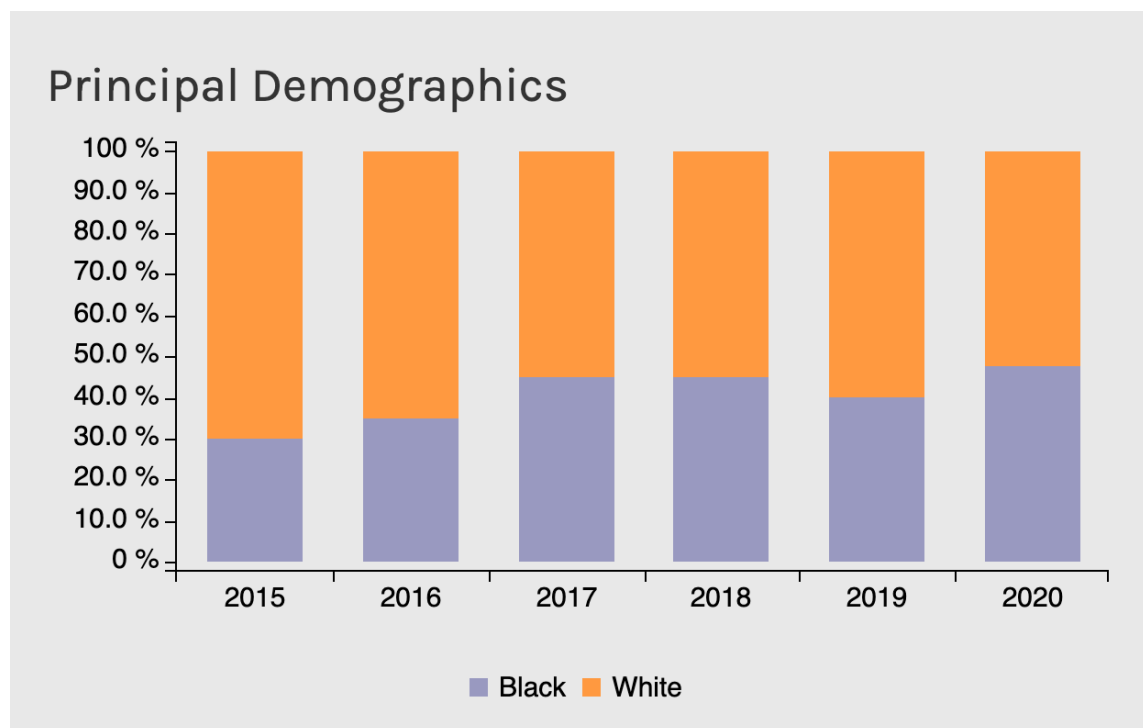
Figure 5

Principal Data by Gender Urban School District 1



As displayed in Figure 5, Urban School District 1 boasts fairly consistent leadership data for the years 2015 and 2016, with 80% of school-based principals being female and 20% identifying as male. During the 2017 and 2018 terms, 75% of all school principals were female and 25% were male. In 2019, 65% of school principals were female and 35% were male; finally, in 2020, 61.9% of school principals were female and 38.1% of school principals were male.

Figure 6 displays senior cabinet leadership data related to Urban School District 1 by race. Variations in the percentages of Black and White leaders in the district are examined from the years 2015-2020.

Figure 6*Principal Data by Race Urban School District 1*

Demographic data related to race for Urban School District 1 as illustrated in Figure 6 are as follows: In the year 2015, 30% of school principals were African American and 70% were White; in 2016, there were slight increases in diversity with 35% of school principals identified as African American and 65% designated as White. The years 2017 and 2018 boasted a 10% increase in diversity with 45% of school principals identifying as African American and 55% identifying as White. There was a slight decrease in the percentage of African American principals in 2019, with 40% identifying as African American and 60% identifying as White. Finally, in 2020, Urban School District 1 had 47.6% of school-based principals identifying as African American and 52.4% identifying as White.

Urban School District 1 Participant Data

Participant D. Participant D is an elementary school principal in the Triangle Area. She began her career as a first-grade teacher. She has taught students in kindergarten through fourth grade. She previously worked as an interventionist, AIG specialist, and lead teacher for an administrative team before pursuing her master's in school administration degree. Following her completion of the program of study, she became an elementary school assistant principal before transitioning to serve as principal. She has served in education for more than 20 years.

Participant E. Participant E is an elementary school principal in the Triangle Area. She began her career as a teaching assistant. She later became a fourth- and fifth-grade teacher before pursuing graduate studies in school administration. Participant E was a North Carolina Principal Fellow and a North Carolina Teaching Fellow. She has previously served in the Triangle as an administrator, magnet school coordinator, and assistant principal. She has served in education for more than 20 years.

Urban School District 2

Leaders currently serving in Urban School District 2 work in an area of 321,488 residents. The district is considered one of the 10th largest in the state, with a student population of more than 32,000 students in both the city and county.

The median age range for the county is 35.7 years, with approximately 66% of the population age range being 18-64 years old. Fifty-two percent of the population is female, and 48% of the population is male. County demographics include the following: 42% White, 36% Black, 5% Asian, 3% two or more races, and 13% Hispanic.

The per capita income in the county is 10% higher than that of the state of North

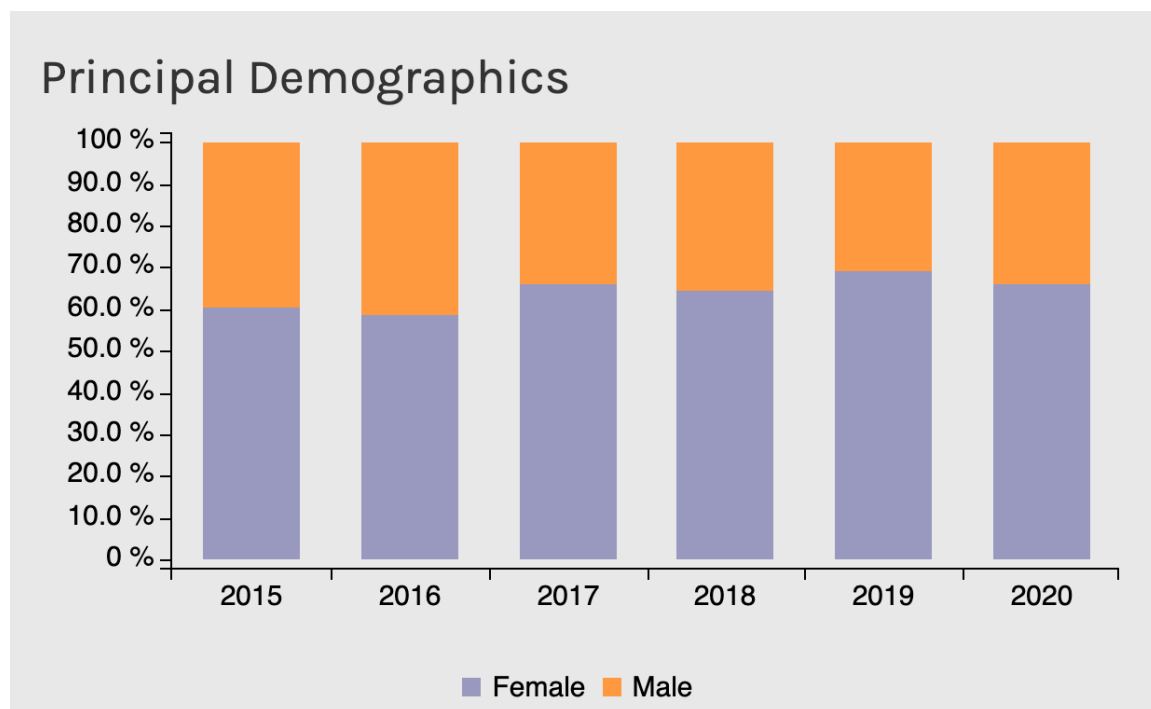
Carolina at \$36,195. The median household income at \$65,317 is 10% higher than the state of North Carolina. A little more than 14% of the population in this county live below the poverty line, which is slightly higher than the state of North Carolina, which has a poverty rate of 13.6%. Twenty-one percent of the population is school-aged, with 8% of citizens identifying as seniors aged 65 and older who also report living in poverty. Fifty-one percent of the 131,140 households in the county are made up of married couples.

A total of 142,012 housing units are in the county, with 55% of those being owned by occupants. The median value of the housing units is \$248,900. Educational statistics for the county include the following: 89.2% of residents are high school graduates, and 49.3% of residents have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. Of the 16% of foreign-born residents in the county, 50% are from Latin American countries of origin. Data included in the review of Urban School District 2 include principal demographic data related to race and gender.

Figure 7 contains gender data for principals who currently serve in Urban School District 2. Data provided are from 2015-2020 and are a snapshot of gender percentages in terms of school-based leadership.

Figure 7

Principal Demographic Data by Gender Urban School District 2



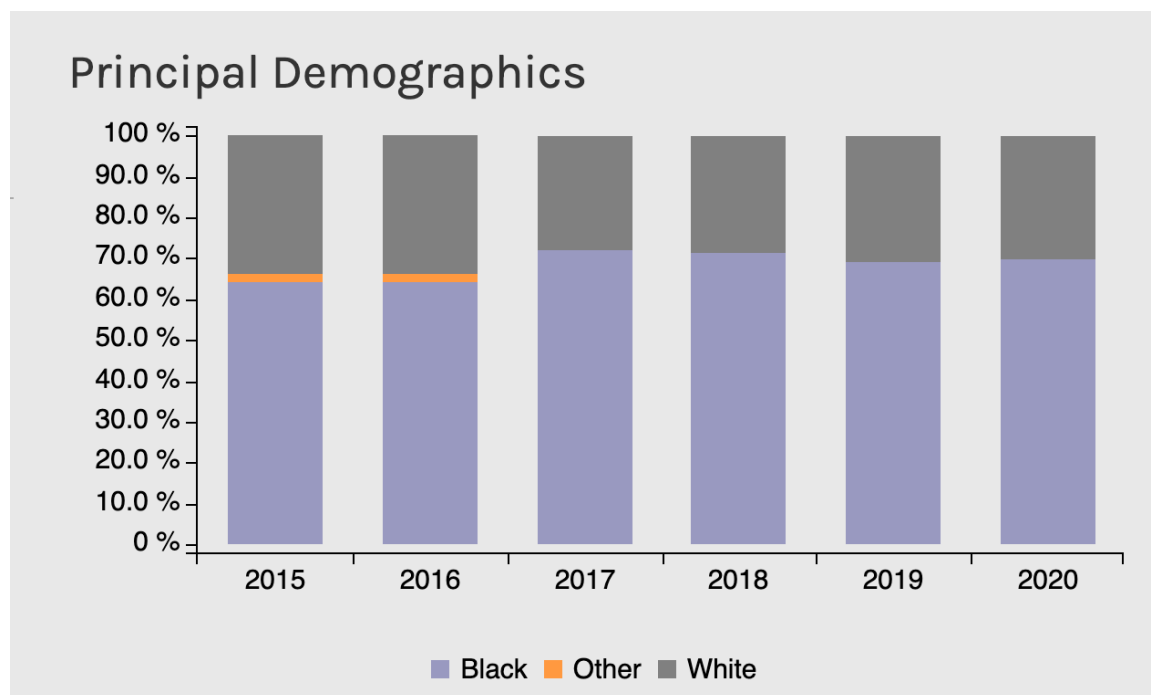
According to data, in 2015, male administrators made up 39.6% of school-based principals, while 60.4% of all school-based administrators were female. The year 2016 saw slight increases in male representation in terms of school-based administrators, with 41.5% of male principals serving in schools, and 58.5% of female principals assigned to schools in the district. Female administrators continued to outrank male administrative percentages during the years 2017-2020, as indicated by the following data: 2017, 66% female and 34% male; 2018, 64.3% female and 35.7% male; 2019, 69.1% female and 30.9% male; and 2020, 66% female and 34% male.

Figure 8 provides a snapshot of demographic data by race for school administrators in Urban School District 2. Data reviewed include the years 2015-2020 and provide a snapshot of leadership by race according to data culled from the district's

North Carolina Report Card.

Figure 8

Principal Demographic Data by Race Urban School District 2



Demographic data related to race for school-based leaders in Urban School District 2 are illustrated in Figure 8. The years 2015 and 2016 saw increased diversity among subgroups with administrators identifying as Black, White, or other. In subsequent years, 2017-2020, administrators in the district were designated as either Black or White. Demographic data for Urban School District 2 by race are as follows: 2015—64.2% Black, 1.9% Other, 34% White; 2016—64.2% Black, 1.9% Other, 34% White; 2017—72% Black, 28% White; 2018—71.4% Black, 28.6% White; 2019—69.1% Black, 30.9% White; and 2020, 69.8% Black, 30.2% White.

Urban School District 2 Participant Data

Participant F. Participant F has served in a variety of school and district leadership positions for the past 26 years. She currently serves as the executive director

for student support services for Urban School District 2. She works closely with the assistant superintendent and also serves as the liaison for the superintendent in all matters related to long-term suspensions and Exceptional Children in the district. She began her career as an English teacher in eastern, rural North Carolina. Following an initial teaching assignment, she transitioned to the Triangle area where she has worked as an assistant principal, principal, executive director for secondary schools, and a director for curriculum and instruction.

Research Questions

Research questions for this dissertation were designed to determine the level of mentorship and sponsorship support received by women of color; more specifically, African American women whose leadership potential may be overlooked or unrecognized in North Carolina school districts. According to the research, mentor relationships when fostered lead to increased positive outcomes for underrepresented groups; specifically, in the leadership space where the presence of minority women is often scarce.

Research Question 1: What Impact, if any, Do District-Sponsored Mentor Programs Have on the Longevity Rates of African American Women Serving in Senior-Level Leadership Roles or in Superintendent Positions in the State of North Carolina?

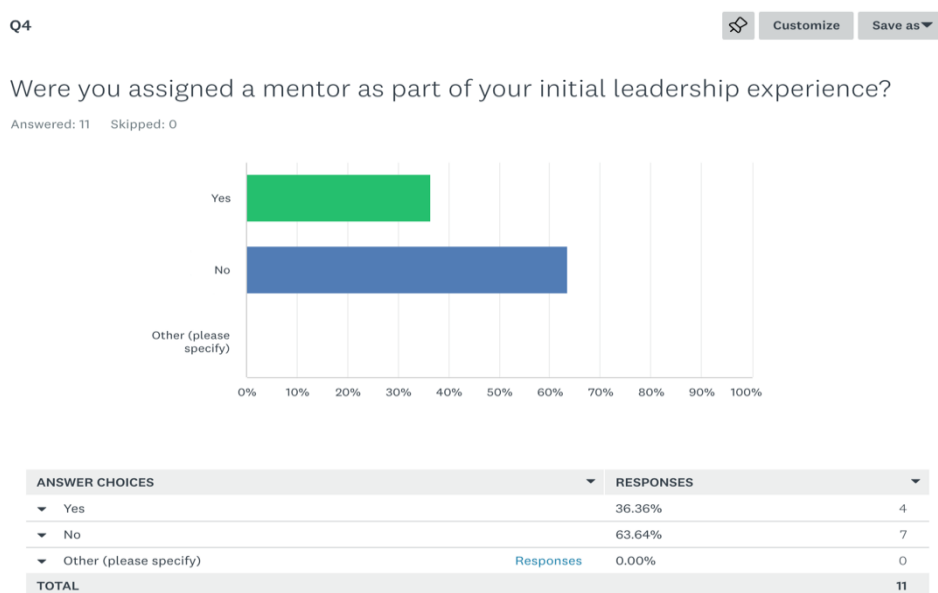
Research Question 1 was designed to determine if district-sponsored mentor programs positively impacted the number of years African American women remained in designated senior-level leadership roles or in their assigned districts. As discussed by the participants for this study, the degree to which a district offered and invested in their professional growth correlated to their degree of investment in the district, specifically the number of years they chose to work in a district and the degree to which they actively

pursued promotion opportunities in the district.

Survey data from Figures 9 and 10 speak to Research Question 1, specifically as it relates to respondent perspectives regarding how mentor programs impact the longevity rates of African American women serving in senior-level leadership positions in the state of North Carolina. In terms of current leadership roles within their respective districts, survey respondents were asked in Survey Question 4 if mentors had been assigned on their behalf as part of leadership training or induction.

Figure 9

Survey Question 4



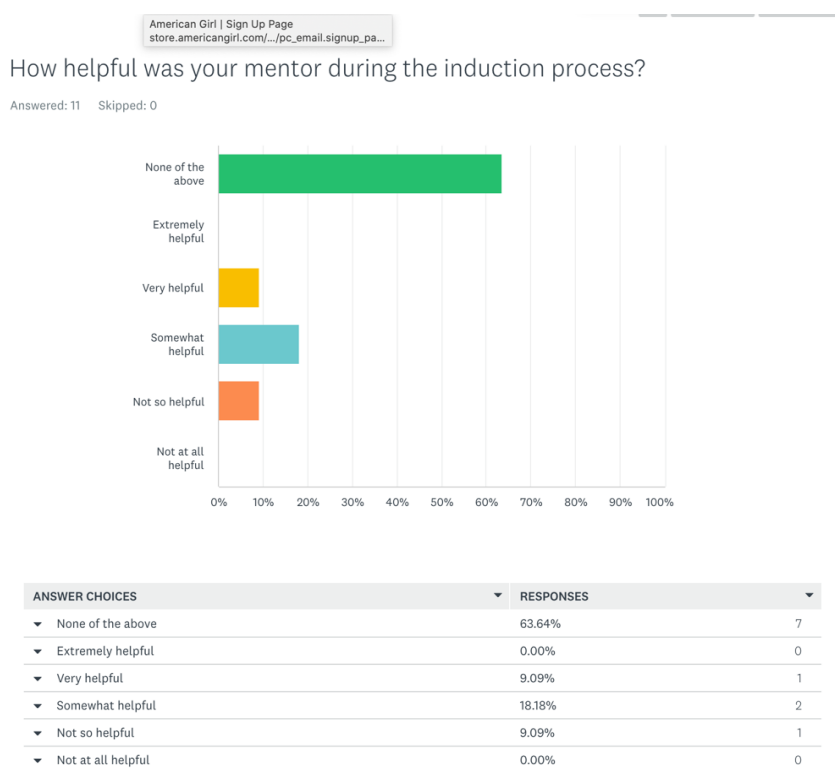
The data from respondents suggest that more than half, 63.64%, of respondents were not assigned a mentor as part of their initial leadership experience. Only thirty-six percent of respondents shared that mentors had been assigned to them as part of the induction process. Based on the survey data, few minority women leaders were assigned mentors as part of their initial experience. This may suggest that leadership preparation programming aptly prepares individuals for the challenges associated with school and

district leadership. Approximately 36% of minority women shared that mentors were in place to assist with addressing their novice leadership challenges.

Survey Question 5 as illustrated in data from Figure 10 asked respondents about the helpfulness of mentors as part of the induction process. Based on the data, nearly 65% of respondents did not provide a positive or negative response to the question related to the helpfulness of mentors in their districts.

Figure 10

Survey Question 5



According to the data, 63.64% of respondents did not find mentors helpful or viewed them as not so helpful as part of their induction process. This suggests that perhaps new leadership hires were not assigned mentors as part of induction processes or contact with mentors was limited and not very helpful to new hires.

Qualitative data that address Research Question 1 from corresponding participant interviews in terms of the impact mentor programs have on longevity rates for African American women in leadership are best illustrated through the responses provided in Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4. For example, Participant C felt that when she was actively supported by a mentor and encouraged by a sponsor, she was equipped to tackle the challenges that came with leading as a minority female in a predominantly White district.

Table 1 provides background related to the work experiences of each of the respondents for the interview portion of this research study. Many of the research participants had more than 20 years of work experience in the field of education. Several began their careers as either classroom teachers or counselors before matriculating to their current executive leadership role. Candidates were asked to discuss educational work experiences, including their current role in education.

Table 1*Participant Responses to Interview Question 1*

Participating Respondent	Interview Question 1: Provide a summary of your work experience; to include your current role in education.
Participant A	I am currently the principal of Elementary School A. My third year began in January 2020, so I am a true ‘pandemic principal.’ Before becoming a principal, I was the assistant principal for 5 years. I was the assistant principal at a K-8 school in the district for about 3 years. I have also been a Curriculum coach and I taught for 6 years.
Participant B	I have been in education for 24 years. I began my career in Special Education where I received my master’s degree. I went on to become a principal in District E—where I was principal of High School E for 3.5 years. Following that experience, I worked in school district D as a Special Education teacher for 2 years. I transitioned from District D to my current district, where I began as an assistant principal at the high school. When the principal transitioned from the position, he was instrumental in supporting me to go on to become the principal here. He made sure my leadership was ‘shored up’ and I would be prepared for this leadership experience.
Participant C	My career began in Psychology in Sampson County, N.C. I worked at Juvenile Justice for a few years before moving to Rural School District 1. I began working at High School J in Rural School District 1 in 1989 and I was there as an assistant principal from 1989-2000. I became principal at High School J and worked as principal from 2006-2010. Now I am the Executive Director of Teacher Induction and Title II programming.
Participant D	My career began in the classroom as a first-grade teacher. I have taught Kindergarten through fourth grade. I transitioned from that role into an Academically and Gifted specialist. I then became lead teacher for my school and began working with the administrative team. In 2016 I became the assistant principal for Elementary School N. I was there as the assistant principal for three years. When my principal transitioned to a new assignment, I interviewed for the position and became Principal of Elementary School N.
Participant E	My career in education began in 1991 as a before and after school care director. I transitioned from that role to Rural School District 1, where I taught for several years before deciding to pursue my Masters of School Administration degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This is my 26 th year in education.

(continued)

Participating Respondent	Interview Question 1: Provide a summary of your work experience; to include your current role in education.
Participant F	This is my 26 th year in education. My career began in rural Pamlico County in eastern North Carolina. I was a high school English teacher. I later transitioned to the Triangle area where I became an assistant principal at High School H in Urban School District 2. I was pursuing my Masters in School Administration degree and had to have an internship opportunity so I transferred to High School J and worked there for several months before being appointed to High School R, where I served as an assistant principal for six years. Following that experience, I transitioned to Orange County where I opened the district's first alternative high school. I served there for about three years before I was appointed Principal at High School C in the county. I am currently the Executive Director of Secondary Schools for Urban School District 2.

Based on candidate responses, many respondents have worked in education for a number of years. Many of the participants included in this study have educational work experiences totaling more than 20 years. Each participant is either currently serving as a building-level principal or an executive director in central office administration.

Table 2 discusses participant responses to Interview Question 14. Respondents were asked to share what their plans would be for a mentor support system for minority female superintendents or those serving in senior-level leadership roles.

Table 2*Participant Responses to Interview Question 14*

Participating Respondents	Interview Question 14: If you could design a mentor support system for new minority female superintendents or minority women in senior-level leadership positions, what would it look like and why?
Participant A	It would be an affinity group. A space created where we could be our true and authentic selves. When I talked to someone, I could be myself—regardless of grammar issues, etc., I could be myself. A safe place for minority women to talk about their work openly.
Participant B	The thing I think about most is when I was in graduate school, I had a Smallwood Fellowship. We had to have a mentor and the pool was ripe enough that you could find people. I would have a coach who looked like me. That kind of impact is powerful. The programming would need to be intentional. Women would be able to discuss the questions we had about the work without feeling like there was this expectation that we should already know the information, or because if you didn't know the information, your time in the district would be short. There would not be this sense of competition, but we could essentially coach each other.
Participant C	I would look for people who have made it. Those individuals who have done it and have achieved it. We would be able to connect and build on what we already know in a place where there is trust. People could be honest with each other about their work. We would have a monthly retreat that would allow us to just talk about issues beyond our work and just relax—have downtime.
Participant D	I envision women searching and excavating their gifts. Really celebrating the resiliency and joy of those who've gone before us; constant, ongoing authentic, unapologetic richness. Teaching people to lift, receive and embrace one another through constant affirmation and individuality. It would serve as a reminder of what we can celebrate and what we can do.
Participant E	It would include a spotlight on equity. It would be a place where we could establish relationships. We would be able to serve as a resource to one another and talk about how to ensure student success.
Participant F	I think the mentor needs to have sat in the seat. I would remind them of what my mama used to tell me, "Don't dress for the job you have, dress for the job you want." I would want it to be a place where we could talk about our adverse experiences and how we survived them. How we learned from those experiences and the practicality of the "real world." Our discussions would focus on building confidence and competence.

Table 2 provides an overview of what respondents considered an ideal design for mentor programming for women of color serving in senior-level leadership positions.

Many spoke about affinity programs with a focus on equity. Several respondents suggested the development of mentor programs that would include the perspectives of women who had experienced success in their leadership work: “Those who had made it.”

In Table 3 of respondent data, participants answered the following question regarding advice to their current local board of education; “If you could share words of wisdom or advice with the current Board of Education in your district regarding your current role, without fear of reprisal, what would you share with them?” This question was meant to highlight potential areas of support that school and district leaders feel require a systemic response.

Table 3*Participant Responses to Interview Question 15*

Participant Responses	Interview Question 15: If you could share words of wisdom or advice with the current Board of Education in your district regarding your current role, without fear of reprisal, what would you share with them?
Participant A	For me, for our district—you know we are so diverse—more than just race, but also degrees of poverty. As a Board of Education and district, we need to know that equal isn't always equitable. For example, I am the principal of a Title I school with a large percentage of my students living in poverty. Because of that, I might get 0.5 counselors assigned to my school, but someone else in the district, who also has a school that qualifies as a Title I school, may receive that same allotment even though they have fewer students in poverty. Those issues need to be looked at—how do we transcend what's on a spreadsheet.
Participant B	It would be interesting to see how we could tap into our African American female population. In other words, how could they 'put them on'—or sponsor them. Would it be through connections with other African American women? I am dismayed that the area has shifted its focus in terms of equity. We seem to be going backward and I am interested in knowing why.
Participant C	I would want them to really experience the day of a teacher in the classroom; especially, a new teacher. I would want them to come and volunteer in a classroom and see what really happens every day in a building. Perhaps even have them work in the cafeteria or drive a bus.
Participant D	I would tell them to listen with an equity lens that goes beyond words. Implement policies and practices that uphold administrators of color. Practice silencing the accusers and call out injustice; renew your commitment.
Participant E	I would have them really spotlight equity and encourage them to think about the work that happens in the building daily. I would ask them to be honest about the entitlement and hidden agendas that exist in our district.
Participant F	I would share with them that this work is an intentional labor of love. Most people believe in the arm of public education. It is important that we have a good relationship with the board. They are the eyes and the ears of the community and the board's role cannot be understated. We really have to dig to build trusting relationships that create synergy. We are the only entity that encourages the public to bring them all to us.

In Table 3, respondents shared advice with their respective boards of education regarding their districts. Many spoke about equity as a primary area of concern, more specifically, their perspectives regarding the need to increase equitable outcomes for students as part of their district's educational focus.

Finally, results for Research Question 1 are also highlighted in Table 4, which address Interview Question 18. Participants were asked whether they considered their current assignment a long-term position. There were a variety of responses provided as respondents considered their work plans following their experience as central office or building-level leaders. Again, this question speaks to the impact district-sponsored mentor programs have on longevity rates for African-American women in senior-level leadership. When respondents were asked whether they saw their current role as a long-term assignment, two of the six spoke about pursuing different career paths, if given the opportunity.

Table 4*Participant Responses to Interview Question 18*

Participating Respondent	Interview Question 18: Do you see your current role as superintendent or senior-level leader as a long-term assignment, why or why not?
Participant A	I would go back to that day when I was trying to decide whether to be an administrator or a counselor, and I would choose my heart's desire—I would pursue counseling; so no, I think that after this experience, I will return to counseling in some capacity.
Participant B	If I had answered this before the pandemic I would have said, no—but now, I think it is a good place to be. Perhaps in the future I could see myself in the role of Exceptional Children's Director or Secondary High School Director. I might even consider higher education or teaching at a community college.
Participant C	Technically, it has been a long-term assignment—I've been here since 2010. Maybe I would pursue counseling instead of administration.
Participant D	Yes, I have been assigned and called to this place. But I also know that if I intend to do this work well, I won't have a long shelf life.
Participant E	I would like to retire soon; I see myself working on the collegiate level. Perhaps training new teachers; I am currently serving on an advisory board at North Carolina Central in the Teacher Education program—so maybe working in a field like higher education in the future.
Participant F	Public education is the great equalizer. I know how it can have an impact on lives. I have 4 years until retirement and I don't know what the future holds. I really want to learn as much as I can and put another crack in the ceiling of White supremacy on behalf of women; especially, women of color.

Interview Question 18 as discussed in Table 4 was designed to uncover the potential career goals of respondents. Given the years of work experience in education, many of the respondents currently have, it would be reasonable to assume that many of them would serve in future leadership roles in the state of North Carolina. Indeed, several spoke about training and leadership programming at the community college or 4-year collegiate level.

Research Question 2: What Identified Resiliency Factors Contribute to the Long-Term Success of African American Women Serving in Senior-Level Leadership Roles or in Superintendent Positions in the State of North Carolina?

Question 2 was used to determine commonalities among respondents regarding their experiences and any “hidden” or recommended strategies employed that positively impacted their overall success. Several respondents spoke to informal mentor relationships they initiated, including designing weekly or daily check-ins with colleagues regarding both simple and complicated procedure or policy matters. Participants also openly shared that having a group of partners and supporters with whom they could be their authentic selves made a significant difference in their overall sense of well-being and success. These relationships were self-initiated and did not include any formal mentorships established by their respective districts. The ability of participants in this study to recognize that a network of support would be integral to their success speaks to their degree of resiliency as respondent interviews included narratives that were rich with “war stories” and the many triumphs each interview participant had experienced because of support systems they had initiated.

Results from Research Question 2 are illustrated in Table 5, which outlines responses from Interview Question 2 of the study. Interview Question 2 asked respondents to describe the initial challenges associated with their current role and how they overcame those challenges.

Table 5*Participant Responses to Interview Question 2*

Participating Respondent	Interview Question 2: Describe the initial challenges in your current role and how you overcame those circumstances.
Participant A	Besides leading during a pandemic—opening a school and closing one down in the middle of the year--one of the major challenges for me was leading in a building where I had been the assistant principal. A former superintendent in this county called it the “shifting of the chair.” There were challenges after I became principal because my leadership style was so different from the previous principal. The former principal could be very strict about some things, but for me, it’s about teachers coming to work. So, for example, if you need to take the morning off for an appointment, that’s fine. I just need you to come to work.
Participant B	Leading during the pandemic has been difficult. Trying to find a work-life balance is always a challenge. My former principal was instrumental in serving as a mentor for me and making sure my skills could be highlighted and seen in the district.
Participant C	My current role is ever-changing in Rural School District 1; for example, I am currently subbing as a principal at High School C in the county while the principal is out of the building. I think that is the most challenging part of my role. When I began this job, I worked with new teachers, beginning teachers, and mentors. Now, I am working with new teachers, beginning teachers, substitutes, volunteers, Title II, and at times—I work as a substitute for administrators.
Participant D	The most challenging part of the job when I was new to the seat was ensuring that we had a diverse staff that mirrored our student demographic. I expected a great deal of pushback initially but was pleasantly surprised that it did not happen. As an assistant principal at the time, I felt quite influential in making sure our students felt welcomed by adults who looked like them. So, when we initially opened, for each grade level there were four classes and among those four, there would be 2 teachers of color and 2 teachers who were White. In cases where we could not staff in that way, I would ask if we had ensured everyone had access to the opportunity to apply for positions.

(continued)

Participating Respondent	Interview Question 2: Describe the initial challenges in your current role and how you overcame those circumstances.
Participant E	The most challenging issue has been dealing with the trauma that has been caused by the pandemic: trauma for children and trauma for staff. When I was in my previous school district, the challenge was being seen and recognized for my intelligence. As a woman of color serving in that district, I often felt ignored. I was treated as though there was very little I could offer professionally.
Participant F	The most challenging part of my current role is that the work has expanded now to include Exceptional Children's Programming. The expansion has meant that there are now three new directors in the department that originally only included Curriculum and Instruction for secondary schools, and middle and high school principals. I also currently supervise the Alternative to Suspension program—New Directions as well as the work we are currently doing regarding students' social and emotional support programming.

Participants discussed a variety of issues that impacted their transition to their respective positions. Most recently, leaders expressed being confounded by current concerns associated with tackling the trauma associated with the pandemic.

Table 6 outlines participant responses to Interview Question 4, which asked respondents to describe any support systems they felt were in place that helped them navigate their careers. These supports could include formal or informal mentor relationships. Each of these supports typifies the resiliency factors necessary to fuel long-term leadership success.

Table 6*Participant Responses to Interview Question 4*

Participating Respondent	Interview Question 4: Describe any support systems you felt were in place that helped you navigate your career. These could be formal or informal mentor relationships. Formal mentor experiences would describe those established by a school or district or external organization. An informal mentor experience, would be one that you have fostered through relationships you have built on your own.
Participant A	Three things automatically come to mind as I consider this question—I am married to one—an African American man who works at the central office, my best friend is an elementary school principal in a neighboring school district, and two other women who work in this district and I have what we call ‘What Would You Do Wednesdays.’ This work group—that is more of an affinity group from the district--allows me to be my authentic self. They look like me, talk like me, and I can be myself. I don’t have to worry about using correct grammar—I can be myself. When I first came to the district, I asked for a mentor and because of the pandemic, I did not have one. I have since been assigned one—she was a retired principal and she has been extremely helpful. She actually served as my assistant principal on an interim basis when I had to close down the school due to the pandemic.
Participant B	During my administrative career in Urban School District 1—I was given a list of people I should reach out to who could serve as a mentor to me. I was able to manage to create a network of support for myself. There were more experienced principals who would ask the questions I was afraid to ask, and I felt like the network of support, though informal, worked well for me at the time. Now as a principal in Rural School District 1, I can recall that as an assistant principal, I felt fully supported by the principal at High School C. He acknowledged that I had served as a high school principal before and supported me to shore up my leadership skills so I would be successful here. When I became principal here, the district provided me with a mentor—more of a coach. She was a White female who had a very diverse student population at her school. I also work with regional AVID principals, which feels more like an informal mentoring opportunity to me. We can support one another and share ideas regarding our schools and AVID programming.

(continued)

Participating Respondent	Interview Question 4: Describe any support systems you felt were in place that helped you navigate your career. These could be formal or informal mentor relationships. Formal mentor experiences would describe those established by a school or district or external organization. An informal mentor experience, would be one that you have fostered through relationships you have built on your own.
Participant C	When I took this position, there was no mentor provided for this position. People assumed that because I had worked in schools and had been a high school principal, I would be prepared for the responsibilities that went along with the position. That was not the case. Much of what I learned as I transitioned to this role, I learned on my own or asked people I trusted for information or help.
Participant D	I was assigned a mentor by Human Resources when I began this job. A retired principal (African American) was assigned to serve as a mentor to me and informally, another retired African American principal served as a mentor for me. She is now deceased, but when she was alive, she would provide me with support and feedback. The Director of Human Resources has also informally supported me in ways that a mentor would by reminding me to only speak to the facts when there are issues in my school. She will make time for me—even if it is the end of the day. She will allow me to meet with her, though unscheduled, to discuss issues that are concerning to me. Finally, before she left the district, one of the Assistant Superintendents, who is African American, scheduled goal setting conferences with me bi-weekly to discuss my professional goals and goals I had for my school. That meant a great deal to me and when she left the district, I couldn't believe it—I missed her support.
Participant E	The district has an excellent onboarding structure in place for principals. They now provide you with a guide for school planning. A person talks with you and meets with you weekly to discuss your school and what is happening in your building—a weekly check-in session. If there are action items that need to be addressed, they meet with you to ensure the action items are addressed. On the informal side, I received a call from a former colleague, who agreed to serve as an informal mentor to me---and she was also the former principal of an elementary school in the district. Then one of my neighbors was the former head of Human Resources in the district where I currently serve, and when she learned about my appointment, she made it a priority to check in with me regarding how things are going and offered her support to me as well.

(continued)

Participating Respondent	Interview Question 4: Describe any support systems you felt were in place that helped you navigate your career. These could be formal or informal mentor relationships. Formal mentor experiences would describe those established by a school or district or external organization. An informal mentor experience, would be one that you have fostered through relationships you have built on your own.
Participant F	I feel like I have really good people around me that I can trust. Thankfully, I participated in strong PLCs (professional learning communities) along the way. Our work is by reputation in this business, so that comes with an aspect of competition. That being said, I felt like I could tap into resources. I took advantage of opportunities to learn about leadership through the Leadership Triangle. I was coached about my leadership style. As a leader, you must understand who you are and maintain networks. Just as people poured into me, administrators of color, I try to maintain an affinity network of people I can trust. At this time, I don't necessarily have a mentor, but I also feel like I could go to my direct supervisor, a woman of color, who is the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction to get support.

Responses to Interview Question 4 highlight the support systems, both formal and informal, that respondents felt were fundamental to their success and longevity.

Responses to this question included shared affinity groups, building trusting relationships with district colleagues, and maintaining networks with individuals in job-alike roles to ensure accuracy and transparency in information sharing.

Data from Table 7 highlights the establishment of preliminary leadership goals, both personal and professional as respondents began their leadership journeys. The ability to set goals is a characteristic of resilience discussed by respondents in this study as they considered their long-term leadership success. Each participant's response to Interview Question 10 is a lens that provides perspective related to the leadership intent of each respondent. Many spoke about their desire to continue making growth as a school or ways to address the social and emotional needs of students and staff who were suffering adversely from the effects of COVID-19. Others spoke about improving their leadership

skills; acknowledging that there were personal leadership attributes and skills that they wanted to continue to hone.

Table 7*Participant Responses to Interview Question 10*

Participating Respondents	Interview Question 10: What were your preliminary goals (personal and professional) in terms of your role as superintendent or senior-level leader?
Participant A	I wanted to turn around the achievement levels at our school; but more importantly, once we reached our achievement level goal, I wanted to make sure we sustained that growth. I wanted our school to also be a place where kids wanted to be every day. We are a high-poverty Title I school, so our parents are very grateful to us for what we do for kids each day.
Participant B	In our shift to become an AVID Demonstration school, I wanted to make sure we succeeded and maintained growth for our students. My greatest challenge here are our underprivileged White boys. Our data shows that if we can keep them from dropping out before the tenth grade, they will usually stay and graduate from high school.
Participant C	The main goal for me was to learn the job. It was so different from the previous roles I served in as a counselor and building level administrator; however, I was able to learn the job and build relationships. The professional development with other state professionals was very helpful. To have those people you can trust to provide you with reliable information or someone you can call and ask about an issue; those are valuable people to know. Especially, with Title II program planning being newly added to my list of responsibilities.
Participant D	One goal for me is to remember to state the facts when I am writing about concerns that are raised by the Board and community regarding my school. With the support I get from informal mentors, people who ‘pour’ their wisdom into me, I am able to set goals for my school and my students.
Participant E	One of the primary goals I set for myself in this position included doing my research about what the culture was like before I arrived. I was intent on rebuilding structures that no longer existed; for example, equity teams and teacher leadership meetings. I wanted to put those things in place that would allow us to use data to address the needs of kids.

(continued)

Participating Respondents	Interview Question 10: What were your preliminary goals (personal and professional) in terms of your role as superintendent or senior-level leader?
Participant F	My preliminary goals were to learn the job and build relationships with people. I wanted to have good people around me that I could trust so that we could learn together. I wanted my team to feel capable and comfortable providing me with feedback so that we could do the best job we could. This job is a blessing and a burden—because you serve the public. People are invested in what you do, so you have to find the balance.

In response to Research Question 2, Table 8 addresses Interview Question 17, which asked respondents to reflect on advice they would provide their former selves, as they either pursued or initially assumed their current role as superintendent or senior-level leader. Respondents provided thoughtful insight into the first few months of leadership as part of their shared responses.

Table 8*Participant Responses to Interview Question 17*

Participant Responses	Interview Question 17: If you could travel back in time and give advice to yourself, as you either pursued or initially assumed this role as superintendent or senior-level leader, what advice would you give yourself?
Participant A	I think about this a lot. I was a Principal Fellow—but I had also been accepted into a Masters of School Counseling program. I really wanted to be a counselor, but at the time—I needed to choose the program that would pay the most money, so I went into school administration. You know as an assistant principal, you get to spend quite a bit of time counseling students, so I miss being an assistant principal some days. If I could go back to that day though, I would choose to go into school counseling. I would have followed my heart’s desire.
Participant B	I would tell myself don’t be afraid to ask for help. Ask for the help you need.
Participant C	I would tell myself to stick to your guns in terms of career choice. My mom wanted me to be a teacher, I wanted to be a counselor. I probably would go back and choose a career in counseling. I would also tell myself, know what you’re getting into.
Participant D	I would tell myself to always show up as your authentic self. You have been assigned, positioned, and called to this place. It has been revealed and honored by the elders.
Participant E	I would tell myself to not be afraid to trust your instincts. Go slow, to go fast. Be intentional and strategic in your practice, know your style and your end goal.
Participant F	During the hardest part of my career, I was an assistant principal. I would tell myself to continue and stick with it. It is all necessary; each experience was a success or a lesson.

Finally, as part of demonstrated resilience, Interview Question 17 is reflective in nature and compels respondents to consider whether they would be inclined to choose a different career path if the option was available. Many respondents seemed to believe that their work in administration was a “calling” and part of what they considered important

and compelling work. Only two respondents seemed to reconsider the path they had chosen and would have pursued a career in counseling instead. Respondents spoke to persisting in their administrative work despite challenges. These demonstrated behaviors are a clear indication of a mindset focused on promoting positive outcomes for students in spite of the challenges that may impact one's leadership abilities.

Research Question 3: What Impact, if any, Do Sponsors, Formal or Informal, Have on Job Promotion and Retention Rates for African American Women Serving in Senior--Level Leadership Roles or in Superintendent Positions in the State of North Carolina?

Sponsors are defined as individuals who can open the doors of opportunity for aspirants in leadership roles. Similar to the mentor, the sponsor can also support and nurture a leader; however, the sponsor, unlike the mentor, has the network to create promotion opportunities for leaders. Question 3 was designed to determine the rate at which African American women felt they were able to successfully tap into sponsors or get support from sponsors as they sought promotion opportunities within their districts. Though many respondents spoke to the power of their established formal and informal mentor relationships, none really spoke to sponsors who could help them navigate the politics that often go along with senior-level leadership. Many participants shared that they simply relied on their professional skills or previous job experiences to promote them to their current or future leadership goals. Though not explicitly stated, it could be assumed that for some of the women who participated in this study, their connections to mentors who served in central office leadership roles afforded them opportunities to be noticed to a greater degree than a typical job seeker.

Figure 11 provides data from respondents to Survey Question 1 regarding job-

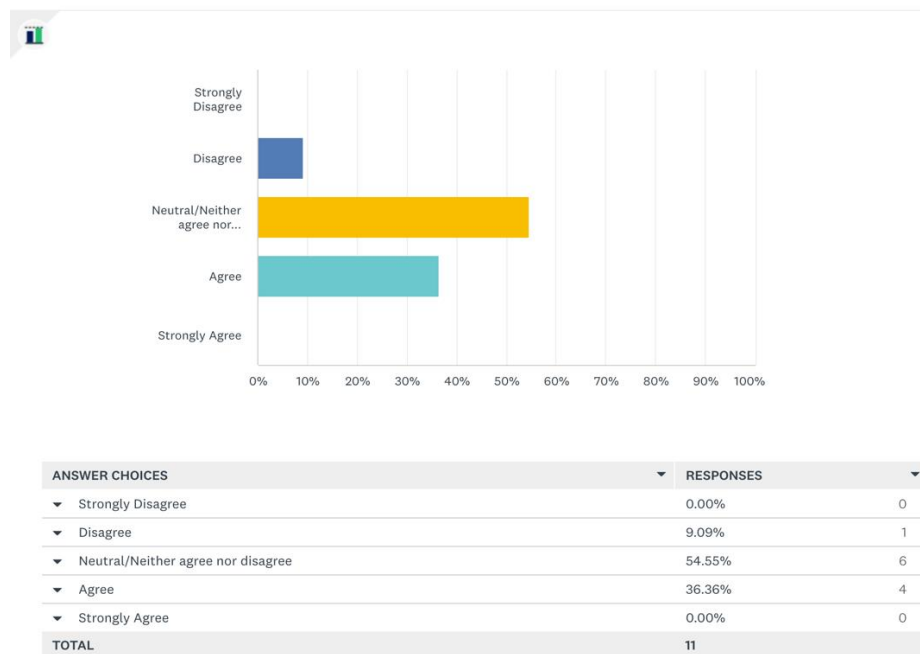
related training offered by their respective districts. The question was designed to determine if professional development related to their job function was part of ongoing leadership preparation programming offered to district leaders. It further speaks to Research Question 3 regarding whether minority women felt that sponsors, either formal or informal, impacted promotion and retention rates in terms of the acquisition of senior-level leadership assignments.

Figure 11

Survey Statement 1

I am satisfied with the job-related training my organization offers.

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



According to the data, 36% of respondents agreed that job-related training was offered to assist with continued leadership preparedness. Fifty-four percent of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, which suggests that training that was offered by their respective districts did not align with current job responsibilities.

Survey Question 2, as identified in Figure 12, focused on job promotion.

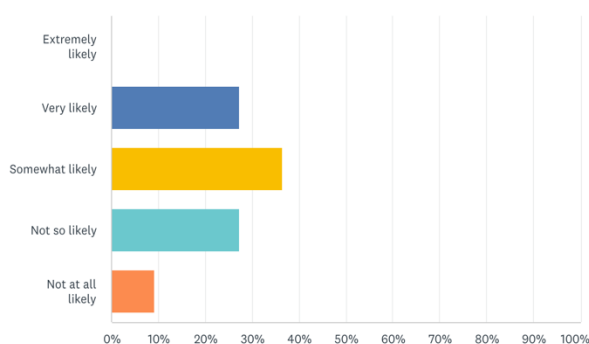
Respondents were asked to state their opinion regarding job promotion if their current work performance met or exceeded expectations. The specific statement asked if promotion in their current assignment would be possible if the job were done well.

Figure 12

Survey Question 2

How likely do you think it is that you will be promoted if you do your job well?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Extremely likely	0.00% 0
Very likely	27.27% 3
Somewhat likely	36.36% 4
Not so likely	27.27% 3
Not at all likely	9.09% 1
TOTAL	11

Based on respondent feedback, 27.27% of respondents felt that promotion was likely if they either met or exceeded performance expectations, while 36.36% felt that promotion was somewhat likely and 27.27% felt that promotion was not so likely, even if they were meeting or exceeding expectations. These data suggest that respondents recognized that quality job performance alone would not be enough to ensure opportunities for promotion.

Survey Question 3, illustrated in Figure 13 of the survey, asked respondents to share feedback related to professional development. The specific question discussed

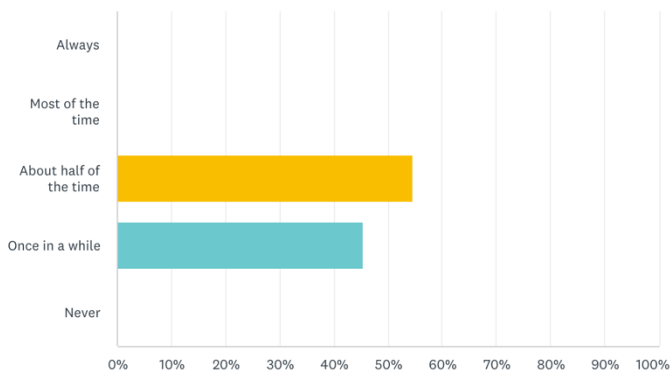
exceptional professional development that exceeded respondent expectations.

Figure 13

Survey Question 3

How often does professional development exceed your expectations?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Always	0.00% 0
Most of the time	0.00% 0
About half of the time	54.55% 6
Once in a while	45.45% 5
Never	0.00% 0
TOTAL	11

Based on the data, respondents shared that a little more than half of the time, 54.5%, the professional development offered by their respective districts exceeded their expectations. Respondents shared that once in a while, 45.45% of the time, professional development exceeded their expectations. There were no data to support that professional development “most of the time” or “always” exceeded expectations.

Figure 14

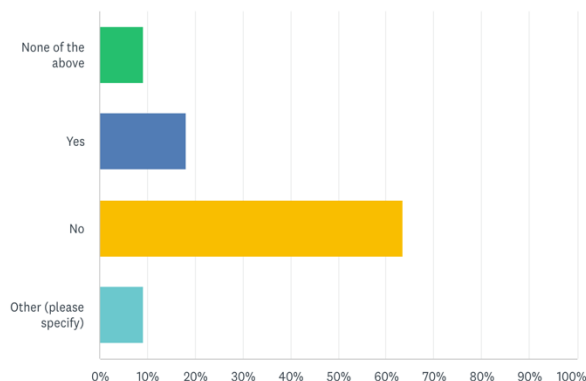
Survey Question 6

Q6

[Customize](#) [Save as](#)

In terms of future work promotion, do you have the support of a sponsor to assist with advancement in your current assignment?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
None of the above	9.09% 1
Yes	18.18% 2
No	63.64% 7
Other (please specify)	9.09% 1

The data for Survey Question 6 suggest that respondents, 63.64%, did not have the support of a sponsor for advancement in their current work assignment. Of the number surveyed, only 18.18% responded positively to the question; fewer than 20% felt confident that their current network of support would be able to assist them with promotion from their current leadership assignment.

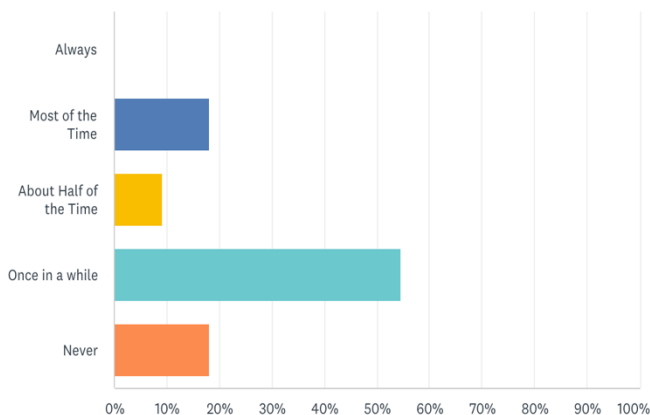
Survey Question 7 highlights the data from Figure 15, which asked district leaders how often they are encouraged to participate in mentor programming, either as mentors or mentees, for professional development or promotion. Data suggest that more than half, 54.54%, were asked to participate in mentor programming for professional development.

Figure 15

Survey Question 7

How often are district leaders encouraged to participate in mentor programming--either as mentors or mentees for professional development or promotion?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



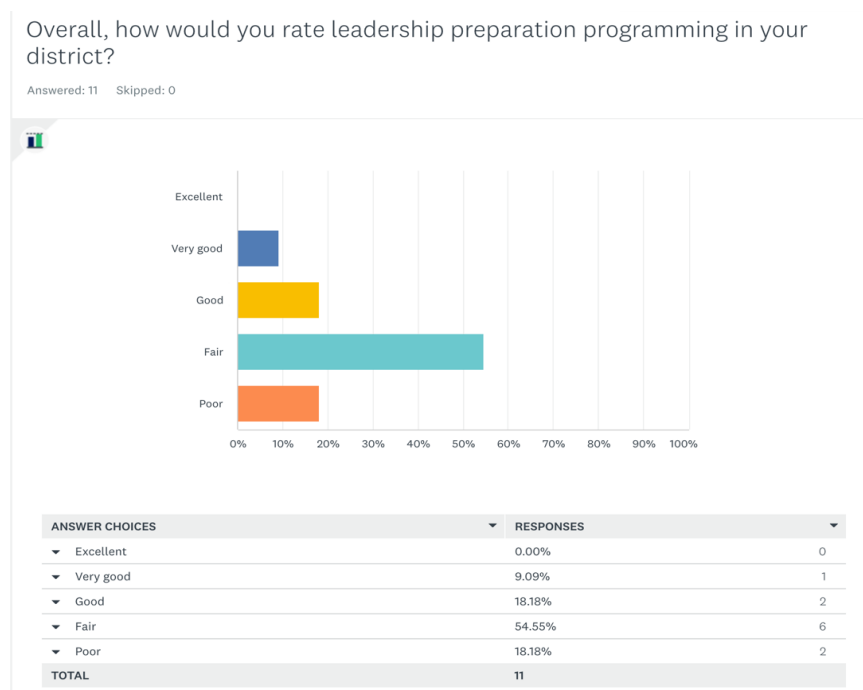
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Always	0.00% 0
Most of the Time	18.18% 2
About Half of the Time	9.09% 1
Once in a while	54.55% 6
Never	18.18% 2
TOTAL	11

The data regarding this survey question are varied in terms of percentages. Approximately 18% of respondents, 18.18%, felt that mentor programming was offered most of the time or about half of the time. Additionally, slightly more than 18% of respondents felt that mentor training was never offered as part of their professional growth and leadership. According to collected data, 54.55% of respondents shared that mentor programming was only offered once in a while. Survey Question 7 speaks to the urgent need for consistent networks of support on behalf of African American female leaders in education.

Survey Question 8 as noted in Figure 16 asked respondents to rate the leadership preparation program in their current district. Based on responses, most respondents rated the preparation programming for district leaders as fair, with a total of 54.55% of individuals responding positively.

Figure 16

Survey Question 8



Responses to Survey Question 8 suggest that most respondents, 54.5%, felt that leadership preparation programming in their respective district was fair, while few respondents, 9%, felt that leadership preparation was very good. Finally, 18% of respondents felt that programming designed to prepare them for leadership opportunities or promotion was either good or poor, each being ranked 18.18% respectively.

Research Question 4: To What Extent Do These Collected Narratives (Qualitative Results) Support the Survey (Quantitative Results) of This Research?

Research Question 4 was designed to connect the narrative portion of this

research study to quantitative data collected from respondents who were not included as part of the convenience sampling approach used to select interview respondents.

Overlapping trends between survey and interview data indicate that African American women in senior-level leadership roles in the state of North Carolina believe the following: In terms of mentors, 36% of African American women had been assigned mentors as part of initial leadership support; of that percentage, most found their mentor neither helpful nor unhelpful.

Data from the survey regarding the assignment of mentors is similar to the data collected from interview respondents. Of the six women interviewed as part of this dissertation study, only two spoke of being assigned a mentor by their district as part of the induction process. The other four respondents shared that their respective districts provided policy manuals and extensive onboarding support, contact information for potential mentors, or PLC opportunities that encouraged the organic formation of mentor relationships.

In terms of sponsors, individuals who have the potential to positively impact one's promotion, according to survey results, only 18% of minority women felt that they had the support of a sponsor to assist with future job promotion. Based on results from interview participants, only one respondent shared that as an assistant principal, she felt as though her immediate supervisor provided opportunities to highlight her skills in ways that would lead to promotion.

Interview Question 20 was the final question asked as part of the qualitative portion of this research study. Respondents were asked to share any final thoughts regarding minority women serving in senior-level leadership.

Table 9*Participant Responses to Interview Question 20*

Participating Respondent	Interview Question Twenty: Is there anything I haven't asked that you would like to share at this time regarding your experience as a superintendent, building or district level leader?
Participant A	No, I don't have anything to add. Just that I am excited about where our district is going—I'm hopeful.
Participant B	No, I don't have anything to add. Just that this is very difficult work. It was extremely difficult during the pandemic.
Participant C	We do need more African American women in leadership. I think about how we're viewed negatively—for example, people don't think we have feelings. We need to be our own support for navigating our burdens. African American women in a district need to support one another—having that is what helps us make it.
Participant D	Stay true to yourself; we have been socialized to believe that we have to compromise who we are—our hair, etc. We have been told we need to look like, talk like, dress like Whites—be true to yourself—there is no one like you. You are an original.
Participant E	I would just add how important it is not to lose yourself in this work—I lost myself once. I know now that I don't have to look like any of my White counterparts—we are enough.
Participant F	I would just like to add that I aspire to make a greater impact. You have to pursue whatever level speaks to your heart. Work to establish a good relationship with the Board of Education—successful schools create successful students.

Though respondents shared many of their perceptions related to leadership as part of their initial responses to interview questions, others were reflective as they considered their leadership experiences in their school and district leadership roles. Each of the six participants for the interview portion of this study was hopeful about the future of leadership for minority women in the state of North Carolina, most importantly the role they would play in ensuring the success of other minority women in the future.

Beyond the relationships previously established with interview respondents, the survey portion of this research was designed to signal that the need for established systems of support is an urgent one across our state. If our educational system intends to promote diversity in gender and race for senior-level leadership in schools, districts, and universities, we must do so in intentional and impactful ways.

Overview of Survey Responses

The survey portion of this dissertation research includes 10 questions respondents were asked to answer related to professional development, mentor training, sponsorship, and promotion. A total of 30 surveys were sent to identified school leaders in the Sandhills, Central, Western, and Triangle portions of the state of North Carolina. The survey included a consent document and a link to the survey that asked respondents to share their overall perceptions regarding leadership preparation programming and training in either their current or former school district. Approximately one third of the surveys were returned completed by respondents; 11 total responses were collected. As part of the quantitative portion of the research, the participation goal for the survey portion of this mixed methods dissertation was 50%; however, only a fraction of the desired rate was captured, with an overall response rate of 30%. Survey Questions 9 and 10 asked respondents to identify their race and gender as part of the survey process. All respondents who completed the survey and interview portion of the research study identified as African American females.

Overview of Interview Responses

The interview portion of this dissertation research study was designed to capture the narrative experiences of African American female leaders in the state of North

Carolina. Respondents work in either rural or urban school districts. Respondents were contacted based on convenience sampling, and the total number of respondents included six school- or central office-based senior leaders. Most respondents were building-level principals (four), and two respondents were central office senior executives.

Unfortunately, despite several attempts, of the six currently seated African American female superintendents in the state, none were available to participate in this study. I relied instead on the narratives provided by senior leaders at the school and district levels.

There was a total of 20 potential questions included as part of the interview process. Several of the participants provided extended responses to questions; therefore, asking respondents to provide additional information was unnecessary. Respondents were open and honest during the interview process. Raw data collected from the interviews indicate that participants provided ample information in response to all questions that were asked during the interview phase of this study.

Though respondents shared many of their perceptions related to leadership as part of their initial responses to interview questions, others were reflective as they considered their leadership experiences in their school and district leadership roles. Each of the six participants for the interview portion of this study was hopeful about the future of leadership for minority women in the state of North Carolina, most importantly the role they would play in ensuring the success of other minority women in the future.

Chapter 5: Discussion

A major focus of this phenomenological study was to illustrate the importance of support systems for individuals who are underrepresented in the leadership space. In this case, the specific group is that of African American women, many of whom are left to create support systems on their own with limited or nonexistent support from their respective districts. This statement is best supported by the survey data that were generated as part of this dissertation study. Though limited, the data offered insight into the pervasive need for mentorship and sponsorship for African American women in the state of North Carolina.

Based on respondent interviews, each of the participants shared stories about their experiences regarding formal and informal systems of support that sustained, uplifted, and encouraged them when their expertise was either ignored or undermined. The interviews were most enlightening and supported my hypothesis regarding the impact of race and gender on leadership experiences. Indeed, in terms of the theories that were explored as part of this study, Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, and Dissatisfaction Theory, all were supported by the narratives shared by interview respondents. Each of these theories was further highlighted by previously conducted research and writings that were used in similar studies that explored the experiences of minority women in the field of educational leadership.

The overall study focused on four guiding research questions:

1. What impact, if any, do district-sponsored mentor programs have on the longevity rates of African American women serving in senior-level leadership roles or in Superintendent positions in the state of North Carolina?

2. What identified resiliency factors contribute to the long-term success of African American women serving in senior-level leadership roles or in Superintendent positions in the state of North Carolina?
3. What impact, if any, do sponsors, formal or informal, have on job promotion and on retention rates for African American women serving in senior-level leadership roles or in Superintendent positions in the state of North Carolina?
4. To what extent do these collected narratives (qualitative results) support the survey (quantitative results) of this research?

The study revealed that despite differences in location, past work experiences, and job responsibilities, a pattern regarding the nature of leadership and the impact that race and gender play in fomenting those experiences for African American women, though distinct based on location, across the board, their leadership experiences as minority women of color were quite similar. More often than not, respondents spoke about creating their own systems of support in addition to or in the absence of district support. Each interviewee displayed a love for learning and for the work they do. All recognized their experience as a “calling” that demanded their best, regardless of what they endured as part of their leadership experience. There was an optimism displayed for the “journey” as one respondent shared, with each individual recognizing that they were contributing to the lives of young people and their respective communities.

Emerging Themes

As part of this phenomenological dissertation research study, four dominant themes emerged. From the interviews conducted with six respondents at varying levels of leadership serving in three very distinct and unique districts, the following conclusions

were drawn: (a) race and gender impact leadership experiences, (b) resilience and spirituality are key to building professional stamina in leadership, (c) adaptability and flexibility are critical to longevity and success, and (d) creating self-sustaining systems of support must be a priority. Robinson (2014) stated, “Themes served as a reminder of what study participants encountered on a daily basis as they worked to serve their families, their schools, and their communities” (p. 4). In order to create themes from the interviews conducted, I reviewed transcribed notes from recorded interviews and identified the overlap in terms of respondent statements to specific questions.

Race and Gender Directly Impact Leadership

According to Dana and Boursaw (2006, as cited in Robinson, 2014), “The stigma of gender and racial biases are quite common in today’s society, including school districts where women and people of color are often ignored for leadership positions” (p. 1). Race, gender, and their subsequent impact on leadership was a dominant theme from the interviews conducted as part of this dissertation research. Respondents shared across each of the three districts that were included in the study that in no uncertain terms many of the challenges they faced could be either directly or indirectly attributed to race. This was especially true in districts where there were few minorities in leadership. In Rural School District 1, it is noteworthy that Participant C shared that there are schools in the district where there are no teachers of color. Moreover, based on the data, schools in the district currently have only two principals of color across each of the elementary, middle, and high schools.

The theme of the impact of race and gender on leadership is further highlighted by responses provided in Interview Question 14; for example, when respondents were asked

to design a mentor program, many of them spoke about affinity groups and programming that was intentional and included women of color who served in leadership roles. Others spoke about a safe space that allowed them to discuss their work in a place where they felt they could be their “authentic selves.”

Resilience and Spirituality Are Key to Building Professional Stamina in Leadership

“Crucial for the psychological health of African American women is the dimension of exercising voice and agency, which is ‘liberating’ when one is faced with the convergence of multiple oppressions” (Roberts et al., 2019, para. 25); in this case, race and gender. Participants in this study openly spoke about the strategies they employed to increase their resiliency in the schools and districts where they lead; most often where women of color were limited in number or in school districts where the community was positioned and empowered such that they were very vocal in their opinions regarding matters that pertained to school and district decisions. At least three of the participants spoke openly about the importance of their faith as the cornerstone of their optimism about their work and leadership. Robinson (2014) stated quite succinctly, “On the other hand, resilience and spirituality provided the strength and direction needed for a school leader” (p. 6).

The women who participated in this study early on recognized their leadership as a “calling.” Indeed, Participant D specifically shared that it was about, “Constant, ongoing, authentic, unapologetic richness; having the ability to lift, receive, and embrace one’s work.” Participant F emphasized that she was a woman of faith; and as a result of her beliefs, she understands who she is and actively maintains networks of support from people who constantly “pour into” her, some of whom include her local pastor and

church community. Specific action steps to increase one's resilience include:

- Create broad networks of support within the organization
- Embrace diverse partnerships with internal and external stakeholders
- Develop alliances with individuals who can provide sponsorship and mentorship opportunities. Avoid becoming a “pet.”
- Continue to enhance and extend professional development opportunities to promote self-improvement and career advancement (Roberts & Mayo, 2019).

Adaptability and Flexibility Are Critical to Longevity and Success

As part of the core dimension of the Robust Sense of Self, as discussed in the work of Shockley and Holloway (2019, as cited in Roberts et al., 2019), one finds the element known as persisting, which is defined as the “tenacious and steadfast resolve demonstrated by African-American women scholars in the white academy” (para. 22). The dimension of persisting also applies to African American women in leadership roles who must constantly be able to adapt to sudden changes in the political landscape, disappearing or limited allies, as well as gender- or race-related norms that influence both internal and external stakeholders.

Respondents in this study openly discussed the impact of evolving job responsibilities, including additional supervisory tasks that were added to already heavy workloads. Many spoke of the loss of mentors of color who had served as sounding boards for them in the early days of their leadership work and how those losses impacted them on both a professional and personal level. As a result, they each had to have the ability to adapt and be flexible to those changes. Each leader had to learn to adjust and build extended relationships so information pertinent to their job functions would be

transparently shared so they could continue operating in an efficient and effective manner.

Creating Self-Sustaining Systems of Support Is a Priority

“Persistence through connectivity and reciprocity with colleagues is particularly important: it has the potential to mitigate the impact of isolation and outsider status experienced by many” (Roberts et al., 2019, para. 23). Each woman of color who participated in this research study shared the importance of engaging in the creation of support systems that would nourish and encourage them in their leadership efforts. Respondents discussed how they created informal networks of support for themselves either beyond what was offered by their respective districts or in lieu of what was offered in their district. Indeed, Participant A shared that her network kept her “grounded” and served as a sounding board for her ideas. She felt that she could ask for help without the pressure she sometimes experiences as a minority leader of color. As shared by one respondent in the work of Shockley and Holloway (2019, as cited in Roberts et al., 2019):

I’m not leaving who I am at home anymore, because that’s what I was doing. I was leaving myself at home, close the door, go to work, take on that persona, do well, leave work, close that door, come home, and embrace who I am. And I decided I wasn’t going to do that anymore, that I was going to bring who I was to the table. (para. 24)

Indeed, being able to create the support systems necessary for one’s individual success is integral to longevity and success as part of building one’s leadership capacity. As discussed in the research of Roberts and Mayo (2019), “Early in their careers, Black employees need safe spaces to grow and develop and to experience authentic failures and

successes without being subsumed in narratives of racial limitation (para. 38).

Summary of Findings

Survey data and respondent interviews support the assertions that race and gender each have the potential to negatively impact the leadership experiences of women of color. Districts must accept the role they play in ensuring the success of African American women they recruit to work in their districts, i.e., rates of retention, sponsorship, mentorship, and promotion in leadership roles. It was established through the responses provided in both the survey and interview portion of this research that mentors and sponsors do matter. Without mentors and sponsors, though navigating the landmines one often associates with leadership is possible, the probability of minority women willingly accepting those risks is diminutive.

Women of color at both the district- and school-based levels identified and adopted resiliency traits to increase their malleability and longevity in their leadership roles. Each one spoke about creating systems of support that included other women of color who had either survived or were engaged in leadership work of their own. Being able to recognize the need for increased support when it is lacking and following up to ensure that the support is in place for one's professional survival is in itself a characteristic of resilience.

To summarize the findings of this study, one must accept the responsibility that goes along with both recruiting and retaining women of color in leadership roles. Recruitment means that districts and universities responsible for leadership training must support these women who often serve in communities under contentious circumstances. These experiences have the potential to diminish one's sense of authenticity, increase

doubt in terms of one's abilities, and leave individuals at the "margins," where isolation often reigns. Indeed, to close with a statement made by one scholar from the Shockley and Holloway (2019, as cited in Roberts et al., 2019) study,

I've talked about the challenges of being in that environment, the alienation, the isolation, the being viewed with suspicion, my scholarship questioned, feeling like the mammy; in some ways I have to compromise my standards [yet] I really believe that if I wasn't there, and other women like myself were not there, that these institutions would be poorer for the fact. (para. 28)

Supporting Theory

Three theories served as the underpinning for this research study. These theories include Critical Race Theory, Black Feminism and Intersectionality, and Dissatisfaction Theory. At the center of the discussion is the racialized supposition that the individual serving in the leadership role is somehow illegitimate. "The significant contributions of African Americans, especially women, in the areas of education and educational leadership have been greatly undervalued" (Reed & Evans, 2008, as cited in Robinson, 2014, p. 1).

Critical Race Theory defined is a broad social scientific approach to the study of race, racism, and society. Critical Race Theory suggests that despite an organization's best efforts to diminish the tensions that coincide with working in heterogeneous organizations, when persons of color serve in leadership roles due to the racialized nature of American culture, issues regarding perceived leadership illegitimacy will arise. This is especially true for women of color, who must also supersede the barriers of not only race, but also gender. This research study, which has only added a fraction of narrative to this

body of research, supports the idea that until districts are able to courageously confront systemic inadequacies in practice, disparities in terms of student outcomes will continue to be pervasive.

Further illuminated by the narratives included in this study is the idea that despite a racialized society, women of color often manage to navigate hurdles and, with systems of support, are quite successful in their leadership roles. As previously stated, inequity does reinforce agency, thereby allowing African American female leaders to experience success in their work. According to Robinson (2014), the attributes of minority women in leadership, more specifically African American women, need further exploration in order to create understanding and recognition for the contributions they have made to educational leadership. Indeed, as proposed by Yosso (2005), Critical Race Theory recognizes the duplicity of schools: “Wherein schools most often suppress and marginalize while they maintain the potential to either emancipate or empower” (p. 74).

The second theory used to support this research is Black Feminism and Intersectionality. First coined by Bell and Crenshaw, intersectionality introduced in 1989, is a term that envelops in a single idea the simultaneous experience of multiple oppressions faced by African American women (Bell, 2020). The women who participated in this research study focused their discussions on their racialized leadership experiences and did not express feelings of inadequacy experienced as a result of being female.

The data that typify the theory of Black Feminism and Intersectionality is most evident in Rural School District 1, where, among 21 schools, there are currently only two women of color serving in school-based leadership roles and only two African American

women currently serving in leadership positions at the central office level. The numbers were more prolific in Urban School District 1 and in Urban School District 2 in terms of minority female representation. There were many more leaders of color and women represented at both the school and district levels; however, the concerns raised in each of these districts pertained to longevity in leadership roles. In other words, after securing their positions, these women expressed concerns related to district-initiated support necessary to ensure minority women leaders remained viable and legitimate in their work. “As more women of color, whether African, Hispanic, Native American, or Asian, enter educational leadership, their lived experiences need to be an integral part of the conversations in empirical research” (Robinson, 2014, p. 8). Further, in spite of multiple oppressions, each of these women expressed a commitment to the work, as long as they felt their contributions were deemed valuable by their respective districts. Study participants discussed creating their own paths forward. Some even expressed having White male allies who worked to intentionally highlight their expertise (as shared by Participant B). These allies ensured that despite their minority female status, their leadership skills and abilities would be showcased in their respective roles within the district.

The final theory that supports this dissertation research is Dissatisfaction Theory, first proposed by Iannaccone and Lutz (1970, as cited in Perry, 2008). Dissatisfaction Theory’s position speaks directly to superintendent turnover in school districts. Using the data for the state of North Carolina, which currently has a total of six African American female superintendents from more than 100 school districts, this theory is a most viable one. Indeed, while writing the background narrative associated with this dissertation

study, the original number of superintendents identified was nine. This number later dropped by two; and as of today, the number has been reduced by one, and there are currently a total of six seated African American female superintendents in the state of North Carolina. According to the research of scholars as identified in the Robinson (2014) study, women make up 84% of the teaching workforce; of that percentage, only 29% of women hold principal appointments. Ten percent of principal appointments are held by African American women (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007-2008, as cited in Robinson, 2014). Ironically, however, more women are enrolled in educational administration programs (Shakeshaft et al., 2007 and Sherman, 2005, as cited in Robinson, 2014). Dissatisfaction Theory speaks to the turbulent relationship that often exists between the board of education and those who serve in the role of superintendent. According to the theory, the school board often will replace a seated superintendent with an individual who will reflect the values and norms that are prevalent in the community (Perry, 2008).

Based on state data regarding the appointments of African American female superintendents as well as data reflected in Rural School District 1, it is evident that Dissatisfaction Theory has an impact on the level of diversity among leaders in a district; indeed, this reality is further illustrated by African American female superintendent data for the state of North Carolina. Despite equity programming directors being positioned in most districts across this state, levels of diversity in leadership across districts and at the state level continue to decline.

Implications for Practice

How does this study translate into increased numbers of female superintendents

and senior-level leaders across the state of North Carolina? Participants in Robinson (2014) expressed, “Race and gender in school leadership was a challenge with regard to experiencing racism and sexism as they [women] pursued leadership positions” (p. 5). Unlike the participants in Robinson’s study, respondents for this study spoke more openly about obvious racial disparities, which they felt impacted their leadership experiences to an even greater degree than their gender differences. Very little was said about their female status. Across the board, respondents spoke about how their race negatively impacted their day-to-day leadership experiences more often than not within their school communities with both internal and external stakeholders. Based on the narratives shared, these women looked for opportunities to circumvent what they recognized as the burden of leadership. Working with the public in a racialized society means that part of what they experience each day are microaggressions that can be directly attributed to race.

According to the research of Roberts and Mayo (2019), districts that hire minority women of color must be the ones to bear the weight for leading the change. Much like the business model regarding diversity and inclusion programming, school districts must assume the responsibility of working as allies within their own organizations with those whom they have hired and entrusted with the task of serving their communities. “We must move away from old systems of anti-racist and anti-discrimination models to newer accountability-based systems that include ‘the adoption of personalized plans,’ along with coaching and courses related to district-and-school based expectations for diversity and inclusion professional development” (Roberts & Mayo, 2019, para. 34). Establishing clear expectations regarding the value placed on diversity and inclusion creates a baseline

for acceptable behavior within an organization. Newly revamped training models should include a variety of stakeholders, namely boards of education, parents, community partners, public school allies, and school-based staff.

Because school districts are a reflection of society, districts must accept the prevalence of race in school communities (Roberts & Mayo, 2019). For this reason, districts must be willing to engage in sustained and difficult conversations related to race. Though they will feel uncomfortable, research has shown that these discussions are critical to ensuring all persons feel accepted and authentic at work, especially those individuals who have been tasked to lead. This is especially true when districts engage in the promotion of minority women to executive leadership positions.

One further step that must occur in the recruitment, retention, and promotion of women of color in leadership involves enhancing the skills they need to advance in their careers. Districts must create networking opportunities for women to develop affinity groups so they can learn from one another and establish relationships with those who also serve in leadership roles. As women of color seek opportunities for advancement within their organizations, districts must continue to train and groom them for promotion. More importantly, once prepared, districts must be willing to advance minority women into leadership roles. One final recommendation that emerged from this study was the continued creation of diverse pipelines of talent among minority women who may be preparing to lead in the future. Establishing partnerships with historically Black colleges and universities would be invaluable in establishing a source for recruiting and retaining minority talent.

One critical component of support for minority women in executive leadership

roles involves the promotion of their legitimacy in their roles. One consistent perception is that minorities in leadership are there due to affirmative action programming. Districts must work to ensure that the credibility, talent, and scholarship of minority women they elect to place in executive leadership roles are acknowledged for their leadership abilities.

Indeed, any leader who constantly defends reasonably made decisions begins to suffer from the fatigue that often plagues people of color. One term for this exhaustion that has surfaced in recent years includes “Being while Black” (el-Khoury, 2012, para.1). At the heart of this discussion is the educational community’s recognition of their role in perpetuating structural racism. This term refers to “public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms that work in various, reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity” (Abdullah, 2020, para.7). Until school districts and, more specifically, the state look at their data and the gaps that exist between leadership representation and diversity in school populations, disparities in leadership representation will persist. Training, coupled with discussions that may be uncomfortable and difficult need to occur. Tough questions may not lead to easy answers, but at least we can begin to explore what schools, tasked with serving the needs of all learners, should look like in terms of leadership representation. Robinson (2014) identified the work of Alston (2005) in her supposition which stated, “African-American female school leaders choose service while leading and leave a legacy of service to others” (p. 7).

Summary of Implications for Practice

To summarize next steps regarding this research study, it becomes incumbent upon districts to offer more than training to school and district leaders. There must be accountability goals associated with training that yield results that will ultimately lead to

increased efficacy for adults and improved outcomes for students. According to Abdullah (2020),

Institutional racism results in data showing racial gaps across every system. For children and families, it affects where they live, the quality of the education they receive, their income, types of food they have access to, their exposure to pollutants, whether they have access to clean air, clean water or adequate medical treatment, and the types of interactions they have with the criminal justice system. (para. 27)

When leaders of color assume leadership roles in school districts, especially in districts where limited minorities may serve in such positions, they are *choosing* to “stand in the gap” for those who are not welcomed at the table. This places them in precarious situations, often leaving them vulnerable to criticisms that may be undeserved. As shared by Participant D, she experienced board censure after refusing a parent’s request to take away Pokemon cards from a student of color, who was accused of stealing them from a White classmate. According to Participant D, this concern resulted in having to write a brief summary regarding the incident for human resources that would later be shared with board members as part of a series of allegations levied by the community regarding her perceived favoritism for staff and students of color due entirely to her status as an African American principal.

While most White leaders would assume incidents of this nature are par for the course, for leaders of color, accusations and subsequent steps that follow *feel* very much like a tally of mistakes that could result in dismissal. Indeed, leaders of color refer to this as “walking on a tightrope,” which means they are navigating a situation that requires

them to be excessively careful in everything they do or say based almost entirely on their minority status. This supports the need that was repeated by respondents in this research study regarding being able to “lead with authenticity.” Feeling as though one must always gingerly navigate the circumstances of their leadership experience because of race makes genuine, authentic leadership impossible.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

Delimitations of this dissertation study included prospective superintendent respondent availability to participate in the interview and survey portions of this research. Ideally, the goal of this research included having five to 10 respondents participate in the study, including minority female superintendents in the state of North Carolina. That being said, I recognized early on that including senior-level leaders at both the central office and school level would be equally beneficial. It would also increase the reliability of the data collected. Ultimately, these narratives became the focal point of my study. Discussions based on common shared experiences provided a lens regarding how districts support, mentor, and sponsor minority female leaders. Finally, the use of a survey to collect several respondent perspectives increased the credibility of these findings. Though there was a limited number of survey responses returned, among the completed surveys there was consistency, which suggested limited mentor and sponsorship opportunities is a recurring issue for women of color in the state of North Carolina.

The perceived limitations associated with this research study included the number of participants for the study. Given the limited number of African American female superintendents nationally, there was little collected research related to their experiences that could be used as part of this phenomenological study. Instead, the dissertation relied

quite heavily on research previously conducted by scholars in the field to frame the collected narratives of minority female leaders in North Carolina. The limited number of African American female superintendents in the state of North Carolina also proved somewhat problematic to the study. Though contacted and asked to participate, there were only two responses received to my repeated inquiries regarding participation in the study. Of the two, one superintendent had to have prior board approval and the other was unavailable due to scheduled conflicts.

For this reason, the narratives collected for this research study focused on the experiences of minority women at the school and central office levels, building level-principals and those serving in executive leadership roles in central office. These interviews and corresponding surveys from minority female leaders serving in the public schools in the state of North Carolina became the data used to support theories associated with the dissertation study. Interview questions for respondents were based on the following:

- the demographic profiles of African American women superintendents and senior-level leaders
- perceived barriers, challenges, and strategies for accessing their current senior-level leadership role in a school or district
- advice and recommendations for aspiring African American women who intend to pursue leadership roles in their prospective school or district
- design recommendations for mentor programs for African American female leaders who aspire to school or district leadership roles

Suggestions for Further Research

Though there were no superintendent narratives included in this dissertation study, it would be helpful as part of future research to include these perspectives as a next step in studies related to minority female leadership in the state of North Carolina.

Though somewhat disheartening, in many ways, the day-to-day operations of schools and districts, including perspectives regarding routine interactions with students, teachers, and the public, provided a more layered perspective regarding leadership challenges for minority women.

It would also be helpful to engage in future comparative studies. Much of the research used as part of framing this discussion dealt with the leadership experiences of minority women in suburban districts. Comparing leadership narratives based on location would perhaps illuminate whether some of the highlighted issues really speak to race or whether the experiences could be related to location, i.e., selecting those districts that embrace minority female leaders. The research conducted as part of this study should also continue to be an area of focus for the state of North Carolina. Given the attrition rates across the state as they relate to superintendent appointments for African American women, it is clear that additional study and work in the area of equity regarding minority female leadership is a need. The collection of narrative experiences as part of the work becomes central to the study and contributes to any quantitative research conducted.

Conclusion

To conclude this research study, race impacts society on a variety of levels on a daily basis. The work of schools, specifically public schools, is to negate and supersede the realities of race in order to equalize educational outcomes for all students, with

particular attention shown to those students who may require more support. In most instances, based on data, these include minorities and students of color. As part of that work, leaders serving in districts where they too may be in the minority must be able to confidently attest to the fact that while race is important, it does not trump one's talents or abilities. Until districts are able to truthfully accept the course ahead in terms of battling systemic racism as part of our work, these words ring hollow and are in fact a lie.

This research study was designed to highlight the overt differences in leadership experiences, especially for minority women serving in leadership roles. It was painful to hear women discuss how they are often dismissed, ignored, or perceived as lacking in competence or feelings. It is only through the creation of networks of support, in many cases as voiced by respondents self-initiated systems of support, that they manage to survive; though not unscathed, I might add. How sad it is that one leader only carries the burden of moving students forward, while another leader must carry that burden along with perceived doubts about their abilities and talents based solely on race and gender.

Not unlike the study conducted by Gregory (2001, as cited in Robinson, 2014), "African-American women in this study and others have exhibited resilience and achieved goals of becoming school leaders" (p. 9). Though gains have been made, continued research in this field needs to occur. Collecting the narrative experiences of African American female women in leadership provides a powerful framework for those who will follow. Indeed, these collected testimonies are of benefit to us all as we create a narrative of survival for generations to come.

References

- Abdullah, H. (2020, June 14). What do terms like systemic racism, microaggression and white fragility mean? *ABC News*. <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/terms-systemic-racism-microaggression-white-fragility/story?id=71195820>
- Allen, K. (1995). African-American women in educational administration: The importance of mentors and sponsors. *Journal of Negro Education*, 64(4) 409-421.
- American Psychological Association. (n.d.). Group relations theory. *In APA dictionary of Psychology*. Retrieved March 13, 2022, from <https://dictionary.apa.org/group-relations-theory>
- Ball, B. (2018, April). *Monday's numbers: America's staggering diversity gap between students of color and teachers of color*. N.C. Policy Watch. <https://ncpolicywatch.com/2018/08/20/monday-numbers-americas-staggering-diversity-gap-between-students-of-color-and-teachers-of-color/>
- Bell, D. (2020, September). *Critical race theory*. JSTOR Daily. <https://daily.jstor.org/what-is-critical-race-theory/>
- Colbert, D. (2009). *Gender and racial experiences in executive school leadership: Perceptions of African-American female superintendents* (Publication No. 3367682) [Doctoral dissertation, Oakland University]. ProQuest LLC.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.

- D'Agostino, J. P. (2020, Nov. 25). *I'm a high-achieving Black woman in largely White spaces, and I'm exhausted*. Huffington Post—Huffpost Personal.
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/black-woman-business-school_n_5fbc68fac5b68ca87f7e3253
- de Brey, C., Musu, L., McFarland, J., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., Diliberti, M., Zhang, A., Branstetter, C., & Wang, X. (2019). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic groups 2018* (NCES 2019-038). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved March 17, 2022, from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED592833>
- Doctoral Degree Awards to African-Americans Reach Another All-Time High. (2006). *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*.
https://www.jbhe.com/news_views/50_black_doctoraldegrees.html
- Eagly, A., & Karau, S. (2020). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, *109*(3), 573-598.
- el-Khoury, L. J. (2012). “Being while Black”: Resistance and the management of the self. *Social Identities*, *18*(1), 85-100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2012.629516>
- Hewlin, P. F., Kim, S. S., & Song, Y. H. (2016, January). Creating facades of conformity in the face of job insecurity: A study of consequences and conditions. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, *89*(3), 539-567.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12140>
- Jones, N. H. (2019). 1619 Project. *The New York Times Magazine*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-american-slavery.html>

- Kowalski, T., McCord, R. S., Petersen, G. J., Young, P. I., & Ellerson, N. M. (2010). 10-year study on the American school superintendent released. *The American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study*. Retrieved March 19, 2020, from aasa.org/content.aspx?id=17280
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.a). Codified. In *Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most Trusted Online Dictionary*. Retrieved March 13, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/codified>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.b). Diversity. In *Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most Trusted Online Dictionary*. Retrieved March 13, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diversity>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.c). Impacting. In *Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most Trusted Online Dictionary*. Retrieved March 13, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/impacting>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.d). Integration. In *Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most Trusted Online Dictionary*. Retrieved March 13, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/integration>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.e). Oppression. In *Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most Trusted Online Dictionary*. Retrieved March 13, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/oppression>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.f). Practitioner. In *Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most Trusted Online Dictionary*. Retrieved March 13, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/practitioner>

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.g). Segregation. In *Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most Trusted Online Dictionary*. Retrieved March 13, 2022, from

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/segregation>

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.h). Superintendent. In *Dictionary by Merriam-Webster:*

America's Most Trusted Online Dictionary. Retrieved March 13, 2022, from

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/superintendent>

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.i). Tenure. In *Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most Trusted Online Dictionary*. Retrieved March 13, 2022, from

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tenure>

National Archives Association. (2002, January). Emancipation proclamation. In *National Archives Online Exhibit*. Retrieved March 13, 2022, from

<https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation>

Ospina, S., & Foldy, E. (2009). Race and leadership: Implications for leaders of color and leadership development programs addressing issues of diversity. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 20, 1-5.

<https://wagner.nyu.edu/files/leadership/RaceLeadershipReview12.10.pdf>

Patrick, J. J., Pious, R. M. & Ritchie, D. (2002). Double Jeopardy. In *The Oxford Guide to the U.S. Government*. Oxford University Press. March 18, 2022, from

<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195142730.001.0001/acref-9780195142730>

- Perry, R. (2008). *Dissatisfaction theory and superintendent turnover: An exception to the Rule* (2008). Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations. 145.
<http://commons.emich.edu/theses/145>
- Rawlings-McDowell, T. (2018). *Pressing on: Challenges and motivators of female African-American leaders* (Publication No. 10931106) [Doctoral dissertation, Trevecca Nazarene University]. ProQuest LLC.
- Roberts, L., & Mayo, A. (2019, November). Toward a racially just workplace. *Harvard Business Review*, pp. 1-10. Retrieved March 17, 2022, from
<https://sps.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/2020-06/Advancing%20Black%20Leaders.pdf>
- Roberts, L., Mayo, A., & Thomas, D. (2019). Chapter 13. In A. Mayo (Ed.), *Race, work, and leadership: New perspectives on the Black experience*. Essay.
www.raceworkleadership.com
- Robinson, A. D. (2014, Sept.). Personal, professional, and sociocultural experiences of African American female school leaders. *Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership, 1*, 1-11.
- Schmitz, K. (2017, March 8). Where are all the female superintendents? *Ahead of the Heard*. <https://aheadoftheheard.org/where-are-all-the-female-superintendents>
- Shelby, T. (2002). Foundations of black solidarity: Collective identity or common oppression? *Ethics, 112*(2), 231–266. <https://doi.org/10.1086/340276>
- Smith, J. D. (2000). In *Black voices from reconstruction: 1865-1877* (p. 135). Essay, University Press of Florida.

- Smith, S. (2020). Black feminism and intersectionality. *Women's Knowledge Digital Library*. Retrieved September 6, 2021, from <https://womensdigitallibrary.org/items/show/195>
- Stoneton, J. (2018). *Characteristics of a long-serving superintendent* (Publication No. 10825757) [Doctoral Dissertation, Northcentral University]. ProQuest LLC.
- Truth, S. (1851). Ain't I a woman? *Modern History Sourcebook*: Fordham University. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/sojtruth-woman.asp>
- Walker, V. (2014). *African-American women superintendents: Perceptions of barriers and strategies accessing the superintendency* (Publication No. 3582087) [Doctoral dissertation, Shenandoah University]. ProQuest LLC.
- Wickham, D. (2014). Do you know when slavery began and ended? *USA Today*. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2014/02/10/black-history-slavery-dewayne-wickham-column/5341129/>
- Yosso, T. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69-91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006>.

Appendix
Survey Participant Letter and Consent

Gardner-Webb University IRB
Informed Consent Form

“The Importance of Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Politics for Women of Color Who Aspire to the Superintendency and Other School Leadership Roles”

The purpose of this research is to highlight the importance of diverse support systems for women of color who serve in senior-level leadership roles. An additional goal is to begin to establish a set of identifiable codified norms that may emerge to frame future discussions regarding the importance of mentorship and sponsorship programming for women of color in leadership positions. One final goal of this study is that once identified, minority women in leadership can begin to establish networks of support that will allow increased numbers of African-American women serving in the role of superintendent and other senior-level leadership positions to thrive. As a participant in the study, you will be asked to respond to 10 survey questions related to your current or former work experiences as an African-American female leader in the public schools of North Carolina. It is anticipated that the survey will require about 15 minutes of your time.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your data will be anonymous which means that your name will not be collected or linked to the data. There are no anticipated risks in this study. You will receive no payment for participating in the study. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty by exiting the survey. Data from this study **will not** be used or distributed for future research studies.

If you have questions about the study, contact:

Researcher's name: Cicily A. McCrimmon
Researcher telephone number: XXXXX
Researcher email address:XXX

Faculty Advisor name: Dr. Benjamin Williams
Faculty Advisor telephone number: XXXX
Faculty Advisor email address: bwilliams22@gardner-webb.edu

Dr. Sydney K. Brown
IRB Institutional Administrator
Telephone: 704-406-3019
Email: skbrown@gardner-webb.edu

Clicking the link below to continue on to the survey indicates your consent to participate in the study:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/225FR32>

If you are not 18 years of age or older or you do not consent to participate, please close this window.