

Letter from the Editors

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Letter from the Editors

The position of school superintendent has become far more complex than when it was first introduced in Buffalo, New York in 1837. Reform efforts of the 1980's shifted the focus of the role to student achievement, even though a host of managerial responsibilities related to finance, human resources, transportation, building maintenance, and public relations remained. More recently, superintendents have been expected to also address an array of societal issues, including diversification of students and staff, increased governmental mandates, the explosion of technology, and the globalization of society. Sadly, these multi-faceted demands have occurred in a context of shrinking resources. Through all of this, perhaps the greatest challenge faced by superintendents is that they are highly visible people who are charged with navigating through bitterly competing political interests. Given this reality, it is no wonder that more and more school districts struggle to keep their superintendents. Furthermore, this dynamic heightens the need to understand the role of the superintendent and the training needed to support those who endeavor to lead school districts. That is the purpose of this themed edition of the *Journal of Organizational and Educational Leadership*.

In *A Portrait of North Carolina School District Superintendents, 2000-2021*, a study group from the North Carolina Professors of Educational Leadership uses data from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and a survey of school district human resources officials to profile school district superintendents in the state. The report focuses on superintendent gender, race, educational experiences, degrees earned, and professional longevity. In addition to providing current data, historical trends are also highlighted. Findings include: (a) high turnover and relative inexperience in the role characterize the position of superintendent in North Carolina, (b) White men comprise the largest number of North Carolina superintendents, and (c) while racial and gender diversity have improved slowly but steadily since 2000, disparities remain. This report is an excellent resource for those who are interested in studying the position of district superintendent as well as policy makers who seek to improve education.

When the climate of Educational Leadership changes, so must the programs that help prepare our future leaders. In *Leading the Leaders: The Redesign of an EdD Program to Prepare Superintendents to Serve North Carolina Schools*, we can see the evolution of a program devoted to best serve schools and school leaders in the 21st century. The article shares how the program underwent changes to better meet the needs of the schools and leaders in North

Carolina, focusing on making the connections between research, theory, and practice. The process in which the institution went through when making these changes can be a model for other institutions to follow, as it promotes scholarly research to ensure best practices in the field.

Given that school district superintendents commonly ascend to the role after serving in other district leadership roles and after completing formal graduate studies, it is important to understand how formal education and professional experiences support the success of superintendents. *The Role of Context on Leadership Transition: Building and District Level Leadership*, describes a yearlong, qualitative study of the transition of a school district leader from the role of principal to assistant superintendent in the same district. This study examines how context responsive leadership was used as this leader transitioned to the new professional role, and how formal graduate education and professional experiences affected the participant's external and internal school context literacies. Interestingly, researchers found that the formal educational experiences from the participant's doctoral program integrated with other work-based professional experiences to heighten the participant's sense of efficacy. This important study highlights the need for skills-based learning to be incorporated into formal education programs that train district-level leaders, as professional skills were associated more with the ability to navigate challenging district expectations than content knowledge.

Leadership occurs in an organizational context. *The Race to Leadership Effectiveness: A Study on School Organization for High and Low Performing Georgia Schools* study analyzes the relationship between school organization and performance. Using a quantitative, correlational approach, authors find that measures of organizational effectiveness predicted student outcomes. As higher performing schools were associated with greater organizational effectiveness, this study provides helpful insights into the organizational themes that support student achievement. This is valuable information for those who aspire to district leadership roles.

Finally, Leaders in South Carolina have developed an innovative approach to advanced training for prospective district leaders. In *Partners in Leadership: Training the Next Generation of Executive Leaders*, officials from Winthrop University describe a partnership between institutions of higher education in that state to support the advanced training of school district leaders. This consortium has created additional degree opportunities for South Carolina school leaders to advance professionally. It has also inspired unique and collaborative approaches to teaching, research, and grant writing among the institutions.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you, the reader, for your continued support of JOEL. It is our hope that this themed issue sheds light on the current climate of educational leadership and the superintendency in North Carolina. Our ever-expanding readership is crucial for the success of JOEL. And finally, we wouldn't have a journal at all if it weren't for our dedicated professionals who submit wonderful articles for us to publish. Your hard work and perseverance do not go unnoticed.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mitch Porter, Gardner-Webb University, Senior Editor

Dr. Walter Hart, University of North Carolina Charlotte, Guest Editor