New York State Council of School Superintendents
and the Membership Committee

Snapshot

2000

A Study of School Superintendents in New York State
A Study of School Superintendents in New York State
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Sponsored by the
New York State Council of School Superintendents
and the Membership Committee

Lead Author: Frederick D. Volp, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Cold Spring Harbor Central
School District

Membership Committee Chair
Geoffrey H. Davis, Ed.D.
District Superintendent
Hamilton-Fulton-Montgomery
BOCES

Contributing Authors:
Patricia Archambault, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Dryden Central School

Robert Service
Superintendent
Mohawk Central School

Marilyn Terranova, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Carmel Central Schools

William E. Whitehill, Ed.D.
Syracuse University

Claire Brown, Ph.D.
University at Albany

Raymond W. O’Connell Ed.D.
Director of School Administration Services
University at Albany
Thanks and Appreciation

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We are especially grateful to the Council of School Superintendents for logistical, and staff support and in particular, the layout, design and general assistance of Bruce Allen.
Executive Summary

This document is the 4th in a series of studies of the demographics and perceptions of the superintendents of New York State. As the chief school officers of every school district, superintendents represent the leaders of New York State's school improvement efforts. The success of those efforts is directly linked to the quality and experience of those school leaders.

For the first time since these surveys have been conducted, we have been able to analyze our data not only with respect to generalities about superintendents as a whole, but disaggregated to see how demographics and perceptions cut across age, gender, experience, and geographic boundaries. These new analyses have brought some remarkable trends into sharp focus and show a picture of a leadership position undergoing profound and rapid change. Given the key role that superintendents play in promoting educational reform, understanding the nature of this change is essential to keeping high quality educational leaders at the helm of every school district in the state.

Understanding the shift in the nature of the superintendency has become all the more urgent because the change has been rapid and is accelerating. For comparison, examine the attention recently paid to the impending shortage of classroom teachers which has been characterized as a crisis. New York State United Teachers (2000) has reported that 57,000 or 25% of the state's 201,000 classroom teachers will retire in the next 5 years. In the superintendency, the rate of retirement is more than twice that with some 57% of superintendents intending to retire in five years.

Despite the extraordinary rate of retirement, the average age of superintendents continues to increase and is now 52.7 years. This belies the notion that retirement-age superintendents are being replaced by younger school leaders starting careers as chief school officers. Instead, our analysis shows that new superintendents begin much later in life and plan significantly shorter careers as school superintendents, causing a major contraction in the pool of superintendent candidates, and explaining the increase in average age.

Replacing this generation of school leaders, therefore, is becoming more challenging than ever before. Despite increasing average salaries, applicant pools continue to dwindle, and according to search consultants, are populated with fewer qualified applicants (O’Connell 2000) (an assertion corroborated by our finding that new superintendents hold fewer doctoral degrees). Most sitting superintendents rate themselves as successful, but barely half would choose the superintendency if given the chance to begin their careers anew, and few would recommend it to their children. It should come as no surprise that only 31% of superintendents indicate that they have actively mentored potential superintendent candidates.

However, this apparent lack of enthusiasm for the superintendency does not appear to come from confrontational relationships with boards of education, as might be suggested from a few, highly publicized cases. While superintendents spend more time than they would prefer on board relations, most nevertheless
report supportive relationships with collaborative boards, although there is a significant drop off in this perception among urban superintendents. Rather, it appears that quality of life issues, the more challenging nature of the position, and the trend by policymakers to view superintendents as managers and not leaders combine to foster a measure of frustration in the superintendency.

A recent study showed micromanagement, time/stress, and diminished resources as major contributors to the lack of interest in the superintendency (Cunningham and Burdick, 1999 — see Table 1). This trend comes at just the time when the need for school leaders is greatest: the accelerating pace of retirement has broadened the number of vacancies even as school improvement efforts become more challenging.

As might be expected in a market-driven environment, the increasing demand and diminishing supply have driven up superintendent salaries. Internal salary data from NYSCOSS show that average salaries have increased 4.2% per year on average since 1997-98. However, salaries are not moving uniformly upward. Salaries in Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester Counties have increased 4.8% per year on average during this same 3-year period, and the upper range of salary has increased by 7.0%. Meanwhile, the average for the lowest 100 salaries has only increased 3.3% per year and remains just $77,900.

Search consultants report that applicant pool size is strongly related to starting salary (O’Connell, 2000). Therefore, the ability of well-resourced districts to attract and retain the broadest possible pool of talented superintendents “...will only serve to perpetuate existing inequities among have and have not school districts” (O’Connell, 2000). Similarly, the statutory cap on District (BOCES) Superintendents’ salary will have the effect of hampering BOCES’ ability to attract large pools of qualified candidates despite BOCES’ critical educational mission.

Our data debunk the commonly held myth that superintendents spend less than 3 years in any one position. Our data, consistent with national findings (Glass et al, 2000), show the tenure to be 5.7 years. However, given the increased vacancies driven by accelerating retirement, the diminished candidate pool, and shorter career window for new superintendents, absent intervention the reality may begin to resemble the myth.

**Major Findings**

Our organization is not alone in sounding an alarm about the recruitment and retention of educational leaders. Recognizing the impending crisis in finding qualified educational leaders to serve as principals and superintendents in the coming years, the State Education Department convened a “blue ribbon” task force and released a report on leadership. The recommendations from that document are intended to serve as a blueprint for policymakers in the upcoming year.

Our findings in Snapshot 2000 complement the information contained in that report. And, while much of our data is interesting and even compelling, several key findings stand out.

1. **Superintendents are retiring more quickly than ever before.** More than 57% of superintendents intend to retire in the next 5 years. This survey was conducted well before the enactment in June 2000 of the retirement enhancement that added 2 years of ser-
vice credit to members of Tiers I & II. Since some 78% of superintendents are in these two tiers, we believe that the reported rate of retirement is now understated. As these veterans leave the superintendency, half a generation of school leaders will need to be replaced from an applicant pool that continues to diminish.

2. **New superintendents exhibit some striking differences from veteran superintendents.** The current cohort of new superintendents (those with less than 8 years experience as a superintendent) is quite different from the typical superintendent from 8 or more years ago.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>New and Veteran Superintendents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average current age</td>
<td>51.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age upon first assuming the superintendency</td>
<td>47.9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age intending to retire</td>
<td>58.8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned length of career in superintendency</td>
<td>10.9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent women</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% with School Aged Children</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% with Doctorate</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of contract term: 3 years / 5 years</td>
<td>64.4%/20.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% in Tier I of retirement system</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find the Superintendency “highly/very” satisfying?</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Highly/generally supportive” relation with board?</td>
<td>89.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 lists these remarkable differences. Despite having much more experience in the superintendency, the average age of veterans is not much greater than newer superintendents. This is only explained when one notes that new superintendents begin their careers about 9.4 years later in life. Because superintendents still intend to retire around age 59, regardless of tenure, this means that newer superintendents' careers in the superintendency will be about half as long, about 11 years, rather than 21.

A veteran superintendent is more likely to have started in his/her 30s, been a man, held a doctorate and been married. The new crop of superintendents is more likely to have less education, start older, be divorced, and include more women. Newer superintendents are hired for shorter contract terms and are less likely to find the superintendency satisfying.

3. **Gender diversity is rapidly improving.** As can be seen from the differences between new and veteran superintendents, women comprise a much larger portion of new superintendents. In fact, 28.2% of the superintendents first hired in the last 3 years are women. Therefore, given the characteristics of the new generation of school leaders and the numerous vacancies that have resulted from the recent rapid rate of turnover, it is not surprising that women now comprise some 18.4% of all superintendents rather than the 12.1% we reported just 3 years ago.

Given the substantial increase in the number of women superintendents, we have paid additional attention to disaggregating our findings by gender else-
wherein this report which has led to some counterintuitive findings. Despite being new to the superintendency, women have not been limited to what are traditionally considered “entry-level” positions. Women superintendents on average make nearly the same salary as male superintendents and lead similarly sized school districts.

4. **Racial and ethnic diversity remains statistically unchanged, but very poor.** Nine of the 573 respondents (1.6%) identified themselves as of a race other than Caucasian, compared to 12 of the 539 respondents (2.2%) three years prior. While this is not inconsistent with national figures (which identify about 1.8% African Americans among a total of 14,000 superintendents), it is clear that the ethnicity of the superintendency looks nothing like that of the population of students and teachers those superintendents serve and supervise which will, by the year 2020, comprise some 38% racial and ethnic minorities.

5. **There appears to be a “disconnect” between the issues of concern to superintendents and State policy initiatives.** The top 3 issues identified by superintendents as being of “greatest significance” to public education all concern education finance. The next two most significant concerns related to educational reform efforts. This is consistent with similar findings nationally (Glass et al, 2000), and suggests dissatisfaction with the distribution of recent state aid increases, however large, as being insufficient and inappropriately targeted to help districts meet higher educational standards. Conversely, the top 10 issues judged to be of “least significance” read like a laundry list of the Legislature and State Education Department’s recent initiatives including: school safety issues, charter school creation, planning documents and mission statements, and publication of state assessment results.

These findings will inform the work of the New York State Council of School Superintendents for the next several years. It is clear that recruitment and retention initiatives will be essential for the continued health of the profession, and underscores the need for the Council to continue to advocate for incentives for educational leadership. As superintendents turn over more rapidly and serve shorter careers, the need for the Council to expand its professional development opportunities will have never been greater. And, given the disappointing lack of improvement in racial and ethnic diversity, it will be incumbent upon the Council to take an even more active role in the promotion of educational leadership for underrepresented candidates, particularly because such individuals represent the untapped potential to close the looming leadership gap.

Similarly, these findings will shape our advocacy efforts, turning the Legislature and State Education Department’s attention away from insignificant issues, however popular or trendy, toward issues of real significance for children’s achievement. Education finance will continue to be a major concern, as will policies on state assessments and their reporting.

It has been suggested that the superintendency (and educational leadership generally) may no longer be considered to be a profession in itself, but rather a “capstone experience” at the end of a career in education. Compensation differentials between senior teachers, principals, and superintendents continue to shrink, whittling away at monetary incentives in a promotional system that has previously relied almost entirely on self-selection. Yet leaders have been shown time and again to be the essential agent in improving the one indicator that matters most: the performance of students. Education is the door to opportunity for our country’s children. The true nation at risk is the one that fails to act to ensure that its children continue to have the leaders they need to succeed.
Survey Background

In July 1991, during the Summer Planning Session at the Gideon Putnam Hotel in Saratoga Springs, New York, the Membership Committee of the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) proposed and implemented a comprehensive study of the demographics and attitudes of superintendents as a means of better understanding our membership and the position of the superintendency. The committee determined that it would be useful to conduct parallel studies in the future at approximately 2 to 3 year intervals to continue to validate the data, refine the questionnaire, track various aspects of the New York superintendency, and provide an updated data bank with an historic perspective for research in the future. This report is the fourth such survey of all superintendents in New York State.

For consistency, the data from previous surveys are identified by the year in which the membership was surveyed, not the date of publication (which was usually one year later) in order to show that the 3 year interval between surveys has been maintained.

Data for this report were obtained from the survey instrument distributed in January 2000 by the New York State Council of School Superintendents to all public school superintendents, New York City community superintendents and BOCES district superintendents. In addition, the survey instrument was directed to non-superintendents who hold full membership in the New York State Council of School Superintendents. The latter are associate, assistant and deputy superintendents.

Of the 778 questionnaires distributed, 576, or 74.04 %, were returned. Responses were received from 34 of 38 BOCES district superintendents for a return rate of 89.47%, and 525 of 687, or 76.42%, of K-12 and New York City community superintendents. As indicated in Chart 1, this is the highest return rate yet of the four “Snapshot” surveys, which gives us a great deal of confidence in generalizing our findings to chief school officers across New York State. Further, comparative data from the previous surveys enable us to identify trends relevant to the New York State superintendency.

Fifty-three associate, assistant, and deputy superintendents who are full members of NYSCOSS received surveys, and 17, or 32%, of this group returned them. These individuals do not differ significantly from superintendents demographically and are therefore included in the demographic data reported herein. Their opinions on educational issues have also been incorporated into Section III, Educational Issues. The data in Table 4 show distribution of responses across school district types and BOCES as reported by all respondents.

Table 3: Response to Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Sent</th>
<th>Returned</th>
<th>Response Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associate, Assistant, Deputy Sup'ts</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOCES District Superintendents</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>89.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYC Community Superintendents</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-12 Superintendents</td>
<td>653</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>78.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>778</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>74.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Type</th>
<th>% of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small City</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large City</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOCES</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demographic Data

Age and Age of Entry to the Superintendency

While the ages of all respondents ranged from 34 to 71, the mean age of chief school officers was 52.7 years for both men and women. The mean age of school superintendents has increased by nearly three years since the first survey was administered in 1991 (see Chart 4). Such a finding is somewhat surprising given the high rate of superintendent turnover in the past ten years. The aging of the superintendency in New York state is consistent with research by Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000), authors of the most recent AASA-sponsored nationwide study of the superintendency. They found that the mean age of superintendents increased nationally from 50 to 52 between the years 1992 and 2000.

The mean age of entry into the superintendency was found to be 43.6 years. A significant gender difference was discovered in the mean age of entry. Male superintendents’ average age in assuming their first superintendency was 42.9 years, while women entered later at 46.5 years. New York state statistics mirror those of the AASA study (Glass et al., 2000). That is, chief school officers start their first superintendency in their mid-40s, and women begin at a greater chronological age.

We have been very interested in the question of why the superintendency has been aging despite the growing rate of turnover. One possible explanation was that the whole cohort of superintendents was aging, but our data show the more profound demographic trend to be the lack of younger educators entering the superintendency at the midpoint of their careers. By correlating age of entry (the year in which an individual first served as a superintendent) with the years of experience in the superintendency, we were able to illustrate this graphically. The scatterplot at left (Chart 5) answers the question: is the more recent generation of superintendents beginning their career as chief school officers later in life than was the case for those who entered the profession 10 or 15 years ago?

The answer is clearly yes. There are few recent new superintendents (those with <10 years experience in the superintendency) who first served as a superintendent between ages 30 and 40. This was not the case as recently as 10 years ago, since there are a significant number of more experienced superintendents (>10 years) who started in their 30s. Instead, it appears that the new generation of superintendents is entering the profession later and later in life. This is especially marked in the number of superintendents who have just entered the superintendency in their 40s and even 50s in the last 5 years.

Expressed another way, if one looks just at those superintendents who have entered the profession in the past 8 years, their average age of entry is significantly higher than those who have been in the profession longer than 8 years (see Table 5). This also contributes credibility to the theory that the superintendency is being viewed as a capstone experience rather than a career choice. This effect could have profound implications including: the observed increase in turnover as superintendents have shorter careers before retirement, the presence of more first-time, and therefore inexperienced superintendents, and the potential perception as “lame ducks” of superintendents close to retirement. All of these are inconsistent with research detailing the need for long-term leadership to effect meaningful change (Fullan, 1991).

Table 5:
Age of Entry—Veteran and New

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Years in Superintendency</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Veteran &gt;8 years</td>
<td>New &lt;8 years</td>
<td>All Supts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gender

Currently 18.4% of all New York State superintendents are female, according to data obtained from NYSCOSS (see Chart 6). Thus, there has been a slow but steady increase in the number of women superintendents in New York State. This is similar to, but well ahead of, the national trend where the number of female superintendents increased from 6.6% to 13.2% between 1992 and 2000 (Glass et al., 2000). In the last 3 years, there were 143 vacancies in the superintendency that occurred by retirement, nearly all men. During this same period, some 47 new women superintendents were appointed, approximately one new women superintendent for every 3 men retired. If this rate continues, the percentage of women superintendents in New York state will continue to rise substantially.

While the percentage of women in the superintendency has steadily increased over time, based upon the responses to the current survey, there has been no corresponding increase in the racial or ethnic diversity of the superintendency in New York State over the past decade. In the current survey, 98.4% of all respondents reported that they were Caucasian. African-Americans accounted for 1.2% of respondents; Asian and Hispanic respondents each accounted for 0.2% of responses. In the 1992 “Snapshot,” 97.3% of respondents reported that they were Caucasian. While this difference is so small as to not be statistically significant with our population size, it does suggest that there is no trend toward greater racial or ethnic diversity in the superintendency in New York.

Educational Preparation

Respondents to the 2000 survey reported their highest academic degree achieved to be: 16.7% - master’s degrees; 45.8% - Certificates of Advance Study; and 36.1% - doctorate. These percentages were nearly identical for both men and women. In the 1997 data, 39% held the CAS and 43% had received the doctorate. Thus, the number of superintendents with doctorates declined nearly seven percentage points between 1997 and 2000. (See Chart 7.) This trend runs counter to the findings in the nationwide study by Glass et al (2000) in which it was reported that the percentage of superintendents holding doctoral degrees increased from 36% to 45.3% between 1992 and 2000.

The drop appears to be driven by the cohort of new superintendents. Only 28.7% of chief school officers in their first superintendent hold doctorates vs. 46.3% of respondents in at least their second superintendency. In the previous Snapshot study, a much higher percentage (37.3%) of first-time superintendents held doctorates. This leads to speculation that as the number of individuals in superintendent candidate pools diminishes, boards of education are less likely to require that a new superintendent have a doctorate.

Women have outnumbered men in preparation programs over the last decade, indicating that many more women are preparing for leadership positions than actually acquire them (Glass, 2000). Similarly African Americans account for 20% of students in masters and doctoral preparation programs indicating that many more are ready to serve than have entered the arena. (Smalls, 2000)

Length of Tenure in the Superintendency

Fifty-eight percent of respondents reported being in their first superintendency. Not all of these superintendents are inexperienced, some individuals remain in their first superintendency for many years. Chief school officers had served in that capacity for an average of 9.0 years during which they held an average of 1.7 superintendencies. The mean number of years in their current superintendency was 5.6 years. Years of service for New York state superintendents were consistent with the national findings of Glass et al (2000) who found that superintendent tenure was five to six years. Cooper, Fusarelli and Carella (2000) reported that the
superintendents in their study had remained with the same district an average of 7.25 years. Such findings undermine the popular myth that superintendent tenure averages 2.5 years per district or that there is a high rate of turnover in the superintendency in the typical school district.

However, this myth may have its roots in the experience of a limited group of superintendents. Of the 50% percent of respondents that have an average tenure of 5 years or less, a substantial number (20.1%) of all respondents have held more than one superintendency and have an average tenure of less than 5 years, suggesting a rapid turnover between positions. This phenomenon bears further investigation as rapid turnover does not appear to be strongly associated with success.

**Personal Data**

Based upon survey responses, there are two dominant career paths leading to the superintendency. For approximately 39% of the respondents, their path was teacher-principal-central office-superintendency. Another 38% entered the superintendency directly from the middle/high school principalship. Glass et al. (2000) found these two career pathways are the most common across the nation.

Consideration was given to whether superintendents tend to be hired from within or from outside the district. Consistent with the three previous “Snapshot” surveys, nearly 69% of chief school officers reported that they entered the district for the first time as superintendent. Twenty-eight percent reported holding a position with the district immediately prior to appointment as superintendent.

Slightly more than 82% of superintendents reported that they did not live in the district at the time of appointment to the present position. Of these, approximately 42% percent were required to move into the district, but nearly 58% did so. Ninety-nine superintendents, or slightly over 17%, reported that they maintained a residence separate from their families for more than six months during the transition to the new district. Of the 321 chief school officers who moved into the district, approximately 31% moved more than one hundred miles.

Of those who relocated to take a superintendency, 65% reported that their moving costs were paid by the district. Another 21.4% reported that relocation costs were partially covered. Seven percent of superintendents reported no assistance with moving expenses.

Approximately 87% of chief school officers were married; about 8% reported that they were single/divorced. However, female superintendents were more likely to be divorced/separated than male superintendents (25.9% vs. 6.3%). Such information is consistent with data from the national survey (23% and 5.3% respectively).

The “graying” of the superintendency also is evident in the percentage of superintendents with school-age children. In this survey, slightly more than 35% of respondents reported having school-age children. Of those with school-age children, 56.1% reported that their children attend the schools for which they are responsible as superintendent. In 1992 in “Snapshot I” these figures were 49% and 69% respectively.

Nearly 36% of respondents reported that they had refrained from applying for a position because they believed that location to be socially or professionally isolated.
The employment contract typically defines the working relationship between the Superintendent of Schools and the Board of Education. While the general duties and responsibilities of the superintendent are set forth in Education Law, the contract specifically references terms and conditions of employment, including compensation and benefits. As a matter of course, NYSCOSS makes available free of charge to its existing and prospective members a Model Contract with various provisions that are common in superintendent contracts. Nevertheless, a great deal of variation in contracts and compensation packages exists around the state, particularly where benefits are concerned.

The Superintendent of Schools serves as the chief executive officer of a school district in New York, appointed by resolution of the Board of Education. The employment contract is a binding agreement upon both parties. Unless terminated by either party under terms contained within it, the contract binds both parties for its entire term. The superintendent has a property right to the entire compensation package of the contract, even in the rare instances where boards have considered ending the contract prematurely.

New York City community school district superintendents work both for the Chancellor of the New York City Board of Education as well as for their community school board. As such, they have an unusual situation in which salary and benefits are determined by the central board.

Terms of Employment

In common, union free, central high school, and central school districts, the term of an employment agreement between superintendent and Board may range from three to five years. In all city school districts, other than Buffalo and Rochester, the Board may, by resolution, set forth a term of employment not to exceed five years, and then enter into a contractual agreement for other terms and conditions of employment. In Buffalo and Rochester, superintendents may be appointed for up to four years.

The employment contract is typically negotiated between the superintendent and Board (or representatives of each) at the time of initial employment, and at any time the term of employment is extended or modified. Contractual provisions typically address the term and renewal of the agreement, salary and other compensation, health benefits, evaluation procedures; leaves of absence including sick, vacation and personal leave; professional development and reimbursement of professional expenses.

Snapshot 2000 data show that a majority of su-
perintendents (54%) have three-year contracts, continuing a consistent pattern from Snapshots I, II, and III. (See Chart 8.) Five year contracts are held by 29% of the respondents, a 5% increase from Snapshot III, perhaps suggesting an attempt by school boards to create stability for the district’s leadership.

As would be expected by the length of contracts (three or five years), most superintendents (60%) have either two or three years remaining on their current contracts. According to Fullan (1991), “depending on size, it takes about six years” for successful change in secondary schools. Longer superintendent contracts create stability to aid in making change successful. Evergreen (or rolling contract) provisions continue to be an option for boards of education to consider in supporting leadership stability. This type of contract comes before the board each year. If a renewal is not granted, the superintendent retains the balance of the original contract. The rolling contract provides the board with an opportunity to translate the annual performance review into an extension of employment and also allows the superintendent a longer period of time to seek alternatives if employment is not to be extended. A majority of Boards (58%) have considered the renewal of the superintendent’s contract annually.

There was a decrease in the percent of written evaluations from our previous survey (from 85% to 71%) and yet 81% of those surveyed believe the evaluation process to be useful.

Salary

Superintendent salaries continue to increase more rapidly than inflation. This appears to be consistent with the market economics of increasing superintendent vacancies (demand) and shrinking applicant pools (supply). Salaries in the downstate metro area continue to be higher than in the rest of the state consistent with higher regional costs. However, the rate at which these top salaries in the downstate area are growing is much greater than in the rest of the state. The top end of the salary range is increasing very quickly while the bottom end remains essentially flat.

Those best positioned to compete in this marketplace appear to be the more affluent districts whose ability to attract and keep the broadest possible pool of talented superintendents “... will only serve to perpetuate existing inequities among have and have not school districts” (O’Connell, 2000). Conversely, the statutory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6: Salary and Benefits</th>
<th>Change Last Year</th>
<th>Average Annual Change</th>
<th>3 Year Cum. Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean Salary</td>
<td>$97,425</td>
<td>$100,692</td>
<td>$104,591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>$21,942</td>
<td>$22,959</td>
<td>$24,481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>$16,588</td>
<td>$15,303</td>
<td>$15,949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range (Min.)</td>
<td>$61,000</td>
<td>$63,200</td>
<td>$65,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range (Max.)</td>
<td>$171,200</td>
<td>$180,000</td>
<td>$195,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downstate Suburb*</td>
<td>$125,223</td>
<td>$130,648</td>
<td>$136,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of State</td>
<td>$88,389</td>
<td>$90,320</td>
<td>$93,965</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Nassau, Suffolk, Westchester, Rockland
cap on District (BOCES) Superintendents will have the opposite effect, hampering BOCES’ ability to attract large pools of qualified candidates.

Benefits

Superintendents’ contracts typically provide for a number of specific benefits. Ninety-five percent of superintendents are compensated for professional travel with about half (47%) provided mileage reimbursement. Other options (approximately 22% each) are lump sum payments and the use of a district car for travel. Wellness of the superintendent continues to be an important issue as 71% of contracts call for a medical review of the superintendent at district expense. Most of these exams are performed on an annual basis.

Professional obligations are addressed by boards of education through the payment of dues and memberships in professional organizations, along with reimbursement for expenses incurred through attendance at professional conferences. Consistent with previous Snapshot studies, superintendents nearly universally (98%) report that dues for the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) are provided as a condition of employment, as are expenses for NYSCOSS conferences.

Insurance

Individual and family health insurance coverage is provided to 95% of the respondents, over 40% at no co-pay. Another 36% are provided this insurance by paying 1-10% of the expense. A new question developed for Snapshot 2000 indicates that over 75% of the contracts provide individual and family dental insurance with copayments the same as for health insurance. It appears that superintendents are paying a higher percentage of the cost of health insurance. It is believed this trend is a mirror of Board of Education expectations for other employee organizations. Approximately one half of the districts also pay disability insurance coverage.

At retirement, 37% of superintendents will have their health insurance paid entirely by the district with another 44% receiving a continuing partial payment by the district. Some 83% of the contracts provide for either term or whole life insurance coverage, a slight increase from previous surveys.

Leave

Employment contracts typically provide for the provision of vacation, sick and personal leave. A majority (53%) of superintendents receive 21 or more vacation days per year with 93% receiving 16 days or more. This is a change from Snapshot III that is believed to be due to the number of entry-level superintendents. A clear majority of superintendents (67%) do not use all their annual vacation time and 30% are allowed to accumulate forty days or more.

Almost every superintendent is provided annual sick leave with 60% receiving between 11-15 days annually and another 26% receiving 16-20 days per year. Many superintendents may accumulate unused sick leave; 87% of superintendents may accumulate 101 sick days or more and the number of superintendents that have no limit on sick days (43%) continues to increase. Given the mobile nature of the superintendency, over one third of those surveyed were permitted to transfer sick days from a previous district.

Personal leave is also addressed in the superintendent’s contract with 50% reporting receiving three days per year and another 34% receiving four to six days annually. Terminal pay provisions at retirement for unused sick or vacation time are common (nearly 50%), as are provisions for Board contributions to tax sheltered annuities.
Gender Differences

Some gender differences in demographics were highlighted earlier, the most striking of which were that women are generally older than men when they assume their first superintendency and are about 4 times as likely to be divorced. The popular perception has been that because of the increase in new women superintendents, most of these women would be in smaller “starter” districts in rural areas that typify the initial rung on the superintendency career ladder. As a result, the average district size and compensation for women superintendents would be smaller, consistent with the experience in these types of districts. The Snapshot data show that a greater proportion of women (68.2%) are in their first superintendency than men (55.6%), however, an analysis of the year 2000 NYSCOSS membership files showed that women superintendents’ average salaries were statistically identical to the state average ($103,306 for women vs. $103,665 statewide) and that the average size of district was also statistically similar (2,368 pupils for women vs. 2,452 pupils statewide).

Such findings can be partially explained by examining the geographic distribution of women superintendents from data in this Snapshot survey. As can be seen from Chart 15, there is an above-average proportion of women superintendents in North Country districts, balanced by a larger proportion in the Lower Hudson/Metro/Long Island region where districts are larger and more affluent.

Only 15.5% of women superintendents have school-aged children while 39.7% of men have school-aged children. Women were somewhat less likely to maintain a separate residence from their family (12.7% vs. 18.6% for men). This is probably because fewer women superintendents have school aged children (21.8% of women answered this question “not applicable” vs. 14.5% of men) and women are less likely to turn down a job because of “personal/professional isolation” (31.8% for women and 36.4% for men).

For recruitment purposes, it is important to note that considerably more women’s career paths included an elementary principalship than men, and that women generally have a stronger perception that informal networks are necessary to enhance career opportunities.
Perhaps the most striking finding from the previous Snapshot survey concerned the high rate of retirement of sitting school superintendents. Just 3 years ago, we reported that more than 53% of superintendents were expected to retire within the next five years. As would be expected given the continuing increase in average age, this rate of retirement has accelerated.

Fully 57% of respondents to the Snapshot 2000 survey intend to retire from their post by the year 2005. More than one-third of today’s superintendents will retire within the next three years. In 2000, the Legislature enacted changes to the retirement system which add up to 2 years of service credit for members of Tiers I & II. The impact of this enhancement is yet unknown, but it certainly has the potential to accelerate further the retirement pattern evidenced over the past few years. This accelerated rate of retirement will significantly change the complexion of the superintendency as new superintendents, who are strikingly different from current superintendents, will form a greater proportion of superintendents overall. It will also place even greater pressure on already depressed candidate pools with serious implications for attracting experienced, capable leaders in the future.

Although a slight decrease from 3 years ago, the preponderance of superintendents are members of Tier I of the New York State Teachers Retirement System (64.1% in 2000 as compared with 67% in 1998 — see Chart 9). Since members of Tier I enjoy the benefit of being able to retire at age 55 without diminution of benefits, the fact that nearly 23% indicated they will retire upon first eligibility is noteworthy. Over half (54%) of all superintendents indicate the intent to retire before the age of 58 (see Chart 10).

Most of this rapid retirement will initially occur within Tier I. Chart 11 shows that the cumulative retirements from current Tier I members will reach 51% by 2003 and 82% by 2006. The rates of retirement for Tiers II, III, & IV are considerably lower, but by 2006, 45.6% of current Tier II members will have retired as well. As a result, instead of being composed primarily of members of Tier I, by 2006, most superintendents will be members of Tiers III & IV. In addition, since 66.2% of men are in Tier I compared to only 55.5% of women superintendents, it is apparent that the near elimination of Tier I members by 2006 may also serve to tip the gender balance in the superintendency more toward women.

What is particularly interesting is that many members of Tiers III & IV intend to retire prior to age 62. (See Chart 11.) Unless these individuals have 30 years of service, they
will see significant reductions in their benefits. For example, 39.1% of Tier IV members and 71.7% of Tier III members plan to retire before age 62. This pattern of retirement at first eligibility, or even prior to the service necessary to realize full benefits, may triangulate with observations elsewhere in this document about superintendents' perception of the diminishing attractiveness of the superintendency.

Several of the study's findings are counterintuitive. One would anticipate that the high rate of retirement would result in a decreasing average age, as incumbents are replaced with younger new superintendents. As is illustrated elsewhere, the opposite has been true as average age continues to increase. Similarly, one would expect that the number of superintendents in Tier I would decrease significantly because of their significantly higher rate of retirement. Not only was the decrease small, but our analysis shows that the percentage of superintendents in their first superintendency who are in Tier I is slightly higher than the percentage of superintendents in their second or greater superintendency (64.1% vs. 63.8%), suggesting that new superintendents are just as likely to be in Tier I.

The chart at right shows that the rate of retirement for Tier I members is significantly greater than for members of Tiers II, III, or IV. More than half of current Tier I members will be retired by 2003.
Issues, Perspectives and Perceptions

In Snapshot 2000, superintendents were asked more than 50 questions regarding their perceptions of issues in education, their experience in the superintendency, and their job climate and responsibilities. Rather than report the totality of the findings in this report, we highlight several interesting and sometimes counterintuitive findings that we believe can better inform the policy debate on education issues, educational leadership, and superintendent-board relations.

Public Policy

The data yielded some interesting results. In Snapshot 2000, superintendents were asked to rate a series of issues and challenges facing them in the daily practice of the profession. The four point scale ranged from 'Of great significance' to 'Of little or no significance'. The 10 issues identified as 'Of great significance' are shown below.

Table 7: The Ten Issues Judged to be of Greatest Significance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>70%</td>
<td>Funding to adequately address student needs to meet NYS learning standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64%</td>
<td>Equity in distribution of state aid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59%</td>
<td>Funding remedial/summer school programs and academic 'safety' nets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55%</td>
<td>Student performance on New York State assessments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52%</td>
<td>Implementation of New York State standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52%</td>
<td>Administrator recruiting/selection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52%</td>
<td>Ability of teaching staff to teach to the new higher standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47%</td>
<td>Funding and implementing the new prof. development plan required by SED.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43%</td>
<td>Teacher recruiting/selection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42%</td>
<td>Changing societal values and behavioral norms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear that the primary focus for superintendents was on finding ways to finance, staff, and implement the new state initiatives. It is not surprising that a great deal of NYSCOSS' recent efforts have been in the area of equity in school finance. The remainder of the top ten list was dominated by issues related to increasing expectations for student, teacher and district academic performance. While not in the top-ten, nearly one-quarter did rate district report cards, overcrowded facilities and charter schools as 'of greatest significance'.

The popular notion that discipline problems and even violence are pressing issues in schools is not borne out by our findings. Despite the highly publicized tragedies in schools around the country, most of the responding superintendents indicated that gangs, weapons, drugs and alcohol, and student discipline were not the most significant issues facing them in their daily professional lives. We do not believe this suggests that these are unimportant issues, particularly in the rare com-
community where they take place, but rather that they take on statewide significance that is entirely disproportionate.

Table 8:
The Ten Issues Judged to be of Little or No Significance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3%</td>
<td>Student gang-related activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7%</td>
<td>Presence of guns or other weapons in the schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8%</td>
<td>Public perception that schools are violent places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13%</td>
<td>Rapidly decreasing/increasing enrollments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16%</td>
<td>Student use of drugs and alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17%</td>
<td>Strategic planning and mission statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21%</td>
<td>Publication of New York State Report Cards and related assessment results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21%</td>
<td>Overcrowded facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22%</td>
<td>Student discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23%</td>
<td>Legislative and local efforts to create charter schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of these issues need to be fleshed out. The dichotomous response on charter schools is a good example. Even though charter schools were seen to be one of the top 10 issues of little or no significance, fully 25% of superintendents rated them as “of greatest significance”. So it is unclear whether superintendents believe that they have little educational value, or that because so few are currently in existence they have little impact on the totality of the educational enterprise. Conversely, the few superintendents that have experienced charter schools or the possibility of a successful charter school application in their district have been extremely upset about charter schools’ detrimental fiscal consequences.

Therefore, many of these attitudes and perceptions will be examined in greater detail in the follow up qualitative study. Individual superintendents will be interviewed about the responses to the survey in order to provide context and interpretation of the raw data from the paper and pencil survey.

Shared decision-making

When asked whether shared decision-making increased parent/community involvement in school decision-making, 62% indicated that it had no effect while 33% reported that shared decision-making had increased involvement. Approximately two-thirds of the superintendents felt that shared decision-making had not been effective in improving student achievement while 28% indicated that it had been somewhat effective. Again there were no gender differences for either question.

Conclusions

The amount of attention given to school safety issues in the last legislative session, and the amount of additional work schools will have to perform to comply with these new legislative initiatives are inconsistent with superintendents’ evaluation of what is most important in schools. In contrast, superintendents appear far more concerned with higher standards and their costs, including the finance equity needed to give all districts a chance at meeting rigorous standards. Similarly, despite the amount of time mandated for shared decision-making initiatives, by a 2 to 1 margin, superintendents found these efforts not to increase involvement or, more importantly, student achievement.

With respect to school safety and shared decision making there is a policy “disconnect” between state initiatives and superintendent perceptions of their effectiveness.
Attractiveness of the Superintendency

A recent study of the applicant pool for the superintendency shows a disturbing trend. Two separate surveys of superintendent search consultants conducted in 1995 and 1999 have highlighted a tendency toward significantly smaller applicant pools for the superintendency. The average number of applicants fell from 40.1 to 27.7 in just 4 years, a drop of almost 31%, and the 1995 survey suggests that this average pool size of 40.1 already represented a significant diminution of the applicant pool. The overwhelming majority of the search consultants also indicated in both surveys that while containing a small core of high-quality applicants, the quality of the pool was lower than in previous years. Moreover, the same core of high-quality applicants were finalists in several contemporaneous searches, exaggerating the true size and quality of the applicant pool. (O’Connell, 1995, 2000)

A great deal of energy has been expended to determine why the superintendency appears to be becoming a less attractive career option. The studies referenced above indicated a strong correlation between advertised salary and applicant pool size, indicating perhaps that many superintendent salaries are not appealing enough to attract individuals from other educational occupations in New York State. Another possibility is suggested by data from our previous Snapshot survey which highlighted the difference between the issues superintendents wanted to spend their time on and how their time was actually spent (see Table 9).

Job Climate

Other explanations for dwindling candidate pools have focused on the job climate of the superintendency. The notoriety of isolated antagonistic relationships between some boards and superintendents has led to a perception of superintendents and boards of education generally at odds. Our data have suggested a somewhat different characterization of the superintendent’s job climate.

Occupational Stress — When asked to indicate the stress levels they experienced while performing their tasks as superintendents, 40% reported “considerable” stress and another 43% reported “moderate to considerable” stress levels. There were no gender differences related to reported stress.

Job Satisfaction — Only 53.3% of superintendents would prefer the superintendency given their choice of any type of employment, and only 44.2% of superintendents surveyed would want their child to be a superintendant. This is somewhat surprising given the fact that 92.7% of superintendents find the superintendency to be “somewhat”, “very”, or “highly” satisfying. Almost 69% responded in the latter two categories.

Labor Relations — Not surprisingly, superintendents were somewhat less likely to characterize the superintendency as satisfying if they felt that labor
relations were “more adversarial than in the past”. Similarly, superintendents were slightly more likely to report additional job stress under the more adversarial circumstances. Fortunately, only 13.5% of superintendents found relations to be more adversarial, while 52.8% found them to be “better than in the past”.

Moreover, only 9.3% of school districts did not have a teacher contract in place. Nevertheless, districts without teacher contracts in place were more than 4 times as likely to have “more adversarial” labor relations than districts with contracts in place (which were twice as likely to report “better” labor relations). Obviously, a resolved contract is often key to better relations, but also appears to be linked to a less stressful, more satisfying environment (see Chart 13).

**Relationship With the Board of Education** — Only 11% of the responding superintendents indicated that they were working with a board of education that was ‘somewhat confrontational and antagonistic’. The rest — nearly 90% — reported boards that ranged from “generally” to “highly supportive and collaborative”.

In addition, the vast majority of boards were described by their superintendents as being “active, aligned with community interests, but not rigid” as opposed to being dominated by community factions or inactive and led by their professional staff.

When working with their boards of education, 49% of the superintendents reported that they initiate action to maintain district effectiveness and 46% said they serve as a professional advisor to the boards by presenting alternatives and consequences in an objective fashion. The results were similar for men and women.

Generally, these results paint a picture of motivated, active boards of education that have supportive and collaborative relationships with their superintendents (see Chart 14). However, there is a significant difference between urban and suburban/rural districts. Superintendents in large cities were much less likely to report “highly supportive and collaborative” boards (17.6% vs. 58% statewide), and those in small and large cities were more likely to report “confrontational and antagonistic” boards (10.6% and 11.8% respectively vs. 2.8% statewide). In addition, city boards were more likely to be “dominated by the elite in the community” (8.5% in small cities and 11.8% in large cities vs 3.5% statewide) or in large cities, to “represent distinct factions in the community and vote accordingly” (52.9% vs. 20.7% statewide).

Given the literature suggesting the link between functional school boards and student success (Goodman et al, 1997), these observations about city boards should serve as a cautionary note about the difficulties of leading urban school districts.
Superintendent Recruitment

Given the high rate of expected turnover and retirements from the superintendent, NYSCOSS has been particularly interested in the cultivation of the next generation of educational leaders. Coupled with the tendency toward smaller applicant pools, it has become clear that much more recruitment needs to take place among candidates typically under-represented as superintendents, particularly women and racial/ethnic minorities. Therefore, a number of new questions were added to the Snapshot to enhance our understanding of superintendent’s perceptions of recruitment phenomena.

When asked if they had seen evidence that Boards and search consultants actively recruit women as candidates for the superintendency, 63.4% of men answered “sometimes” to “yes, frequently”, while only 36.3% said rarely or not at all. However, among women, the numbers were 56.8% and 39.5% respectively suggesting a significant difference in perceptions between genders.

When asked a similar question about traditionally underrepresented racial or ethnic minority groups, the results were less encouraging. Forty percent said sometimes to frequently and 58% said rarely to not at all. Men and women responded similarly for this question. There were also no differences when the data were disaggregated by racial and ethnic group (because the subset was too small to meet standard tests of statistical significance).

Women were significantly more likely than men to report having seen evidence that the lack of experience in budgeting and finance was a barrier to women entering the superintendency. They were also more than three times as likely to report that women lack access to informal networks that would enhance career opportunities. Women were twice as likely to indicate that racial or ethnic minorities similarly lack access to these networks.

These perceptions signal both the need to begin to change the recruitment process and an opportunity to find alternative avenues of encouraging under-represented candidates to enter the superintendency. One such avenue that has been frequently reported in the national literature is the role mentors play in encouraging educators to aspire to leadership positions, especially the superintendency.

Nearly nine out of ten respondents felt that an organized mentoring process was “important” or “somewhat important” factor in the advancement of women. Nearly 70% of the female respondents indicated that it was an important factor as compared with 52% of the males. Yet interestingly, only 31% of the respondents had personally mentored a candidate in the past year and there were no gender differences. Forty-two percent reported that they had personally nominated a candidate for the NYSCOSS ‘Aspiring Superintendents Workshop’. These data may also signal consistency with observations elsewhere in the document which suggest that educators may view the superintendency as the capstone to a career in education rather than a separate long-term career choice.

In addition to the Aspiring Superintendents Workshop, NYSCOSS should continue to expand its formal role in encouraging mentorship and developing the pool of future educational leaders. NYSCOSS is committed to promoting the superintendency as a career, not merely an experience. This is not only for the profession’s sake, but because of the strong research base linking effective leadership and student success.
Gender Differences

Because of the profound increase in the number of women superintendents in just the last 3 years, and the rate at which women are being hired for current vacancies, understanding any potential distinctions in attitudes of women superintendents became an important goal of the survey.

However, when the data were disaggregated by gender, there were remarkably few statistically significant differences, suggesting that female and male superintendents saw the most important and least important issues in much the same way. There were but a few questions where the gender differences were statistically significant. Female superintendents rated the following areas as more significant than did their male colleagues: student performance on the New York State assessments, the ability of teachers to teach to the new higher standards, funding for acquisition and maintenance of computers/software, labor relations, student discipline, publication of New York State Report Cards and related assessment results, and rapidly decreasing/increasing enrollments.
Snapshot 2000 is our fourth triennial study on the superintendency in New York State. The reports are essential to understanding the changing makeup of the profession of educational leadership in order to inform the policy dialogue about educational improvement. We believe the present research to be the best to date for several reasons:

1. Of the four studies conducted over the last decade, the present research has the highest return rate — 74%. Thus, our conclusions follow from a broad base of superintendents representing all regions of New York State; all types of school districts, rural, suburban, urban; and all sizes, from small K-6 systems to the New York City school system, the largest in America.

2. While previous survey instruments were reviewed carefully, each item in the current survey was scrutinized for clarity and ease in collecting valid responses. As a result, we have greater confidence in what each item measures, and can “disaggregate” data to probe more fully the information reported by chief school officers in each of the four sections of the current survey.

3. The writing team secured permission from the American Association of School Administrators to use certain items from the organization’s National Study of the Superintendency (1999-2000). Consequently, with respect to the overall demographics associated with the superintendency, and especially the section on women leaders, we are in a strong position to compare our findings with those published by the AASA.

4. A companion, qualitative study of New York State superintendents is being carried out to inform, in even greater depth, the quantitative results in this research.

The most telling “soundbite” resonating from our survey is the continued exodus of experienced educators from the superintendency. No fewer than 57% of incumbent chief school officers intend to retire by the year 2005. In fact, that percentage may go higher, and the departure may accelerate in light of the New York State Legislature’s June, 2000 action to enhance certain retirement benefits for Tier I and Tier II educators, including superintendents. Where our earlier published works spoke of possible leadership “vacuums” or even “chasms,” present data show that future openings for chief school officers are even less likely to draw deep, experienced, and talented pools of candidates. The continuing cap on District Superintendent salaries emphasizes a symbolic message that school leaders are not valued, making recruitment difficult, not only for these essential positions, but for all leadership posts.

While certain “lighthouse” school districts, of course, may continue to prove to be exceptions to this rule, the reality of continued leadership “gaps” seems assured when front page headlines (New York Times, 2000) trumpet the dwindling interest of educators in school principalships, the traditional path to the superintendency. As it has become increasingly difficult to recruit and retain middle and high school

Conclusion
principals, this proven pipeline to the chief school officer post will eventually run dry, forcing boards of education to find leaders from elsewhere within the educational establishment.

The good news for those seeking leaders is that several initiatives are underway to attract quality educators and to diversify the candidate pool for the superintendency. The New York State Commissioner of Education has secured funds to identify future chief school officers and to support incumbents. The New York State Council of School Superintendents has invited nominations for its Aspiring Superintendents' Conference. Higher education institutions, notably SUNY Oswego, Columbia University and the University Council for Educational Administration, have launched innovative programs to train future administrative talent. Such statewide professional organizations as New York State School Boards Association, School Administrators Association of New York State, and New York State Association of Women Administrators have acted on the obvious need to cultivate administrators who have energy and the skill set to be successful leaders.

The promise of recruiting leaders is shown by the increase in the percentage of women serving in the superintendency. Since our last study in 1997, the percentage of women chief school officers rose from 12.1% to 18.4%. In our initial 1991 survey of New York State school superintendents, only 8% of the respondents were women. Women educators have learned in growing numbers “that understanding the stated and unstated selection rules can lead to successfully accessing the superintendency.” (Tallerico, 2000). In fact, our data reveal nearly 30% of new superintendents are women. Such a finding, unfortunately, does not extend to greater ethnic diversity in the superintendency. More ambitious recruitment, coupled with more aggressive mentoring, needs to take place if the chief school officer post is going to mirror the strength of diversity in our society.

Student performance is very much in the forefront of superintendents’ thinking. Top issues reported by chief school officers include New York State learning standards for students, state aid to support reform, testing, summer remedial programs, professional training plans, as well as teacher and administrator recruitment. How students fare in achieving rigorous new standards for graduation, however, seems to be the common bond linking all of the prime issues. Superintendents reported an uncertain relationship between shared decision-making and student achievements, calling into question whether this intensive process is the most effective use of educational leaders' valuable time.

In contrast to our earlier studies, the appearance of two new “top” issues for superintendents—namely teacher/administrator recruitment/selection and professional development plans—serve to reinforce the obvious notion that teacher knowledge and skills are essential for student success. Likewise, educational leaders, principals and superintendents must be found to assure the focus on achievement in individual school buildings and on a district-wide basis. Professional development looms large for teachers as well as administrators as reform agendas multiply.

As with our three earlier studies on the superintendency in New York State, school finance and other state aid issues continue to register significantly. Enabling all students to reach Regents-level performance standards requires dollars along with determination. Funding reform initiatives, including summer remedial programs and training, becomes an imperative for student success. Even with record levels of aid to education, one of the paramount questions for the follow-up qualitative study is why so many chief school officers see state aid as so inequitably distributed. From operating aid to building aid, superintendents view state aid formulas as broken. While the power to reform the formulas obviously rests with the legislature and governor, the political willpower necessary to address state aid
equity is widely dispersed and formidable indeed. Ongoing investment in children, with continued local community and state support over the next decade, gives rise to optimism in assuring that students meet the challenge of the all-Regents diploma requirement.

If the key to improved student performance originates in the classroom interactions between children and teachers, then the master plan for district leadership, what former President George H.W. Bush once called the “vision thing,” resides in the relationships between the superintendent of schools and the board of education. Where trust, solid communications, and clarity in decision-making abound, school board members and superintendents team in ways that concentrate on student learning first and promote community confidence in how policies are determined. In such collaborative relationships, long-range planning is fostered and financial resources are handled responsibly. Nearly 90% of the chief school officers characterize their relationships with their boards as “generally supportive or highly supportive and collaborative.” These “supportive” numbers, albeit drawn from incumbent superintendents, are even higher than those found in our 1997 study and point to a system which appears to continue to work well. However, a dissonant note is sounded by the experience of board-superintendent relationships in large city school systems where superintendents reported their boards to be significantly less supportive and collaborative as well as more confrontational and antagonistic relationships than their peers in rural and suburban school systems.

The generally improved climate of board-superintendent relations may be attributed to the leadership of two prominent state-wide professional organizations, the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) and the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS). These organizations have become more closely aligned in recent years solidifying leadership in the local level with concomitant benefits in the classroom. Mr. Kremer and Dr. Robert Loretan, Executive Director of the New York State Council of Superintendents, have clearly articulated educational dividends for students when functional relationships exist between the superintendent and the board of education. Joint conferences, training sessions, and leadership recruitment are tangible proof of the strengthened cooperation between these two professional organizations, and there appears to be a parallel impact on local district relationships.

In his classic study Leadership, James MacGregor Burns (1985) describes both “transactional” and “transformational” leaders in historical perspective. Transactional leaders tend to be oriented in quid pro quo terms while transformational leaders act on followers’ hopes, desires, and aspirations to elevate them into leaders in their own right. Superintendents combine both leadership qualities in their role in complex school systems. But ultimately, where decisions involve the board of education, teachers, community and parent interests to benefit students, superintendents rely on the primary skill Neustadt (1991) attributed to American presidents: the power to persuade. The persuasiveness of the superintendent will influence, in important ways, how students succeed in reaching high standards; how financial resources are secured and allocated; how long-term planning missions are achieved; and how teaching and learning become embedded in the school community.

In the Empire State, all of these educational challenges exist simultaneously in a reform environment where high stakes tests and results count for both students and educators. Effective school superintendents, working with and enjoying the support of others, can and will continue to inspire students, teachers, and community residents to help bring about exemplary accomplishment. In so doing, future leaders in the classroom and the district office may be encouraged to serve, publicly and well.


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The New York State Council of School Superintendents

7 Elk Street, Third Floor
Albany, NY 12207
(518) 449-1063 • Fax: (518) 426-2229
www.nyscoss.org