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8-24-2016

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What Have We Learned from the Departures of Female Superintendents?

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study of 20 female former superintendents in Virginia was to answer: (1) What factors cause women superintendents to move and/or leave the superintendency? and (2) How do the women construct the story of their moving or

leaving? Thematic analysis of the interview narratives revealed four major themes in the stories of the women: (1) Expectations of job duties; (2) Exhaustion as Superwoman; (3) Conflict with stakeholders; and (4) Departure on their own terms and timelines. The study findings contribute to the research on women in the superintendency and suggest implications for research, policy, and practice.

Introduction

Research has established that women superintendents encounter barriers in both achieving the superintendency and retaining the position. These barriers may also have an effect on why women choose to leave the position of superintendent. Although some female superintendents choose to leave because of retirement or movement to another district; the greater concern is for women who exit the position of superintendent altogether. The stories behind why a woman moves or leaves the position of superintendent have not received an adequate and focused exploration. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine – through the stories and experiences of women who have held the position – why women move and leave the superintendency. The intent of the study was to answer two questions:

- (1) What factors cause women superintendents to move and/or leave the superintendency?
- (2) How do the women construct the story of their moving or leaving?

Theoretical Framework and Brief Review of Literature

Standpoint theory emerges from the works of feminist sociologists such as Harding (1987, 1991), Harstock (1983), and Smith (1987). The theory proposes that there are numerous understandings of our world and those people who have historically and traditionally resided in the margins who are able to provide insights that are often ignored by those in dominant positions (Nielsen, 1990).

For a theoretical framework, I chose to work with feminist standpoint theory so that the former superintendents would be at the center of the research process and their experiences were where I began building the knowledge base because “only by making women’s concrete life experiences the primary source of our investigations can we succeed in constructing knowledge that accurately reflects and represents women” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 56).

Before beginning the study, it was imperative to examine previous research on why women move and leave the position of superintendent. Similar to their male counterparts, many women leave their positions of superintendent to move on to another superintendency (Allen, 1996; Tallerico, Burstyn, & Poole, 1993; Tallerico, Poole, & Burstyn, 1994; VanTuyle, 2008). Based on the data from the 2003 AASA National Survey of U.S. Women Superintendents and Central Office Administrators, 38% of women made the move to a larger district (Brunner, Grogan & Prince, 2003). This move is perceived as a positive one since a larger district often means more pay and professional challenges (VanTuyle, 2008). Tallerico, Burstyn, and Poole (1993) categorize this move as a “pull” which allows the woman superintendent an opportunity to assume greater responsibilities.

Challenges with the school board prove to be a strong reason women leave the position of superintendent (Tallerico, Burstyn, & Poole, 1993). Beekley (1999) identified that women superintendents often experienced challenges working with school boards, especially ones primarily made up of men. In some cases, the women felt that the challenges they experienced were attacks due to their gender. Tallerico and Burstyn (1996) found that one of the greatest clashes between the two parties that often caused the superintendent to exit was when there were moral or ethical conflicts between the

superintendent and the members of the school board that she served. Brunner and Grogan (2007) identified the two main school board related causes for women leaving the superintendency: 13% of women cited school board elections and 10% cited school board conflict. The research of McKay and Grady (1994) discovered it was not necessarily the school board itself that caused the conflict, but when the board felt the need to micromanage the superintendent. These actions drove the superintendent to feel she could no longer be an effective leader.

When women do not feel successful in the position of superintendent, they often look inside themselves to determine why they are unhappy in the position. A number of studies note that the position of superintendent takes them away from their original focus, a desire to provide strong instructional leadership that will benefit all students (Allen, 1996; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996; Tallerico, Burstyn & Poole, 1993). In order to return to the focus on curriculum and instruction, many of the exiting female superintendents take positions in K-12 besides that of superintendent.

Not all exits found former female superintendents returning to a position in K-12. Allen (1996) found that other life trajectories included university teaching, serving as an educational consultant, or returning to finish the PhD started before the superintendency. The largest post-superintendent group was those who had a desire to move into higher education. Of the entire group interviewed, 30% of the women in the study left the superintendency to move into teaching educational administration courses at the university level. The pull of moving into higher education allowed the women “the opportunity to impact the profession by training future administrators” (p. 48).

Although a number of the reasons for leaving were attributed to the internal challenges within the position, researchers have also concluded that the external barriers of family responsibilities contribute to both deterring women from ascending to the superintendency as well as reasons for why they departed (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Grogan, 2000; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Tallerico & Tingley, 2001). These studies reinforce the argument that throughout the literature on women in the superintendency, family responsibilities versus work responsibilities continue to be perceived as a challenge.

The final theme presented in the literature was the female superintendent's desire to exit "the fishbowl" that goes with the position. Mercer (1996) explained that it is often customary for the leader of an organization, male or female, to feel some level of isolation from others on staff. In addition, Kinsella (2004) explained that school systems expect the leader of that organization to model behaviors based on the beliefs of that system. This often means leading a relatively quiet, conservative existence in the position and that members of the community will be watching for those beliefs to be demonstrated.

Methods

"We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). To carry out the study, I chose a qualitative methodology so that the stories would provide the opportunity to explore the unique experiences of the participants which, at the same time, allowed me to find common themes between the women.

In-depth interviews were used for qualitative analysis. Rubin and Rubin (2005) explained that interviewing offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and

memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher. This asset was particularly important for the study of women in order to provide a voice of this often silenced group. These voices, as Reinharz (1992) explained, are “an antidote to centuries of ignoring women’s ideas altogether or having men speak for women (p. 19).

In determining participant selection for the study, a combination of purposeful sampling methods was utilized. Criterion-oriented sampling deliberately selects participants because of their abilities to provide information that only they can because of their lived experience in that position (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 1998, Patton, 1990). For the study, purposeful sampling began with criterion-oriented sampling. The criterion-oriented identifiers were:

- Participant is a female
- Participant held position of superintendent in the Commonwealth of Virginia
- Participant served as a superintendent between 1990 and 2010
- Participant served as a superintendent and left or moved to another superintendency

To identify possible study participants who met the criteria, I created a database of all of the female superintendents who served in the Commonwealth of Virginia from 1990 through 2010. This was accomplished by reviewing Virginia Department of Education records, individual school division websites, and reviewing the annual editions of the *Virginia Review Directory of State and Local Government Officials* at the Library of Virginia. In cases when a name did not allow me to determine whether or not the superintendent was a man or a woman, an internet search or phone inquiry to the specific school division was made to make the necessary determination. From this database, a population was identified. The database included the names of 51 women who had served

in the position of superintendent of schools between 1990 and 2010 and then exited that particular superintendency. I was able to locate contact information for 39 women. All 39 members of the identified population were asked, through telephone, letter and/or e-mail contact, to participate in the study. Twenty-six agreed to participate. Findings are based on interviews with 20 participants.

The participants have had long tenure in public education. Collectively, they have more than 600 years of service in PK-12 education. In addition, the group of 20 women has had 151.25 collective years in the position of superintendent. Other interesting facts about the participants include:

- Sixteen women are Caucasian; four women are African American
- All district types were represented: urban, suburban, and rural
- District sizes ranged from <1,000 students to > 18,000
- Shortest tenure was 1.5 years; longest tenure was 19 years (average 7.96)
- Seven of the 20 women have held multiple superintendencies
- Only three of those seven secured multiple superintendencies in Virginia

Data Analysis

Interview protocols that Seidman (2006) referred to as in-depth interviewing were used for the study. This type of interviewing is a semi-structured, open-ended interview approach that asks questions in order to obtain research study participants' responses to the interview questions. This in-depth interview process allows participants to turn inward and reflect in order to truly understand the meaning behind their behaviors.

The in-depth interviewing method consisted of either one long interview or a series of multiple shorter interviews. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or by

telephone. Whether the participant gave one interview or multiple interviews, the same format was followed. The first part of the interview set the context of the participant's experience. In the second part, participants were asked to reconstruct the elements of why they left the situation in which it occurred. The final part allowed participants to reflect on the significance of the incidents and the meaning they made of their experiences. An interview protocol guided each of the interviews.

Once an interview was conducted, the process of transcribing and analyzing the interview began. I transcribed and analyzed after each interview before conducting another to help identify coding categories early in the process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

The overall data analysis plan was guided by the framework proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) for qualitative analysis: (1) data reduction, which involved selecting, focusing, condensing and transforming data; (2) data display, which involved creating an organized, compressed way of arranging coded data that are connected in some way; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification, which involved revisiting the data many times to verify, test, or confirm identified themes and patterns.

Findings

My intent, while analyzing interview data, was to unearth similarities; but, I also looked to recognize the differences between the women as well. I wanted to embrace the uniqueness of each woman's story. For the purpose of this paper, I report the following themes for why women choose to leave the position: expectations of job duties, exhaustion as Superwoman, conflict with stakeholders, and departure on their own terms and timelines.

Theme 1: Expectations of Job Duties

Expecting to Be Instructional Leaders

All of the women interviewed explained that they went into the superintendency to make a difference for students. Although a number of the participants “reluctantly” or “accidentally” went into administration in the first place, they only chose to continue the trip up the ladder because they believed they could make a difference for students.

In the role of superintendent, the women had a great deal of control over the instructional programs that were put in place. In fact, these women were quite proud of the instructional initiatives that were created during their tenures and that remained even after they had left the position. These programs provided educational opportunities for students and best practices for teachers. The initiatives the women started included: alternative education opportunities for students, Reading Recovery, online instruction, using data to make instructional decisions, curriculum mapping, introduction/expansion of Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs, and personnel evaluations tied to classroom instruction. These programs were focused on improving the curriculum for all students.

Many times, in order for these instructional initiatives to take place, the superintendent felt she needed to roll up her sleeves and take a large role in the implementation. One woman explained how she implemented a new program in one of her schools:

I wanted people to know I was part of the process. I was there for the meetings. I had every content area sitting at the table and they worked with their department chairs to make sure that teachers were... that the curriculum taught and tested and the curriculum were aligned and that teachers had the classroom management and the knowledge base in

place to be able to implement the curriculum and pacing guide. And, if not, then administrators needed to get in there and help.

For all the women, there was a realization that the position could not only focus on instruction. This was a major source of disappointment and partially the reason some of the women left the position. These women left the superintendency to go to a position that would allow them to return to their main focus, instruction. Even if the women did not go “back” into a previous position (principal, assistant superintendent), they often chose to move into a new position that could provide the opportunity to establish a connection to learners.

Dispelling the Myths of a Female Superintendent's Preparation

Another issue that these women superintendents heard throughout their searches for a position was the requisite qualities needed for the superintendency. All study participants had easily exceeded the minimum qualifications to hold the position, but that did not mean they easily secured their positions. Even with the additional instructional pressures of state accreditation and the escalating requirements of No Child Left Behind's measurement of Adequate Yearly Progress, many of these women found that buildings, budgets and board interests were what got them the superintendency. A number of the women interviewed in the study were kept from an earlier superintendency because of the hiring school board's belief they did not know about buildings or budgets. The women often felt that they had to go out of their way to get involved in building projects. Throughout their tenure, they were constantly battling the bias that women do not know anything about construction.

Superintendents who have left the position more recently explained that the requirements of the position continued to change and that the budget continued to become a

greater focus in the overall job responsibilities. One woman noted the shift to an added emphasis on budget and finance:

If I take a close look at how things have changed while I have been a superintendent, I would have to say that I have spent a great deal more time in budget meetings and talking about finance than I have had opportunities to talk with my Assistant Superintendent about instruction.

The women explained that in the past three years, there has been a great deal of time spent meeting with city/county officials specific to school division funding. What may have been normal funding procedures in the past are now being looked at more closely. This long-term process makes a traditionally long budget cycle even longer.

Actual Responsibilities of the Job – School Board Members’ Wishes

According to a number of the women, the most frustrating part of her job realization was when the superintendent needed to devote a disproportionate amount of time focused on the needs and “whims” of school board members. By having conversations during closed sessions, the public could not hear that the school board was asking the superintendent to focus on items that were not about instruction or what is best for children.

Even when the women tried to address the needs of the school board while still focusing on their own vision for the students in the district, many felt they were constantly fighting a losing battle. It was not that the women did not try and keep instruction the top priority, the school board always had a way of reminding the superintendents what was

“most important.” One particularly tech-savvy superintendent thought she had solved the issue of keeping the board happy:

Focus on the board. If you want to stay, you focus on the board. Let your staff do instruction, if you have a staff. I only had five people. When I was there, one of the first things I wanted to do was a podcast that would give them a summary of the day. The school board chair called the podcast “cute;” but ultimately said, “No, we like more personal contact.” That meant that I could spend a whole day trying to make contact, because if you contact one, you've got to contact them all. Otherwise, they start playing this game of, "The superintendent told me, she didn't tell me that, why's she calling you?" So much for trying to save time to focus on instruction...I should've been more forceful with that, but I would say to keep your job that the name of the game is pay attention to the board. Keep them on your side.

Theme 2: Exhaustion as Superwoman

Superwoman as High Achiever

As a collective group, the interview participants proved to be a fierce set of high achievers. Some of the highlights from the participants:

- One participant has six degrees
- One participant has two doctorates
- One woman has eight endorsements on her teaching license
- Two of the women completed their PhDs in 3 years while working full-time

The majority of the participants followed a “traditional” female path to the superintendency. This means that on average they spent more than 30 years gaining experience in anywhere from 5-7 instructional positions while they worked up the administrative ladder. They spent years in the classroom, working as department/grade-level chairs, assistant principals (sometimes in more than one school), principals, and one or more positions at the central office before ascending to the superintendency.

As these women told their stories and shared their stops in various positions, they all explained that they have “been this way” forever. The women described their drive as “Type A extreme,” “a workaholic,” “having a puritan work ethic.” They also explained that a great amount of the responsibility they carried was because they brought a lot on themselves. The long hours seemed to be something shared by all of the women, but the reasons for that varied by location. In smaller school divisions, there was not a large enough central office staff for the superintendent to delegate responsibilities. She was responsible for carrying these roles out herself.

I didn't have a large staff to help me work on all of our initiatives. I took the time because I wanted to get done what I needed to get done. When you finally look up from your desk or your computer it is 11 o'clock at night and you say, “Well I'll do that tomorrow;” but, the same thing happens over and over. That's the superintendency in my view. I have a feeling a lot of people don't really realize the pressure or the full extent of the job that is involved. It's a stressful job and it's a time consuming job.

Although some of the women did not have a large central office staff, other women found that even if there was a staff, the superintendents were unable to delegate responsibilities to others. They had worked so hard on these programs, projects, and initiatives, they did not feel they could give them to someone who would devote as much time and effort.

I started the New Teacher Mentor Project. When I hired my assistant superintendent that responsibility was on his job description but I told him I would continue to run that program. That program was my baby and I wasn't going to turn it over to anyone.

The lack of delegation, even when the woman had the staff to support her, was one way the position became too overwhelming. The "Superwoman" title also came into being because many of the women felt the need to become an expert in all fields. A number of participants explained that budget and building were perceived to be a woman superintendent's weaknesses. These women wanted to make sure that this would not be the case during their tenures.

Not only was there a struggle to achieve the superintendency as Superwoman, but the women felt the need to keep up the breakneck pace by taking on roles outside of the schools. These women found that being a superintendent meant more than just running the school division. Although this was their primary responsibility, these participants also explained their need to be involved in the community as well. Not only did they participate in activities like the Chamber of Commerce or the Rotary, but they also felt the need to hold leadership positions in these organizations.

Superwoman Gives Up Her Family

Of the participants who were married throughout their superintendency (11), all explained that the opportunities they had could not and would not have happened without consulting their family first. Family played a large role in the women's decisions to both accept a position as well as leave a position. Numerous studies on women in administrative positions emphasize the necessity of having to juggle multiple roles in order to perceive success in the position. Loder (2005) found that women's stress comes from the administrator's struggle of having to be an instructional leader, wife, mother, caretaker, and more.

For the women in the study, the superintendency meant a forced isolation from family life. The study participants explained that decisions were never taken lightly within their family units, since in many ways it meant having to "give up" their family in order to gain the position. Sometimes that meant having to miss a child's soccer game, not spending Sunday at church services, and it often meant having to live separately. As one woman explained:

You can get a superintendency if you are willing to move. At one point, I was a superintendent finalist in six different states. My family understood that I would have to move to wherever I got the job.

When spouses live apart so that they can each have a career, the time the couple spent together also revolved around the school division. These women spent months (and in some cases years) living a separate life from their husbands. Some of the women explained their "weekend/holiday marriage." Other women noted that their weekly "dates" with their spouse involved attending high school sporting events. Many of the superintendents

realized that they would be losing family time unless they incorporated their family into their job. In some cases, the spouses spent most of their time apart. The time alone away from family takes a toll. A few women explained they had to keep a calendar just so they would know what house they would be going to for the upcoming weekend. The biggest metaphor for living a lonely life was one woman's description of the house she lived in:

I bought a home within a month of my appointment. I never put any furniture in it. I had a bed in the bedroom. My sister came to visit, and said, "Oh my God, you don't even have a table." She brought me a table. It wasn't that I couldn't afford it. That was not it at all. I just couldn't get set. For a year, I lived in a house that when I was talking to people, it was too big. I'd walk around and it would echo; and, they would say, "Are you in a tunnel?" There was no furniture in the house. That first year, there was so much going on with the job, I never bought furniture... It was almost like I knew I wasn't going to stay very long... When things really started going badly with the school board; I wanted my husband with me. My husband called. And he said, "Just come home. You don't have to work. Just come home." I left that superintendency and went home.

Vacations were often an attempt to find an opportunity to "normalize" family time. Unfortunately, this was not the relaxing break often associated with time off from work. For these women, vacation often meant doing the job in a different location. Some of the women explained that while they did try to "sneak away" from time to time, it was never for very long. There were mentions of a lot of "long weekends" but very few mentions of

lengthy vacation breaks. One of the earliest women to ascend to the superintendency from the group put it bluntly:

I can't even imagine women who got a superintendency after me. I worked in a time that everyone didn't have a cell phone. Some of the women who came after me that I have talked to, they should almost put "going on vacation" in quotes because, you know, they're on the beach with their Blackberry. They are always on the job.

Although the women experienced challenges living apart from their husbands, there were other challenges within the family, most often aging parents and their care. Because many of the women did not take on the position of superintendent until they were in their 50s, they did need to worry about the care of parents. Two participants left the superintendency for the sole purpose of "going home" to take care of parents.

The role of mother was another challenge. Of the twenty study participants, eight women never had children. The other twelve women had children who were at least high school age, if not older, when they assumed the position of superintendent. The children were much younger; however, as mom was in various positions climbing up the ladder towards the superintendency. Many of the interview responses revolved around children being "left behind" with their father to finish high school, or moms having to miss children being dropped off at college because school was starting.

Superwoman and Her Health

Not only is trying to keep up with all of the responsibilities of being Superwoman exhausting, the participants in the study also explained how this non-stop pace took a toll on many of the women's health. All of the study participants spoke to me about the high level

of stress that the position caused them. Six of the women shared that they took anxiety medication while on the job; and, four of the women worked with therapists to help them “get over” the position. Two of the women have chronic illnesses that they attribute to their time in the superintendency.

Many of the women in the study were so worried about taking care of everyone else (at work, in the schools, at home, in the community) that they spent little to no time on care for themselves. When asked about trying to find a routine that would allow for healthy practices, they explained how they had stopped exercising regularly once they achieved the position. One woman knew that she would not find time in the day to eat, so she fasted during the work day to keep her focus on the work. Once she got home, however, “I ate anything in front of me that wasn’t nailed down.” Other women dealt with the stress in the opposite fashion. Not only did they eat, but they made terrible choices in what they ate:

The people who worked the drive through at the McDonald’s knew me and knew my order. I would drive through a few times a week because I could eat in my car as I was driving from one place to another during my day.

Theme 3: Conflicts with Stakeholders

Conflicts with the School Board

Previous research on women leaving the position of superintendent has focused on superintendent and school board relations. A number of participants echoed this finding by explaining that a conflict with the school board – most often the school board chair – was a reason for the superintendent’s departure. Although research on both men and women superintendents shows that conflicts with the school board is a major reason to exit, women

seem to handle their departures differently. Since a woman's leadership style has an ethic of care grounded in forming relationships, continuing conflicts are very difficult to work through. In addition, women often will back away from conflict or will leave in order to not cause further disruption.

This was a particular phenomenon that I was very interested in exploring. I could not figure out how a woman could be elected by a school board and then experience the conflicts that emerged with the school board. Based on the interview findings, a number of reasons for the conflicts were described.

One issue that proved to be the case for the superintendents from the early 1990s was that they may have been hired by an appointed school board; but, the board converted to an elected school board during the superintendent's tenure.

Things change when a school board goes from being appointed to elected. All of a sudden there are constituents you worry about and answer to. I never had a grandstanding appointed school board member; but, they became a different political animal once there was an election involved.

Another issue that emerged from the interviews was the challenge of micromanagement by the school board. This frustrated a number of the women who experienced this challenge.

An experience reported by the women was the micromanagement that was displayed by the school board chairperson. This adverse relationship was cited as a reason for leaving the superintendent's position. An additional frustration for the women was when the school board chair was a woman with whom they were in direct conflict. This made it challenging

for the women to acknowledge that often their biggest challenge, detractor, or foe was another woman trying to micromanage the duties of the superintendent.

I know we both publically stated that we were doing what was best for kids; however, every move she made seemed to do nothing but prevent me from putting kids first...She felt I was her puppet and at her beck-and-call at all times.

Since women will most likely leave a situation quietly instead of remaining in the battle, the control remains with the school board. In contrast, the study participants shared that they believed male superintendents more often involve enforcers (i.e. lawyers) to remain in a position. The male superintendent is not going out without a fight (and often much larger compensation) than their female counterparts.

Conflict with Staff

The participants also spoke openly about the conflicts they had with school division staff. These conflicts depended on whether or not the superintendent was hired from within the system or from the outside. A superintendent who was hired from the outside was given the charge of “change agent.” Unfortunately, this was often in direct contrast to what some others thought.

Perhaps one of the most frustrating conflicts was with someone getting passed over for the superintendent’s position who was then still working in the division. The women perceived that these people often worked quietly behind the superintendent’s back to undermine the work being done by the superintendent.

For some women, the frustration in having an undermining member of the staff was remembering how different she was when she was in that particular support position.

The number one job the assistant superintendents in South County had was to watch the superintendent's back. In fact, there were many times we were so good at it, the superintendent didn't even know. And that was ok. We did whatever to let the superintendent do the job. I thought I was going to get that level of support too.

The frustration of not having a supportive staff appeared to be most often shared when the women had expected to have staff that would mimic the support they previously offered their superintendents. They believed it to be "just what you did."

Theme 4: Departure on Their Own Terms and Timelines

Although many of the women explained that the position was challenging, stressful, and overwhelming, they fought very hard to stay in control in their positions. Some of the women had the power of choice. These women were able to make a decision to leave, either by their own decision or a step ahead of a school board that wanted to let them go. Since a number of the women participating in the study came to the superintendency at an older age with a great number of years vested in the Virginia Retirement System, they felt that they had a bit more flexibility about when they could leave. As one woman stated:

When I didn't agree with the direction the school board was going, when I felt like I wouldn't have an ally sitting up there next to me, that's when I said to myself, "You already have 33 years in, do you really want to get renewed and spend the next four years banging your head against the wall?"

Another woman explained that she had found out ahead of time that the majority of the school board was not going to vote to renew her contract. This woman chose to act proactively:

I kept the power. I walked in to that meeting that night and told the board of my intention to retire at the end of the year. I saw jaws drop. They didn't know what hit them. They were going to let me go; but, I beat them to it. That allowed me to keep the power and it made a difference for my last four months on the job.

Unfortunately, not all the women who participated in the study had the opportunity to leave the position on their own terms. These were situations where the school board kept the power and let the superintendent go. By eliminating the choice for these women, the departure had a negative effect on the women. One woman explained her feelings after being let go:

I knew I didn't want to be there anymore; but, I still couldn't believe they wanted me gone. Over the next six months this really did a number on me. I really lost my confidence and it may sound silly; but, it also hurt my feelings. Especially as hard as I had worked for them. You know, it's hard for a Superwoman to take...The way things ended there made me realize, I didn't want to go through that again. Ever. No superintendency is worth that.

Conclusion

When studying the female superintendent, it appears that the frequency of exits from the position requires the study of the entire tenure of the woman, not just the departure. Perhaps studying the initial years the woman was in the position will suggest strategies to help women retain the position longer. If these strategies can be identified, then it is also imperative that this information be shared with graduate programs in educational leadership as well as the associations that support and search for superintendents.

Recommendations for future studies include expanding the sample outside of the state of Virginia. Are the stories from women in other states, specifically states that have strong teachers' unions, similar to the experiences in Virginia? Another study might compare the experiences of female superintendents to their male counterparts. Are the experiences the same based on the position of superintendent, or are they different based on the gender of the superintendent in question?

Since leadership is paramount for a school district's success, the consistency of a person in the top leadership position can only assist a school district in being able to focus full attention on student success and achievement. Hopefully, through the assistance of mentoring by veteran superintendents, the length of tenure for women superintendents will continue to increase.

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Retrieved April 2, 2010, (Publication No. AAT 3338885).