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## ABSTRACT

This research examined the pool of African descent candidates for superintendencies, focusing on superintendent openings and the superintendent pool in New York. The inquiry involved 3 studies conducted over the course of 2 years. The first study documented the representation of African American candidates in the superintendent applicant pool pipeline, surveying search consultants and presidents of boards of education. The second study examined, from the perspective of male applicants, who was applying for superintendent positions and the kinds of districts to which they applied. The third study explored the job-seeking experiences of African American and white candidates for superintendent positions through individual and focus group interviews. Data analysis indicates that African descent candidates are still underrepresented in the superintendency, are still required to have better credentials, and are still typed as appropriate for minority districts only. Search consultants rarely move African descent candidates forward after the first interview. Although there are many candidates of African descent in the superintendent pool, they are not being fully utilized. (Contains 28 references.) (SM)

**The Pool of African American Candidates for the Superintendency**  
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The purpose of this study was to examine the pool of African descent candidates for superintendencies. While we believe that the results of this study are generalizable nationwide, this study focused on superintendent openings and the superintendent pool in New York.

In New York State, administrators, search consultants, and school board members have been heard to lament that they cannot find African American<sup>1</sup> candidates for administrative positions. Typically, the most common refrain is that there are not enough African Americans in the pipeline. Our data do not support their claims, but rather, illustrate that this perspective is a distortion of the problem. There are African Americans in the pipeline. However, African American candidates are not pursued, recruited, or promoted as vigorously as are white candidates.

What we have found is that, if anything, there is a “log jam” in the pipeline. While white candidates can exit the pipeline through jobs in both white and minority districts, our data indicate that African American candidates are only considered for positions in minority districts. This perception discourages potential applicants from applying for superintendencies.

### ***Background and Theoretical Perspective***

African descent educators make up 12% of teachers, but only 3% of superintendents, most of who serve in school districts with large minority populations. This study is driven by a set of beliefs: if equitable conditions are present, African descent superintendents should be represented in equal proportions with African descent teachers; all students deserve the best leaders available, and many of those educators are African descent candidates; and jobs for African American superintendents should not hinge on their ability to serve only students of their own race, but on their ability to serve and lead all students

In order to think about the representation of African descent candidates in the superintendent pool, we examined the issue of the African American superintendent pool from three methodological and conceptual perspectives. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed through interviews, surveys, and focus groups

### **Lack of Research on African American Administrators**

To a great extent, the scholarship in the last 75 years related to the superintendency has relied on white male samples. The scope and depth of information

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, we use the term African descent and African American to describe those people whose ancestry can be or is thought to be able to be traced to Africa and whose skin color is brown or black, resulting in a social identification as a Black person.

on underrepresented groups in the superintendency is scarce (Tallerico, 1999). While the literature on females is increasing, most of these studies still focus on white females or on populations predominantly represented by white females. Although still limited, there has been a growing list of literature published on women of color in the superintendency. Research on African descent males seems to be the least studied population.

Although still greatly under-represented in the superintendency in comparison with their proportion in the teaching ranks, white women have made gains in attaining the superintendency in the last decade. African descent representation has not increased appreciably. One of the barriers to understanding changes in representation by race or ethnic group is that (1) annual statistics are not available and (2) intersectionality of race/ethnic group and sex is rarely reported. A 2000 New York State study by the New York State Council of School Superintendents' (NYSCOSS) indicated that from 1997 to 2000, women were 40% of the newly hired superintendents in the state and make up 18.4% of the 730 superintendents (up from 12% in 1996). However, during the same time, few of the newly hired superintendents were from ethnically diverse backgrounds and by 2000 African descent superintendents accounted for 1.5% of all superintendents in New York. Nationwide, African descent educators (both sexes) are 14% of teachers and 2% of superintendents. Women (all races) are 72% of teachers and 13% of superintendents.

In New York, as in most of the U.S., African American superintendents lead districts with larger concentrations of Black and Hispanic children. Moody's (1971) and Scott's (1980) pioneering works were the first in-depth studies of Black superintendents and are regarded as benchmark texts among scholars and school leaders. These studies articulate the challenges and dilemmas that confront African American superintendents and aspiring African American administrators. According to Scott, African American superintendents, unlike their white counterparts, are typically hired only in troubled districts. Troubled districts are demanding settings in that they are affected by social and economic issues that impact on a district's ability to provide quality educational resources (Eversley, 1999). Such districts – no matter what the race of the students and staff – require someone with superhuman skills to bring about sustained school improvement. Nevertheless, nearly a quarter century after Scott's observations, it is still these "no win" opportunities that are primarily available to qualified and highly credential African American superintendents.

It should come as no surprise that change has been slow since Moody's benchmark study of Black superintendents. In 1970, Moody reported that only seventeen of an estimated 20,000 superintendents were identified as Black (Moody, 1971). Scott (1980) predicted that increases in these numbers were likely to take shape as follows:

[The number of ] Black superintendents will never be as large as the number of Caucasian superintendents, but there will be an increase. This increase in Black superintendents will occur in cities with problems

that Caucasian superintendents will not want to deal with and in which no assertive affirmative action efforts will be needed to justify selecting a Black superintendent, (Scott, 1980).

In districts in which African Americans are superintendents, Scott's prediction was right on target. Even ten years after his initial study, Moody observed that the dominance of Black superintendents was in districts composed of students of similar race (Moody, 1981). In those ten years, the number of superintendents identified<sup>2</sup> as African American had increased, but only in urban settings. Commentary at the time presumed that because urban districts are beset with problems, those with other options took them, leaving administrative openings to African descent or other minority candidates. An additional explanation assumed that African descent candidates would want to lead districts that were predominantly African descent and that it was logical for school boards to match administrator ethnicity with student body ethnicity. The often double-edged sword was that only an African descent administrator is qualified for an African descent school district or, on the other hand, an African descent administrator is only qualified to lead an African descent school district.

The same race limitation was much less true for white candidates, since many minority districts employed white superintendents. As a result, the opportunities for white candidates were much greater, not only because there are more predominantly white communities than predominantly African descent communities, but also because white candidates were considered for all types of school districts.

The first study in this cluster of research focused on Long Island, an area East of New York City with 126 school districts in Nassau and Suffolk counties plus New York City Community School Districts in Queens and Brooklyn. Of the 126 school districts in Nassau and Suffolk County, 6% had African descent superintendents. Of the 126 communities, 11 are predominantly African descent or Latina/o people. At the time of the first study, 7 of the 11 minority school districts were headed by African American superintendents (4 males and 3 females). White superintendents were CEOs of the remaining 4. No predominantly district had African descent leadership at the central office level. In New York State in 2000, all African American superintendents were employed in predominantly minority districts.

## **Race Matters**

The effects of race and racism in education are real. Race "still does matter as a socioeconomic and political construct that in turn plays a deciding role in the shaping the life chances of African Americans in the United States" (Omi and Winant, 2000 p.37). Racial attitudes weigh heavy on the choices that African Americans have when seeking superintendencies - -- whether they are the attitudes held by those who hire or the beliefs of applicants about which openings are available to an African descent candidate.

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note that none of the 50 states maintain a database on superintendents by ethnicity.

The privileges afforded people with white skin are a subject rarely discussed in publicly, particularly the assumption that all doors are open. Kivel (1996) makes an interesting distinction between privilege and benefit, one that bestows both privilege and benefit on white candidates to the superintendency.

Privileges are the economic "extras" that those of us who are middle class and wealthy gain at the expense of poor and working class people of all races. Benefits, on the other hand, are the advantages that all white people gain at the expense of people of color regardless of economic position (Kivel, 1996, p. 28).

Edelsky (1999), Hacker (1992), Howard (1993), and McIntosh (1988) all write about the privilege that comes to all white people regardless of wealth. This advantage is largely invisible to most white people, leading many to believe that merit alone explains whatever accomplishments they have made.

Social research has repeatedly demonstrated that if Jessie Myles, an African American friend, and I walk into the same bank on the same day and apply for a loan with the same officer, I will be more likely to receive my money—and with less hassle, less scrutiny, and less delay. This is in spite of the fact that Jessie has more education and is also more intelligent, better looking, and a nicer person. Likewise, if I am turned down for a house purchase, I don't wonder whether it was because of the color of my skin. And if I am offered a new job or promotion, I don't worry that my fellow workers may feel that I'm there nor because of my qualifications, but merely to fill an affirmative action quota. Such privileged treatment is so much a part of the fabric of our daily existence that it escapes the conscious awareness of most white Americans. (Howard, p. )

White educators and school board members are complicit in the reproduction of white privilege in the selection of superintendents. While there is ample evidence that people hire people with similar values and backgrounds, skin color trumps all other characteristics including social class and amount of education.

## **Methods**

This inquiry, which includes three studies conducted in three phases over a two-year period, were the result of a faculty student partnership that resulted in a dissertation study.<sup>1</sup> Although While we might call this a mixed method study, that would be reconstructing the reality of the process to make it conform to a logical progression, In fact, what happened was that one question grew from another and that, in the end,



we had three studies all directed toward examining the African American superintendent candidate pool. The first inquiry explored the superintendent pipeline from a hiring standpoint. Phase two examined applicant trends and patterns pursuant to the kinds of districts to which superintendents and assistant superintendents applied. The third and final phase looked at the African American experience and perspective in the context of seeking a superintendency.

*Study One:* The purpose of this study was to document the representation of African American candidates in the superintendent applicant pool pipeline, as described by search consultants and presidents of boards of education engaged in the superintendent search process.

The sample for the first phase was intentionally narrow in size and scope in order to take advantage of current local data. The sample included board presidents and search consultants in districts that advertised superintendent openings in the 1998-99 school year on Long Island; as many as twenty-two school districts advertised superintendent vacancies that year. The 7 search consultants that served these districts and the 22 board of education presidents were our target population.

Sample participants completed a one-page questionnaire with seven questions, which was mailed with an accompanying cover letter explaining the purpose and intent of the survey. The first round of surveys mailed was followed up with a post card. Specifically, the questionnaire asked the respondents to provide the number of applicants, gender, and ethnicity of the applicants, at the different levels of the superintendents' search process.

*Study Two:* The study was designed to get a snapshot from the applicants' perspectives of who was applying for superintendent positions, and the kinds of districts to which they applied, examining the patterns of white and African descent candidates. This study looked only at male candidates.

A survey was developed to determine the actions of male superintendent and assistant superintendents with respect to attaining a superintendency. A random sample of white male superintendents and assistant superintendents in New York and all African American male superintendents and assistant superintendents in New York State were surveyed. Because the title assistant superintendent may perform a variety of tasks such as assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, personnel or business, telephone calls were made to the district in which the samples were employed to determine the assistant's area of responsibility. In this way, the assistant superintendent sample was comparable across districts.

The sample of African American superintendents to draw from was not large enough for random sampling. In August 2001, excluding New York City, there were 17 African American Superintendents employed in New York State. Of the 17 African American superintendents working, 10 were African American males. An equal number of assistant superintendents were identified throughout the State. We identified 16

African American assistant superintendents. Twelve of the 16 were identified as African American males. Snowball sampling was used to identify the sample. Identification of the African American superintendents was made by networking locally with sitting African American superintendents and making use of the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE) *Directory of African American Superintendents* (NABSE, 1999). However, generating a list of African American assistant superintendents presented more of a challenge. Letters were written to 30 District Superintendents (DS), who were agents of the Commissioner of Education, requesting that they identify African American Assistant superintendents in their supervisory zone.

Like the Long Island survey, the survey of New York State superintendents and assistant superintendents was accompanied by a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey and the participant's contribution to the overall project. Assurances protecting the anonymity of the participants were given. In order to identify the returned responses the surveys were color-coded as follows: African American male superintendents (red), African American male Assistant Superintendents (green), white male superintendents (gray) and white assistant male superintendents (blue).

White superintendents and assistant superintendents were selected at random and mailed a 10 question color-coded survey. All 14 African American male superintendents and 17 assistant superintendents were surveyed, using the same survey. The surveys were pre-tested by a select group of assistant superintendents and administrators. These individuals were provided with a script that asked them to scenario assume one of three roles. The first involved a superintendent looking to move to another district. The second scenario highlighted a superintendent content to stay in his/her current district. And the third scenario illuminated a superintendent who was being recruited by several school districts. Demographic and statistical data were incorporated to the scenarios to strengthen the scenario's realism.

*Study Three.* The final study explored the job-seeking experiences of African American and white candidates for superintendent positions through face to face and focus group interviews with 5 African descent and 5 white superintendents. The interview questions were designed to obtain the professionals' personal experiences and perspectives on attaining the superintendency in New York State. As both a matter of convenience and because of the concentration of African American superintendents in the New York metropolitan area, the majority of sample participants were chosen from the Long Island region and the lower New York State region. This sample included both male and female educators.

## ***Findings***

*Applicant Pool for Superintendency.* Our first study documented the sex and ethnicity of candidates who applied for the 12 of the 22 superintendent openings on Long Island in 1999 – 1999, using survey responses from both the school board president and the search consultant involved in each search. For the 12



superintendencies examined, there were 550 candidates. The majority (93.6%) was white and 76% were males. Latina/o and Asian descent candidates comprised fewer than 1% of applicants and have been removed from subsequent discussions.

Table 1. Applicants by Race/Ethnicity and Sex		
Race/ Ethnicity and Sex	Number Applied	Percent Interviewed
African American Female	7	1.2
African American Male	25	4.4
White Female	125	22.7
White Male	390	70.9
Latina	1	.1
Latino	3	.5
Asian Female	1	.1
Asian Male	1	.1
Total	550	100.0

Tables 2 and 3 provide two perspectives from which to examine the “flow” of candidates through the search process. Table 2 indicates that white males were hired at a higher proportion than their representation in the applicant pool, white females were hired at a lower rate than their representation in the applicant pool. African descent males were 4.5% of the applicant pool, but not among those who attained the superintendency. The small number of African descent female applicants skews the proportions and, therefore, we are not examining these numbers. Overall, males were hired in higher proportions than they existed in the applicant pool and females at smaller proportions.

Table 2. Percent of Applicants at Each Search Decision Point by Race/Ethnicity and Sex				
	African Descent Applicants		White Applicants	
	Percent Male	Percent Female	Percent Male	Percent Female
Applied	4.5	1.2	70.9	22.7
First Round Interviews	4.4	1.4	67.1	25.4
Final Round Interview	1.3	1.3	71.2	27.3
Hired	0.0	8.3	83.3	8.3

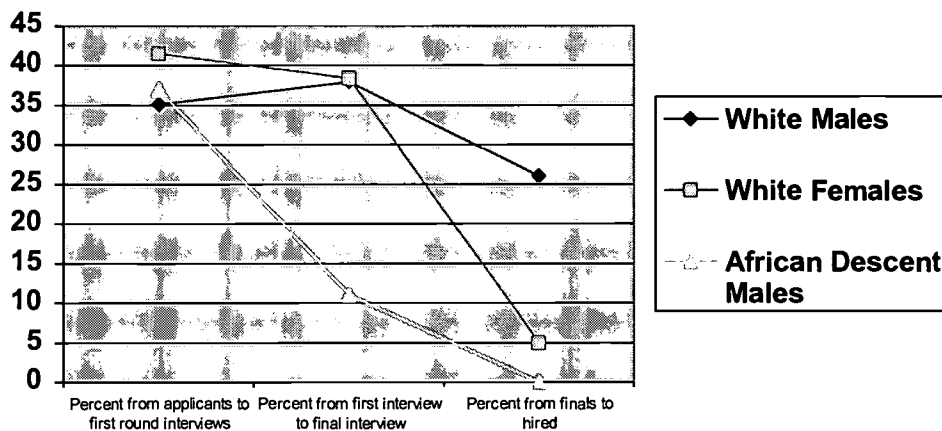
Table 3 displays the same numbers as proportions within race/ethnicity and sex categories. The percent of applicants that make it from the application stage to the first round of interviews ranges from 35% of white males to 42.8% of African descent females. However, the proportion of applicants hired range from 0% of African descent

males to 2.5% of white males, with .8% of white females who applied being hired. Again, the small number of African descent females skews the results.

Table 3. Percent of Applicants at Each Search Decision Point within Race/ethnicity and Sex Group				
	African Descent Applicants		White Applicants	
	Percent of African Descent Male Applicants	Percent of African Descent Female Applicants	Percent of White Male Applicants	Percent of White Female Applicants
First Round Interviews	37	42.8	35.1	41.6
Final Round Interview	4	14.2	13.3	16
Hired	0	14.2	2.5	.8

Figure 1 illustrates the changes from decision points for each of three groups: white males, white females, and African descent males. White males maintain proportional representation throughout the process, while white females make it to final interviews but not to superintendentcies. African descent males are removed from the process before the final interview.

Figure 1. Representation by Race/ethnicity and Sex throughout the Superintendent Search



Each of the perspectives on the data indicates that white males are still over represented in proportion to their numbers in the applicant.

Our second take on this issue was ask African American and white male superintendents and assistant superintendents in New York about their job-hunting experiences. We surveyed a sample of white male superintendents and assistant superintendents and all African American male superintendents and assistant

superintendents; response rates to the surveys were acceptable for superintendents, but less so for assistant superintendents (Table 5).

Table 5 Response Rates by Race/Ethnicity and Role	
	Percent Response
African Descent Superintendents	78
African Descent Assistant Superintendents	46
White Superintendents	72
White Assistant Superintendents	56

*Applicant Reports of Pursuit of the Superintendency.* Our first study documented the presence of African descent candidates in the superintendent applicant pool on Long Island and traced the patterns from application to appointment. This study continued the strand by examining application patterns through applicant reports.

This second study, narrowed to include only male applicants, indicates the African descent candidates are pursuing the superintendency in equal or greater numbers than white candidates. A higher proportion of African descent assistant superintendents applied for a superintendency than did white candidates and a considerably higher percentage of African American superintendents indicate they will apply for another superintendency in the future.

Table 6: Pursuing the Superintendency				
	Superintendents		Assistant Superintendents	
	African Descent	White	African Descent	White
Percent Applied to Superintendency during Study Year	15	15	27	19
Percent Plan to Apply to Superintendency in Future	71	27	45	50

We also found that White candidates have more choices than do African descent candidates. All of the African American applicants for the superintendency (whether superintendents or assistant superintendents) applied for positions in minority school districts. Additionally, 33% applied for superintendencies in white districts. Not all white applicants applied to white districts: 85% applied to white districts and some of these candidates also applied to a minority district. Overall, 28% of white candidates applied to a minority district. Despite similarities in percentages of candidates who

applied for “cross race/ethnicity” superintendencies, the responses to those applications are quite dissimilar. None of the African American candidates that applied for superintendencies in white districts were offered a position. However, 57% of white candidates were offered a superintendency in a minority district, although none accepted the offer. 78% of white candidates who applied to a superintendency in a white district were offered the position and 50% accepted the position.

Table 7 Superintendent Applications for Superintendencies by Race		
	African Descent Applicants	White Applicants
Percent applied for a superintendency in white district	33	85
Of those who applied, percent Offered a superintendency in white district	0	78
Of those offered, percent accepted superintendency in white district	0	50
Percent applied for superintendency in minority district	100	28
Of those who applied, percent offered a superintendency in minority district	100	57
Of those offered, percent accepted superintendency in minority district	33	0

**Barriers to African Descent Candidates for the Superintendency.** The numbers painted a picture of less opportunity and less success for African descent and white female candidates. But these percentages don't tell us what it feels like or how it happens. For that, we wanted to hear from both African descent and white assistant superintendents and superintendents, as well as from search consultants and school board presidents. Interviews with those on the hiring side of the search as well as with 10 superintendents – five African descent and five white -- explored the job seeking experiences of through stories of the search process.

**Ordinariness of Racism.** The ordinariness of the absence of African descent candidates for superintendencies in white districts was particularly obvious in our interviews with search consultants and school board presidents. In most cases, these gatekeepers hadn't considered the possibility of any but white candidates and, thus,

didn't question the lack of minority applicants or see this absence as unusual or worthy of thought. Most white people had not questioned their assumptions and the "normalness" of race matching of superintendent to student population. Critical race theory examines the ordinariness of racism. This was clear throughout the study, particularly in the unquestioned assumption that African descent candidates were appropriate for positions in minority districts and only minority districts. This wasn't an open or discussed criteria, nor – when we probed – did we find it was one on which search consultants and other white respondents had thought about. It was assumed.

*Search consultants protect their own interests.* Search consultants rarely move African descent candidates forward after the first interview. Board presidents we interviewed and in their surveys reported that they did not see credentials from the initial pool of candidates, nor even know how many or who applied. Thus, they had no idea that African descent candidates were in the pool. Although African descent candidates made it to the first screening interview with the search consultant, few were moved forward. Both our study of the search process from the consultant and board president perspective and our study from the perspective of African descent candidates confirms this pattern.

Critical race theorist might impose a line a reasoning that argues it is not in the best interest of the search consultants to seek out other sources. Interest convergence holds that search consultants do not do more to open the field to a diverse candidate pool because they want to protect to promote African descent candidates in a white district. Search consultants cannot afford to do something radical that might jeopardize future employment opportunities.

The second theme that critical race theorists support is referred to as "interest convergence" or material determinism. This feature of critical race theory maintains that because "racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working - class people (physically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it" (Delgado & Stefancic, p.7, 2000). In theory, interest convergence looks at who stands to profit by perpetuating racism.

On search consultant reported that he has done searches for districts where "I have been told, do not bring a minority or a woman to the board. When asked how he could justify his actions, he maintained that he had an obligation to bring a slate of finalist to the board that were representative of the community.

Another African descent candidate related his experience with a search consultant.

The consultant said, "You are a good guy and I think that you could do a wonderful job here. You know the community and you have the experience." After a short pause the consultant continued "the board has already told me don't bring any minorities, don't bring any woman and don't bring any three dollar bills."

I was puzzled and asked him what a three-dollar bill was and he said, "queers and faggots".

All the African American superintendents believed that when they were given a first round interview with the search consultant for a white district, the process was not genuine. They viewed the invitation as a courtesy and believed that their application would not be given serious consideration. They presumed that the search consultant's invitations or calls were intended to "kill two birds with one stone." For example, the district(s) wanted the records to reflect that, (1) there was diversity in the applicant pool; and (2) the district wanted to satisfy equal opportunity employee regulations for recruiting and hiring personnel.

They will seek you [minorities] out for those districts that have high concentrations of children of color, and also districts that are less affluent than other districts. If the consultant seeks you out for the other ones [white school districts], more often than not it will really be perfunctory. They'll say that they are following the federal law of equal opportunity employers. They [districts and search consultants] want to say that there was diversity in the candidate pool when they go out to the public [to report on the search]. However, they were not the candidates of choice because they'll say it just wasn't the right match. They use phrases such as right fit and right match [to justify their selection].

Another African American superintendent vividly recalled the duplicitous tactics employed by one search consultant who contacted her. The search consultant used her to make a contact and "pad" their applicant list.

One set of reflections provides an interesting twist on racism. An African American superintendent reported that the search consultant thought she might not be black enough for a minority district.

I was the first black administrator in the central office in EF&G school district. The white superintendent at the time wanted to make sure that I was black before he hired me. The superintendent wanted to say that he hired someone black. The conversation went like something like this. "Before I hire you, tell me you are Black. Are you Black?" I said yes. It was pretty blatant then, and maybe it is still pretty blatant now.

*Disproportionate Opportunities.* Thus, an African descent candidates' best chance for employment as a superintendent is in a minority school district. Prior to the superintendency, 90% of the African American superintendents worked in minority



school districts, and very few of them have had experience in non-minority districts. All African descent candidates applied to at least one minority district for a superintendent's job. Although 33% applied to white districts, none were hired in a white district.

A larger percentage of the assistant superintendents (58%) had been or were employed in non-minority school districts, which might bring a different future for them. On the other hand, none of them were hired for superintendencies in the white districts to which they applied.

Unlike their white counterparts, African American superintendents and assistant superintendents are not invited to apply to white school districts. White candidates are invited to apply for positions in minority districts, where 70% of the African American superintendents also were invited into the applicant pool.

A dominant theme that emerged from focus group and interview data concerned the different levels of access by race: White candidates have greater access to positions and more opportunities for advancement than do African American candidates. An underlying corollary to this theme is the belief that African American candidates get the positions white superintendents no longer want—the "leftovers". One "Big City" superintendent reported that "if someone white could and would run this district, there is no way I would be sitting here now." Another African descent superintendent made this observation, "Historically we've had greater access to low-performing school districts or districts that have fallen into disrepair. It doesn't matter what your credentials are. It doesn't matter what your track record is."

What has changed since Scott's landmark study is that today, there are a sprinkling of African American superintendents in the suburbs, but like their brethren a score ago, they, too, administer districts that have both high need and large minority populations.

A number of superintendents commented that they were often invited to apply to openings in predominantly black or minority school districts, but not in white school districts. For instance, one superintendent commented that when he has been invited by search consultants to apply for superintendencies they have always been invitations to apply in majority-minority school districts, where there is a preponderance of children of color. Drawing on his professional experiences this African American superintendent made this observation.

I've had many inquiries to apply for other positions. I am in Westchester County where there are some very affluent school districts. Recently superintendencies opened up in East Chester, Chappaqua, Peekskill, and Greenburgh 7 and one other one. I got a lot of inquiries about Peekskill, which is a minority district. I got a lot of inquiries about Greenburgh 7, which is close to White Plains. No one ever asked me

anything about [applying to] East Chester. Nobody asked me anything about [applying to] Chappaqua. Nobody asked me anything about the other districts. So that there is this thing where they fear the match would be that an African American person would be most suitable for a district that represents that population, as opposed to saying that if you can do the job, you can do the job here. You can also do the job in East Chester. You can do the job in Chappaqua. You can do the job in Scarsdale. But all the time, when I get inquiries it will be for a school district that is in a community that is less affluent than other communities. It makes you wonder why.

*Invisibility of African Descent Candidates.* African descent candidates are applying for superintendencies. It is not the case that there are no candidates. However, because board presidents don't see initial pools and because African descent candidates are not invited to apply and actually discouraged from applying, white gatekeepers can claim that there are no candidates available.

*Requirement of More and Better Credentials.* The double standard in these searches was evident in all three studies. African descent and white women had to have more education, broader backgrounds, and more experience to be considered for the superintendency than did white male candidates.

Not surprisingly, focus group discussions pointed out a double standard for white and African American candidates. The African American male superintendents placed a higher premium on the doctorate than white male superintendents. They assumed that the doctorate would open doors and invite interviews. The African descent candidates often talked about the pressure to attend a more prestigious university, even if they didn't believe it would equip them as well as one not as prestigious, because they felt they had to have top credentials to be considered for a position.

The white superintendents did not share this assumption about the power of the doctorate. A white superintendent made the case that standards have been lowered as the candidate pool has declined. For example, as a white superintendent said, "not having it [doctorate] doesn't hurt you as much now because there are not enough people out there with it [doctorate]." The question is, does this treatment cut across race and gender lines? The data do not support equal treatment across racial lines. Being African American and not having it [doctorate] is not the same as being white and not having it.

The informants generally agreed that the level of competence and kinds of experiences candidates brought to the table should have some bearing on the superintendent selection process. However, there was strong feeling among the informants that a double standard was held, and that African Americans candidates had to meet a higher and/or different standard than their white counterparts. African

American candidate said that their experiences had taught them that those who control the process play the “qualification/competence game” and inconsistently apply the rules for selection and/ or ignored them altogether. For example, one African American superintendent was quick to point out that the field will not “take you seriously if you do not have the *hard skills* as part of your repertoire”. Knowledge and expertise in finance, budgeting and negotiations were examples of *hard skills*. This superintendent remarked that,

Sometimes we [African Americans] go into jobs that aren't perceived as well qualifying for the superintendency. In fact, they may not be well qualifying. We sometimes go into personnel jobs ...or we [African American administrators] go into curriculum coordinator jobs. Those aren't the jobs, those aren't the hard-core skills that the field is going to look at and say, this is the person that's ready for the superintendency. Whether you are or not is irrelevant. But when you go into jobs and don't have business experience ... you haven't negotiated ... you haven't managed something of significance within an organization ... If you're thinking about being a superintendent, you're really wasting your time. (Eric, (p. 12)

In support of the above comments, one superintendent shared his personal assessment on the matter of hard skills versus soft skills in the context of selecting candidates for superintendencies.

I had a traditional path [career path]. I was assistant principal of a middle school for five years, principal of a high school for eight years. I was in the central office for seven years. I had 20 years of building and central office experience before I became a superintendent. I know a guy right now who is superintendent of the Biltmore School District (fictitious) in Westchester County, and his experience was that of the principal of the XYZ High School in ABCD. I know other people who are not people of color who ascend to these positions without a lot of breadth and depth to their experiences, yet they will make sure that we [African Americans] have that before we'll get an opportunity to be at the top.

One superintendent stated that,

I have seen people only in their position maybe five years ... administrative position five years ... and they [white superintendents] don't

have to go through all of the hoops that we have to go through and then some more. They go right to the superintendency.

*Persistent Optimism about Fairness.* Furthermore, African descent candidates reported different beliefs about the relationship between work, competence, and rewards than did white candidates – particularly white male candidates. African descent candidates viewed themselves as “outsiders” and were more inclined to play by the rules of the dominant group. The African American superintendents have an expectation that hard work will not go unrewarded. They live by a code of ethics, which says that an individual’s work will speak for itself. In a world dominated by whites, African Americans developed a work ethic that was nurtured by their need “to get ahead”.

Being “a cut above” meant out performing their white peers in a variety of fields such as scholarship, athletics, and the arts. This double standard outlined at some level is self-imposed by the minority group on itself. However, if we interpret critical race theory accurately, this behavior facilitates whites’ dominance over people of color.

*Lack of Multiple Job Opportunities.* When it came to identifying African American superintendents who had three or more superintendencies the interviewees drew a blank. On the other hand, when asked to identify white people who had held three or more superintendencies, interviewees had no difficulty coming up with names.

The available data paints an interesting picture with respect to the number of multiple superintendencies African Americans have had in comparison to white superintendents. Twenty-eight percent of the African American superintendents interviewed had held more than one superintendency while 40% of the white superintendents interviewed have had at least two superintendencies.

Second and third chance opportunities for African Americans are rare. An African American male superintendent related that it has been disheartening to passed over and watch his white counterparts get the “preferred” jobs. However, what he finds even more discouraging is that his colleagues do not measure up to him in terms of competence. For example, this superintendent has taken a failing district and turned it around. His accomplishments covered in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. With a tinge of sarcasm in his voice he said that, “Were I a white superintendent, I would have had to hire a secretary to field the offers and telephone calls from other districts. That’s what I mean about racism. Whites say they would hire an African American candidate but can’t find one. They can’t find me for a white district even though I am getting national attention?”

*Hiring practices that allow for bias.* Reflecting the possibility for increased race and gender bias in a process that includes many layers, an African American superintendent pointed out how multiple-level participation in the search harms candidates from under represented groups.

I get very concerned when I see these group interviews. This requires that people go through these different stages. If I have to wait for a candidate to get to my desk, there are too many obstacles along the way ... too many people with their biases and their prejudices ... that the candidate will never make it to the superintendent for consideration. That's why I get very concerned when you have to go through all these levels. When you have these multiple interviews where everybody gets an opportunity to challenge and to question, any thing can occur.

### ***Summary***

Things haven't changed much. African descent candidates are under represented in the superintendency. They are still required to have better credentials and are typed as appropriate for minority districts only. These studies document considerable representation of African descent candidates in the superintendent pool, but they aren't getting to swim.

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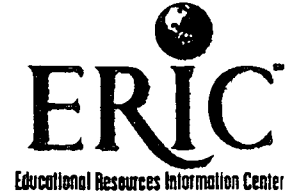
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<sup>1</sup> This inquiry, which consists of three studies, is a typical example of faculty-doctoral research in our department. The strand began with work by the faculty member. Along the way, a doctoral student indicated he had similar interests. The faculty member and the doctoral student then did a study together. A third and fourth study were undertaken by the student for his dissertation, working with the faculty member.



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