

PERCEPTIONS OF MENTORING: EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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This descriptive mixed methods study gathered both quantitative and qualitative data on the mentoring experiences of women superintendents in a Southeastern state. The quantitative participants included 39 women superintendents from this state and the qualitative portion of the study was comprised of eight female superintendents purposefully selected from that group. Overall findings revealed women superintendents had positive mentoring experiences that included the importance of having a female mentor and establishing a support system. Additional findings revealed social-emotional based elements for effective mentoring relationships leading to challenge, support, and encouragement of other female educational leaders through both formal and informal mentoring.

Introduction

Historically women have held the majority of positions in the teaching field but hold the smallest percentages of leadership positions, especially that of superintendent (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). According to Katz (2006), if 75% of women occupy teaching positions, expectations would be that more would obtain the role of superintendent. Contrarily, women in the superintendency have not increased in number at the same rate as their male counterparts; in fact, they remain disproportionate compared to males. Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, and Ellerson (2010) reported women make up approximately 24% of superintendents across the nation, while men account for nearly 86%.

As an aging population of baby boomers prepares to retire, a crisis looms in the K-12 leadership ranks. Kinsella and Richards (2004) reported there would be a shortage of school leaders in the near future, and Glass and Franceschini (2007) stated that by 2015 several vacancies could exist, specifically in the superintendency. Within the next five years, approximately 39 percent of superintendents plan to either leave their position, or retire (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2010).

The disproportionate number of women in the superintendency could possibly be linked to challenges they face, both on the road to advancement and once they are in the position of superintendent. Issues such as gender bias (Glass & Franceschini 2007), work family balance (Darrington & Sharrett, 2008), and a lack role models (Sherman, Munoz, & Pankake, 2008) have been noted as specific challenges of women superintendents. In order to increase the number of women joining in the superintendency and continuing to support those currently in the position, research reveals that mentoring is an avenue that holds promise.

Mentoring is an important component of building support systems for personnel in administration and leadership (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005). A mentor can be described as one who teaches, coaches, advises, trains, directs, protects, sponsors, guides and leads another individual or individuals (Brunner, 2000; Grogan, 1996; Kochan 2003; Shakeshaft, 1989). According to Kram (1985), mentoring is a developmental relationship with the goal of career development and guidance for the mentee.

Mentors play a critical role in the recruitment and development of female leaders. According to Kinsella and Richards (2004), mentors have been associated with helping mentees attain access to and achieve success in leadership positions such as the superintendency. Similarly, Gilmour and Kinsella (2009) indicated mentors play a crucial role in sharpening a superintendent's decision-making skills, regardless of whether the superintendent is a veteran or novice. Brunner and Grogan (2007) noted that a lack of support and mentorship was a main reason that there are few females holding superintendent positions. Clearly mentoring, and specifically the mentoring experiences of women, is an area that requires further examination.

Review of Literature

A number of theories exist regarding women's studies and of mentoring relationships, but rarely are both discussed in concert. As such, the framework for this study was based on

the broad theoretical areas of women in educational leadership and the elements of mentoring relationships.

Women and the Superintendency

In 2000, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA, n.d.) conducted a ten-year study of American School Superintendents that indicated the number of female superintendents increased from 6.6% in 1992, to 13.2% in 2000. In 2007, Glass and Franceschini conducted a survey of 1,338 superintendents that provided a snapshot of school leadership in America and women's preparedness for the superintendency. This study indicated that the number of female superintendents increased to nearly 22%.

This study was followed by the decennial study on the American School Superintendent conducted by Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, and Ellerson (2010). Similar studies have been conducted every ten years since 1923. In this study of 1,867 superintendents surveyed women respondents composed 24.1%. Although the number of women superintendents is increasing, 51% of superintendents surveyed indicated they would not be in the superintendency by 2015, which indicates a substantial turnover in the near future.

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) study (2000) also showed most women superintendents began their administrative careers in elementary positions and were employed in small districts. Grogan and Brunner (2005) revealed a large number of women superintendents were found to pursue the following career paths: teaching, assistant principal or principal, and central office. Nearly 40% of female superintendents were recorded as coming from an assistant superintendent's position. This path to superintendency was quite different from male superintendents, of whom 53% came directly from the principalship.

In relation to career advancement, Grogan and Brunner (2005) found 75% of women superintendents reported that networking assisted them in securing their position. Findings also indicated most women superintendents reported their boards hired them to be educational leaders rather than managers. Interpersonal skills and organizational relationships ranked higher for women, indicating a strength in the more social aspects of the position. However, 73% of women sought professional development in the area of curriculum and instruction compared to 39% of men.

Challenges Faced by Women Superintendents

Investigations have been conducted by numerous researchers concerning challenges women face when pursuing the superintendency (Blount, 1998; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Derrington & Sharrett, 2008, Gilmour & Kinsella, 2009; Katz, 2006). One reason the superintendency contains disparities among women and men may be due to the existence of the glass ceiling and the lack of mentoring opportunities for women and people of color (Haar, Rankin, & Robicheau, 2009; Kamler, 2006; Marina & Fonteneau, 2012). Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, and Ellerson (2010) noted that superintendents reported the most crucial source for enlightening elements of their practice was peer superintendents. Research revealed individuals are most likely to

mentor those most like themselves (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). More specifically, Sherman (2000) reported that male administrators naturally move toward mentoring younger males who they view as younger versions of themselves. Since the majority of superintendents are male and they are typically pursuing a mentee of their own gender, establishing a mentoring relationship is a clear challenge for women superintendents.

Support Systems for Women Superintendents

Due to the variety of challenges that have existed for women superintendents, one might assume that some of the professional organizations would provide support and guidance for this population. Unfortunately, Glass (2000) observed women had a less developed mentoring system than men and Brunner and Grogan (2007) noted a lack of mentors and professional networks for women superintendents.

A number of organizations have continued to be available to school administrators seeking professional development. However, most professional organizations for school administrators promote assistance for school and district educational leaders in general; women administrators are not offered targeted assistance within these organizations.

Mentoring Women Superintendents

The State of the American School Superintendency (2007) reported that 39% of superintendents across the nation indicated that they had received no mentoring before becoming a superintendent. In comparison, 33% of these individuals indicated they had received mentoring from a superintendent and this experience aided them in their transition into the superintendency. According to the research of Sherman, Munoz, and Pankake (2008), mentoring plays an important role in developing confidence and leadership and networking skills; which is a problem for women superintendents since there exists a lack of mentors and role models for this population. Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011), who examined female administrators and their mentoring experiences, found these relationships beneficial in assisting women in gaining high level leadership positions. These correlations increased when the mentor and mentee shared many similarities such as values, background, experiences, and outlook.

Several studies have been conducted regarding the contributions females can bring to the superintendency (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992; Grogan, 1996; Helgesen, 1990). Unfortunately, these offerings may go unnoticed unless there are more women chosen for the available positions. Grogan (1996) claimed female aspirants to the superintendency have defied traditional perspectives by providing unique and individual approaches to the position. These can include using alternative techniques to leadership, reforming outdated practices, and placing more emphasis on teaching and learning rather than organizational management. Helgesen (1990) reported that women succeed by employing their feminine strengths such as supporting, encouraging, teaching, open communication, soliciting input, and creating a positive, collegial work environment. Aburdene and Naisbitt (1992) suggested that women are interpersonal experts who network well when given the opportunity. Considering the positive attributes women

have to offer the superintendency, mentoring was explored as another option to provide additional support for females in this role.

Women superintendents require positive, encouraging mentors and career environments that are supportive (Grogan and Brunner, 2007) and Glass (2000) specifically noted this group benefits from a mentoring experience. In addition, Gilmour and Kinsella (2009) indicated mentors play a role in honing a superintendent's decision-making skills and Odum (2010) noted that both networking and mentoring were important factors that existed in the circles of the superintendency. Mentors can assist aspiring women superintendents in gaining positions as well. Dana and Bourisaw (2006) stated women with mentors shift into school districts or school leadership positions more rapidly than those who are without mentors.

Elements of Mentoring

Mentoring women superintendents can consist of formal and informal experiences. Informal mentoring is defined in the literature (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011) as a relationship that develops spontaneously or informally without any assistance. In this study, informal mentoring experiences were described as those that were impromptu and free flowing, where there was a comfort level between mentor and mentee. These sessions contained an array of topics that could be discussed at any time. Similarly, formal mentoring is described as a relationship that results from a structured program that contains specific criteria for implementation.

There are two main areas of support that mentors have provided for their protégés: vocational/career and psychosocial (Bauer, 1999; Chao, 1997; Kram, 1985). Friday and Friday (2002) reported the career development functions included actions such as assisting the mentee in obtaining desirable positions, coaching, running interference, providing challenging assignments, and introducing the mentee to influential people in the field.

Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011) investigated female administrators and their mentoring experiences in higher education through a quantitative survey with women in Tennessee. Mentors proved beneficial to those females who do aspire to the top leadership positions. The authors also noted that mentoring is more effective for these women when the mentor and mentee share many similarities, such as values, background, experiences, and outlook. The study pointed out that mentor relationships that develop informally through natural interactions are generally more beneficial than formal relationships. Kamler (2006) noted that friendship actions such as reassurance, support, transparency, and availability were crucial constituents of mentoring.

There is some disagreement in the literature related to gender and the mentorship experience. Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011) found that there were no differences in the provisions of career or psychosocial mentoring between mentees with female mentors and mentees with male mentors in higher education. However, females who had female mentors perceived that the gender was important and would have an impact on the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship, which was supported by former research (Lowe, 2003; Wolverton, 2002).

Alsbury and Hackman (2006) found that both principals and superintendents noted benefits in the development of skills when addressing difficult issues. Positive relationship building between the mentor and mentee was recorded as important. In addition, gender and race were two crucial variables that should be considered in mentoring programs.

Although studies on mentoring women exist, few have been conducted specifically on women administrators, especially at the state level. The purpose of this study was to gain information on the perceptions and experiences with mentoring by women superintendents in an effort to gain further insight on the extent to which women superintendents have been mentored, how they describe these experiences, what elements are contained in an effective mentoring program, and how an effective mentoring program could encourage women to enter the superintendency. The results of this study could be utilized to assist persons and agencies in mentoring women who are or wish to become superintendents. This information may lead to an increase in the support offered to female educators, potentially creating further opportunities for advancement and decreasing disparities in the number of women superintendents.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How extensive is mentoring among women superintendents in one Southeastern state?
2. How do women superintendents in one Southeastern state describe their experiences with mentoring?

Methods

The researchers examined the effects of mentoring on women superintendents by utilizing a sequential descriptive mixed methods approach. A three-part survey was used for the quantitative portion of the study. The first two sections included descriptive data including demographic items and information about superintendents' mentoring experiences. The third section listed potential elements of an effective mentoring program specific to the position of superintendent (see Appendix A). The qualitative portion consisted of a semi-structured interview protocol designed to further explore the mentoring experiences of the participants (see Appendix B). All of the survey and interview questions were developed by the researchers based upon elements found in the literature regarding mentorship and the superintendency. In addition, prior to beginning the research, four retired women superintendents were contacted and formed a panel to establish face validity for the quantitative survey instrument developed by the researchers and to refine the interview questions for the qualitative phase.

Participants

The survey was sent electronically via Survey Monkey to all 52 women designated as superintendents in one Southeastern state in the current or previous school year (2011-2013). Of the 52 surveys distributed, 39 were returned and analyzed. This number

represented a response rate of 75% and yielded a 95% confidence level and a confidence interval of eight. Of the 39 respondents, 84.6% (N=33) were Caucasian, 10.3% (N= 4) were African American, and 5.1% (N=2) identified as “other”. A high percentage of Caucasian of women superintendents reported in this study, mirroring the AASA national survey which was 94% for both men and women (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2010).

Survey respondents were asked if they would be willing to participate in follow up interviews. For the qualitative phase, eight women superintendents were purposefully selected from those who participated in the survey. From those who indicated they had been mentored, four participants were chosen from rural districts, three from urban districts, and one from a suburban district. Each interview lasted approximately 25 minutes and identities of participants remained confidential throughout the process. The eight interviewees are described in Table 1.

Table 1.

Qualitative Participants

Superintendent Number	Years of Experience	District Type	Mentor Gender
Superintendent 1	5	Rural	Male
Superintendent 2	6	Suburban	Male
Superintendent 3	11	Urban	Female
Superintendent 4	6	Urban	Male
Superintendent 5	5	Urban	Male then Female
Superintendent 6	1	Rural	Female
Superintendent 7	1	Rural	Female
Superintendent 8	5	Rural	Female

Data Analysis

Data collected using Survey Monkey were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies, percentages, and distributions were reviewed to assist in answering the research questions. The qualitative data were analyzed using open, axial, and analytical coding in accordance with procedures for a basic interpretive study (Miles & Huberman,

1994; Merriam, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First, the researchers performed initial coding of responses, followed by identification of patterns, which in turn led to the identification of broad themes. The first level of data analysis involved reading each transcript in its entirety and noting significant points. The researchers then reviewed the notes and recorded any commonalities that existed. Transcripts were analyzed multiple times, leading to 19 initial elements and then narrowed down to six patterns. A third level of analysis produced the major themes discussed in the findings. Triangulation of data was utilized to corroborate evidence retrieved from the panel, quantitative surveys, and qualitative interviews. In addition, feedback was solicited from the emerging findings from the women superintendents interviewed, described by Merriam (2009) as member checking.

Findings

The findings are arranged by the method used. The first section includes the quantitative results which addresses Research Question 1: How extensive is mentoring among women superintendents? The second section covers the qualitative results, which addresses Research Question 2: How do women superintendents describe their experiences with mentoring?

Quantitative Results (Extensiveness of mentoring)

Data showed that 84.6% (n=33) of respondents indicated they had a mentor when they became superintendent and 15.4% (n=6) reported they did not have a mentor when they obtained the superintendency. It is important to note that in the state where this study took place, there is not a universal requirement for superintendents to have mentors.

Regarding the length of the mentorship experience, 58.8% (n=20) had a mentor zero to one year; 35.3% (n=12) had a mentor one to two years; 2.9% (n=1) had a mentor from three to five years; and 2.9% (n=1) had their mentor more than five years. In relation to gender, participants who had male mentors accounted for 63.6% of the survey responses, while 36.4% indicated they had a female mentor.

Participants were asked to indicate the type(s) of mentoring they had experienced. Dunbar and Kinnerly's (2011) definitions of informal and formal mentoring were provided with the question to assist in clarification regarding mentoring received. An option of selecting both formal and informal mentoring experiences was listed for those participants who may have had more than one type of mentoring experience. Participants indicated 56.4% (n=22) received both informal and formal mentoring. A total of 17.9% (n=7) received informal mentoring, 10.3% (n=4) received formal mentoring, and 15.4% (n=6) reported they did not have a mentor.

Finally, participants were asked to rank the areas they perceived to be important elements to be emphasized in an effective mentoring program (see Appendix A). A Likert scale was utilized to rate the importance of each element listed, with a score of five (5) denoting the highest level of importance for each particular element. The top 10 effective elements listed by the respondents can be found in Table 2. The percentage of

respondents who selected each item is listed followed by the actual number in parentheses.

Table 2.
Top Ten Effective Elements of Mentoring

Element	Ranking of Importance for Mentorship					Mean Score
	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always	
School Board Relations	0	2.7% (1)	0	18.9% (7)	78.4% (29)	4.73
Personnel Matters	0	0	5.4% (2)	24.3% (9)	70.3% (26)	4.65
Budget and Finance	0	2.7% (1)	2.7% (1)	27% (10)	67.6% (25)	4.59
Strategic Planning	0	0	18.9% (7)	32.4% (12)	48.6% (18)	4.30
School/Community Relations	0	0	29.7% (11)	27% (10)	43.2% (16)	4.14
Familiarity w/Board Policies	0	10.8% (4)	16.2% (6)	29.7% (11)	43.2% (16)	4.05
School Law	2.7% (1)	5.4% (2)	18.9% (7)	32.4% (12)	37.8% (14)	4.0
Politics in Education	0	2.7% (1)	24.3% (9)	48.6% (18)	24.3% (9)	3.95
Collaboration	2.7% (1)	2.7% (1)	29.7% (11)	32.4% (12)	32.4% (12)	3.89
Stress Management	5.4% (2)	5.4% (2)	21.6% (8)	32.4% (12)	35.1% (13)	3.86

Qualitative Results (Experiences with Mentoring)

All eight participants indicated their overall mentoring experiences had been positive and beneficial. Mentoring experiences were broken into sub-themes that emerged based upon the interview responses. The sub-themes included: the importance of a good relationship and support, a preference for a combination of formal and informal mentoring, and having a female mentor.

Formal/Informal Combination. Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011) defined formal mentoring as a relationship that results from a structured program that contains specific

criteria for implementation and informal mentoring as a relationship that develops spontaneously or informally without any assistance. These were the definitions used for the survey question that asked about the types of mentoring experiences participants received.

However, the results of the interviews led to a much different interpretation of formal and informal mentoring experiences. Participants described formal mentoring as instances of mentoring that were more structured and purposeful, with the interaction is limited to a predetermined set of topics and meeting times. Conversely, informal mentoring experiences were those that were impromptu and free flowing, with less structure based on a comfort level between mentor and mentee. These perspectives on formal and informal mentoring were focused more around the nature of the relationship between mentor and mentee, rather than the nature of the activities.

Six of the eight participants interviewed revealed that having a combination of formal and informal mentoring in the relationship with their mentor was beneficial. Superintendent 7 disclosed her mentoring relationship was informal in that she could call her mentor anytime on any topic and formal in that the mentor gave her assignments. For example, “I had to list my goals for the 2011-12 school year and she looked over these goals, gave me feedback, and let me know if I was on the right track for priority setting” (Superintendent 7).

Similarly, Superintendent 2 stated,

My mentoring was a combination of both that began with formal mentoring that contained protocols and timelines and the informal portion came in when I casually called him between the formal, scheduled sessions. In the formal sessions, he guided me and helped facilitate my thinking without giving me advice.

Superintendent 3 indicated the formal portion consisted of assignments while the informal portion was geared toward the relationship. She shared:

I could just say [to my mentor] you know I’ve got this situation and this is how I’m thinking about handling it. What do you think? That’s kind of informal because we are just having a conversation. Or I could get specific formal feedback in writing of something I had done, for example, my goals, my priorities that I knew I wanted, I would want to know her point of view and if that was the route I was supposed to be taking. (Superintendent 3)

In describing her mentoring experience, one participant said, “It was very informal. I felt very free to ask questions. I felt like there were not any questions that I didn’t feel comfortable asking so in other words, there were no dumb questions” (Superintendent 5).

Support System. All eight superintendents reported having positive experiences from mentoring and 75% (n=6) of them specifically mentioned mentoring was a supportive system for them. Superintendent 1 revealed the most beneficial portion of her mentoring was feeling she was supported and not alone in her concerns. She felt better,

“Knowing that there are other superintendents out there who face the same types of issues and you know hearing how they deal with things in their district in order for you to try it in my district” (Superintendent 1).

Superintendent 7 reported she experienced a supportive mentoring experience when she initially began the superintendency. She indicated support was a necessary ingredient for success:

My mentor provided support throughout my experience. She let me know quickly that other superintendents had the same problems and issues as me and that brought relief. Sometimes you think you are the only one with these issues and you are not. Just knowing you have good people out there that are willing to help you and support you for success was a benefit. (Superintendent 7)

Superintendent 4 reported an effective element needed in a mentoring program would include support for managing emotions. She also described the important role of mentors in assisting women with directing their feelings:

It would be nice to have people to tell us how you manage your emotions in this job, how do detach when you make a decision and what do you have to do to take care of yourself. I think this would really be beneficial to a lot of women. (Superintendent 4)

Positive Relationship. All eight superintendents disclosed having an excellent relationship with your mentor could be advantageous. Superintendent 2 revealed it was important to have a good relationship with your mentor and someone accessible. She described why:

They assigned me someone geographically close to me and someone who had a lot of experience with different types of situations since I was in a difficult situation where someone had been fired and there was a lot to clean up. We had a good relationship immediately and this was instrumental in my success with a difficult situation. (Superintendent 2)

In addition, having a mentor with a similar outlook and character can prove to be key to the relationship, “My mentor matched my personality and I think that is important” (Superintendent 3). Overall, the participants revealed a highly developed relationship with their mentor. Descriptions portrayed during interviews indicated these affiliations were important attributes of a positive mentoring experience.

Female Mentor. Overall, five participants indicated female superintendents desire other female superintendents for mentoring due to specific challenges their genders face. One participant was assigned a male mentor, but sought out a female one. She explained:

You know there's nobody to really help us through things and I think women have a...another dimension of challenge. We tend to approach problems differently...I mean men superintendents are very fine people and I enjoy conversations with them, but how they would go about handling problems such as personnel issues, communication problems, and things like that are just a whole lot different than I would...when it comes to those real solutions women tend to have a different style...when you talk about something you have done and how you went about something [with male colleagues], you feel like you are talking another vocabulary. (Superintendent 4)

Similarly, another participant reported she initially had a male mentor, but later began leaning on other female superintendents. She shared, "Even though I had a male mentor, I leaned heavily on other female superintendents because I felt like sometimes some of the same issues may not be the same for a male superintendent" (Superintendent 5).

Similarly, Superintendent 6 believed given the state of K-12 education today, having a female mentor assigned to new women superintendents was key. She elaborated:

Being a superintendent is definitely a man's world and so there are some things you have to deal with that you are going to deal with the majority of men. The committees are going to be men and other groups you are in are going to be men. It was exciting that the mentor I had was a female veteran superintendent to give me guidance in the role of being a superintendent, but also in being a woman in a man's world. (Superintendent 6)

Discussion

All eight superintendents indicated their experiences with mentoring had been positive. The survey indicated 91% of participants who had a mentor believed the process had been beneficial to them in their current position of superintendent. Those who were not mentored responded that they believed the mentoring process would have been beneficial to their development as an administrator. Similarly, those women who took part in the interviews claimed mentoring had been valuable to them. Benefits noted by these participants included developing a support system for them in the district, creating a bond or good relationship that has continued, having a female mentor, and experiencing a combination of both formal and informal mentoring. Bjork and Kowalski's (2005) research was supported by this study in which participants revealed mentoring is an important component of building support systems for personnel in administration. The Iowa Department of Education's study by Alsbury and Hackmann (2006) maintained that positive relations between mentors and mentees were recorded as important and the same information was found in this research.

The majority of surveyed superintendents reported they secured their mentor's assistance for one year. Most of the interviewed superintendents disclosed they had mentors when they began their position and indicated they have maintained a mentor to date. However, many of their mentors have changed during this time and most sought

out a female mentor if they previously did not have one. Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011) pointed out in their study those mentoring relationships that develop informally lead to natural interactions that are generally more beneficial and longer lasting than those created more formally.

A total of 63.6% of surveyed participants indicated they had a male mentor. Previous AASA studies in 2000, 2007 and 2010 (n.d) revealed more males occupy the superintendency than do females, which may be the reason for the higher numbers of male mentors. Conversely, interviews revealed that while these women appreciated and supported male mentors in the field, they felt that women better understood women, and a female mentor could better assist with challenges specific to women. Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011), Lowe (2003), and Wolverson (2002) also reported females who had female mentors perceived their gender was important and would have an impact on the effect of the mentoring relationship.

The majority of females surveyed indicated they received a combination of both formal and informal mentoring experiences. In the interviews, participants commented on the importance of having formal (structured) and informal (unstructured) relationships with their mentor. An amalgamation of both formal and informal mentoring experiences and relationships would prove beneficial because it offers flexibility and organization in a constantly changing arena that requires preparation and planning.

As previously mentioned total of 91% of surveyed participants and 100% of interviewed women indicated mentoring had been an advantageous process for them, which substantiated earlier research by Sherman, Munoz, and Pankake (2008). Benefits of mentoring noted from the qualitative portion of this study included building a support system, creating a good relationship, being mentored by another female, and employing both formal and informal mentoring. Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011) found mentoring proved beneficial to females who have aspired to top leadership positions and the findings from this study reinforced those claims.

Implications

Current school administrators including assistant principals, principals, Title I Directors, Special Education Directors, Transportation Directors, Human Resource Directors, Assistant and Associate Superintendents could review this research to enlighten themselves on the benefits of a mentor if they were considering advancement to the position of superintendent. Superintendents could also review this study to perhaps mentor another female administrator in their district or another nearby district who desires to aspire to the superintendency. Based on this study, consideration should be given to assigning female mentors to other females aspiring or currently in the superintendency. A combination of both formal and informal mentoring should be recommended for these mentees. Formal mentoring sessions should include scheduled meetings between the mentor and mentee with designated topics, which should comprise board relations, budget, and personnel. Informal mentoring should be available when needed to discuss topics pertinent to the superintendent.

Conclusion

Overall, the information found by answering these questions provided insight into the mentoring experiences of women superintendents in one Southeastern State. Through this study, new knowledge was gained regarding the extent to which women superintendents in one Southeastern State have been mentored, how they described these experiences, what elements were contained in an effective mentoring program, and how an effective mentoring program could encourage women to enter the superintendency. In addition, the information gained from this research could assist persons and agencies in mentoring women who wish to become superintendents. This information might lead to the creation of additional opportunities for advancement for women in education, thereby decreasing disparities in the number of women superintendents.

Recommended/Suggestions for Future Research

This study has provided valuable insight into the mentoring experiences of women superintendents. However, other recommendations will be explored to enrich the topic of mentoring women superintendents. These include:

1. This study could be replicated in additional states to broaden the research and also compare to the results obtained to those found in the Southeastern state used for this study. It is recommended that both quantitative and qualitative research continue to be utilized as opposed to a single research method in order to produce enriched results.
2. It is recommended that a mixed methods study examining whether or not gender of the mentor makes a difference in the mentoring experience be conducted. This study could provide needed information regarding assignments of mentors to female superintendents.
3. Finally, a qualitative study could be developed to ascertain if formal, informal, or a combination of both styles would also be more productive for women superintendents being mentored. Information obtained from this study indicated that a combination of both would be most beneficial. Data obtained from this type of study could support or contradict results obtained in this research project. Mentor programs could utilize this to inform mentors what relationship and type of experience is preferred when guiding mentors.

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APPENDIX A

Part III – RECOMMENDED ELEMENTS FOR AN EFFECTIVE MENTORING PROGRAM

Listed below are areas that often require a school district superintendent’s knowledge and understanding. Please read each item and utilize the radio button to rate your opinion based on whether the item is an important element to include in a mentoring program.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always

Subject Areas

Indicate the extent which the following administrative functions should be included as an Effective Element of a Mentoring Program for Superintendents

Budget & Finance	1	2	3	4	5
Personnel	1	2	3	4	5
School Board Relations	1	2	3	4	5
Politics in Education	1	2	3	4	5
School-Community Relations	1	2	3	4	5
Strategic Planning	1	2	3	4	5
Collaboration	1	2	3	4	5
School Law	1	2	3	4	5
Facilities (planning, construction, & operations)	1	2	3	4	5
Data Analysis for Instructional Improvements	1	2	3	4	5
Being familiar with Board Policies and their impact on the school district	1	2	3	4	5
Conflict Management Training and Application	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge of Federal Programs such as Title I, IIA, III, ESOL, Migrant	1	2	3	4	5
Information on NCLB/Waivers	1	2	3	4	5

Preparing Grants at the federal, state, & local levels	1	2	3	4	5
Professional Development for Faculty & Staff	1	2	3	4	5
Personal Time Management	1	2	3	4	5
Work-Family Balance	1	2	3	4	5
Personal Stress Management	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe your mentoring experience as a women superintendent.
2. What was the first topic you and your mentor addressed in the superintendency?
3. How would you describe your mentoring experience?
4. What leads you to say it was a _____ type of mentoring relationship?
5. What positive experiences have you had based on your mentoring experience as a women superintendent?
6. What negative experiences have you had based on your mentoring experience as a women superintendent?
7. As a women superintendent what has been the most beneficial part of your mentoring experience?
8. Why was _____ the most beneficial in this role?
9. Describe what elements that an effective mentoring program would contain for women superintendents based on your experience.
10. Why do you believe these elements are most beneficial?
11. What advice would you provide to aspiring women superintendents when searching for a mentor?