The Northwest's Phantom Pool: Superintendent Certificate Holders Who Do Not Plan to Apply and Why

Mimi Wolverton
University of Nevada Las Vegas

Responses gathered in a recent study of the superintendency in the Pacific Northwest suggest that less than 25% of sitting superintendents in the year 2000 were under the age of 50; and 40% of those who were 50 years or older planned to retire within the next four years. While the pool of potential applicants includes over 1,000 superintendent certificate holders, fewer than 150 of respondents in the same study planned to apply for upcoming vacancies. This article examines aspects of the position that serve as disincentives to seemingly qualified candidates and the policy ramifications of possible pool inadequacy within the given context.

A recent national study suggested that 80% of current superintendents are at or near retirement. Sixty-eight percent of these superintendents are between the ages of 50 and 59 years; another 10 to 15% are over 60 (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000). This is not simply a big-city or large-district phenomenon. The graying of the superintendency extends to rural America as well. In *The Superintendent Pool: Realities in the Northwest*, researchers reported that in the five-state region (Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington) 75% of sitting superintendents in the year 2000 were over the age of 50, 40% of whom planned to retire within the next four years (Wolverton, Rawls, & Macdonald, 2000). If the more than 500 superintendents (60% of all superintendents in the region) who participated in the study are representative of the region, the Pacific Northwest may experience a sizeable exodus from superintendent positions by the year 2005.

What about the Applicant Pool?

Is the U.S., as a whole, experiencing (or will it experience in the near future) a crisis in the ranks of school district superintendents? Arguments, both anecdotal and research-based, abound suggesting that a shortage of qualified applicants for available superintendent positions exists nationwide (Cunningham and Burdick, 1999; Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella, 1999; Forsyth, 1999; Houston, 1998; McKay and Grady, 1994; Johnston, 2000). Simply put, these accounts say that there are too many positions and too few qualified applicants. In contrast, Glass, Björk, and Brunner (2000) contended that no such shortage exists, nor will one materialize in the near future. Various others have added to this side of the debate by examining the economic realities of the overall job market (Kowalski, 2002; Glass, 2002), state-specific data (Björk and Keedy, 2002), the quality of the superintendent pool (Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella, 2002) and turnover rates in the position (Natkin and Cooper, 2002).

Nationally, retirements in the superintendency account for, at most, about 20% of all vacancies each year (Glass, Björk and Brunner, 2000). In most instances, the number of individuals who complete administrative certificate programs and are eligible to apply for a superintendency more than compensates for the loss of sitting administrators (Glass, Björk, and Brenner, 2000). The same is true of the Pacific Northwest. Some 820 superintendents serve in almost 1,100 districts in the region. In any given year, certificate holders who are not superintendents number in excess of 1,000. However, about one-quarter of these certificate holders are already retired but still employed in administrative positions other than the superintendency, and less than one-third of the remaining superintendent certificate holders plan to apply for a superintendency within three years. Simply put, within the pool of more than 500 superintendents (60% of all superintendents in the region) who participated in the study, 191 superintendents planned to retire by the year 2003, and of the non-superintendents (also 60% of the subject population) only 119 planned to apply for their positions.

The Pacific Northwest is quite unique. The five-state area covers almost one million square miles, roughly one-fifth of the country. Not only is it vast, but relatively few people live there. Only two metropolitan areas—Seattle and Portland—have populations in excess of 500,000 people. And, two of the five states, Alaska (627,000) and Montana (902,200), have fewer than one million residents in the whole state (Idaho has just over one million). Two-thirds of Oregon's population (four million) resides in four city areas with Portland being the largest (1.3 million). Over one-half of Washington's six million residents live in the Seattle area. To put these numbers into perspective, Pennsylvania covers a scant 45,000 square miles, but its population of 12 million is almost identical to that of the entire northwest region.

This population-land mass disparity, alone, poses several problems for school districts. Montana, for instance, has three school districts each serving only one student. Overall, Montana has 446 districts, 86% of which serve fewer than 500 students. Idaho has a district that serves five students, and over 30% of its districts serve fewer than 500 students. Thirty-five of Alaska's 53 districts educate fewer than 500 students each. Only seven of its districts enroll more than 1,000 students. Somewhat surprisingly,

Washington hosts three districts each with 9 students; about 30% of its school districts enroll fewer than 500 students. Oregon is no different. Four students attend school in its smallest district. Almost 40% of the districts in Oregon serve fewer than 500 students and over one-half enroll fewer than 1,000.

Not only do distance, rugged terrain, and inclement weather make it difficult to run school districts, but the regional economy presents a formidable barrier as well. In each of the five states, the majority of the economic base has been built on natural resource industries—mining, fishing, agriculture, timber, oil and natural gas. Collectively, these industries have taken massive collective beatings to the point where most of them will never recover. Even new attempts to diversify the economy by focusing on tourism and technology are cyclical and very sensitive to national economic downturns. The region's economic instability manifests itself in ongoing governmental fiscal shortfalls, which make funding education difficult.

In the Pacific Northwest, researchers examined whether individuals who possessed the required credentials for applying for the position in the five-state Pacific Northwest region of the United States would, indeed, do so. Findings suggest that many will not—to the extent that without some sort of intervention, a shortage of applicants for available positions in the region may occur within the near future.

This article focuses on the factors that serve as disincentives to potential candidates as they consider whether or not to apply for the superintendency. It draws on research commissioned by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) and frames the discussion using various motivation theories to provide insight into why certificate holders do not seek the position. In addition, it suggests that the study provides a cautionary counterpoint to national projects, where researchers suggest that aggregated data is representative of all segments of the country, and to state-specific reports, which imply that all states possess similar profiles. Finally, authors raise some of the policy issues that arise from taking such a position.

The Study

Early in 2000, Washington State University's Center for Academic Leadership surveyed over 1,900 superintendents and superintendent certificate holders in the five-state region (Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington) served by the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (Wolverton, Rawls, & Macdonald, 2000). The survey was comprised of three sections. The first section asked for general demographic information, such as current position, education, income, whether a respondent had ever applied for a superintendent position (and if so how many times), and whether the respondent planned to apply for a position by 2005. Depending on the answer to this last question, respondents completed one of two inventories that detailed possible reasons for applying or not applying for the position. In each instance, using a 5-point Likert-style scale (where 1 signified very unimportant and 5 very important), respondents rated a combination of items that could serve as either incentives or disincentives in the decision.

The items in both inventories were derived from the National Association of School Administrators (AASA) survey instrument (Glass, 1992) and state-specific surveys conducted in New York (O'Connell, 1992), Nebraska (Dlugosh, 1994), Wisconsin (Price, 1992), and Louisiana (Jordan, McCauley, & Comeau, 1994). The inventories were piloted in a 1997 study conducted in the state of Washington (Rawls, 1998). The inventory of concern in this paper deals with reasons not to apply for a superintendency. In the follow-up study, conducted in 2000, sitting superintendents responded based on their interpretations of why someone might not apply for the position and non-superintendents responded based on their personal reasons for not applying. In the pilot study, two variables in the *reasons not to apply* inventory emerged as unidimensional; and were considered unique and omitted from the inventory. These included *district size and location* and *enjoy current position*. For a discussion of the responses to the *will apply* inventory, see Wolverton, Rawls, and Macdonald (2000).

The 1,900 superintendents and superintendent certificate holders who were surveyed represent roughly the entire population of certificate holders in the five-state region. The decision to conduct a census was made primarily because of inconsistencies in record keeping across states. Although a reliable random sample could have been drawn for Oregon and Washington, which would have produced a sample of sufficient size, researchers could not be sure of similar results in the other three states. Each state could provide addresses for its superintendents but not necessarily for its certificate holders. To complicate matters further, Alaska has only 53 districts and suffers from yearly turnover rates of up to 50% in both the superintendent and certificate holder ranks. Conducting a census guaranteed that response rates by state would be sufficient to conduct the analyses desired by NWREL. Surveys were administered using Dillman's (1978) total design survey method. The regional response rate for both superintendents and certificate holders was 60%.

In the remainder of this article, the authors examine the responses of those non-superintendent certificate holders who could apply, if they desired to, for a superintendency. Of the 658 non-superintendent respondents, 150 were retired, and another 137 planned to retire by the year 2004. The remaining 371 certificate holders were considered a viable applicant pool for upcoming superintendent vacancies in the region.

Profile of the Viable Pool in the Pacific Northwest

Sixty-eight percent of the 371 certificate holders considered as potentially viable candidates were men. About 7% of the pool carried minority status based on race

or ethnicity. The mean age of members in the applicant pool was 50 years. In general, respondents had participated in graduate education beyond the master's level. They averaged almost 15 years of administrative experience and had been in their current positions roughly 6 years. One-half of the respondents had earned their certificates prior to 1988; all but one respondent were certified. Women tended to possess less administrative experience; several had been in their current positions for slightly less time and held certification that on average was about two years more recent than that of the male respondents. At the time of the study, most pool members were either elementary or high school principals (38%), assistant superintendents (18%), or members of central administration (31%). Women held fewer high school princpalships and more central office administrative positions than did men. Seventy percent of the potential applicants worked in districts having 2,000 students or more. A slightly higher percentage of women were located in larger districts than were men.

Of the 287 respondents who answered the question: *Have you ever applied for a superintendency*, 184 (64%) responded yes. Over three-quarters of the men in this group had applied. Less than 40% of the women had done the same. Of those who applied, 73% had been interviewed, and 83% of those who were interviewed were offered superintendencies. However, over 90% of those who were offered positions were men. Another way to say this is that 94% of the men who applied said they were offered jobs, while only 41% of the women who were interviewed were offered positions.

Only 131 members of this pool (35%) planned to apply for a superintendency within five years. Overwhelmingly, the reasons they gave for applying stemmed from a variety of self-actualizing motives, such as a desire to grow, achieve, meet new challenges, and develop oneself (Wolverton, Rawls, Macdonald, and Nelson, 2000). Sixty-five percent (240 of the 371 certificate holders) of the viable pool does not intend to apply. Our greatest concerns lie with this group and in trying to determine why they chose not to apply for the superintendency. Table 1 provides a summary of the profile data.

Table 1.

Profile of the Viable Pool for the Northwest

Variable	Pool (371)	Male (252)	Female (119)
Male	68%		
Female	32%		
Minority	7%	8%	7%
Average Age	50 years	50 years	51 years
Masters Plus	60%	61%	51%
Doctorate	36%	33%	41%
Certified	all but 1	all but 1	all
Mean Certification Year	1988	1987	1990
Years Administrative Experience	14 3/4 years	15 3/4 years	12 2/3 years
Average Years in Present Position	6 years	6 years	<5 2 years
Current Position			
Elementary Principal	22%	21%	23%
High School Principal	16%	19%	10%
Assistant Superintendent	18%	18%	17%
Central Administrator	31%	28%	36%
Other Administrator	19%	16%	21%
School District Size			
<2000	29%	33%	23%
2000-9999	37%	36%	40%
>10,000	33%	32%	36%
Applied for Superintendency in Past	64% (184 of 287)	77% (144 of 188)	38% (38 of 99)
Interviewed	73% (135 of 184)	75% (105 of 144)	71% (27 of 38)
Attained Superintendency	83% (112 of 135)	94% (101of 105)	41% (11 of 27)
Plan to Apply	35% (**131** of 371)	39% (98 of 252)	28% (33 of 119)
Do not Plan to Apply	65% (**240** of 371)	61% (154 of 252)	72% (86 of 119)
Enjoy Current Position (5 point scale)	3.91	3.94	3.86

Career Motivation: When Characteristics of a Profession Become Disincentives

Motivation theories strive to explain human behavior. In general, these theories can be divided into three categories—content, process, and environment. Content theories look at what energizes behavior; process theories take into consideration the factors that direct behavior; and environmental theories focus on how individuals sustain behavior over time (Bowditch & Buono, 1997).

Popular content theories include Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Alderfer's ERG Theory, and McClelland's Socially Acquired Needs Theory. Maslow (1954) postulated that five basic needs—physiological, security, social, esteem, and self-actualization—drive human behavior. These needs form a sort of hierarchy in which lower needs, such as food, shelter, and safety, must be met before an individual's behavior is motivated by needs for social interaction, recognition, or self-development. Alderfer (1972) collapsed Maslow's levels into three categories: basic existence needs, relatedness needs, and growth or achievement needs. He suggested that needs are not progressively staged but can overlap, and that people might shift back and forth between levels without fully satisfying one level before moving on to the next. McClelland (1961) also arrived at a system of three basic needs: achievement, power, and affiliation. Needs, as McClelland defined them, are culturally based, not necessarily instinctive but learned, and vary in strength over time and across situations. Individuals, however, tend toward one set of needs more than the others, depending on personal disposition and life experience.

Typically, superintendents begin their careers in education as teachers. So, in seeking to understand what motivates individuals to become superintendents, determining why they became teachers is one place to start. Several studies have been relatively consistent in explaining why people become teachers: They wanted to help children achieve (ACE, 1990; Bauman, 1990; Berg, Coker, & Reno, 1992; Clarke & Keating, 1995; Farkas, Johnson, & Foleno, 2000; Fuller, 1990; Metropolitan Life, 1990). Some individuals suggested that they were drawn to teaching because they relate easily to children (Bauman, 1990). Others cited a desire to combine career and family options, referring specifically to the flexibility that nine- or ten-month contracts provide when trying to raise their own children and engage in activities, such as family vacations, holiday celebrations, and after-school events (Bauman, 1990; Farkas et al., 2000). A few spoke to the advantage of working with other like-minded people and collegiality (Berg, Coker & Reno, 1992; Fuller, 1990). In a recent study, 84% of those surveyed said they enjoyed the job security that teaching provides, and two-thirds of them felt that the position gives them a sense of being respected and appreciated (Farkas et al., 2000). Over 95% of new teachers in the same study said that they teach because they love to do it.

Clearly, content motivation theories explain a good portion of what attracts people to the profession of teaching. Maslow's survival needs and Alderfer's existence needs for shelter, food, and security are met by the mere fact of having a job. The manifestation of affiliation needs in teachers, whether innate (Maslow and Alderfer) or acquired (McClelland) appear quite strong in terms of wanting to work with children and, to a lesser extent, enjoying the contact they have with colleagues. A desire to be respected and appreciated seems to indicate that Maslow's self-esteem need is being met. In addition, "much of a person's self-actualizing behavior [in McClelland and Alderfer's words, the need for achievement, growth, and development] is motivated by the sheer enjoyment obtained from realizing and developing his[her] capabilities" (Maslow, 1954 as cited in Lawler, 1994, p. 30). Teachers, especially new ones, love their work (Farkas et al., 2000). Although a portion of this engagement in teaching is driven by a love of children, it makes sense that they find teaching a rewarding profession because it challenges them to reach their potential—to grow beyond themselves.

Teachers do not wake up one morning and decide to apply for a superintendency. Most of them move first to a principalship or other mid-level administrative position. Recent research suggests that having satisfied their lower-order needs, teachers who plan to move into principalships revisit their achievement, growth, and self-actualization needs (Harris, Arnold, Lowery & Crocker, 2000; Parkay & Hall, 1992). The most important factors in the decision to pursue principal certification seem to revolve around making a difference and being challenged to grow, both personally and professionally. The prospect of salary increases also provides impetus to enter administration, which may indicate that lower-order needs can coincide with higher-order ones. Status, prestige, and using the principalship as a stepping stone to a higher administrative position, which reflect potential self-esteem (Maslow) or power (McClelland) needs, are some of the least important factors in their decision (Harris et al., 2000; Lonardi, Willower, & Bredeson, 1995).

The power that undergirds the superintendency, in general, could provide some impetus for school administrators to move into the superintendency. However, the research typically either does not address this issue or suggests that raw power alone is not a sufficient incentive. Many studies suggest that individuals seek the superintendency because it affords them the opportunity to exercise leadership. How these individuals define leadership opportunity is unclear, but it could implicitly include a desire for power (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Wolverton, Rawls, & Macdonald, 2000). Power can, however, be viewed negatively. For instance, the prospect of added exposure to the media, increased stress associated

with increased responsibility, and the uncertainty of dealing with politically charged issues and school boards—all trappings of power in the superintendency—could serve as disincentives to those who might otherwise aspire to the position.

Process theories of motivation, particularly expectancy and equity theories, also shed light on why principals and other mid-level administrators might choose to become superintendents (Adams, 1963; Lawler, 1994; Vroom, 1964). The most commonly cited expectancy theory is Vroom's VIE Theory. Vroom suggested that to be motivated to engage in a particular behavior, an individual must believe that putting in the necessary effort will result in getting the job done, and that by performing well, he/she will be rewarded in some manner that is valued or attractive. From Vroom's perspective, applicants for the superintendency must want to be superintendents and believe that they can be effective in the position if they expend the energy necessary to do the job; and they must believe that the reward (whether in terms of salary, prestige, respect, or self-development) justifies the effort. If any aspects of the process are looked upon as undesirable, then individuals are disinclined to apply.

Equity theory focuses primarily on the reward aspects of the motivation process. Its underlying assumption is that individuals want to be treated equitably at work. Strictly speaking, individuals work in exchange for rewards. According to this theory, if an individual's counterpart earns more for the same level of effort or if an individual expends a great deal more effort than a subordinate but believes that the difference in compensation does not adequately reflect the increased effort, then the reward system becomes a disincentive to moving into a position of more authority and responsibility (Adams, 1963). Based on equity theory, a principal or central administrator may choose not to pursue the superintendency, or a superintendent may leave the position because gains associated with the position do not reflect equitable compensation for the effort deemed necessary to do the job.

Content and process theories of motivation help expose aspects of the superintendency that could be viewed as disincentives and reasons why individuals choose not to apply. Indeed, two recent studies, in which superintendents were surveyed, found that board-superintendent disharmony, small pay differentials between the superintendency and other administrative positions, and issues of comparable worth with private sector CEOs were major contributors to high turnover rates and sparse applicant pools (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000). Under these conditions, disharmony counters the need for affiliation (Maslow, Alderfer, and McClellend), and concerns about small pay differentials and comparable worth (Vroom and Adams) serve as disincentives to many who might otherwise be interested in becoming superintendents.

A final type of motivation theory also provides possible insights into why individuals do not to apply for the superintendency, or choose to leave after they successfully attained it. Environment-based theories take into account how surroundings impact an individual's decisions. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), for example, suggests that individuals engage in three human processes—vicarious learning, use of symbolism, and self-control. Bandura claimed that individuals learn vicariously by accepting the experiences of others as their own. Under this theory, symbolism resembles a form of scenario building where individuals think through and play out in their minds various options that surround a particular situation. In the end, based on conclusions drawn during vicarious learning and from the use of symbolism, these individuals may choose not to engage in certain behaviors. Bandura's theory as it relates to the possible reasons for diminishing applicant pools suggests that potential superintendent candidates can learn quite a bit by watching those already in the position. They may also engage in symbolism by envisioning problems in the superintendency as their own. Finally, they may choose to exercise self-control by not applying for the position.

Analysis of Data

To gain an understanding of why presumably qualified individuals are not motivated to pursue the position, the dimensionality of the data collected from the 240 individuals in this study who did not plan to apply for a superintendency was reduced using principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation. In this analysis, factors carrying eigenvalues greater than one were initially considered to be significant (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1992). The resulting dimensions of the construct *will not apply* are presented in Table 2. An additional variable, *enjoy current position*, also seemed to weigh heavily in the decision. When ranked by mean, this variable carried the highest score (0 = 3.91; 1 low, 5 high) overall. The next highest mean score for an individual variable (*am place bound*) was 3.46. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for variables loading most heavily on each factor to determine the reliability of the inventory (Noursis, 1994). The first factor to emerge carries the greatest predictive reliability, as do the variables loading most heavily on a particular factor.

Table 2.

Reasons for Not Applying Inventory Principal Components Factor Analysis (using data from the 240 subjects in the viable pool who will not apply)

Variable	Varimax Rotated Factor Loadings F1	F2	F3
Undesirability of Position			
Media image of superintendents	**.74**	.21	-.21
Fluctuating relationships with the community	**.72**	.16	.03
Engaging in ongoing relationships with school boards	**.68**	.02	.12
Stress	**.68**	.24	-.02
Insecurity of superintendent position	**.67**	.36	.05
Politics of administration	**.63**	.32	-.20
Addressing collective bargaining issues	**.61**	.10	.02
Unstable financing of state's public schools	**.58**	-.04	.18
Low pay differential from current position	**.48**	-.16	.20
Cronbach's alpha	**.84**		
Individual Support & Image Issues			
Lack of mentor support	.09	**.83**	-.01
Lack of self-confidence	.11	**.79**	.14
Weak certification program	.17	**.67**	.08
Lack of affirmative action	.09	**.49**	-.21
Cronbach's alpha		**.68**	
Family Considerations			
Place bound	.00	-.01	**.75**
Spouse's job	.18	-.02	**.70**
Children at home	-.02	.0	**.69**
Cronbach's alpha			**.58**
Eigenvalue	4.5	1.9	1.6
Percent of variance accounted for	28.2	11.9	10.2
Cumulative percent of variance accounted for			50.3

Factor One (Undesirability of the Position), which explained most of the common variance in the data (R^2 = 28%, alpha = .84), reflects many of the negative realities associated with the job. Items contributing to this factor include media image, fluctuating relationships with the community, maintaining relations with school boards, stress, politics, position insecurity, dealing with collective bargaining, funding instability, and low pay differential from current position. The second factor (Individual Support and Image Issues) to materialize points to individual issues of support and image. It accounted for 12% of the variance in the data (alpha = .68). The four variables loading on this factor are lack of mentor support, lack of self confidence, weak certification program, and lack of affirmative action. The final factor (Family Considerations) to emerge focuses on family considerations (being place bound, spouse=s job, children in school). It accounted for 10% of the variance in the data (alpha = .58). The three factors loaded similarly for men and women, although the second and third factors emerged in reverse order for women in the pool. Note: Although the variables loading on the last two factors appear to be reasonable groupings, the factors are less reliable than factor one; and their relatively low reliability ratings suggest that elements not included in the survey instrument impact these sources of motivation and the decision not to apply.

Why People Do Not Apply for the Superintendency

The pool of potential applicants in the Pacific Northwest appeared to be adequate to meet the immediate need for superintendents in the region. But, once the pool was disaggregated, the data revealed that 44% of its members were either already retired or planned to retire in the near future. Of those who could be considered viable applicants, only 35% (130) actually planned to apply. Clearly, aspects of the superintendency served as disincentives to the remaining 240 potential superintendent aspirants.

The reasons not to apply are certainly tinged with some of the negative aspects of the superintendency (Factor One) that could be attributed, at least in part, to the power that attends the position. If the need for power (McClellend) in superintendent aspirants is low and their levels of self-esteem (Maslow) are sufficiently high, otherwise qualified individuals may simply choose not to apply.

In addition, negative aspects of the superintendency, such as poor media image, politics, and so forth coupled with a low pay differential from their current positions, may suggest that the rewards (Adams) do not justify the effort they would have to expend in doing the job. For instance, one of the issues that non-superintendents noted as a deterrent to applying for a position was salary and low pay differentials between other central administrative positions and the superintendency. In all but a handful of very large districts, which pay over $125,000 per year to superintendents, pay differentials are virtually nonexistent. And, in most locations, low salaries coupled with high costs of living proved an unattractive combination to would-be applicants. Even in Alaska where the cost of living is extremely high and the lowest superintendent salary is about $15,000 more than the lowest salaries in other states in the region ($75,000), over 70% of the superintendents in the study made less than $125,000 per year. In Montana, 55% of its superintendents earn less than $60,000 and less than 2% earn more than $100,000. Ninety-two percent of Montana's superintendents make less than $80,000. Idaho is little better off with over 60% of its superintendents earning less than $80,000 and only 4% making more than $100,000. Even in Oregon and Washington, the two more populated states where top-end salaries are somewhat higher, 50% and 35%, respectively, make less than $80,000. And, in Oregon, 40% earned less than $60,000. In all instances, average household incomes are close to superintendent salaries suggesting that dual career job options may not provide viable mechanisms for increasing household earnings (Wolverton, Rawls, & Macdonald, 2000).

Potential applicants may even believe that no matter how much effort they put forth, they would not be effective because they perceive that the job is impossible to do (Vroom, 1964). Some may feel that they lack the requisite abilities to be effective (Factor Two). Finally, other considerations, such as family and personal balance, (Factor Three) could outweigh any potential reward that the superintendency has to offer.

Potential superintendents entered educational professions because they wanted to work with children, could make time for family, and, at the same time, garner respect (Maslow). Working with parents and the general public is not the same as working with children. Superintendents work year-round and are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week (Holcomb, 1987), leaving little time for family. The lack of job security also seems to be an issue. Consequently, the disincentives that surround today's superintendency may outweigh any need for achievement (McClellend) and self-actualization (Maslow).

A further examination using social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) suggests other possible explanations as well. Fifty-five percent of the viable pool were either high school principals, assistant superintendents, or central administrators. Close proximity to superintendents in their districts might afford them the opportunity to learn vicariously. After observing superintendents in action, they may have decided that the job was not as attractive as it first seemed and not worth the added effort on their part that doing it well would require. Similarly, they could have anticipated problems and how they, as superintendents, might deal with them and drawn the conclusion that they were not prepared to deal with the daily tension and stress of the position. The truth is that the superintendency, itself, may provide little incentive for certificate holders to move beyond their current positions.

The Northwest Reality

Such findings are not unusual. They typify responses from individuals who have no intention of becoming superintendents in other states and parts of the country. Individuals who do not want to take on this type of leadership role espoused very similar reasons for not doing so no matter where they live. However, assuming away the potential of a shortage of applicants in the Pacific Northwest, at least in the short-run, because one does not exist elsewhere is dangerous. The problem is that researchers and policy makers find it difficult to take local or regional context into account when they rely heavily or exclusively on aggregated data.

The Pacific Northwest region is made up of a handful of large urban districts and a majority of isolated, small, rural and mountain districts. Some may say that such a description holds for other parts of the United States as well. While this may be true, the sheer vastness of the territory, the ruggedness of its terrain, and its distance from most of the primary population centers in the country set the Pacific Northwest apart as unique. At least in the short-run, unless more current certificate holders decide to apply for the superintendency, or current superintendents decide not to retire, or the number of qualified applicants substantially increases, applicant pools in the region will be thin and

perhaps inadequate. Some of the more remote districts may not even be able to generate a viable group of candidates. Based on the responses of individuals who have no intention of applying for a superintendency, better support, professional development, and family-friendly policies may diffuse some of these disincentives. The problem, however, runs deeper, and issues will remain concerning the viability of districts and their ability to attract good, solid leadership unless the states individually, and perhaps, the region as a whole, take proactive, long-term actions to rethink not only the position but the size and role of school districts in the Pacific Northwest.

The ramifications of such a study for policy makers and researchers are three-fold. At the national level, the results of the study provide a stark example of why taking local context into account is crucial. While understanding the national picture is important, advocating that policy decisions about district size, support, and superintendent availability be made based on a national view leaves the needs of some regions, states, and districts unchampioned. Even though, nationally there are enough viable candidates for available positions, this does not necessarily mean that any of them want to move to the Pacific Northwest. It seems questionable to think that many individuals with administrator certificates in New York, but with no local opportunity for a position, will decide to move to a remote community in Montana, Alaska, or Idaho, and then be willing to invest the time and money to become recertified within that particular state in order to take a position where pay levels remain moderate to low and district fiscal conditions are marginal at best.

At the regional and state levels, policy makers and researchers must look for unconventional approaches to the problem at hand, a problem that is not just about the size of the superintendent applicant pool in one district or another, but more precisely about how districts themselves are configured, supported, and managed. Clearly, there is some movement by superintendents within the region. Twenty-seven percent of sitting superintendents in the study planned to move to another district; some within state, others across state lines but within the region. States should take advantage of this inclination toward mobility by fostering ease of movement of certificate holders within the region. They could do so by establishing region-wide certification and licensure systems. Such a move might encourage a broader perspective on the part of potential applicants about the range of positions and locations available to them. Some states and larger city districts, Alaska and Seattle included, have experimented with still another approach to filling vacancies. They have turned to the CEO model where state boards or legislatures authorize the hiring of business leaders to manage school districts. This direct departure from tradition should motivate university-based preparation programs that want to remain viable to seek some sort of collaborative ongoing professional development endeavors with this new breed of superintendent.

In addition, states must look for other models. In other words, rethink the district system to create entities that are fiscally sustainable. For instance, districts in Alaska and Canada are large. Superintendents fly from one location to the next. States, like Idaho and Montana, in particular, could examine the financial realities of a few large districts that own their own planes and hire their own pilots. Even certain parts of eastern Washington and Oregon might benefit from such arrangements. The Australian model provides another approach to educating students who live in isolated locations with very few at any one location. Here, regional efforts might be more reasonable than state-based ones. With today's advances in technology and distance education the possibilities are endless. Regionally, these five states might also build a jointly funded and administered cooperative that would offer education in exchange for service to aspiring administrators. This system could be designed following the federal model where the government pays for the education of doctors and dentists in exchange for providing healthcare for an agreed upon length of time (say five years) in remote localities.

Locally, district boards must ask: does an adequate pool exist? Or is it a mere illusion? A phantom pool, at best? The answer may vary across districts, but for many it seems questionable at least in the short run. As a consequence, districts might want to figure out what makes people want to stay and to adopt more selective recruitment and selection policies that incorporate indicators that gauge willingness of individuals to serve disparate schools in districts that cover large geographical territories. For some districts, the best remedy might be to groom from within.

Whether we consider policy at the national, regional, or local level, the issue of superintendent pool adequacy is more complex than simple numbers might suggest. For the Pacific Northwest, any such numbers point to deeper, systemic problems. The same may be true of other states and regions in the United States, as well.

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