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Are women prepared to be school superintendents?[1] An Essay on the Myths and Misunderstandings

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The purpose of this essay is to examine and respond to Tom Glass's (2000) assertions about the dearth of women in the superintendency using the lenses of new data (from two large national studies) and analysis—an analysis that primarily focuses on women superintendents' and central office administrators' formal, experiential, and personal preparedness. The essay concludes that women who aspire to and who are seated in the superintendency meet and even exceed preparation requirements and expectations. Further, while experiential preparedness for women may look different from that gained by men, the variation and concentration on curriculum and instruction during career path development may render women better prepared than men.

Most professional occupations require basic preparation. In fact, selection processes include careful reviews of documents, vitae and résumés, which iterate the type and amount of preparation that candidates have accrued. Such practices abound in educational administration selection processes. Certainly, typical paper representations of school superintendency preparation include lists of formal education and career experiences (often referred to as informal education). But, vitae and résumés neither reveal whether candidates are attitudinally and emotionally prepared to take a position nor evoke the decision-making selection team (usually the Board of Education) to question their normative understandings of what kind of preparedness the position of school superintendent requires. Add to these practices the normative expectation that the school superintendent is a man with particular formal education and experiential preparation (experiences not as often enjoyed, available, or sought by women), and one is logically left with the assumption that men are the candidates of choice. Could it be that such an assumption includes myths and misunderstandings of *women's* overall preparedness for the role?

Beyond the obvious need for equitable and equal selection processes, we believe this question is important because some scholars suggest that if reported discrimination against women and people of color[2] was eliminated, their hiring would be one solution for the reported superintendent shortage, smaller applicant pools, and declining quality in candidate pools (Björk & Keyed, 2003; Glass & Björk, 2003; Kowalski, 2003; Tallerico, 2003). The fact—that only 18 to 20 percent of superintendents are women (Brunner & Grogan, 2007) while the candidate pool, from which most educational administrators come, is 75 percent women (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000)—provides some evidence that discrimination exits. To be sure, recent research established that selection criteria and processes reinforce the biased notion that men, because of their typical preparedness for the role, are the ideal candidates for the superintendency (Newton, 2006; Skrla, 1999). Such beliefs and processes limit the advancement of women to higher administrative positions (Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Tallerico, 2000). Thus, this essay begins with a problem: biased selection processes and attitudes can grow out of harmful myths and misunderstandings of women's preparedness. Before deeper considerations of these myths and misunderstandings are pursued, we provide very brief information (not to be taken as a review of the literature) on the nature of preparedness (as we define it) and the capacities of women leaders.

The Nature of Preparedness

Without a doubt, the preparedness of educational leaders has been a focus of attention over the past several years (Lankford & Wyckoff, 2003; Levine, 2005). Questions abound related to what constitutes preparation (Baker, Orr, & Young, 2007), what comprises quality preparation, and how preparation should be delivered (Hess & Kelley, 2005; Levine, 2005). While answers to these questions are beyond the scope of this essay, we do wish to provide a few organizers and definitions to clarify the later discussion. First, for the purposes of this essay we cast preparedness into three categories: formal, experiential, and personal. *Formal* preparedness is defined by the advanced educational administration training/education that can be received through the conventional coursework and programs offered by all types of institutions (colleges and universities) of higher education. *Experiential* preparedness is characterized by candidates' actual employment record (direct career experiences) and other experiences that could contribute to the quality of professional performance (these include indirect career experiences such as professional relationships, e.g., mentoring). *Personal* preparedness is defined as one's personal attitude towards both the pursuit and the role of the superintendency.

Second, we acknowledge that our categories of preparedness are limited in scope—the topic of preparation is extremely complex. To begin, when considering formal preparedness, one is

struck by the lack of consistency and tremendous variety across preparation programs—variety (to name a few) in terms of (a) the type of institution that delivers the program, (b) the nature of the curriculum designed, (c) the criteria by which applicants are evaluated and selected, (d) the amount of coursework required, (e) the nature of the delivery system employed (online, face-to-face, hybrid; cohort or individual), (f) the cost of the program offered, and (g) the background and vitae of faculty who deliver the program (most of these elements are discussed in Baker, Orr, & Young, 2007). Next, when considering experiential preparedness, again, variety dominates the picture. For example, career paths leading to administrative roles vary tremendously. Further, experiences are impacted by gender and race (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). And finally, personal preparedness, while a few trends exist (Young & McLeod, 2001), differs by individual. However, even with these limitations, we believe that recent findings help illuminate and discredit the commonly held answers to the question "Where are all the women superintendents?" (Glass, 2000).

Are women capable leaders?

Misunderstandings of women candidates' capacity and capability exist even when some literature advances information about the effectiveness of women's ways of leading (Alston, 1999; Brunner, 2000; Fulk & DeSantis, 1999; Grogan, 2000; Mandell & Pherwani, 2003; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Ortiz & Marshall, 1988; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000; Zaccaro, 2001) including their focus on instructional leadership (Faith, 1984; Glass, et al. 2000; Pitner, 1981; Shakeshaft, 1989, 1999). For example, this literature explains that there are gender differences in leadership styles, and attention is drawn to the notion that "women tend to adopt a more democratic or participative style, and men tend to adopt a more autocratic or directive style" (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; in Gibson, 1995 p. 258). Several researchers suggested that women should fill higher administrative positions because women's leadership styles often better support current democratic/participative organizational reform/development (Fresher & Fresher, 1979; Gross & Trask, 1976; Mendel & Pherwani, 2003) and, in particular, the teacher empowerment required for organizational learning (Marks & Seashore-Louis, 1999).

Other studies on leadership style show that women leaders are rated as displaying transformational leadership behaviors more frequently than men leaders (Bycio, Hackett, & Allen, 1995; Yammarino, et al., 1997). Women's transformational skills often include a preference for collaboration. Indeed women leaders on average obtain higher scores on collaborative scales in contrast to men (Rosenthal, 1998).

This small example of research literature along with a myriad of others, while reflective of a fuller description of women's talents and capabilities, has not altered contemporary reality. Men still dominate educational administration and superintendency positions. According to survey data collected as early as 1977 by Taylor, the majority of school board members thought sex

[gender] should not be a determining criterion in selecting superintendents and secondary principals, yet even now the majority of those positions are occupied by men. In no small measure, an enduring question remains: are women prepared to be school superintendents? And, are board members, and others involved in the selection of a superintendent, biased in favor of men because they are misinformed or lack understanding about women's preparedness for the role?

An Informed Essay: The Approach

In this essay, as we focus on women preparedness to be school superintendents, we use three categories—(1) formal, (2) experiential, and (3) personal—in order to *respond to* multi-faceted insights "on the lack of better representation of women in the superintendency" posed by Thomas Glass (2000) in an article titled, "Where are all the women superintendents?" (par. 1). To empirically inform our work, our responses are primarily grounded in a secondary analysis of the data from the most recent study (of women superintendents and central office administrators) conducted by Brunner and Grogan (2007). In addition, for some comparisons we conducted a secondary analysis of the data from one of the recent large national studies of the superintendency (Glass, et al., 2000) But, before moving to a description of the studies from which the data is taken, we briefly describe Glass's (2000) article and the part it plays in the essay.

Thomas Glass has been conducting research on the school superintendency over many years and has made significant contributions to the field of educational administration. One of Glass's most important contributions has been his lead on the three more recent national studies of the superintendency (Glass, 1992; Glass, et al., 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007), studies funded and published by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA)—an association primarily established for school superintendents. Of these studies over the last 20 years, only the most recent ones have disaggregated the data by gender.

After the 2000 study, Glass wrote a short article titled, as noted earlier, "Where are all the women superintendents?", that was published in the AASA journal *The School Administrator* (2000). In the article, Glass was clear that his asserted "insights" (his term) were his opinions based on his study and experiences of the superintendency over time rather than on any specific factual data. Upon reading the piece, we noted that Glass's insights were a slice of "common understandings" that were often heard from groups and individuals who were speculating on the dearth of women in the superintendency. We also noted, after a secondary analysis of the data from the 2007 study of women superintendents and central office administrators, that many of these common understandings could now be referred to as *myths and misunderstandings,* and that the time had

come to either confirm them, further explicate them, or expose their fallacies.

A response to Glass's (2000) article is important because most of his "insights" (a) can now be fleshed out for greater understanding, (b) tend to cast women in a disparaging light, (c) gain additional degrees of accuracy, (d) perpetuate misunderstandings about women's preparedness, and (e) leave preparation programs, school board members, headhunters, women themselves, and others in the dark. In other words, with additional new data, the myths and misunderstandings related to the women's preparedness for the superintendency can now be revisited.

Thus the purpose of this essay is to examine Glass's assertions about the dearth of women in the superintendency through the lenses of new data and analysis—an analysis that primarily focuses on women superintendents' and central office administrators' formal, experiential, and personal preparedness for the superintendency. To meet this purpose, the remainder of the essay is divided into three primary sections: (a) a brief description of the two large national studies (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Glass, et al., 2000) from which the data for this examination were generated, (b) a discussion of Glass's insights through the three-faceted lens of preparedness (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Kim & Brunner, 2007; Kim & Brunner, 2009), and finally, (c) a conclusion with implications for future research and suggestions for action.

Data Sources: Two National Studies[3]

Our responses to Glass are grounded in secondary analyses of two large national data sets collected by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA): the national study of women superintendents and central office administrators (Brunner & Grogan, 2007) and the most recent national study of superintendents (Glass, et al., 2000). Because they are embedded in an essay, the descriptions of the two studies do not constitute a typical methods section. We begin with a description of our primary data source.

The AASA National Study of Women Superintendents and Central Office Administrators

The AASA conducted and completed the first nationwide study focused *only* on women in the superintendency and central office positions. This study aimed at providing the most up-to-date, comprehensive information on women and the superintendency (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

This new data informs, extends, and even debunks previous assertions. In particular, because this national study of women superintendents and central office administrators asked the central office administrators the question (Q 105): "If you are not currently a superintendent, do you aspire to the superintendency? Therefore, the data could be disaggregated into two categories—those who *did* aspire and those who *did not* aspire to the superintendency. In other words, we now know much more about the women

who are poised to move into the superintendency and for the purposes of this essay have been able draw on information never before available (see Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

A bit before 2000, using the AASA membership database and data from Market Data Retrieval (the leading U.S. provider of education mailing lists and databases) researchers Glass, Björk, and Brunner, identified 2,500 men and women superintendents among 13,728 school districts and mailed surveys to them. Approximately 13 percent of the 2,500 study participants were women. Around five years later, in a study of *only* women superintendents and central office administrators, Brunner and Grogan (2007) reported that women superintendents lead approximately 18 percent of districts. When comparing the two studies, Brunner and Grogan (2007) wrote:

In addition, 3,000 surveys were sent to women holding central office positions that included the word "superintendent" in the title— Assistant Superintendent or higher. 723 superintendents (in contrast to 294 in the 2000 study) and 543 central office (in contrast to 0 in the 2000 study) personnel responded. Nearly 30 percent of the total population of women superintendents is represented in this national sample. (p. 155)

The survey used for the 2007 study included approximately 100 short-response questions and eight open-ended questions.

The AASA Study of the Superintendency

AASA has conducted consecutive national ten-year studies since1960. Primary purposes of the 2000 study included first, maintaining and updating trend data from earlier studies (1960, 1971, 1982, & 1992), and second, providing an overview of the perspectives of district leaders (see Glass, et al., 2000, for the full study). In keeping with its purpose, the 2000 study included information on the superintendency such as demographic characteristics, school board relationships, superintendents' opinions on specific problems and issues, women and minority participation in the superintendency, as well as professional preparation and superintendents' career patterns. The 2000 study consists of 90 short-response items and the sample, the largest of any of the ten-year studies, contains responses from 2, 262 superintendents across the nation—1,938 men and 294 women (Glass, et al., 2000).

Reconsidering Myths and Misunderstandings: Three Facets of Preparedness

In this large section, we analyze each of Glass's insights about the dearth of women in the superintendency using the lens of three-faceted preparedness: (1) *formal* or the advanced education received through institutions of higher education, (2) *experiential* or direct career and other professional experiences, and (3) *personal* or one's attitude toward the pursuit of the superintendency. The section ends with a summary of the results of our analysis.

Category One: Formal Preparedness

In the first insight, Glass (2000) focused on women's levels of education and degrees, in other words, on women's formal leadership preparedness. As he stated:

> Women are not gaining superintendent's credentials in preparation programs. . . . Women also are achieving the doctorate at comparable rates to male candidates. However, about only 10 percent of women in doctoral programs are opting to earn the superintendency credential along with their educational specialist or doctoral degree. (2000, par. 2)

Without a doubt, this particular insight is directly related to women's preparedness. We find Glass's statement difficult to unpack because of the lack of information. To begin, we do not know where Glass got his information. In order to assert that "only 10 percent of women in doctoral programs are opting to earn the superintendency credential along with their educational specialist or doctoral degree" (Glass, 2000, par. 2), Glass needed either to survey a large sample of women in educational specialist or doctoral degree programs, survey a large sample of certification programs, or cite other researchers who conducted such surveys. Since there is no citation in the essay, it is difficult to know where he got his information, though because he uses the number "10 percent" it sounds as if he has factual information.

In contrast, our anecdotal knowledge of superintendency certification programs leaves us with the strong impression that over half of the students pursuing superintendency certification are women. The same is the case with specialist or doctoral degree programs. However, the number of women who are seeking both a doctoral degree *and* superintendency certification remains undocumented. In other words, we can neither support nor refute Glass's statement.

However, we do have additional information that causes us to question Glass's insight. First, over the past two decades, numbers of university preparation programs have separated masters' and specialist/doctoral degree programs from certification/licensure programs. Thus, in a certain sense, the two must be considered separately. Glass does state that women make up more than 50 percent of educational administration programs and 50 percent of doctoral programs. Clearly, women are interested in pursuing educational administration and advancing their educations. Again, without documentation specifically about the numbers of doctoral candidates (by gender) who are pursuing the superintendency certificate (specifically), Glass is on shaky ground. It is possible, for example, that only 10 percent of *men* in specialist or doctoral programs opt to earn the superintendency credential, yet Glass does not compare the percentage of women to the percentage of men in doctoral degree programs who opt to earn this credential. Thus, this insight (as

he calls it) is, at best, a very weak statement, and at worst, a damaging and misleading piece of information.

Going further, we acknowledge our lack of certainty regarding Glass's message in this insight. But, since it is included in an article in which he is answering the question "Where are all the women superintendents?", we believe he is implying that women are uninterested in the superintendency position or not formally prepared for the role or a combination of both. However, with data gathered for the 2007 study, we know that 40 percent of women central office administrators are interested in the superintendency position and, we can make informed statements about women superintendents' and central office administrators' formal preparedness (degrees and certification) (see Tables 1 and 2). And while this information does not set aside Glass's assertion that only ten percent of women doctoral students are pursuing superintendency credentials, it helps clear up some of the confusion about women and their interest in and educational preparedness for the role.

The 2007 study also helps address the general topic of women's preparedness for the role of superintendent—an indication of their interest in the role. Toward that end, we note that based on the number and the percentage of women in the 2007 study who were holding Ph.D.s and superintendency certificates, it is clear that women are generally well prepared for the superintendency. In fact, larger percentages of women superintendents (57.6% in 2007 study) than men superintendents (43.4% in 2000 study) hold their doctorate degrees. Related to the superintendency certificate, most women central office administrators (93.5%) who aspire to the superintendency already have a certificate or are currently working toward it. Clearly, this data does not refute Glass's assertion, but it does remind us that specific information about women is important for any conversation about why women are not in the superintendency.

Table 1. Highest degree of superintendents

Highest Degree	Men Superintendent (2000)	Women Superintendent (2000)	Women Superintendent (2007)	Aspiring Women Administrator (2007)	Non- aspiring Women Administrator (2007)
BA/BS	6(0.3)	1(0.3)	1(0.1)	0(0)	8(2.4)
MA IN ED	155(7.9)	18(6.1)	172(23.8)	48(23.8)	122(36.1)
MA NOT IN ED (MBA)	9(0.5)	1(0.3)	3(1.2)	0(0)	5(1.5)
Specialist	460(23.6)	31(10.4)	102(14.1)	30(14.9)	51(15.1)
EDD/PHD	847(43.4)	168(56.6)	416(57.6)	114(56.4)	122(36.1)
Other (MA+)	463(23.7)	77(25.9)	28(3.9)	10(5.0)	30(8.9)
Total	1953(100)	297(100)	722(100)	202(100)	338(100)

Note. Values in the parentheses are percentages.

In addition, according to U.S. Census Bureau (2000), 60.7 percent of *all* educational administrators in the United States are women and 39.3 percent are men. Based on the 2007 study, among women central office administrators who are not currently positioned in the superintendency, 39.3 percent aspired to the superintendency. Consequently, among the many women educational administrators in the US, almost 40 percent of those in central office administration want to be superintendents. These statistics roughly indicate that there are many women who are appropriately and sufficiently qualified in terms of education and certification. Therefore, the matter of the paucity of women in the superintendency may *not* stem from the small pool of credentialed and degreed women applicants. In brief, while more research is needed, we can say that many women have the formal preparedness to become superintendents.

Table 2. Certificates of women administrators in 2007 study

Certificate	Superintendent	Aspiring Women Administrator	Non-aspiring Women Administrator	Total
Yes	650(90.2)	169(85.4)	173(53.2)	992(79.7)
No	64(8.9)	13(6.6)	139(42.8)	216(17.4)
Currently working	7(1.0)	16(8.1)	13(4.0)	36(2.9)
Total	721(100)	198(100)	325(100)	1244(100)

Note. Values in the parentheses are percentages.

Category Two: Experiential Preparedness

When considering women's experiential preparedness for the superintendency, Glass (2000) stated, "women are not in positions that normally lead to the superintendency" (par. 1). In this large section, we reconsider Glass's statement in four discussions; we: (a) problematize the notion of normal, (b) compare the career experiences of men and women, (c) examine women's experience with finance, (d) consider women's mentoring experiences, and finally, (e) discuss the issue of how women's later entrance into administration positions might affect their preparedness.

Assumptions of "Normal"

In this section we problematize Glass's assertion that women are not in positions that normally lead to the superintendency. Using the lens of experiential preparedness, we assert that discussions of career paths (and the

benefits of some over others) carry the assumption that particular experiential skills and knowledge result in successful performance in the superintendency. Thus when Glass asserts that women are not in positions that normally lead to the superintendency, in our view, he is suggesting that women are not gaining the "normal" experiential knowledge that leads to the superintendency. The detailed assumptions of this statement include the notions that (a) there *is* normal experiential knowledge/preparedness that lead(s) to the superintendency, (b) that the "normal" path creates higher quality superintendents because they have accumulated higher quality experiential knowledge, and (c) the phrase *normal positions* should be connected to positions filled by men since, when compared historically to other groups, they have moved most easily into the superintendency—an underlying assumption that disregards the possibility that men have moved most easily into the superintendency based in some part on their race and gender rather than solely on their superior experiential preparedness. To be sure, since men have overwhelmingly been selected for superintendency positions, their career paths have become the template for success (in this case, "success" means getting the job). Grounded in these assumptions, Glass asserted that women must do what men do in order to be normal and thus successful. We note that the term "successful" in Glass's essay is in no way connected to high quality preparedness or performance. In fact, as of this writing, we know of no study that identifies any measures of quality for superintendency candidates or superintendents. Thus, we disagree with Glass. We believe that this assumed "right way" to pursue the superintendency is less useful and even harmful for women and men who hold new visions of the role—new visions which in part may be the result of unusual experiential preparedness.

Certainly, many scholars who study the school superintendency have noted what the position requires. For example, Kowalski (1999) asserted that the main categories of superintendents' tasks and responsibility can be divided into three domains regardless of the various roles of the superintendency: (a) a wide range of managerial duties, (b) instructional leadership responsibilities, and (c) analytical tasks (e.g., planning and making policy). In traditional or masculine-oriented leadership in the superintendency, the primary role of superintendents focuses more on managerial duties and political strategies than on instruction.

However, considering the social, economic, and educational reforms of schooling, role expectations for the contemporary superintendent could be characterized as one of multi-functional leadership—a role further compounded by new requirements such as instructional leader, collaborator, and culture reconstructionist (Brunner, Grogan, & Björk, 2002; Kowalski, 1999). In fact, given the current focus on academic achievement, alternative routes to the superintendency may be superior to the historical norm. This suggestion gains strength upon an examination of data reflecting what

superintendents believe their school boards expect of them. Indeed, the largest percentage (41.3 %), regardless of gender, believes hiring comes if one is a strong educational leader focused on curriculum and instruction (see Table 3). If the concept of school reform for enhancing students' achievement was fully reflected in educational administration/ superintendency hiring processes, the *normal* career paths leading to the superintendency would include positions focused on curriculum and instruction—positions most often filled by women.

Table 3. School board's primary expectations of you as a superintendent

Role	Men Superintendents (2000)	Women Superintendents (2000)	Women Superintendents (2007)	Total
Education Leader (curriculum and instruction)	742(38.0)	152(51.2)	329(46.3)	1223(41.3)
Political Leader (board and community relations)	259(13.3)	26(8.8)	81(11.4)	366(12.4)
Managerial leader (general management, budget & finance)	733(37.5)	82(27.6)	173(24.4)	988(33.4)
Leaders of school reform initiative	52(2.7)	10(3.4)	70(9.9)	132(4.5)
Community leader (symbolic importance for district and community)	·	·	27(3.8)	27(0.9)
Other	154(7.9)	26(8.8)	30(4.2)	210(7.1)
Total	1953(100)	297(100)	710(100)	2960(100)

Note. Values in the parentheses are percentages.

To be sure, most of the women central office administrators (49%) in the 2007 study were assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction (see Table 4). Clearly, if experiential preparedness in the area of instructional leadership is important, these women received essential leadership preparation. To be clear, experiential preparedness in the area of curriculum and instruction may be the most important career path acquisition—something that should be required for gaining a superintendency position. Thus, we believe that the term *normal* needs a new definition—one that includes experiential preparedness in curriculum and instruction. But, exactly how do the career paths of men and women superintendents compare?

Table 4. Current positions of women central office administrators

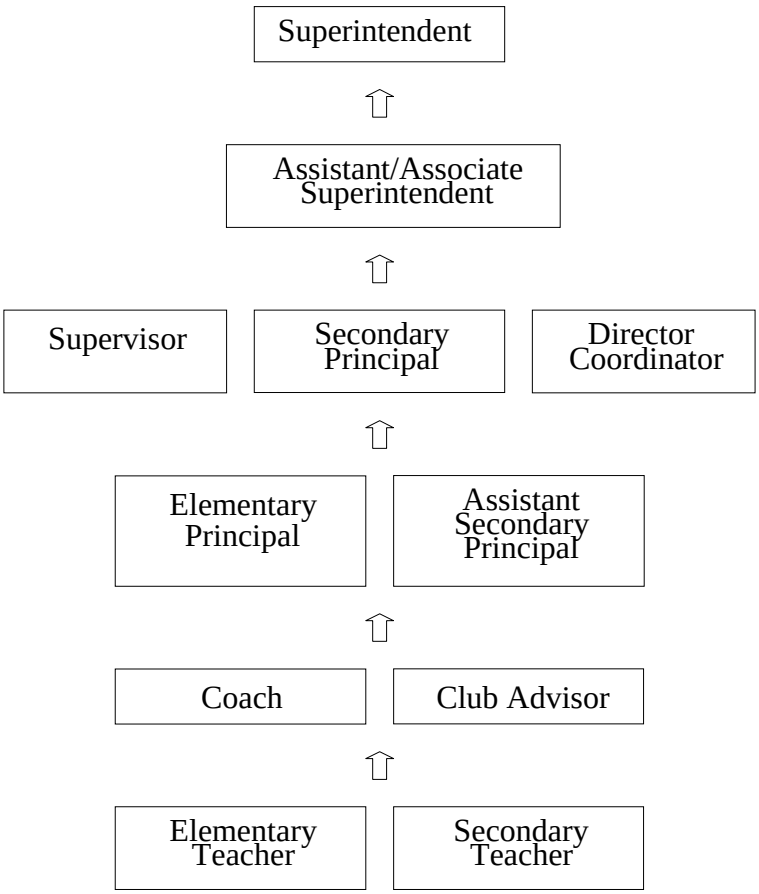
Position	Women Administrator (2007)
Deputy Superintendent	86(8.2)
Chief Academic Officer	10(2.1)
Assoc/Ass't Superintendent for Human Resource	51(10.8)
Assoc/Ass't Superintendent for Finance	30(6.4)
Assoc/Ass't Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction	231(48.9)
Assoc/Ass't Superintendent for Operations	9(1.9)
Assoc/Ass't Superintendent for Administration	30(6.4)
Assoc/Ass't Superintendent for Support Services	25(5.3)
Total	472(100)

Note. Values in the parentheses are percentages.

Comparing Career Paths to the Superintendency

In our secondary analysis of the two large data sets, as Glass implied, we found that when contrasted with men, women's pathways to the superintendency are different. In this discussion, we work within an understanding that the career path of men determines the normal route that most often leads to the superintendency. Thus this discussion is connected to the experiential preparedness that is acquired with on-the-job experience. Figure 1 below represents typical pathways that women and men travel to the superintendency. Shakeshaft (1989) first constructed this figure to compare women and men's pathways to the position, and we further developed it to reflect hierarchy, job opportunity and visibility for career advancement, and job category in terms of line and staff roles.

Figure 1. Typical Career Paths of Women and Men in Administration



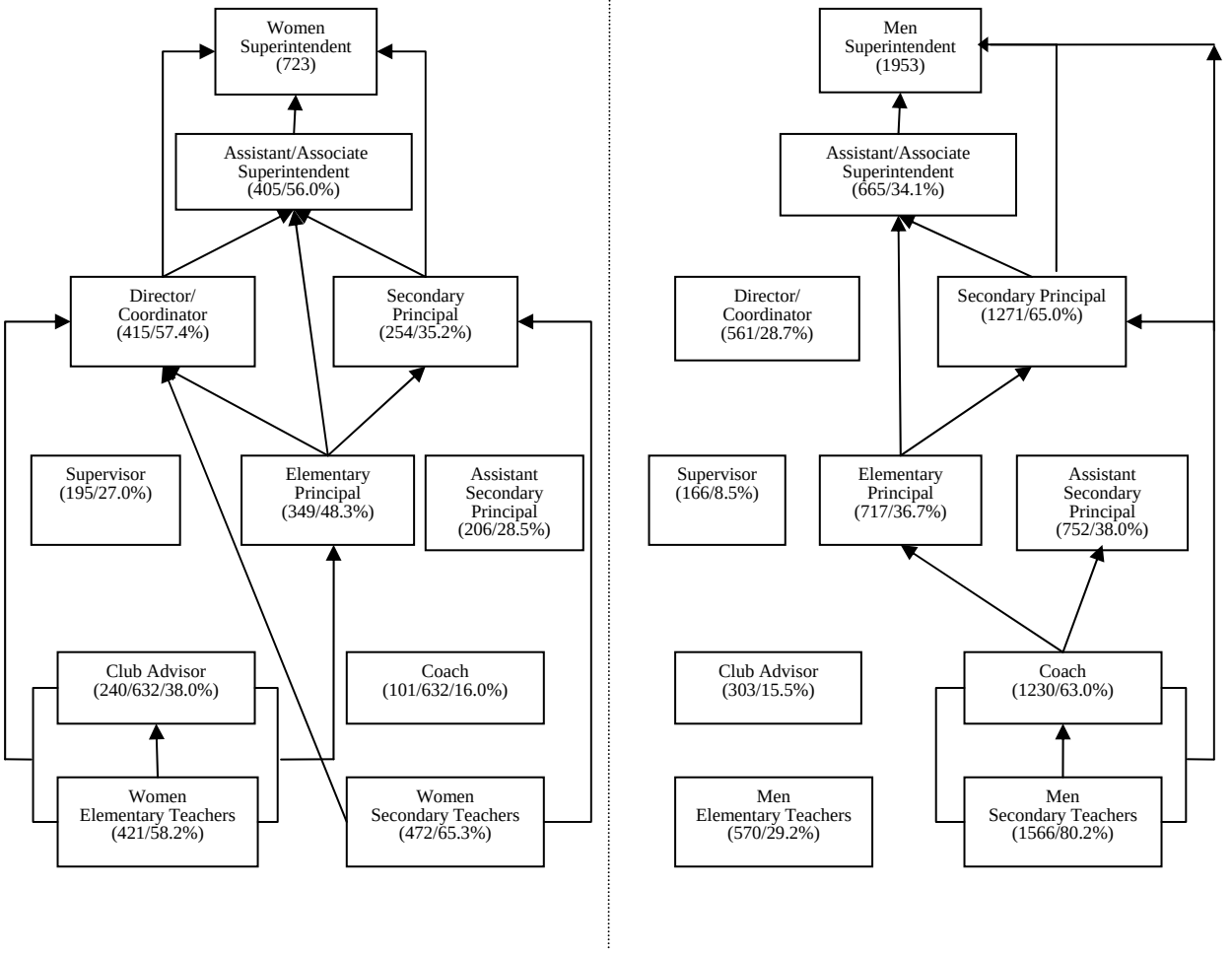
Note. This figure (Kim & Brunner, in press 2009) is modified from Shakeshaft's model of "Typical Career Paths of Women and Men in Administration" (1989, p. 73); taken from Kim & Brunner, in press 2009)

Next, based on analysis of new data (2000 Study and 2007 Study), we constructed typical career paths of men and women superintendents by assigning numbers/percentages and arrows illustrating position-to-position movement by the majority of the study participants (see Figure 2). The typical route (the percentage who take these positions in this order toward the supeirntendency during their career paths) for men to the superintendency is secondary teacher (80.2%) → athletic coach[4] (63.0%) → assistant secondary principal[5] (38.0%) → secondary principal (65.0%) → superintendent, while women's typical pathways to the position is elementary (58.2%) or secondary teacher (65.3%) → club advisor (38.0%) → elementary principal (48.3%) → director/coordinator (57.4%) → assistant/associate superintendent

(56.0%) → superintendent (Kim & Brunner, 2009) (see Figure 2). Note that the survey respondents in this figure were able to check more than one response for the question about their career experiences. For example, if a respondent had teaching experience in both elementary and secondary schools, he or she could respond to the both items in the answer. Most women (58.2%) in education started their careers in elementary teaching position. Although, in many cases, secondary school teaching is not the first entry port for women, many of the study's women superintendents had experience teaching in secondary schools (65.3%). In other words, while most women teachers are in elementary schools, the majority of women superintendents in the study had experience in secondary schools or both elementary and secondary schools.

Shakeshaft (1989) argued that women generally do not move into line positions such as the secondary principalship and the superintendency. In our current analysis, however, the typical career paths of women moving toward high levels of administration included both line and staff roles so arrows, in the women's portion of Figure 2, spread to the right and left side as well. Also, Figure 2 illustrates that many women started their first administrative positions in elementary schools (48.3%) as principals or in the district office as specialist director/coordinators (57.4%). As stated before, when in the central office, women are usually in positions related to curriculum and instruction (48.9%, see Table 4). Of particular note in Table 4—because positions of assistant or associate superintendents do not exist in many small districts—the number and percentage of women in these positions vary according to district size. In contrast to women's typical career paths, arrows in the men's figure were most often placed on the right side of the figure, revealing that men's mobility is much more likely to be concentrated in line positions—positions considered to provide greater job opportunities and visibility (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. A Comparison of Women's and Men's Career Paths



Notes: 1) This figure is modified from Author, et al. (in press, 2009). 2) Arrows are drawn to and from boxes that have a value of 33 percent or higher. 3) Secondary schools include junior high/middle schools and high schools

As Figure 2 shows, women's career pathways are complex and diverse, while men's career pathways are simple and concentrated. This gender difference in career pathways to the superintendency in educational administration could be interpreted in several ways. First, when compared to men, women travel in different paths because of the dearth of entry positions into administration. For example, many women who work in elementary school often do not have access to positions such as coaching[3] or assistant principalships[4] since these positions are scarce in elementary schools (Kim &

Brunner, 2009) In fact, coaching activities, preferred by men teachers, traditionally have provided junior high and secondary school teachers with an initial step toward administration (Glass, 2000). The lack of the coaching and assistant administration positions may lead women to travel in diverse trails of career development rather than through traditional career paths to high levels of administration. While we understand that the visibility of coaches (63% of men superintendents have this experience) may increase aspirants' chances of "being known more broadly" if and when they seek administrative roles, we are not convinced that coaching experience is essential in the preparation of the highest quality superintendents. However, in the short run, men appear to have an advantage when they move through the very visible entry position of coaching.

Second, the exclusion of women from line positions could be another reason they have fewer opportunities in their career paths. Although women successfully move into administration, as mentioned earlier, many of them take jobs in staff rather than line positions. Without a doubt, while we have answered this question in part because of the preponderance of women in elementary schools, further studies should be done to answer the question: Why are so many women administrators in staff rather than line positions? Finally, women have more complexity and diversity in their career paths than do men. Thus, the experiential knowledge that women gain over the course of their careers has greater variation and is more likely to include a focus on curriculum and instruction. In terms of substance, we argue that women may have a "preparedness advantage" over men in the long run.

Lack of Financial Experience

In one of his insights, Glass (2000) advanced that "women are not as experienced . . . in district-wide fiscal management as men" (par. 2). Clearly, this insight is focused on women's experiential preparedness. Again, we problematize Glass's notion of what experiences are essential for a person to become a superintendent. In this case, we question the assumption that women are less prepared than men for fiscal management—both may be underprepared.

In order to challenge this assumption, we point out that neither men nor women superintendents, in the 2000 or 2007 studies, indicated that fiscal-management was the primary reason they were hired. In the case of women superintendents, they most often thought that their boards had hired them primarily to be educational leaders working with curriculum and instruction (in 2000, 51.2 %; in 2007, 46.3 %). While 37.5 percent of men superintendents (in 2000) thought that boards had hired them to be managerial leader for general management including budget and finance, 38 percent thought they had been hired to be education leaders (see Table 3 above).

While not as great as Glass might have predicted, the percentage differences between men and women superintendents' beliefs about why they were hired are no doubt related to the experiential knowledge and skills that

they gained from career pathways (see Kim & Brunner, 2009). To be sure, as Glass suggested, the lack of experience in finance and budget could be a factor that hinders women in their move toward the superintendency. In fact, approximately 77 percent of women superintendents, compared to approximately 25 percent of men, believe that school board members *perceive* that women are less qualified than men in the area of finance (see Table 10 in Appendix). We are not fully persuaded, however, that women's perceptions and lack of experience are as large a barrier as Glass implies. We advance this notion in light of the current increased national attention to academic achievement that we noted above. Without a doubt, school board member's perceptions of the ideal superintendent are changing to include curriculum and instruction leadership. Indeed, Glass admits in his essay: "This situation [the focus on finance] may be changing as many boards are now looking for superintendent leadership in raising test scores and meeting the requirements of state-mandated, high-stakes assessment systems" (par. 18).

Thus, in this investigation, we turn again to a pool of women central office administrators poised to move into the superintendency, with the aim of uncovering whether they are ready to meet the criteria for instructional leadership. In so doing, we find that while only 6.4 percent of women central office administrators work as associate or assistant superintendent for finance, 49 percent of the women central office administrators currently have positions as associate or assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction and are obviously ready to fill the superintendency as strong educational leaders focused on academic achievement (see Table 4 above).

Lack of Mentoring Experiences.

Mentoring experiences can be viewed as a combination of formal and experiential preparedness. However, because formal mentoring programs are less prevalent than those that are informal, we view this part of the insight as experiential preparation. On the specific topic of mentoring, Glass (2000) asserted that women seem to have a less-developed mentoring system than men. We are not certain what Glass means by a "less-developed mentoring system." We know of no study that has come to the same conclusion. Glass continued by stating that "this is important since mentors many times act as go-betweens among superintendent candidates and school boards (par. 4)." This last statement leads us to believe that Glass narrowly defines mentoring. In fact, women may receive less mentoring (than men) aimed at gaining a superintendency position. We define mentoring more broadly to include the learning of the competencies required to be an effective superintendent (see McClellan, Ivory, & Dominguez, 2008), and suggest that Glass is not current on the broader topic.

Indeed, according to the 2000 and 2007 studies, more women administrators have the experience of mentorships than men superintendents. More than 70 percent of women superintendents (contrasted with 56.3% of men) in both studies have mentors

and about 60 percent of women central office administrators have mentors (see Table 5). In addition, about 77 percent of women superintendent in 2007 study had men mentors. Therefore, it is certain that women administrators are actively using mentorships (see also Gardiner, Enonmoto, & Grogan, 2000; Murtadha-Watts, 2000), but perhaps we should further examine whether there is a difference in the quality of these experiences. There is no doubt that the experiential preparedness gained from a mentor in a superior role is a critical part of leadership preparation and development.

Table 5. Mentorship Experience

Mentor	Men Superintendent (2000)	Women Superintendent (2000)	Women Superintendent (2007)	Aspiring Women Administrator (2007)	Non-aspiring Women Administrator (2007)
Yes	1099(56.3)	211(71.0)	520(72.0)	106(61.3)	126(60.0)
No	837(42.9)	85(28.6)	196(27.1)	64(37.0)	99(37.7)
Uncertain	15(0.8)	1(0.3)	6(0.8)	3(1.7)	9(3.3)
Total	1951(100)	294(100)	722(100)	173(100)	270(100)

Note. Values in the parentheses are percentages.

Women Enter Too Late

In one of Glass's insights about the dearth of women in the superintendency, he notes that "women enter too late" into administrative positions (par. 4). We assume that Glass means that aspirants to the superintendency have a shorter time to get their experiential preparation and as well as a limited period of time to pursue the role. And while this notion holds some practical value, as with other insights, we have evidence that Glass overstated the importance and extent of this phenomenon. Data from the Brunner and Grogan (2007) study brings more information to this insight.

While 80.6 percent of men superintendents entered their first administrative positions before 36 years of age, only 50 percent of women superintendents and administrators aspiring to the superindendency were in their first administrative roles before the age of 36 years. Clearly, the women were older than men entering their first administrative positions. However, Kim and Brunner (2009) found in a previous study that while men's average age at first superintendency is 42.7 years, women's average age is 47.3. In other words, while most men enter administration earlier than women, men enter the superintendency only five years earlier than women. We conclude that the five-year difference in the entry ages of women and men is not as significant as previously thought (see Tables 6 and 7).

Table 6. Age at first Administrative position

Age	Men Superintendent (2000)	Women Superintendent (2000)	Women Superintendent (2007)	Aspiring Women Administrator (2007)	Non-aspiring Women Administrator (2007)
30 or younger	1025(52.8)	62(21.1)	119(17.5)	38(20.0)	48(16.0)
31 – 35	540(27.8)	77(26.2)	193(28.3)	61(32.1)	77(25.7)
36 – 40	237(12.2)	81(27.6)	174(25.6)	42(22.1)	79(26.3)
41 – 45	105(5.4)	48(16.3)	120(17.6)	36(18.9)	70(23.3)
46 +	36(1.9)	26(8.8)	75(11.0)	13(6.8)	26(8.7)
Total	1953(100)	294(100)	681(100)	190(100)	300(100)

Note. Values in the parentheses are percentages.

Table 7. Years of classroom teaching experience

Years of Experience	Men Superintendent (2000)	Women Superintendent (2000)	Women Superintendent (2007)	Aspiring Women Administrator (2007)	Non-aspiring Women Administrator (2007)
0 – 5	789(40.5)	60(20.2)	159(22.0)	54(26.8)	94(27.7)
6 – 10	730(37.5)	120(40.4)	267(37.0)	72(35.6)	92(27.1)
11 – 15	294(15.1)	70(23.6)	188(26.0)	51(25.2)	94(27.7)
16 – 20	90(4.6)	34(11.4)	80(11.1)	21(10.4)	43(12.7)
21 – 25	36(1.8)	11(3.7)	22(3.0)	4(2.0)	14(4.1)
26 +	8(0.4)	2(0.7)	6(0.8)	0(0.0)	2(0.6)
Total	1947(100)	297(100)	722(100)	202(100)	339(100)

Note. Values in the parentheses are percentages.

Finally, when viewing this phenomenon through the lens of educational leadership preparation, we suggest that the five additional years (created by longer teaching careers and time taken in administrative roles before moving into the superintendency) of experiential preparation could actually be beneficial to superintendents. Wisdom, it is often thought, comes through years of experience. And at a time when knowledge of teaching and learning is of paramount importance for all administrators, we assert that the five-year time gap—spent in classrooms and administration of curriculum and instruction—could be of greater experiential preparation benefit than previously thought.

Category Three: Personal Preparedness

In one of his insights, Glass (2000) observed that for personal reasons, women are not interested in the superintendency. Glass listed the following personal reasons: women (1) are not interested in finance, (2) are more

accustomed to child-centered teaching in elementary classrooms, (3) fear that too much work time will interfere with their family life, (4) are less willing to move to take superintendencies, and (5) have different purposes for being in education. Women's lack of personal preparedness to aspire to or take superintendencies for these reasons is upheld to some extent by the 2007 study, but overall these reasons should be reconsidered. We discuss each reason below.

Not Interested in Finance

In his article, Glass asserted, "women are not . . . as interested in district-wide fiscal management as men" (par. 2). However, we are not convinced that Glass has evidence to support his assertion that women *are not as interested*. We can tangentially support Glass's notion with the fact that only 6.4 percent of the women central office administrators in the 2007 study were associate or assistant superintendents for finance (see Table 4 above). In our view, however, this fact does not necessarily speak to "interest in finance." As noted in the earlier section on career paths, men and women alike move into positions for multiple and complex reasons. To assert, for example, that men move into finance positions *because* the position represents their strong interest is also problematic.

Indeed, almost all superintendency positions hold the expectation that the person in the role has financial capability and capacity. Thus, any men and women who aspire to the role are indicating at least some interest in the financial side of district work. We can say that 40 percent of the women central office administrators in the 2007 study indicated an interest in becoming superintendents, and further, that of the 60 percent of the women central office administrators who *did not* aspire to the superintendency, the largest percentage of responses (beyond the fact the they were happy in their current position) indicated that the politics of the role dissuaded them, not the financial responsibilities. And finally, we suggest that all central office work includes budgets of some size—yet another opportunity for experiential preparation relative to finance.

Comfort With Child-Centered Work in Elementary Classrooms

To begin, Glass's rationale that women are not interested in administration, because they are more accustomed to child-centered teaching in elementary classrooms, should be examined. To conduct our examination we turn to the 2007 study and look closely at women central office administrators. As mentioned above, approximately 40 percent of women central office administrators aspire to the superintendency. The other 60 percent do not aspire to the superintendency for several reasons.

Women administrators who do not aspire to the superintendency were asked the question, "Why don't you aspire to the superintendency?" (see Table 8) As mentioned above, the most frequently selected (36%) response from these women was that they were satisfied with their current positions and had no interest in changing jobs. 27.9 percent of the women answered that the

politics of the job did not appeal to them. After the top two responses, they next chose respectively "Too much stress (18.6%)", "Superintendent's salary is not high enough for the weight of the job (13.6%)", and "Job demands of the superintendency would interfere with my family responsibilities (11.3%)." Noting the fact that the women's top four responses were *not* commonly gendered and could easily have been chosen by men, Glass's gendered insight becomes much less compelling (see Table 8). For example, Glass's assertion that "women are more accustomed to child-centered teaching in elementary classrooms", is not the case in the 2007 study for many women administrators, who have, after all, already left the elementary classroom and indicated no interest in returning.

Table 8. If you do not aspire to the superintendency, please indicate why not

Reasons	Non-aspiring Women Administrator	
	Checked	Not Checked
Too much stress	87(18.6)	382(81.4)
I would have to take a cut in salary	13(2.8)	456(97.2)
Superintendent's salary is not high enough for the weight of the job	64(13.6)	405(86.4)
Job demands of the superintendency would interfere with my family responsibilities	53(11.3)	416(88.7)
I'm happy with my current position and have no interest in changing jobs	169(36.0)	300(64.0)
I'm not willing to relocate	46(9.8)	423(90.2)
Family members would not be willing to relocate	22(4.7)	447(95.3)
I don't have sufficient experience	16(3.4)	453(96.6)
I don't have sufficient academic training	16(3.4)	454(96.6)
Politics of the job don't appeal to me	131(27.9)	338(72.1)
Job opportunities are limited because few school boards would ever hire a woman superintendent	18(3.8)	451(96.2)
Other	34(7.2)	435(92.8)

Note. Values in the parentheses are percentages.

Further, another question in the Brunner and Grogan (2007) study clearly demonstrates that Glass's assertion was a weak one. In the study, women central office administrators and superintendents were asked the question, "If you had to do it all over again, which career would you choose?" Most of the women (73.1%) responded that they would remain in the same or higher positions— meaning they would remain in school superintendencies or other central office positions. Only 2.4 percent of them responded that they would rather be "Classroom teachers," and only 9.2 percent of women superintendents and central office administrators indicated that they

would want to get a job "outside of education" (see Table 9). Based on this data, we conclude that women educational administrators generally have strong occupational preferences for educational leadership positions and, thus, are personally prepared to be administrators.

Table 9. If you had to do it all over again, would you choose a career as:

Careers	Women Superintendents (2007)	Women Administrators (2007)	Total
School superintendent	526(74.0)	123(27.5)	649(56.0)
Other central office position	39(5.5)	159(35.6)	198(17.1)
Classroom teacher	14(2.0)	14(3.1)	28(2.4)
Guidance counselor	4(0.6)	9(2.0)	13(1.1)
College professor	18(2.5)	17(3.8)	35(3.0)
Business manger	1(0.1)	7(1.6)	8(0.7)
State agency employee	1(0.1)	1(0.2)	2(0.2)
Intermediate school district administrator	4(0.6)	5(1.1)	9(0.8)
Principal	25(3.5)	18(4.0)	43(3.7)
Private school administrator	5(0.7)	4(0.9)	9(0.8)
Outside of education	54(7.6)	53(11.9)	107(9.2)
Other	20(2.8)	37(8.3)	57(4.9)
Total	711(100)	447(100)	1158(100)

Note. Values in the parentheses are percentages.

Work Time Diminishes Family Life

Glass asserted that women are not interested in the superintendency because the time demands interfere with family life. In our brief response, we again draw attention to Table 6 and the question posed to non-aspiring central office administrators about why they do not aspire to the superintendency. The answer, "Job demands of the superintendency would interfere with my family responsibilities" drew positive responses from only 11.3 percent of the study participants. Therefore, while we acknowledge that more women might be superintendents if they could depend on a family-life support system just as men superintendents have traditionally depended on their wives to take care of the family (Brunner, 2000), we also believe that Glass overstated this insight regarding the dearth of women in the superintendency. Evidence points to women's interest in the position even when they have families and children.

Unwillingness to Move

When asked why they did not aspire to the superintendency, only 4.7 percent of women central office administrators indicated that their

families were not willing to relocate. Mobility did not appear to be a large concern among women who *do not aspire* to the superintendency. In his article, Glass provided reasons that women do not become superintendents without the support of research. Clearly, we now have evidence that refutes his opinion that women are unwilling to move.

Entering Field for Different Purposes

As with a couple of Glass's previous assertions, this reason for the dearth of women in the superintendency is directly connected to personal preparedness. This opinion focuses on women's motivation for teaching over administrating In his article, Glass pointed out that because women have many more career choices than in the past; those who choose teaching really want to *stay* in teaching. We believe that this opinion, if proposed of men, would not play out. Men have always had more career choices than women, and many have chosen to be teachers. We doubt that the fact that men chose teaching as a career is any indicator of whether they *do or do not* want to be administrators. We cannot know what people want with so little information. We have known numbers of men who have been certified as administrators and never became administrators. In brief, this is a weak reason for the low number of women in the superintendency. In other places in this essay, we have noted that most women in the central office are not interested in returning to teaching.

Summary of Analysis

This essay on the dearth of women in the superintendency began with a problem: biased selection processes and attitudes can grow out of harmful myths and misunderstandings of women's preparedness for the role. In order to unpack the problem, we first established a three-faceted definition of preparedness: (1) *formal* or the advanced education received through institutions of higher education; (2) *experiential* or direct career and other professional experiences; and (3) *personal* or one's attitude toward the pursuit of the superintendency. Second, we identified an article written by Glass (2000) in which he expressed many of the common explanations of the dearth of women in the superintendency, in particular as they related to women's preparedness for the role. Third, we articulated the core questions driving our examination of the problem: Are women prepared to be school superintendents? And, in what ways are board members—and others involved in the selection of a superintendent—biased in favor of men because they are misinformed or lack understanding about women's preparedness for the role? Finally, using the lens of three-faceted preparedness, we examined Glass's insights about women and the superintendency. In the following subsections we summarize the results of our examination in each area of preparedness.

Formal Preparedness

To begin, related to formal preparedness, we found no evidence that women seek superintendency credentials less often than men. In fact, almost all women central office administrators who aspire to the superintendency have their credentials. Further, more women superintendents than men have their doctoral degrees. Without a doubt, women are formally prepared to become superintendents.

Experiential Preparedness

Related to experiential preparedness, there is no evidence that the "normal" path to the superintendency is the path that creates the highest quality superintendents. Indeed, the normal path is a gendered one because the career paths of men have overwhelmingly constructed it. Finally, given the current concerns about academic achievement, new and different routes to the superintendency may be superior to the historical norm. To be sure, superintendents believe that school boards want district leaders who focus on academic achievement, making women's significant preparedness in curriculum and instruction extremely important.

As stated previously, women's career paths include much more curriculum and instruction than the career paths of men, As a result, women's career paths include both line *and staff* positions and, as a result, are complex and diverse. In contrast, men's career paths are somewhat simpler and more concentrated. Thus, women gain more variety in their experiential preparedness. Their various experiences, however, rarely include the narrowly defined finance position. We do note that finance positions typically exist in large districts; thus, we believe it safe to say that anyone seeking the superintendency has confidence in her or his own capacity in finance. We also note that the majority of men and women superintendents report that financial expertise was *not* the *primary* reason they were hired.

Finally, two other misunderstandings related to experiential preparedness were set aside. First, contrary to common belief, women are more often mentored than men. And second, given the most current data, we now have evidence that women on average enter the superintendency only five years later than men—a difference that is much shorter than previously reported. We note that these five years were most often spent with curriculum and instruction related jobs—jobs that may actually add value to women's experiential preparedness for the superintendency.

Personal Preparedness

Regarding personal preparedness or women's attitude toward the pursuit of the superintendency, we addressed five myths or misunderstandings about the dearth of women in the superintendency. The first relates to women's attitudes toward finances. Glass asserted that women are not interested in finances and as a result are not interested in pursuing the supeirntendency. We acknowledge that only a few women central office administrators are assistant or associate

superintendents of finance. However, we can assume that those who aspire (men *and* women) have some interest or capacity in finance since superintendents are ultimately responsible for the financial health of their districts. And we also assume that all central office administrators have oversight in appropriate budget areas, thus, they are aware of and experienced in financial matters. Finally as support for our assumptions, we note that when asked why they *did not* aspire to the superintendency, women central office administrators responded only 3.4 percent of the time that they lacked the necessary experience (see Table 10 in Appendix).

The last four of the five myths or misunderstandings are related to each other. Glass asserted that because of women's focus on and interest in children and family: (a) they are most comfortable with child-centered work, (b) they want to stay in teaching because, given the greater number of choices that women currently have, it is the reason they choose a career in education, (c) they believe the job would interfere with their family responsibilities, and (d) their families are unwilling to relocate. We found little evidence to support any of these assertions. As is probably assumed true for men, 97 percent of women central office administrators indicate *no desire* to return to teaching, 89 percent believe the job would *not* interfere with family life, and 95 percent indicate that their families are willing to relocate for job purposes. We also note that men have always had the greatest number of occupation choices, and no one assumes that they *want* to stay in teaching because they chose it initially.

Conclusions and Implications

Given our discussion of the data, we conclude that women central office administrators are formally, experientially, and personally prepared to become superintendents. And further, we conclude that the negative perceptions surrounding the dearth of women in the superintendency, those that make the women themselves the cause of the dearth, are gendered myths and misunderstandings—that is myths and misunderstandings created, in the first place, by gender bias. In addition, we assert that gendered norms create barriers for women seeking the superintendency. In fact, the 2000 study asked men and women superintendents what barriers to the role exist for women. Although women superintendents indicated that most factors in the list function as important or somewhat important barriers for women in administration, most men superintendents did not consider most factors as important (see Table 10 in Appendix). Men held very different views than women. We suggest that because most men have not faced these barriers (with the exception of the issue of relocation), they could not relate to them as possibilities. However, according to women, all the barriers were important to very important. Some barriers that women thought of as significant included: school board's prejudices against women administrators, school board members' perception that women are not strong

mangers, and 38 percent indicated the school board members' perception that women are unqualified to handle budgeting and finances. These barriers relate directly to negative perceptions of women's lack of preparedness. And yet, we have very little evidence to suggest that the absence of women in the role has been created because they are not prepared for it. And we have very little evidence to suggest that the less complex preparation of men superintendents results in high quality performance in the role. Therefore, we wish to emphasize this point: "What is" is not necessarily "what is best" and, therefore, "what is" should not be the standard for admission to the position.

In sum, we believe that women central office administrators who aspire to and women already seated in the superintendency meet and even exceed all formal, experiential, and personal preparedness requirements. Further while some of the preparedness components for women are different from those gained by men, we suggest that the variation in career path and the concentration on curriculum and instruction may render women better and more thoroughly prepared than men. Overall, we find aspiring and seated women superintendents well-prepared for the superintendency and can offer no explanation for the dearth of women in the superintendency other than the fact that long-held biases, while perhaps lessening their hold, are still afoot during superintendency and other administrative selection processes.

Implications for Research: New Questions

Throughout this essay, we identified several areas for future study of women in the superintendency. First, we need to examine at the structural level why and how women are frequently occupied in staff positions rather than line positions in every area of the educational system. Second, we know that women more actively use mentoring systems than men in their career paths. However, we wonder whether: (a) women, given their lack of access to the informal networks constructed by men, are coached to effectively utilize their mentoring experiences, (b) women receive lower quality mentoring than men, and (c) discriminative perspectives of women protégés produce further barriers for aspirants. Third, women enter their first superintendency positions approximately five years later than men. We need to fully understand and flesh out the positive effects of this delay. The time gap of five years is not large enough to account for the under-representation of women in the superintendency, but it could be a positive factor when considering preparedness. Finally, more general research on the superintendency should be focused on the question: How can "high quality" be defined, developed, measured, and determined in preparation programs and in candidates for the superintendency?

Implications for Action: Improving Preparation

The previous suggestions for future research are useful when thinking about the improvement of educational leadership preparation. First, we believe that preparation programs must engage in coursework conversations that lay bare the issue of gender bias. We recognize that gender bias is a societal issue and one perpetuated by both women and men. Thus, conversations in mixed groups are extremely important. We often find unwillingness, on the part of leadership students and professors, to include the topic in coursework even when the value of these conversations is acknowledged. One way to address such unwillingness includes conducting such conversations in places that allow anonymous participation. Efforts of this type have proven powerful in many cases (see Brunner, Hammel, & Miller, 2003; Brunner, Opsal, & Oliva, 2006).

Second, with the clear acknowledgment of experiential preparedness, preparation programs must include all manner of technology-based strategies for more creative approaches to simulating parts of the role that are not currently practiced by the typical superintendent. We tend to count on internships to provide experiential training. The limitations of this model are obvious if we actually believe the superintendency must change. Students cannot learn new ways of doing the supeintendency if they are strictly imitating others who are currently in the role. In addition, as professors of educational administration most often come from practice, the formal layer of preparation must also be addressed. In particular, the "School Superintendency" class is most often taught by men (from the perspective of their experiences) because they dominate the positions in the field. This creates another barrier (since women typically have different experiential preparation) for women who aspire to the role. In our view, one of the only ways to address the multi-layers of the re-enactment and re-enforcement of the status quo is through the use of virtual spaces—spaces in which gender and other forms of difference can be set aside during development programs (see Brunner, Hammel, & Miller, 2003; Brunner, Opsal, & Oliva, 2006).

Finally, preparation programs could be reshaped to value complexity and variety in addition to the commonly offered skill development. Clearly, the superintendency in particular is a role that includes a wide variety and complexity of responsibilities. The role is broader than any other in the educational system. A systematic effort could be made to draw attention to how various educational career paths support preparedness for the superintendency. When considering the variety and complexity of superintendent responsibilities, we understand that the primary focus must be on academic achievement for students. We believe that many preparation programs already provide an emphasis in this area, but research is still showing that superintendents do very little related to curriculum and instruction, and certainly have not valued it over other areas of preparation. Thus, while there are efforts in this direction, their impact

is not yet evidenced in the field. In brief, we are calling for a reshaped superintendency—one that requires the experiences most often chosen by women aspirants.

Notes:

1. This essay focuses on the United States school superintendent position. This particular position is the most powerful employee role in a school district. The school superintendent directs and is ultimately responsible for all aspects of business (e.g., teaching and learning, human resources, finance, facilities, transportation, policy implementation and compliance, athletics and activities, lobbying, work with the community, serving at the will of the school board, and public relations). Typically only one person in a district serves in this role.
2. While women of color are included in the two large data sets that inform this essay, their numbers are quite low, and since for the purposes of this paper we focus on gender only, we have not broken out the data by ethnicity or race.
3. This essay is based on a portion of the data set collected in a large study (Brunner & Grogan, 2007) focused on women superintendents and women central office administrators. Therefore, the brief methods section is similar to portions of other publications written from the same database. Further, in this essay, we use the year 2007 when referring to the Brunner and Grogan data in order to simplify the text. Data was first available in 2005.
4. Coaching positions in the United States PreK-12 schools are held by people who supervise and train young people in various types of athletic sports, including but not limited to football, basketball, volley ball, tennis, swimming, track events, soccer, and others. Almost all coaching positions are at the Middle School (11-13 year olds) and High School (14-18 year olds). Coaching positions are highly visible to the whole community and require engagement with parents and other members of the community.
5. Assistant principal positions exist most often at the Middle School and High School levels. In larger districts, elementary schools (PreK-6) may have assistant principal positions. The person in this role assists the principal (the building-level administrator) as needed. The assistant principalship is seen as the gateway to higher-level administrative roles.

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Appendix

Table 10. Barriers limiting administrative opportunities for women

Barriers	Men Superintendents (2000)				Women Superintendent (2007)			
	Important	Somewhat Important	Not a Factor	Don't Know	Important	Somewhat Important	Not a Factor	Don't Know
Schools boards do not actively recruit women	153(7.9)	566(29.3)	1000(51.8)	211(10.9)	196(27.5)	335(46.9)	144(20.2)	39(5.5)
Lack of mobility of family members	408(21.1)	978(50.6)	258(13.4)	287(14.9)	321(44.9)	311(43.5)	58(8.1)	25(3.5)
Mid-management career "glass ceiling"	53(2.8)	527(27.5)	927(48.4)	40721.3)	159(22.6)	322(45.8)	157(22.3)	65(9.2)
Lack of opportunities to gain key experiences prior to seeking the superintendency	142(7.4)	582(30.2)	1059(55.0)	144(7.5)	168(23.5)	281(39.3)	255(35.7)	11(1.5)
Lack of professional networks	74(3.9)	611(31.8)	1008(52.5)	226(11.8)	158(22.2)	337(47.4)	196(27.6)	20(2.8)
Perception of school board members that women are not strong mangers	129(6.7)	693(35.9)	834(43.3)	272(14.1)	287(39.9)	280(38.9)	114(15.9)	38(5.3)
Perception of school board members that women are unqualified to handle budgeting and finances	70(3.6)	435(22.5)	1168(60.5)	257(13.3)	272(38.0)	281(39.2)	125(17.5)	38(5.3)
Perception that women will allow their emotions to influence administrative decisions	99(5.1)	553(28.7)	979(50.7)	299(15.5)	218(30.4)	295(41.1)	164(22.9)	40(5.6)
The nature of superintendents' work makes it an unattractive career choice	252(13.1)	693(36.0)	749(38.9)	233(12.1)	165(23.1)	335(46.9)	198(27.7)	17(2.4)
Lack of mentors/mentoring in school districts	116(6.0)	670(34.8)	884(45.9)	255(13.2)	151(21.1)	364(50.8)	185(25.8)	16(2.2)
Perception that women are not politically astute	•	•	•	•	148(20.7)	275(38.5)	250(35.0)	42(5.9)
Perception that instructional and curricular orientations or emphases limit administrative and managerial interests and skills	•	•	•	•	104(14.5)	305(42.7)	244(34.1)	62(8.7)

Note. Values in the parentheses are percentage