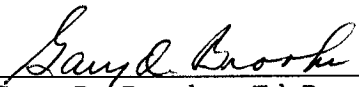


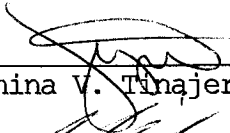
CAREER PATHS AND PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO THE SUPERINTENDENCY  
IN THE STATE OF TEXAS: SIGNIFICANT FACTORS AND CRITICAL  
CHARACTERISTICS IN SUPERINTENDENT SELECTION


EDWARD LAWRENCE GABALDON

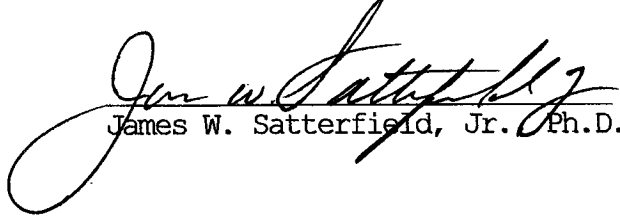
Educational Leadership and Administration

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to the people that mean the most to me in this world, my wife, my two children, and my parents.

First, I dedicate this work to my wife Angie for being there with me during this entire process. Without you, this project would not have been possible. Your love, support, encouragement and assistance will forever be appreciated. Thank you having more faith in me than I often had in myself. Thank you also for the many sacrifices you made over the past few years. You continue to make my dreams come true.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this project to my parents, Ruperto and Manuela Gabaldon. It was my parents who laid a strong educational foundation in the early years for my siblings and me. Even though neither one of them earned a high school diploma, our education was always their main concern. I want to thank them for instilling in me the desire to become a lifelong learner and for encouraging me to continue my formal education. I only wish that my father were still alive to share this with me.

PREVIEW

CAREER PATHS AND PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO THE SUPERINTENDENCY  
IN THE STATE OF TEXAS: SIGNIFICANT FACTORS AND CRITICAL  
CHARACTERISTICS IN SUPERINTENDENT SELECTION

by

EDWARD LAWRENCE GABALDON, B.S., M.Ed.

DISSERTATION

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for the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Educational Leadership and Administration

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## **ABSTRACT**

### Overview

The purpose of this descriptive-exploratory study was to examine the career paths of Texas superintendents and the barriers they perceive to attainment of the superintendency, as a function of community type and the ethnicity, gender, and age of the superintendent. The two main research questions that guided this study were: (1) What are the career paths of school superintendents in Texas? and, (2) What are the perceived barriers to attainment of the superintendency in Texas? A series of questions were also asked regarding the effects of ethnicity, gender, age, and type of community in which the school district is located on the career paths and perceived barriers to attainment of the superintendency in the state of Texas?

A 42-item survey, developed by the researcher, was utilized to gather the information regarding the research questions. Surveys were successfully sent to 937 of the 1038 superintendents of independent, consolidated and municipal school districts listed in the 2002-2003 Texas Education Agency Directory.

Responses were received from 411 superintendents for a response rate of 43.9%. The data collected were analyzed utilizing descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies and percentages. In addition, Pearson Chi-square procedures were used to test the research hypotheses for those research questions where the dependent variable could have had a statistically significant effect on the independent variable.

#### Profile of the Responding Superintendents

The "typical" school superintendent in Texas is a White, non-Hispanic, married male between the ages of 46 and 55. The "typical" superintendent works in a rural community and holds a master's degree in educational administration and leadership from a public university.

#### Conclusions: Career Pathway

The majority of the respondents had between six and fifteen years of teaching experience. A plurality indicated that their first administrative position was as an assistant principal at the high school level. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents became administrators between the ages of 21 and 35, and almost 80% received their first superintendency position between the ages of 36 and 55. Almost eighty

percent of the female respondents indicated being the first woman to serve as superintendent in their districts.

Almost two-thirds reported having from 0-5 years of teaching experience in their current positions and nearly a third of the respondents were in their first or second year of service in their districts. Just over half of the respondents reported having held two or fewer total superintendencies during their career, while more than two-thirds indicated that they left their previous superintendency for either a higher salary or the opportunity to move to a bigger district.

Almost half of the respondents reported that the principalship was the position that best prepared them for the superintendency. Respondents listed finance, educational law and the superintendent internship as the most important courses in their superintendent preparation program. The majority of the respondents were appointed to superintendencies within a year of the time they became certified and began applying.

The most common career path to the superintendency was reported as teacher, high school principal, central office. While no statistically significant differences were found in

the career paths of superintendents as a function of ethnicity, age or community type, three statistically significant differences were found as a function of gender. Compared to males, females possess more teaching experience before obtaining a superintendency (16-20 years), females attain the superintendency at a later age (46-65), and more females were the first minority superintendents in their districts.

#### Conclusions: Perceived Barriers

Thirteen different barriers were identified in the survey. Respondents identified five of the barriers as being perceived as important. Those factors were high amount of stress associated with the job, high pressure from the state mandated accountability system, lack of stability in position/job security, the superintendency increasingly becoming an undesirable position, and lack of experience in certain levels of the career path. Three barriers (age-too old, age-too young, and lack of a doctoral degree) were identified as not being factors to attainment of the superintendency.

The top three barriers to attainment of the superintendency and the top three barriers listed as not a

factor were the same for both White, non-Hispanic respondents and for minority respondents. No statistically significant differences were found in the perceived barriers to attainment of the superintendency as a function for ethnicity, gender, age, or community type.

### Recommendations

Recommendations were made for further research in the areas of career pathways and perceived barriers to the superintendency, to examine the issue of the paucity of minority superintendents identified as holding superintendent positions, and the need for a nationwide database that identifies public school superintendents by gender and minority status. Finally, it was recommended that universities revise their preparation programs to more closely meet the needs of superintendents and that further studies be conducted to determine the role that mentors, role models, and leadership qualities have on the success of school superintendents.

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PREVIEW

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Selecting a superintendent is one of the most critical decisions a school district makes (Boone, 1989; Krinsky, 1992; Irvine, 1998; Ortiz, 1999; Sharp & Walter, 1997; Tallerico, 2000). Not only is the superintendency the most visible role in public education, but it is also the most demanding and challenging role (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Hardy, 1998; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

Charged with providing leadership and inspiration to a district, superintendents are also expected to develop an educational program that ensures that each student receives a quality education (Hoyle, 1993).

Superintendents influence the direction the school system is to take and set the atmosphere under which employees and students function (Boone, 1989). As such, the "superintendent influences the direction of the school system and largely determines the atmosphere in which employees work and students learn" (Boone, 1989, p.31).

The process of selecting a superintendent has become quite a multifaceted and complex task (Glass, 1992). The importance of the right "fit" should be considered (Hardy,

1998, p.23). With the shrinking applicant pool, school districts must be "smarter and more focused" when conducting their superintendent searches (Hardy, 1998, p.22). Many factors must be carefully considered prior to making a final decision. Is the district seeking an administrator with a collaborative administrative philosophy, or one with more of a traditional background? Is the district looking for a superintendent with more of an intellectual or pragmatic approach? (Hardy, 1998).

With each succeeding year, the expectations placed on superintendents continue to rise. Parents have become much more demanding, communities much more divisive, and immediate results are often expected (Hardy, 1998). The rapid increase in students nationwide and the growing diversity of the student population demands that superintendents possess the experience, knowledge and skills to lead their schools into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Glass et al., 2000). As such, "the superintendent must be an expert on children and youth and in that role must understand the variety of environments from which the students come and the conditions they face" (Norton, Webb, Dlugosh, & Sybouts, 1996, p.331).