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Understanding the Aspirations and Challenges of Michigan's Black School Superintendents: A Toolkit for Building Equity in the Superintendency

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UNDERSTANDING THE ASPIRATIONS AND CHALLENGES OF MICHIGAN'S AFRICAN AMERICAN SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS: A TOOLKIT FOR BUILDING EQUITY IN SUPERINTENDENCY

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Black superintendents are significantly underrepresented in our nation's schools. Despite a slight increase in representation of female Black superintendents, minorities of all races continue to be underrepresented (Tienken & Domenech, 2020). In this study, I examined the experiences of Black superintendents in Michigan who currently hold superintendent roles, along with the obstacles they faced and their personal characteristics and associated factors that attributed to their resilience and longevity in their role as superintendent. Using a phenomenological qualitative study approach of personal and confidential interviews and survey questions of 12 Black superintendents, data was collected to formulate a toolkit for aspiring Black superintendents. The purpose of this study serves to increase the representation of minorities to equal that of the increasingly diverse student populations and provide equity in the top leadership position in K-12 education. Three major themes explored in this study included: (a) external support systems needed for confronting obstacles, (b) hiring practice preparation, and (c) adequate and effective programs for the recruitment and retention of Black superintendents. These findings will be valuable to the aspiring Black superintendent candidate and will also serve as relevant insight for superintendent search firms and school boards to prioritize diversity and recognize their own biases and seek intentional policy changes that would provide opportunities for aspiring Black leaders to further their careers.

UNDERSTANDING THE ASPIRATIONS AND CHALLENGES OF MICHIGAN'S
BLACK SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS: A TOOLKIT FOR BUILDING EQUITY
IN THE SUPERINTENDENCY

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

School administrators are crucial to the success of the education system. They serve a vital role in ensuring academic achievement among the district learners, supervising day-to-day operations and long-range planning of all the district's programs and facilities, and serve as the chief spokesperson for the district (MASA, 2021). While the term administrators may refer to principals or assistant principals, managers, or directors, the superintendents are the top executives with the most challenging roles that have increased over the decades with increased responsibilities, most recently, due to our nation's current COVID-19 pandemic (Frick, 2021). As such opportunities currently exist in the nation, the demand for quality personnel to fill these positions has increased (Frick, 2021). These personnel, however, have been limited, due to a history of systemic racism in the educational arena, to White males. In Michigan, Bridge Michigan journalists "created a racial tally by examining the online photos and profiles of superintendents at the state's 828 traditional local school districts and intermediate school districts" to discover "just 26 superintendents were black" (French & Halpert, 2021). In comparison to the national data that 8 percent of the nation's superintendents are Black, Michigan's 4 percent representation reflects only half of that percentage (Tienken & Domenech, 2021). When 95 percent of the superintendents in Michigan are White, and 77 percent of those male, aspiring minority leaders see limited opportunities for advancement when hiring firms continue to hire White males (Tienken & Domenech, 2021). Even consultant Alena Zachery-Ross, who works for a hiring firm from Ypsilanti, Michigan, and is also a Black superintendent, admits, "People typically want people who look like them and have the same background. There's an intent for diversity, that's what they want, but the behaviors don't align with intent"

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(French & Halpert, 2021). Certification for the position has been tied with racial discrimination, with the Black leaders having the lowest percentage of representation. Both implicit and explicit bias among hiring firms and school boards continue to affect the success of those aspiring Black leaders seeking to become superintendents (French & Halpert, 2021). Likewise, these biases are embedded in the hiring practices of Black superintendents and affect both their success and longevity in their fields as school boards hire Black superintendents to carry out personal agendas or impose unrealistic expectations (Horsford, 2009). Not only have the hiring practices been obstacles, maintaining and succeeding in the position as superintendent are more challenging for the Black superintendents than their White counterparts due to unrealistic expectations of those Black superintendents from the governing bodies (Hill, 2018). Despite improved prospects of other careers in the US, the Black leaders have had limited access to the position of superintendent. Better preparation and a toolkit for addressing and overcoming these obstacles can build a stronger foundation for mentorship which can, in turn, build greater equity in superintendent leadership across the nation.

Background

The top paid position in any K-12 school district is the superintendent, earning a salary in the national range in 2021 between $106, 901 and $229,359 (Bean-Mellinger, 2021). While open positions follow the expected alignment with the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, COVID-19 has contributed to an increase in departures and early retirements for these executive positions. According to *Michigan Live*, the pandemic "expedited plans for some school superintendent retirements as the burden of responsibilities had taken its toll" (Frick, 2021, para. 1). Criteria for these positions include a master's degree, usually with preference to educational leadership, experience as an administrator in education, finance, and labor relations. Some

criteria provided include specific qualities: communication, visibility, and motivation, among others (*MISTAFF – MASA – Michigan Education Job Postings*, 2020). Under Title VI I of the Civil Rights Act (1964), candidates are protected from discrimination based on skin color, religion, gender, or national origin. Despite this legal protection, biases affect the hiring practices of potential candidates and serve as an obstacle of Black superintendents. Racism, whether implicit or explicit, as applied through the tenets of Critical Race Theory, plays a role in either discouraging Black leaders from pursuing candidacy, prohibiting Black superintendent candidates from receiving the job offer, or interfering with the success of the newly hired Black superintendent. Black leaders in these top paying school district positions are currently underrepresented and disproportionately aligned with the increasingly diverse communities in school districts they have the potential to serve (Parker, 2009).

Problem Statement

Practical and Researchable Problem

The school superintendent is one of the most challenging and perhaps most crucial public positions in today's American life. The occupants of this position greatly influence the shape of public education more than any other person in the community (Fields, Jones, & Korelich, 2019). They have the essential role of determining the future of the young people within the community through education. In the 1800's, the need for someone to oversee the instruction and funding of a school district was reserved for the White male (Hodge, 2017). Ever since, Black leaders' aspirations for this position have remained challenged. Currently, only 8% of all superintendents in the nation are identified as Black (Tienken & Domenech, 2021). Establishing a pipeline for aspiring Black superintendents proves challenging as well, with White teachers in the U.S. representing 76.3% of all public school teachers, while Black teachers

represent only 23.7% (Harris-Muhammed, 2020). Black teachers are disproportionately lower than White teachers in comparison when pursuing administrative roles in education. The demographics of the student population are also rapidly increasing in diversity (Tienken & Domenech, 2021), yet the leadership fails to reflect the demographics of the student population. The Whites males are more likely to occupy the superintendent's office compared to any other demographic (French & Halpert, 2021). While the education system in the U.S. has made a significant gain in equity in the teaching profession, superintendents have remained unique with low integration of minority representation. According to Lowery (2019), as the Black populations remain the most underrepresented in the superintendency, the superintendent chair has been reserved for the White male for the last 75 years.

Related Studies Addressing the Problem

Historically, Black educators, despite their success and dedication in segregated schools, had been victimized through integration; Black administrators were demoted, and Black teachers were fired (Horsford, 2009). A stereotype and misrepresentation emerged from this, resulting in a negative perception that Black educators lack the abilities for educational leadership and are inferior to the dominant White male educator (Horsford, 2009). Ultimately, this resulted in the low percentage of Black representation in education today and limited the pool of candidates for aspiring Black superintendents. As a result of this perception, Black superintendents face obstacles with hiring firms and school boards. Black superintendents take a longer route through offers of subsidiary positions while in comparison, their White counterparts take less time and hold fewer positions to achieve the top position in a school district. As this path takes longer, Black leaders fail to maintain the path toward superintendency or retire before reaching the opportunity (Wiley et al., 2017). Further, to the Black leaders afforded the opportunity of

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becoming superintendent, their role can be suppressed by the personal agendas imposed upon them by the governing bodies in such a capacity that superintendents believe they were hired simply to meet a quota or hired to make a public symbolic statement of inclusion while having limited authority to run the school district (Wyatt, 2019). Often, the hiring of a Black superintendent is for the purpose of serving a personal agenda of the school board member or members. This reality has led to the continued racism and negative perception of the Blacks leaders, hence minimizing their superintendent career aspiration.

Once hired, the Black superintendent faces higher levels of stress along with higher expectations associated with maintaining their position in the first place (Parker, 2009). While all superintendents face increased challenges that lead to stress, particularly with the COVID-19 pandemic, Black superintendents have added stressors.

African American superintendents often lead complex school districts that present a range of leadership challenges. In addition to addressing the academic needs of their increasingly diverse students, African American superintendents must address community needs, practical concerns, and local politics. African American superintendents resultantly can find themselves searching for additional resources to compensate for systemic issues related to economic pressure, time constraints, and cultural and class differences (Johnson et al., 2003, p. 66).

As a result of the heightened pressures, Black superintendents face higher levels of stress than White superintendents.

Moreover, an obstacle remains in which Blacks apply but do not receive fair opportunities to compete with the White males in the superintendent position (Hodge, 2017). When Black leaders do find themselves outlasting the interview process and being approved for

such an esteemed and lucrative job, they are faced with unrealistic expectations of assimilating multiple cultures and doing more with less (Allen, & Hughes, 2017). The Black superintendents in almost every educational district are associated with crumbling infrastructure, poor tax bases, and have substantially low academic achievement in urban environments. In Michigan alone, "of the 22 Black superintendents in the state, most are hired into Black-majority, economically disadvantaged districts" (French & Halpert, 2021). As Black superintendents earn appointments in these mostly urban positions, they are faced with the overwhelming pressure of restoring a physically crumbling district, a challenge wealthier districts do not face. According to Joshua Talison, a Black superintendent of a district predominantly Black, high-poverty school, "Let's call a spade a spade, we [Black superintendents] don't get the platinum districts" (French & Halpert, 2021). Opportunities for Black leaders to be hired in more racially diverse, economically sufficient school districts remain limited and serve as an obstacle for Black leaders to thrive in the profession.

Significance of the Study

Data collected from this study was used to formulate a relevant, best practices toolkit for aspiring Black superintendents, for the purpose of increasing the representation of minorities to equal that of the increasingly diverse student populations. The explored themes of external support, hiring practice preparation, and professional resources are not only valuable to the aspiring Black superintendent candidate, but could potentially serve as a wake-up call for superintendent search firms and school boards to prioritize diversity and recognize their own biases and seek intentional policy changes that would provide opportunities for aspiring Black leaders to further their careers.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of my study was to synthesize collected data of the obstacles that impede Black leaders from pursuing or attaining a position as superintendent. Ultimately, this insight will provide an avenue leading to a preparation toolkit for successfully attaining a position and establishing equity in the top educational leadership position. In accessing this insight, I conducted a phenomenological qualitative interview of twelve Black educational leaders in varied roles to understand the complex obstacles involved in acquiring a superintendent position. Infused in the Critical Race Theory of experiential knowledge (Delgado et al, 2001), the value of the nuances of these experiences will contribute to a heightened awareness of the deficiencies in equity in leadership.

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Research Questions

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1. What are the career pathways for Black school administrators seeking to become district superintendents?

2. What hiring obstacles existed as you sought your first superintendent position?

3. What job-related challenges are you dealing with that you believe exist due to your ethnicity?

4. What support systems did you put in place or were put in place for you related to being a Black education professional?

5. What are some hidden biases new black superintendents need to be aware of before their first day on the job?

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of using theories within a research study is to establish a skeleton for upholding the body of the research. Race is a definitive factor at the core of my research, and no theory is more applicable than Critical Race Theory (CRT). This theory was developed in the 1970s after several legal scholars, activists, and lawyers realized that the Civil Rights Movement might not fully ascertain equality between Blacks and Whites (Hodge, 2017). According to Davis and Bowers (2019), racism is a human-invented classification system, connected with power, which impacts the behavior, beliefs, values, and ultimately the decisions of a particular group of people. Those decisions are controlled by the dominant group as addressed through the tenets of CRT.

The five basic tenets of CRT include:

1. Racism is permanent and embedded in American culture.

2. The concepts of color-blindness, equal opportunity, and race neutrality, among others are challenged in that they are merely masking self-interests of white privilege. This assertion is referred to as a dominant ideology.

3. The power of the Black experience, as told through the lens of those experiencing it (storytelling, also known as experiential knowledge), must be maintained, as so much of the experiences have been diluted through inexperienced storytellers.

4. The recognition of the assertion that Black communities will advance only at the interests of the dominant White community as well. This assertion is known as interest convergence.

5. The understanding that bias from the dominant group is exerted upon those with multi-

layered factors, whether it be gender, disability, race, socioeconomics, etc., that could impact

the hiring practices of the dominant group. CRT scholars claim that the hiring

pattern may not change due to the consultants' racial nepotism and interest convergence.

It can only be accomplished when the interest of Whites converges with the interest of

Blacks. This assertion is referred to as intersectionality (Valentine, 2018).

CRT affects all facets of pre- and post-hiring of aspiring Black superintendents. These

facets include the governing body's expectations, the career path of the aspiring

superintendent, the community's perspectives and expectations, and the mentoring and

networking resources available to the aspiring superintendent.

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework for Simmons (2022) study.

Obstacles Affecting Aspiring Black Superintendents
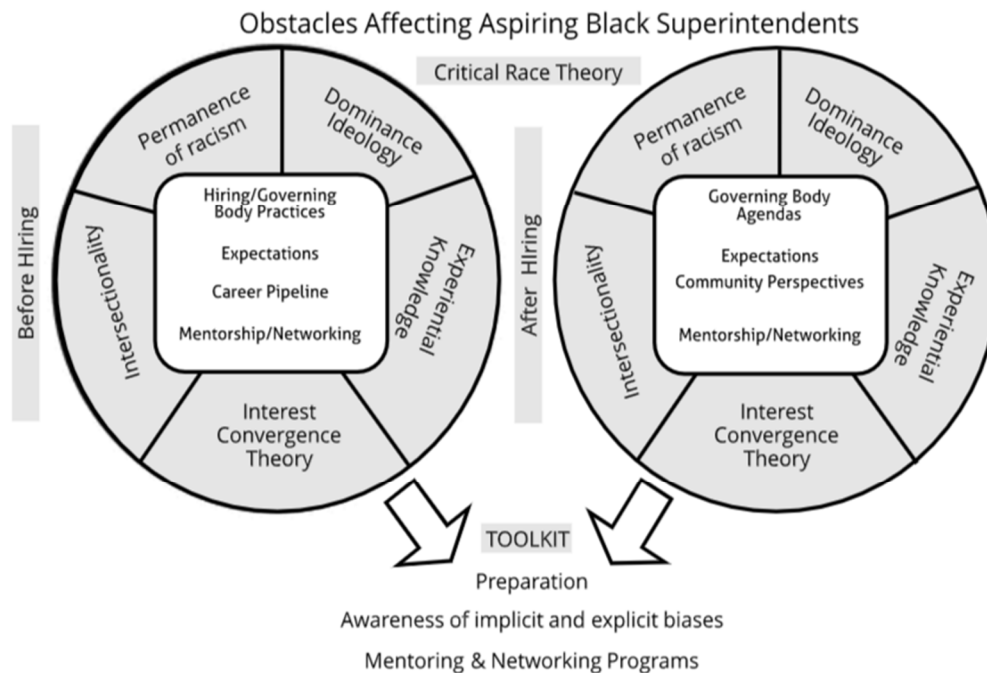
These tenets affect the hiring practices, expectations, mentorship and networking, governing body agendas, and community perspectives both through application of implicit and explicit biases in these actions. A toolkit of preparation, awareness of these implicit and explicit biases, and a resource of mentoring and network programs can benefit aspiring Black superintendents in addressing these obstacles.

Research Methods Overview

The research used qualitative design, considering that the focus of qualitative research was based on the need to identify and describe the obstacles that impede Black educational leaders from pursuing or attaining a position as school superintendent. This approach was also used to identify qualitative themes and study groups of the Black educational leader population and gather recommendations to serve as a toolkit for aspiring Black educators. The research used phenomenological qualitative study for the Black educational leaders to articulate their experience in their current positions as it related to their choice of pursuit of a superintendent position. A total of 12 Black administrator participants were involved. The respondents were randomly picked from 12 districts to represent other Black administrators in Michigan. The data from the 12 participants was collected through the online questionnaire. The interview as a data collection method was applied.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

History of the Superintendent

Today's current K-12 school district superintendent has evolved and transformed the role based on the circumstances for which he or she has been exposed. The superintendent now acts as the health director for the school district due to the rapid succession of the COVID-19 virus. Coupled with this current responsibility is the increased role of the superintendent as the communicator, intensified during the onset of the pandemic as well. Additional duties include directing finance, human resources, public relations, facilities, management, technology, and educational programs. An effective superintendent is one who is an exceptional leader, communicator, listener, and risk taker.

The qualities of a current effective superintendent are vast and complex in comparison to a superintendent fitting the original role developed in the 1830s. "This role, thought to exist for several decades prior to 1850, was predicated on the belief that big-city school boards were reluctant to relinquish power, so they relegated their superintendents to performing simple clerical and practical tasks" (Kowalski, 2003 p. 3). The governing body assigned to oversee this elected administrator was created by state governments. "In 1642, with no standardized requirement for education in a community, Massachusetts became the first recorded state to legislate compulsory education" (Hodge, 2017, p. 28). School boards surfaced five years later, overseeing the funding, instruction, and accountability of the schools. "Responsibility for supervising and evaluating this educational task fell to the town's Selectmen, males appointed or elected to serve as local government officials" (Hodge, 2017, p. 28). The Selectmen were required to collect school funding from the towns' families and maintain the financial records as

well as hire teachers, purchase equipment, etc. "This general practice set the stage for duplication throughout the rest of the growing country" (Hodge, 2017, p. 28) for American school boards. As the population grew, the role of the superintendent increased as did the growing number of superintendents. "By 1860, 27 cities in the United States had given individuals the role of superintendent" (Glass et al., 2000, p. 1). The responsibilities of the early superintendent concentrated mostly on clerical duties.

The Beginnings of the Superintendency

As school districts grew, the role of superintendents expanded beyond paperwork. Cities grew, along with compulsory attendance increasing the student population. Standardized tests added accountability along with an increase in academic curricula (Kowalski, 2003). Governing bodies increasingly turned to a single individual serving as a superintendent in larger school districts. District superintendents, as we know it, are commonly believed to have begun in Buffalo, New York, and Louisville, Kentucky, between 1837 and 1850 (Grieder, et al., 1969). This position has been held and continues to be dominated by White males (Tienken & Domenech, 2021).

Segregation and the Role of the Black Educator

As public schooling remained segregated, the Black superintendent remained largely nonexistent. Prior to the *Brown vs. Board of Education of 1954* decision, Black students in segregated schools organized protests to demand more funding from the White run school boards. Three years before *Brown v. Board,* in November 1951, "students in a civics class at the segregated Black Adkins High School in Kinston, North Carolina, discussed what features an ideal school should have for a class assignment. When they realized that the local white high school indeed had everything they had imagined, the seeds were planted for a student-led

protest" (School Segregation and Integration, 2011). Such efforts were futile, however, and the

school board instead provided funding for a new gymnasium at the all-White Adkins High

School, which would remain segregated until 1970 (School Segregation and Integration, 2011).

In 1955, the Supreme Court holding known as *Brown II* announced that "the dismantling

of separate school systems for Black and White could proceed with 'all deliberate speed,'"

(Virginia Museum of History and Culture, 2021), and received opposition from both Black and

White communities. Schools across the country took preemptive measures to avoid

desegregation at all costs. Opponents of the *Brown* decision created vouchers for White students

to attend schools of choice, moving to newly built rural schools to avoid attending urban schools

with Black students. In Virginia, state funding was cut off to desegregated schools. Retirement

packages were established and supported by the state government for White teachers who moved

to private segregated schools that were established in response to instituting desegregated

schools (Alexander & Alexander, 2001). This type of creative encouragement to re-segregate

schools promoted a march of "white flight," leaving Black students behind to enter buildings

severely neglected, underfunded, and literally crumbling. "[A]s a result of harassment by local

Whites and the tactics employed by state pupil placement boards, by 1965 almost 94% of

southern Black students remained in all-Black schools, and in several states only the slightest

change had been made in the system of separate and unequal schools" (Wells, 1993 p. 66). These

Black students remained in schools run by Black educators and administrators.

While some Black communities vied for what they perceived as equal protection under

the Fourteenth Amendment, opposing the *Brown* ruling included Black leaders like W.E.B.

DuBois, who envisioned a different outcome for segregation. The leader of the National

Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) found himself at odds with his

fellow leaders regarding the *Brown* decision. He felt it "essentially would be worthless as a tool for securing black civil rights in the absence of a specific deadline for states to desegregate public schools" (Gaines, 2004, p. 27). DuBois felt Black children were better off in their segregated schools and examined the history of this perspective even prior to the *Brown* decision. DuBois (1935) in his article, *Does the Negro Need Separate Schools? stated, "*If the public schools of Atlanta, Nashville, New Orleans, and Jacksonville were thrown open to all races tomorrow, the education that colored children would get in them would be worse than pitiable. It would not be education. And in the same way, there are many public-school systems in the North where Negroes are admitted and tolerated, but they are not educated; they are crucified" (p. 329). While *Brown* enabled children of all races and backgrounds to have equal opportunity and access in education, poor integration implementation policies, including the expediency of the *Brown II* Supreme Court decree, and widespread White backlash presented problems for many Black students and teachers. Thriving Black communities built productive Black schools with limited funding supplemented by their own funding. Many of these schools had higher per pupil spending than White schools. The all-Black schools in Tulsa, Oklahoma, exemplified such prosperous communities. Media consultant Carmen Fields recalled her experience in her segregated community in the 1950s, "Some of our teachers were Ph.Ds., or Ph.D. candidates. We had the best of the best, the talented 10th, if you will, and they expected the best of us" (as cited in Bates, 2014). These were communities where the Black children felt safe and valued due to highly qualified Black educators and administrators.

DuBois found himself at odds with the NAACP as its view supported desegregation. According to DuBois, segregation "undermine[d], not enhance[d] black pride" (Lutz, 2017, p. 4). DuBois saw segregated schools as a way to protect young Black children and give them a chance

to attend segregated schools where, like the Tulsa, Oklahoma schools, were considered valued and safe. In Topeka, after middle and high schools were integrated, elementary schools "came with the stipulation that segregated schools for children must have equal facilities. Schools for black children had to 'be as easy of access' as those provided for white children" (Lutz, 2017, p. 10). Ignoring this ruling, school boards "conveniently overlooked this requirement, as all too often black school children had to walk several miles each way to school, often passing through railroad yards and crossings, and other industrial areas" (Lutz, 2017, p. 5). The Black schools, at least in the view of the Black community thrived, drawing media attention. Reported in the *Topeka State Journal* in 1915, "representatives of the colored race at school board meetings frequently intimate that the board does not do as much for the colored children as for the whites. As a matter of fact, the average cost per pupil at the colored schools in the last school year was $35.74 as compared with $26.82 for white children. This does not include overhead costs and salaries for officers, general office expenses, cost of school census, etc." ("The High Cost of City Schools," 1915, pg. 1, para. 1). What appeared in the *Topeka State Journal*, however, was deceiving, as the per pupil spending did not identify the source of income, which included the Black communities.

Despite this report of higher per pupil spending in Black schools, these thriving schools were often funded by the Black communities themselves and accounted for the per pupil spending. The Black communities ensured that their Black schools were staffed with caring and committed educators. Black teachers had positive rapports with their students and communities (Lutz, 2017). According to a former student at Monroe Elementary School in Topeka, "My grade school education was not inferior, it was superior. I never felt my school was inferior" (Lutz, 2017, p. 6). All this changed, however, as reports in the *Topeka Daily State Journal* reported that

"'Negros [were] aroused at the closing of a local black school for economic reasons" (Lutz, 2017, p. 6). Desegregation led not only to the elimination of thriving all-Black schools, but it also perpetuated a lack of Black educators that would have provided the pipeline to Black administration.

Decline of the Black Educator

As a result of the closing, Black students lost their teachers and administrators, those who were active members of the Black community. White principals and superintendents replaced the Black principals, and White teachers replaced Black teachers in segregated schools after closing the all-Black schools. Immediately after the *Brown* finding, there was a "wholesale firing of Black educators" (Tillman, 2004, p. 280). "Seventy-three percent of the African American role models in the education field were cut. School districts throughout the country fired Black educators and administrators, replaced by less-qualified White teachers (Hodge, 2017, p. 35). Black communities, once actively involved in education, no longer participated or funded these desegregated schools (Lutz, 2017, p. 3). Any professional aspirations in desegregated school systems were suppressed. "Ironically, the legally segregated school systems provided greater opportunities for black educators than did segregated school systems" (Scott, 2015, p. 22). Black communities lost their voice in education.

Qualified Black leaders seeking to further their careers reached a blockade in advancement and were limited to the role of assistant principal or principal after the *Brown* ruling (Tillman, 2004). Studying the decline of Black teachers and administrators overall in comparison to the rise of a diverse population in Florida, Superintendent of Dade County Schools Everett Abney exposed the racial disparities with teachers and administrators. "The data gathered indicated that as the state of Florida proceeded to achieve some semblance of

desegregation, Black principals were forced to pay an exorbitant price, through displacements and/or job losses" (Abney, 1980, p. 406). Abney (1980) surmised that the reduction and inadequate representation of Black principals in Florida could be credited to the all-White racial makeup of the school boards and superintendents.

In the 1970s, opportunities for advancement occurred in a "reservoir of unmet needs" (Scott, 2015, p. 22) in which neglected urban schools fell into states of disrepair. What remained for Black leaders and educators were shifted into these urban districts. While there is a growing amount of evidence on the scholarly contributions of Black educational leaders in America both pre- and post- *Brown* era, there is little evidence of the "radicalized aspects of the educational leadership pipeline and hiring and promotion processes...that can limit advancement of people of color" (Smith, 2017, p. 123). The 1990s emerged as a "quiet reversal of Brown" or "resegregation" (Horsford, 2009, p. 174) in which numerous court cases allowed districts to be released "from obligations to maintain desegregated schools while mitigating the harmful effects of segregation" (Hosford, 2009, p. 174). These racially segregated school districts emerged due to the changes in affordable housing opportunities, "and the move away from neighborhood schools, the contemporary conditions and characteristics of Black education present unique and complex school and community contexts in which to examine and advance the opportunities, achievement, and success of Black children and youth" (Horsford, 2009, p. 174). This condition established the unappealing urban school district and opened the door of opportunity for the Black superintendent.

Black superintendents were assigned to lead urban desegregated school districts, but these superintendents were former students in segregated schools and were held to the daunting task of not only leading the children, but the entire communities through their ordeals of the

post-Civil Rights era. Unfortunately, Black superintendents remained overwhelmingly in predominantly Black urban school districts, which were underfunded and composed of low socio-economic and underachieving student populations. Black superintendents were preoccupied with restoring crumbling buildings, stabilizing school districts, and simply meeting students' needs rather than advancing their academic prowess (Horsford, 2010). Since the 1960s, little has changed. "The voice of the Black superintendent is rarely heard and notably silent on issues where it may prove to be of particularly significant value, such as those related to the power and prejudice of race, unintended consequences of desegregation, conceptualizations of educational quality and inequality, and social justice in pre- and post-desegregation contexts" (Horsford, 2010. p. 310). With limited opportunities for Black superintendents focused primarily in struggling urban school districts, the Black superintendent lacks the necessary presence nationwide to match an increasingly diverse student population.

Current State of the Black Superintendent

Currently, there have been no burgeoning trajectories of significant numbers of Black male superintendents employed in the United States, a trend in contradiction to the growing diversity of student populations (Tienken & Domenech, 2021). "Districts are more diverse than ever before. Compared to the 2010 survey, there was a slight increase in districts serving 51% or more students who were non-white" (Tienken & Domenech, 2021, p. 21). As diversity among schools' student populations increased, the percentage of Black superintendents continues to remain the same at 6% of the overall number of school superintendents nationwide (Tienken & Domenech, 2021, p.21). The Black male continues to be underrepresented at all levels of education. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) parallel the lack of alignment of superintendents within K-12 school districts with a similar issue for Black faculty in higher education; students are

increasingly diverse in colleges and universities, but the faculty is not reflective of that diversity. "In the fall of 2013, among full-time professors in the United States, 84 percent were White, 4 percent Black, 3 percent Hispanic, and 9 percent Asian/Pacific Islander. Making up less than 1 percent each were professors who were American Indian/Alaska Native." (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p.2). At all levels in education, Black representation in leadership continues to be minimal.

According to H. J. Scott in *The Black Superintendent* (2015), the number of Black superintendents in the United States in 2015 was strikingly deficient. "The National Alliance for Black Educators estimates the number of black superintendents is about fifty. Only an approximate total is possible because states do not maintain an official identification of school superintendents by race" (p. 22). The National Alliance for Black Educators is the only organization in the nation that collects data on the race and locations of the Black superintendents. "Statistically, when compared to the more than 16,000 superintendents in the nation, the 50 black superintendents constitute just over one-fourth of one percent of the total. (Scott, 2015, p. 22). Considering the only organization collecting demographic data on Black superintendents is a Black organization, diversity in this leadership role does not appear to be a priority.

Of interest are the slight gains in gender equity in the profession for Black female superintendents, forty-two of the 8.6% of Black superintendents are Black females. Overall, Black female superintendents represent only 5.1% of all superintendents; however, this number was only 1.9% in 2015, showing a gain of 3.2% over the past five years (Tienken, 2020). "The 2020 AASA Decennial Study reported a gender breakdown of 26.7% females and 72.9% males compared to 24.1 % females and 75.9% males in 2010" (Tienken & Domenech, 2021, p.

19). This increase, while small, has minimal impact on the White superintendent's partition of equity. This percentage has more than doubled since 2000, evident that this fracture continues to spread. However, the outlook for this trajectory may be stalled in the current year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in declining employment opportunities for women more than any other demographic: "Female job loss rates due to COVID-19 are about 1.8 times higher than male job loss rates globally, at 5.7 percent versus 3.1 percent respectively" (Madgavkar et al., 2021, para 5). Considering the only organization tracking Black superintendents is the National Alliance for Black Educators, their limited funds and resources may result in skewed data during the COVID-19 pandemic related to the slight trajectory of female Black superintendent employment.

The Impact of the Covid-19 on the Superintendency

The COVID-19 pandemic exhausted superintendents overall, as superintendents dealt with politically divided communities, exhausted staff, and budget crises. As reported in *The American School Superintendent 2020 Decennial Study*, as was the case in the 2010 study and in previous years, "job-related stress continues to be a byproduct of the position and its excessive time requirements" (Tienken & Domenech, 2021, para. 11). The 2020 study did not include the added stressors of the COVID-19 pandemic as much as added stressors related to their Return-to-Learn plans. As further evidenced, Yale University conducted a study of over 1,000 superintendents in New York City, asking them to share their emotions regarding their positions and the stress levels they were experiencing. "Leaders were asked to share the three emotions they had experienced the most during the prior two weeks. An overwhelming 95% of the feelings they named could be classified as 'negative.' The most commonly mentioned emotion was anxiety, which stood out glaringly above all others-overwhelmed, sad, stressed,

frustrated, uncertain, and worried" (Brackett, 2020, para. 2). An additional study of over 100

school leaders found "94 percent of the respondents stated that they have experienced an increase

in stress during COVID" (DeWitt, 2020, para 7). Leading the school district has its stressors

already with increased job responsibilities, but adding the pandemic-related factors has made it

even more difficult.

The increased responsibilities absorbed by school superintendents over the course of

history, added to the increased stressors from COVID-19, have contributed to the current exodus

of superintendents leaving the profession in the past decades (Heim & Strauss, 2021). In

Kowalski et. al's *2010 American Superintendent Decennial Study*, a trend of concern indicated

that half of the superintendents were not planning on continuing in their career in the next five

years. In addition, the report indicated an increase in the number of retirement-eligible

superintendents within the same five years (Kowalski, et. al, 2000). Comparatively, in the 2020

study, "59% of the respondents said they planned on being a superintendent in the next five

years" (Minichello, 2020, para. 5). Of this percentage, the increase was a reaction to the 2010

projection that half of the superintendents would leave their posts within five years. Currently,

the job opportunity outlook for superintendent positions is in alignment with the national average

of a 4% growth rate over the next ten years (*U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, 2021). However,

this growth rate projection does not consider the added job stress related to the pandemic that

could result in an increased growth rate.

Regardless of potential opportunities, the growth of the Black superintendent, and all

minorities, continues to be limited. Chris Tienken, the principal investigator of *The American

Superintendent 2020 Decennial Study* stated, "While the trends are headed in the right direction

in education, the low proportion of women and individuals of color in the most important district

position in education is still troubling (Modan, 2020, para. 2). With less than 8% of administrator and executive leaders considered Black (Whitford, 2020), much of this deficit is attributed to a breach in the educational pipeline to advance educational leaders. This breach is attributed to the influence of a historically White-dominated culture and racist influence, which I will address in the next section using Critical Race Theory as a lens.

Critical Race Theory

Racism continues to exist today and permeates into the educational system. While today's Generation Z may feel that much of racism is eradicated, perhaps due to the co-mingling of races ("I have a Black friend"), studies have shown that "blacks and Latinos who seek loans, apartments, or jobs are much more apt to suffer rejection, often for vague or spurious reasons" (Delgado et al., 2001, p. 38). Situations in which racism is ignored and minorities continue to suffer injustices such as these form the foundation for Critical Race Theory (CRT). Emerging in the 1970s after the Civil Rights Era began to wane, CRT sought to look beyond the idealism of eradicating racism and establishing unity. Instead, it focused on legal, emotional, and sociological aspects of the structure of racism itself. Demographics are fluid concepts, and as they continue to mold and shape society, new circumstances, and crises surface, giving CRT a necessary platform to address these issues.

The CRT movement "is a collective of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power (Delgado et al., 2001, p. 2). These activists and scholars engage in the progress of "the foundation of the liberal order, including quality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law" (p. 2). Such discourse includes scholars such as Derrick Bell, who proposed that *Brown vs. The Board of Education, (1954),* was brought about, not to advance racial

educational equity, but founded on the premise that it was more to "advance elite whites than to help blacks" (Delgado et al., 2001, p. 7). Bell's basis for this proposal was founded on the use of the *Brown vs. Board* decision as a political maneuver of securing mostly black, underdeveloped nations in the fight against Communism during the Cold War. Any international reports of lynchings or murders of Blacks related to peaceful civil rights protests would be detrimental to the United States when attempting to gain allies of those nations (Delgado et al., 2001). Thus, desegregation was used merely as a tool for White political leaders to secure their political agenda. Such proposals are founded on the fact that racism does exist, but White Americans are unaware of their own racism, or the way culture has influenced our views of race or how we react to situations involving race. While there are several factors involved in CRT, the fundamental beliefs included in five tenets are based on Monica Allen's study, *The Relevance of Critical Race Theory: Impacts on Students of Color* (2016).

Tenet One: The Permanence of Racism

Racism is permanent. Indeed, racism is so ordinary and embedded in our American culture, that it appears accepted and commonplace. According to Allen (2016). "The White, Christian, middle class, heterosexual norms of the dominant group have become the point of reference against which other groups are judged. They determine the norms of which define what is right or wrong and expect other groups to conform" (para. 5). This first tenet meets with opposition due to a person's lack of awareness of his or her own bias. "Racism is difficult to address because it's not acknowledged (Delgado, 2001, p. 34). The fact that racial discrimination occurs when one considers himself or herself as "color-blind" builds further barriers to racial equity. This lack of acknowledgement is further advanced when materialistic gain subliminally support's elitist's conviction to "color-blindness," leading to the second tenet of CRT.

Tenet Two: The Liberalism Challenge

CRT challenges liberalism: CRT challenges the concepts of White privilege and objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity" (Allen, 2017, para. 6). The CRT tenet establishes that attempts at suppressing racism by ignoring it is merely a way to "camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of the dominant culture in America'" (Allen, 2017, para 6). By ignoring racist policies through the lens of color-blindness, racial inequality exacerbates. No more is this second tenet relevant than in the recent political climate under President Trump as the White privilege and "color-blindness" theory permeated into education. President Trump called for a "formation of the '1776 Commission' and 'National Commission to Promote Patriotic Education' to encourage educators to 'teach our children about the miracle of American history'" (DeMatthews & Watson, 2020, para. 1). In doing so, Trump explicitly denounced Critical Race Theory used by the United States Department of Education. He explicitly addressed the *1619 Project*, which addresses Americans role in the brutality of slavery. Through Trump's involvement in the educational policies, and his use of power in explicitly denouncing Critical Race Theory as "Anti-American," the paradox arises in Critical Race Theory in a way that the person in power suppresses the voice of the minority. By Trump using his power to withhold funding to schools that expose racism in America because he considers it Anti-American is suppressing the issues that minority groups face today and is, in fact, racist. With one of the tenets of Critical Race Theory addressing that racism exists, both in the past and present, the person in power controlling educational policies, being a White male, only further strengthens the theory itself. This political climate compounds Black superintendents' stress factors, ultimately resurfacing this theory formulated in the 1970s.

Critical Race Theory is prevalent in the educational community today and is evident in the obstacles Black superintendents face in achieving success in their fields.

The ideology of ending racial discrimination by ignoring race, or failing to see color, is referred to as "color-blindness." When referring to the "color-blindness" method of addressing conflict, Lopez (2003) uses examples like the Harlem Race Riot to illustrate the conflict of power and the outcomes of color-blind theory. Occurring two weeks after Lyndon Johnson signed the *1964 Civil Rights Act*, making it illegal to discriminate against a person of color, a 15-year-old Black boy was shot and killed by an off-duty police officer. Peaceful protests escalated to violence as tensions grew within the Black community seeking the resignation of the officer. Those in power failed to recognize this event as a race-related riot, ultimately exacerbating the conflict and suppressing the voices of the minority. "By refusing to label the 1943 incident as a race riot, individuals not only strip the event of its racial underpinnings but render its social and political significance as meaningless" (Lopez, 2003, p. 81). Ignoring the issue of race limits the extent of its impact as "superficial manifestations like prejudice, discrimination, and blatant intolerance" (Lopez, 2003, p. 81). Ignoring race aggravates racism. Lopez reinforces the fact that most people view racism as explicit and intentional (hate crimes, N-word, etc.) and disregard their own implicit biases, and because they do not see their own implicit bias, they do not address racial issues that surface. The dominant White male in educational power does not address racial issues, ultimately resulting in racial conflict. Lopez contends in the first tenet of Critical Race Theory that racism is ever-present in our society but notes the evolution of racism as it now requires explicit acts to prove its existence. Indeed, proving racism is nearly impossible with the more predominant form of racism: implicit bias. "Because [racism] is so ordinary, we often fail to see how it functions and shapes our institutions, our relationships, and ways of

thinking. By unmasking the hiding faces of racism, CRT aims to expose and unveil White privilege 'in its various perpetuations and reveal a social order that is highly stratified and segmented along racial lines. It is hoped that such an unveiling will reveal the simple fact that racism is a permanent fixture in the American political, legal, and social spectrum" (Lopez, 2003, p. 84). Lopez emphasizes the need for racism and issues of race to be unearthed by educational leaders and infuse these concerns into the educational political arena.

These first and second tenets in CRT are essential for aspiring Black superintendents to be cognizant during the hiring process and the role in which race influences the decisions made by the governing body. Regardless of what may be perceived as idealistic, implicit bias is a driving force that impacts school boards and hiring firms and their decisions to consider a Black candidate.

Tenet Three: Centrality of Experiential Knowledge

Centrality of Experiential Knowledge is using storytelling to present experiences through the lens of the minority experience. One method to challenge the dominant culture is through the use of minority storytelling. Narratives of the dominant culture exist everywhere, and CRT theorists focus on the importance of viewing the minority's experiences through their own lens and not through the lens of the privileged culture. "The experience of oppression, such as racism and sexism, is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding and analyzing the plight of these marginalized groups" (Allen, 2016, p. 31). This tenet is referred to as counter-story telling as it counters those narratives accepted by the dominant culture and reveals the experiences of those originally telling their story.

For example, I grew up as one of eight brothers and one sister in rural Mississippi, the son of a factory worker and special education teacher who taught in a desegregated school. We

farmed land my parents purchased from working at Plumrose Meat Packing Company, and my mother's teaching salary. When my parents died, we divided the land into ten acres for each sibling. Unfortunately, the story imposed upon my daughter, the sole minority in her grade, in her high school freshman history class contradicted my experience. The White teacher made the assumption the land was distributed to all former slaves under the "40 acres and a mule" myth, telling my daughter she was mistaken that her grandparents purchased the property as land was handed out to Southern Blacks. This teacher emphasized a perspective on the Black experience regardless of what was true and focused on a dominant viewpoint that material gain for minorities occurred only at the hands of the dominant group.

Three types of counter-storytelling exist: The first is personal stories, which are told directly by the person involved, that being a minority experiencing racism and how that person reacts to it. The second is other people's stories, those who move the person's stories to a larger, more historical perspective, a re-telling of the person's stories. Third, a composite story, which synthesizes a compilation of individual stories. A sanitized version of America's role in slavery is one example of the application of these three genres. Teaching lessons in history class that divorce the U.S. from its brutality and downplay white supremacy creates a false narrative. Countering these stories include personal accounts from slaves themselves, such as those of Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, for example. Solomon Northrup's personal story, written in his memoir *Twelve Years a Slave*, was retold, and further explored by journalist and historian David Wilson, who traced his roots to slavery in North Carolina and created a composite of stories of into a documentary (Karow, 2010). Northrup's memoir was then adapted to screen by producer John Ridley. The uniqueness of Northrup's life, having been a free man kidnapped into slavery is one which counters the dominant narrative that suppresses crimes such

as kidnapping in American history, its counter-narrative valuable to present experiences of the minority.

The third tenet of Critical Race Theory is important for acquiring qualitative data on aspiring Black leaders for superintendency as their experiences are not always aligned with the dominant cultural experiences. Without this qualitative data, Black superintendents' experiences are absorbed into a dominant cultural experience, suppressing all race-related experiences that may expose implicit or explicit biases that may affect success in their careers.

Tenet Four: Interest Convergence

Interest Convergence asserts that Black communities prosper only when it promotes the interests of the White communities as well. Harvard law professor Derrick Bell (1980) first presented this tenet in its relationship to *Brown vs. Board of Education (1954)*. As presented earlier, Black scholars including Bell presented the economic advantages of closing Black schools and redirecting funding to integrated White schools, eliminating the *Plessey vs. Ferguson (1896) "*separate but equal" doctrine. Desegregation also provided a means to gain political allies in predominantly Black developing countries. Interest convergence is just as applicable today as it was in the 1960s. For example, in light of racist-related political turmoil, George Floyd's death promoted an overwhelming response in support of the *Black Lives Matter* movement. While this may appear altruistic, corporations cannot afford to remain silent. "Consumer-driven corporations were all too quick to showcase their anti-racist positions. Never mind that some of these corporations had engaged, or continue to engage, in anti-Black practices. Although retail spending decreased during the pandemic, companies could not possibly lose more money speaking out against racism, but they could by remaining silent, or

worse, condoning racism (Hoag, 2020, para. 8). Anti-racist positions simply look better in business.

An aspiring Black superintendent should be aware that hiring practices include the Interest Convergence tenet. Specifically, school board members may hire inexperienced Black superintendents to serve personal agendas, as in my experience. According to one board member who hired me, "I hired you because we could mold you to carry out our expectations, and you would be grateful that we not only hired you without experience, but you could also say you made history being the first Black superintendent." Taking into consideration few Black superintendents are hired in Michigan, I felt the need to be grateful for the opportunity along with an obligation to carry out the school board member's personal agenda which was presented to me two weeks after being hired. This feeling of indebtedness conflicted with my moral obligation to uphold district policy when the personal agendas conflicted with these policies.

Tenet Five: Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to the overlapping layers of race, gender, socio-economic class, disability, and numerous others that intersect and affect each other and how the dominant group views these factors. For example, the experience of the Black male superintendent will be different to that of the Black female superintendent. Intersectionality is a consideration in hiring practices, as each of these layers affects how that candidate is viewed by a dominant group. This tenet refers to the fact that "racism advances the interest of both white elites (materially) and working-class people (physically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. 7). In hiring practices, this occurs when governing bodies dictate to hiring firms that they do not want a minority in the pool of applicants. When completing the

study of aspiring Black superintendents, it is necessary to explore the intersectionality of the participants and how those factors affect their decisions to pursue their careers.

Obstacles to Aspiring Black Superintendents

As indicated in the demographics presented in Tienken's (2021) *The American Superintendent Decennial Study 2020*, the fact that less than 8% of the superintendents in America are Black is a result of the many obstacles that interfere with aspiring Black superintendents from pursuing a career in the field. The obstacles can occur both prior to hiring and after accepting the position. While many obstacles occur as part of the stress-related factors of employment and overwhelming stress of day-to-day operations in superintendency, the added barriers related to racial equity worsen the obstacles aspiring Black superintendents and Black superintendents face. "Data gathered indicates that... superintendents believe that because of their skin color, they have to work harder, are questioned, and doubted more often, do not receive every possible opportunity to advance, are often treated as outsiders, are typecast into certain roles, have unfair expectations placed upon them and don't play on a leveled field" (Parker, 2009, p. 54). The color of their skin is an obstacle that affects aspiring Black superintendents before they ever get their foot in the door.

Hiring Practices

According to the U. S. Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, federal laws prohibit discrimination against race, color, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, or disability (Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1964). This statement is included in all employment applications. However, hiring practices are far from equitable. According to Glass (2000), "[t]here is also a large discrepancy in perceptions of hiring and promotional practice between white

superintendents and minority superintendents. Close to 50 percent of minority superintendents see these issues as major problems, while only 10 percent of white superintendents view them in the same way" (p. 16). Despite the increasingly diverse school district and a need to hire Black superintendents to represent the diverse community, the image of today's superintendent continues to be the predominantly White male. "Search consultants and school board presidents had not really considered the possibility of hiring anyone other than white candidates. Boards did not make it a priority to diversify the applicant pool they chose from and there was an underlying yet prevalent belief that black applicants were only really suitable for black or minority districts" (Parker, 2009, p. 17).

Search firms are hired by school boards and serve at the boards' discretions. If the school district has a history of hiring a White male, any deviation of that norm would be considered controversial. Thus, Black candidates included in the pool of White male candidates consider being included as disingenuous, as a perfunctory effort in providing equity in their firm's candidate pool (Parker, 2009). Board members also felt their communities were not ready for, nor would they be accepting of black leadership" (Parker, 2009, p. 17). Brown (2005) noted that "schools in a racially diverse society will require leaders and models of leadership that will address the racial, cultural, and ethnic makeup of the community" (p. 585). But districts continue to hire White males. Charles Moody (1973) illustrated the inequities in hiring Black superintendents despite the need for more Black superintendents. Edward Fort, a former superintendent from Inkster, Michigan, amplifies the notion that "the most difficult thing about being a Black superintendent is...getting the job in the first place" (Moody, 1973, p. 376). Bernard Watson, a Black professor of Urban Education at Temple University, vehemently confirmed the systemic racism in hiring practices. "We have been systematically kept out of top

positions for years-and we still are" (Moody, 1973, p. 376). The first step into attaining the top leadership position in a school district is navigating through the hiring agency process, dominated by the White male within the hiring agency and/or within the governing bodies that hire the agency. There is still evidence of a range of structural inhibitors to the hiring and promotion of African Americans to school administrative roles with, in the majority of cases, search committee membership being exclusively dominated by White males (Ortiz, 2000).

In Jackson and Shakeshaft's (2003) *The Pool of African American Candidates for Superintendency*, their study showed that White males were considered for jobs at a higher rate than Black males or females, with White females well below consideration, but still higher than Black males or females as indicated in the Table 1 below. The small portion of Black superintendents dropped out after the first round of interviews. The most disturbing factor, however, was that no job offers were extended to the Black male candidate pool that applied for superintendency.

Table 1

Percent of Applicants at Each Search Decision Point by Race/Ethnicity and Sex: April 22, 2003, by Jackson and Shakeshaft, in The Pool of African American Educational Research Association.

	African Descent Applicants		White Applicants	
	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female
Applied	4.5	1.2	70.9	22.7
First Round Interviews	4.4	1.4	67.1	25.4
Final Round Interview	1.3	1.3	71.2	27.3
Hired	0.0	8.3	83.3	8.3

However, limited research exists involving the impact race has during the hiring process, especially when implicit bias is not a conscious behavior. How do we recognize bias in the hiring process when we are not aware of this bias in the first place? It is commonly accepted among Black superintendents that the hiring process, including the consulting firms and the boards that hire them, are inherently discriminatory. (Glass et al, 2000; Kowalski, et al., 2010; Moody, 1983, Tallerico, 2000).

Role of the Search Firm in Hiring Practices

The consulting firm is the first hurdle in gaining access to senior leadership positions in a school district. These firms are hired by the governing bodies to recruit and screen applicants prior to the initial interview. These search firms are formed primarily by former superintendents, and since most superintendents are White males, the search firms are composed of White males (Tallerico, 2000). Because these search firms are paid for by the school district, screening applicants to find the best fit for the school district involves tailoring this process to fit the implicit and explicit needs of the governing body. "[S]earch firms found it controversial to bring black candidates before boards so they often only introduced white candidates" (Parker, 2009, p. 17). What makes a good fit is when the consultant knows what the board wants and brings those with matching credentials to the board irrespective of race (Tallerico, 2000).

The hiring process occurs by surveying the school board and assessing their needs, including understanding the unspoken rules conveyed by the school board (Tallerico, 2000). These unwritten rules include the sociocultural biases that create challenges for minorities such as women and Black males: etiquette, norms of behavior, traditions, and customs of the community. Because search firms are paid to meet those needs, it is no wonder the search firms withhold bias in the hiring process. Yet, some consultants in search firms do come forward, "I

have been told, do not bring a minority or a woman to the board" (Shakeshaft & Jackson, 2003, p. 13). While the descriptors of what a school board is looking for (attached to recruitment brochures or online applications), in compliance with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines, none of them include any preference of gender or race as that would be deemed illegal on the basis of discrimination. In other words, school boards simply cannot explicitly request a White male as their superintendent.

After hiring firms recruit the applicants, they begin the process of screening applicants. Moody (1983) asserts that Black candidates, male and female, and women in general, are eliminated after the first round of interviews. "The elimination of candidates is particularly prevalent for searches by districts with predominantly White student populations. It is only reasonable to believe these candidates were never going to be seriously considered for the positions, and only served to quell any negative reaction to people of color not getting an opportunity to be interviewed (Hill, 2018, p. 22). As many applicants seek positions where they are likely to be hired, it's not surprising applicants apply to "districts with student populations in which their respective race is the majority for students" (Hill, 2018, p. 22). Considering the increase in diversity of student populations, it would be logical to assume that opportunities for Black superintendents have increased, yet getting hired into these positions is unlikely. In the event that an African American candidate actually makes it to the final round of a superintendent search in a predominantly White district, he or she will not typically be offered the job. On the other hand, more than half the White superintendents who apply to districts in which students of color are the majority can expect to be offered a position (Shakeshaft & Jackson, 2003).

Applying Critical Race Theory as a factor in the consulting firms' hiring process, the tenet of convergence theory emerges. As mentioned previously, interest convergence asserts that

racial equality for Blacks occurs only by benefiting Whites. Implicit bias is established in the hiring process when White people in positions of power give preference to the White applicants. If a Black superintendent is hired, the governing body, often predominantly White, needs to acknowledge a shift in demographics. "White suburban districts begin to realize a population shift in the community and schools towards an increased number of blacks or another minority group. The White power base in that community may decide that a person of color would be better suited to 'handle' the school system that is full of students of color. Again, it should be noted that these districts are less desirable to White candidates" (Hill, 2018, p. 28).

"Symbolic racism theory, "also called 'new racism,' 'modern racism,' or 'racial resentment,' assume that whites' true attitudes reflect in their opposition to actually doing something to end racial inequality rather than in their survey responses about prejudice" (DiTomaso, 2013, p. 5). It can be argued that these racist attitudes, without admitting overt racism, are the result of Whites believing subconsciously that they are entitled to a dominant relationship with Blacks (DiTomaso, 2013, p.5). As a result, DiTomaso amplifies the argument that Whites do not see their racism as the issue; rather, they see Blacks as the ones who "violate key principles of American values about the role of government and the requirements for responsibility and effort on the part of individuals" (p. 6).

Of particular issue regarding hiring practices is DiTomaso's theory that "acts of favoritism that Whites show to each other (through opportunity hoarding and the exchange of social capital) contribute most to continued racial inequality" (DiTomaso, 2013, p. 6). This accounts for superintendents remaining predominantly White males. Thus, for the benefit of the dominant group, the open positions in a suburban district controlled by a governing body of predominantly White males are reserved for White males.

This can best be illustrated in the following research:

Shakeshaft and Jackson (2003) researched hiring practices in New York State regarding minority candidates for the superintendency. They focused on 126 Nassau and Suffolk County districts along with community school districts in Queens and Brooklyn. Six percent of the districts in Suffolk and Nassau counties had Blacks as leaders of their systems. Eleven of these 126 districts were predominantly minority. Of these 11 districts, seven were headed by Black leaders (four of which were male), while the remaining four were headed by Whites. In the year of their study (1999) there were 22 vacancies, 12 of which were selected for further study; these 12 vacancies attracted 550 candidates. Black males made up 4.5% of the applicant pool, while White males accounted for 76%. Only 1.3 % of the original Black male applicant pool went on to the second round of interviews while 71.2% of White males advanced. Of those eventually hired, 83.3% were White males, while none were Black males (Shakeshaft & Jackson, 2003).

Critical Race Theory permeates the interview process and the varying perspectives of those in power over the Black candidate. The Black candidate's perception of hiring ability tends to focus on their leadership qualities rather than their personal characteristics, those of which are the focus of White superintendents. The Black superintendent tends to focus on educational skills including instruction (Hill 2018). When the governing body and hiring firms are White males, contradictions occur when they tend to relate more to the candidates who have like-minded foci (Hill, 2018). For example, my former experience as an athletic director was a focal point of discussion during my interview as members of the school board, parents of athletes, considered athletics a priority. Ultimately, even if the Black candidate is able to obtain an interview, the different perceptions of focus tend to create a disconnect between school board members and the

candidate when the Black male focuses on educational skills over personal characteristics, leading toward a tendency to hire a White male superintendent.

In order to overcome the hurdle of inequities in hiring practices, aspiring Black superintendents must position themselves in leadership roles to thoroughly fit the criteria expected of the superintendent position, eliminating all doubt by the governing bodies that the applicant is unsuitable for the job. This will be addressed in the interview of Black superintendents.

Governing Body

The hiring process serves as one of the biggest obstacles for the small number of Black superintendent candidates that actually reach the threshold of being hired into a school district whether it is the more commonly acquired urban school district, or the less commonly acquired rural district. The next hurdle the Black superintendent must face is the complex nature of the governing body. In accordance with Critical Race Theory, the fact that a Black superintendent is hired by a predominantly White school board has less to do with hiring the best candidate for the job and more to do with serving the personal agenda of school board members. While at first glance, it may appear that the school superintendent holds the highest office in the school district, and a Black superintendent has reached the pinnacle of authority and power over the district, in reality, the superintendent continues to be subservient to multiple people who tend to be White males. The superintendent is the sole employee of the school board who evaluates that person. The school board hires the superintendent based on how he or she "fits." Unfortunately, 'fit' has been used as a tool for keeping schools looking and operating in such a way that power continues to be in the hands of the dominant culture" (Hill, 2018, p. 42). Dealing with personal

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agendas, higher expectations, and conflicting priorities all lead to greater obstacles faced by the Black superintendent.

The logical motivating factor of a person running for office of a school board member is "the formal and positional power within the school district and the community" (Mountford, 2004, p. 704). Conflicts between the superintendent and school board members exist when the member's motivation follows a personal agenda. When a personal agenda is a motivating factor for the person in power, "that person may feel entitled to oppress the needs of the minority and dominate over that group "(Mountford, 2004, p. 704). Critical Race Theory of White privilege infused with the school board member's personal agenda creates a power struggle in which that member feels entitled to having the superintendent serve his or her personal agenda, not only because the board member was elected to the position of power, but also because the board member holds an implicit or explicit sense of White privilege or superiority over the Black superintendent.

Studies on the motivating factors of school board members are limited, possibly due to the lack of reliability that a board member would report on motivating factors related to self-interests. School board members attain this new access to power, but some have conflicting views on how this power is to be used. "A growing number of scholars have defined the role of power in school districts by differentiating the term 'power over' versus 'power with.' This distinction suggests a shift from oppressing others and dominating control over others to collaborating with others in the decision-making process" (Mountford, 2004, p. 711). This lack of understanding between these distinctions creates conflict between any superintendent and board member and is compounded when a Black superintendent is placed in a position in which an all-White school board oppresses the role of the superintendent.

While literature provides such distinctions of authority and the importance of "power with" authority, little research has been presented about board members who choose to dominate control. "Although the literature offers different paradigms of power and suggestions for socially just ways educational leaders can wield power, what is primarily absent is empirical research on the relationship between a leader's inherent conception of power-a conception gained through life experience as well as learned knowledge-and the way he or she may wield power" (Mountford, 2004, p. 711). Obviously, when the school board member sees the role as one in which holds "power with" the superintendent versus "power over" (Mountford, 2004, p. 711), the superintendent is able to work productively and collaboratively with those in power. However, when the board member exerts control over the superintendent and sees the role as one in which exertion of "power over," the superintendent's role is then micromanaged and undermined. In a qualitative study of school board members' motivation, Mountford (2004), found that "9 of 20 board members...were motivated to join the school board for personal reasons" (Mountford, 2004, p. 719). Dissatisfaction with current leadership, ego-building, political advancement, and advantages for their own children were among the many reasons for running. One board member in Mountford's (2004) study who had a specific agenda said, "I didn't at all agree with the new superintendent. He was not my choice for hire. Therefore, I was motivated to join the board because he either shaped up or he was going to ship out" (p. 719). While this study did not examine racial bias, or even the thought that such personal agendas are racially motivated as CRT's first tenet indicates, the potential that board members' motivation is racially biased compounds the many obstacles a Black superintendent is forced to confront.

It can be argued that racist attitudes without admitting overt racism are the result of Whites believing subconsciously that they are entitled to a dominant relationship with Blacks

(DiTomaso, 2013, p. 5). Mountford's study revealed that female school board members in the study tended to have more altruistic motivations, and while these were still personal, these motivations were education-focused. "Some altruistic motives school board members in this study reported were, but were not limited to, a general concern for education and a sense of civic responsibility. Board members whose narratives, triangulated data, and corroborative evidence suggested that their motivation for membership was altruistic were placed on the altruistic end of the motivation continuum. One board member said her motive for joining the board was to help make a difference in children's lives and the community. "Another commented on the importance of keeping children at the center of decision making" (Mountford, 2004, p. 722). While board members' motivating factors for serving can be committed to educational equity and serving the needs of the students, implicit biases may interfere with such services of goodwill.

The majority of school board members, the White male dominant group, serve on school boards for personal reasons, those reasons advancing themselves and their dominant community in some ways are not founded on educational equity or student-centeredness. According to the National School Boards Association, 78% of board members are White (2018, p. 3), and less than 50% of all board members are female (2018, p. 4). And while it can be argued through the Critical Race Theory that altruism among a dominant group is nonexistent and motivations serve only to advance the dominant group, the fact that the female minority is the only group categorized as serving on a school board for altruistic reasons only furthers the obstacles a Black superintendent faces.

Because the governing body is controlled by the White male dominant group, racism and racial issues tend to be suppressed as a result of the political positions of school board members.

Politics of education involve four areas of concern when involving race: the role of schools as state agencies, the study of power, the study of conflict, and the study of educational policy (Lopez, 2003). The first involves the relationships between federal, state, and local governments. The second involves social relationships of those in power and how those in power affect the values of the public and educational policies. The third involves the tensions involved when those values conflict with different members in the educational arena. Resolution of conflict is directly related to power because power is "the vehicle through which conflict gets resolved" (Lopez, 2003, p. 74). The fourth factor, educational policy, is the visible and invisible methods by which decisions are made and who makes those decisions.

Because all four factors are executed by the governing bodies in power, it is evident that Black educational leaders do not partake in this political process as the governing bodies are dominated by the White males. Theories of "participatory democracy" (Lopez, 2003, p. 76), in which those in power determine the educational policy is heavily reliant and ultimately ignores the issues that affect minority populations. Lopez (2003) addresses the "contagiousness of conflict" method (p. 77) in "management and control of conflict was essentially the heart of the political process" (p. 77). Ignoring these issues is sometimes referred to as the "color-blind theory" in which those in power ignore race and racial issues as a way to, what they seem to think, suppress conflict, and in its paradoxical form, surfaces as racism. Ideally, a school board member would work collaboratively with the Black school superintendent in the framework of *power with* versus *power over,* addressing racial issues and racism. However, realistically, in a White male dominated and controlled system, the Black superintendent finds school board members more of a hindrance than an advocate of that superintendent's success and longevity in this role.

In order to address the obstacle of governing bodies that clash in leadership roles, personalities, and agendas, the Black superintendent must advocate for school board training with state agencies and be able to navigate the political complexities that are embedded within the communities. Adaptive schools training, crucial conversations training, and National Institute of School Leaders training, among others, will be included in the questionnaire.

Unrealistic Expectations of the Black Superintendent

Black superintendents have held tremendous power and authority over the educational institutions that house predominantly Black students. However, despite this power, their efforts are marred by opposition and obstacles, included of which are higher expectations. Despite support systems or supportive school boards, the expectations of the superintendent are "so unrealistic that many professional reputations are stained, and many careers stymied by contrasts, conflicts, and calamities that beset persons holding that position." (Scott, 1990, p. 165). The Black superintendent has even higher expectations. In Scott's (1990) study *Views of Black Superintendents of Black Consciousness and Professionalism,* "Black superintendents desired to be accepted as competent professionals by the general public" (Scott, 1990, p. 166). Yet, the demands, including higher standards and overwhelming responsibilities, create unrealistic expectations that affect the success of the Black superintendent.

Scott's (1990) study found that Blacks held Black superintendents to higher standards than Whites did, including the expectations for Black superintendents to address diversity and social justice. In the 2000 study titled, *The American School Superintendency*, "a difference exists between minority and non-minority superintendents in that they are selected much more often by their boards to what they would refer to as "change agents" (Glass, 2000). Some minorities considered themselves to be "leader[s] of school reform." This may mean that boards

wish to see major changes in districts by doing the same thing as in the past, but by doing it better in the future. Among the many findings included in this survey, one conclusion is the lack of confidence Black superintendents had in White-controlled school systems for addressing racial equity. Of particular significance is the point Scott's study made in recognizing the awareness White-controlled governing bodies had that they "could no longer deceive Blacks into believing that White-controlled education means quality education for Black students" (Scott, 1990, p. 170). Scott concludes that Black superintendents face the daunting task that has not yet been achieved, addressing Black school districts that achieve academic excellence. However, school districts continue to fail to promote educational equity as Black superintendents are aware. The hope is that these Black superintendents advocate the right for educational equity and work to promote more diversity in White-controlled governing bodies that fail to meet the needs of the diverse student population.

As previously noted, most Black superintendents are hired into positions in urban districts whose student population tends to be predominantly Black; these superintendents were brought in as "change agents." Once the district became so overwhelmed with problems that school board members sought Black superintendents to ameliorate the low student performance, low teacher morale, crumbling infrastructure, and poor community involvement, among others. Day-to-day operations and responsibilities of any superintendent are monumental, but expectations for superintendents in urban districts were nearly impossible. Charles Moody's (1973) dissertation concluded that:

> Black superintendents are chief officers who are largely Black and in effect are not
> an integral part of the larger educational systems. They find themselves isolated in
> the segregated sector of American society...These Black superintendents have been

forced into the unenviable position of survival by proving they are supermen. They

are not allowed in terms of their responsibility and pressing needs to concentrate on

the instructional aspects of the school systems. The Black superintendent finds

himself on the platform constantly trying to communicate to the community that he

has inherited a district beset with problems. He is expected to be a miracle man

who can undo in a few days, conditions that years of neglect, and in some cases,

mismanagement have created (pp. 22-23).

In his dissertation on Black superintendents' experiences in Midwest school districts,

Hodge (2017) presented findings that supported the notion that Black superintendents continue to

be viewed as less competent than their White counterparts, and that they "must prove themselves

over a much longer time period as well as meet a substantially more stringent, and often

fluctuating, employability standard" (Hodge, 2017, p. 41). Kowalski et al. 2010, noted in *The*

American Superintendent: A 2010 Decennial Study, Black superintendents reportedly earn more

Ed.Ds and Ph.Ds than their White counterparts; however, they don't benefit financially from

earning these degrees as compared to White superintendents having the same degrees (Hill,

2018, p. 19). The Black superintendent works longer, and harder, to reach the same level as the

White superintendent, yet fails to be financially rewarded at that same level.

With higher degrees and lower salaries, the interest convergence theory of Critical Race Theory

emerges in the fact that Black superintendents tend to navigate toward urban districts. These

districts may appear to have more equitable hiring practices, but in fact, are less desirable to

White superintendents. The states of disrepair in urban districts that are significantly

underfunded create overwhelming challenges that compound the already overburdened

responsibilities of the superintendent. As a result, positions in these districts are unappealing to

White candidates as few of them apply. Thus, the Black superintendent steps in to serve in these districts (Hodge, 2017). Interest convergence theory emerged in various studies as White superintendents sought the desirable rural districts, and Black superintendents were limited to less desirable urban districts in financial and structural ruin. According to Moody, founder of the National Alliance for Black School Educators, "The black superintendent is expected to be able to do more with less, and undo overnight years and years of things" (Marriott, 1990, Sec. B, p. 5).

Superintendents have increased responsibility as their positions evolved; however, Black superintendents tend to be hired into their positions as change agents, with higher expectations than White superintendents. Marriott (1990) states Black superintendents ``increasingly find themselves under fire" (Marriott, 1990, Sec. B, p.5). Black superintendents are held to higher expectations in an already demanding profession, and Marriott provides several examples of Black superintendents who did not meet the demands, particularly those on all-white school boards choosing not to renew the superintendent's contracts. One example was that of Black Superintendent Laval S. Wilson of Boston Public Schools, whose all-White school board voted to buy out his contract. Another example was that of Black Superintendent Norward Rousell whose all-White school board voted against renewing his contract. Because of these decisions within diverse districts, racial tensions increased as community members accused school boards of racism. School boards may claim to have varied reasons for these dismissals, educators and civil rights advocates attribute any ultimate decision of Black leaders is race-related: "race often adversely affects the relationships between black superintendents and the boards, teachers, parents and students with whom they must work" (Marriott, 1990, Sc.B., p. 5). Most of the Black superintendents are in their first year of superintendency, citing 78% (Marriott, 1990, Sc.B., p.

5). Since most Black superintendents are in their first year, they are under tremendous scrutiny. "The first black anywhere catches hell," said Dr. Scott, who was Washington's first black Superintendent, serving from 1970 to 1973" (Marriott, 1990, Sc.B., p. 5). For Dr. Rousell's case, in his first year, he questioned inequities between the predominantly White schools and began by providing more advanced college course offerings to Black students. "'It cost me my job,' he said, because many whites believed that the change threatened to dilute a privilege their children were enjoying" (Marriott, 1990, Sec. B, p.5).

Addressing the obstacle of unrealistic expectations for aspiring Black superintendents, it is necessary to prepare them to work longer hours and complete more tasks than their White counterparts. Applying the first tenet of Critical Race Theory that racism is ordinary and not aberrational, aspiring Black superintendents must be prepared to acclimate themselves to these unrealistic expectations. This will be addressed in the interview of the Black superintendents.

Community Perspectives as Obstacles in Superintendency

The pressures placed on any superintendent regardless of race are overwhelming within the institution, let alone within the community. In comparison, though, the Black superintendent has greater expectations regarding community relations. "They must simultaneously view themselves through the scope of white society and the black community. Black superintendents feel the pressure from those in the black community who expect them to be advocates or crusaders for their own race. Yet, superintendents are charged with creating the best educational environments for students of all races and cultures, not just their own" (Parker, 2009, p. 18). School leaders must "lead culturally responsive efforts and are tasked with promoting a school climate inclusive of diverse student populations" (Khalifa, et al., 2015, p. 27). The disparities in between the Black and White superintendent, however, are advantageous in equipping the Black

superintendent to manage the diverse community. Demographically, clear disparities existed between the majority and minority issues superintendents concerned themselves with, specifically those issues pertaining to the community. The majority, White superintendents, concerned themselves with issues of discipline and policies. The minority, Black superintendents, concerned themselves with diversity and educational equity. As diversity increases among school populations, an increase in racial tensions will occur; a need for a leader who not only prioritizes equity and diversity but one who is comfortable confronting issues of race relations is necessary (Tienken & Domenech, 2021), and the Black superintendent who prioritizes community issues, including racism and race relations is better equipped.

Despite the dominant demographic of White males in this leadership position, 11% of these White superintendents reported it was "not important" to lead conversations of race within their community (Tienken & Domenech, 2021, p. 22), and only "42% of white men said it was extremely important," even though "superintendents of color are twice as likely as white superintendents to actually lead a conversation in their districts" (Tienken & Domenech, 2021, p. 22). This could be attributed to the fact that very few felt prepared to lead those conversations about race.

Community involvement is one of the biggest challenges for the Black superintendent. Prior to *Brown*, "African American families were more engaged. As schools became more racially integrated and African American principals and teachers were demoted, African-American families felt their 'ownership' in the school had been removed" (Khalifa et al., 2015, p. 252). As schools become more racially diverse, parental and community involvement looks different than it was in the past. "Oftentimes white parents tend to be seen in the school volunteering, while parents of color participate by assisting with homework and encouraging

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children to do their best in order to have a more promising future" (Khalifa et al., 2015, p. 252). While serving as an advocate for their child's education is not discouraged, school leaders must "foster African American family engagement in the educational process of their children" and therefore, "school leaders must take ownership of the communication between the school and the school community" (Khalifa et al., 2015, p. 252). The Black superintendent is tasked as the communicator of the school district and must "begin with a mind-set that focuses on a collaborative, democratic leadership style" and "gain an understanding of the context of their communities" (Khalifa et al., 2015, p. 252). The Black superintendent is tasked with the responsibility of establishing a collaborative leadership style that engages the both the Black and White communities along with balancing the governing bodies to encourage them to lead with that same democratic style.

Aspiring Black superintendents must be aware of the expectations of community involvement as crucial to their longevity in the district. This includes not only participating in community organizations and events, but also being a master communicator of the district.

Career Pipeline

"Research on the impact of race/ethnicity on individuals' intentions or decisions to seek administrative position is fairly sparse because of limited racial/ethnic variation in most data sets to date" (DeAngelis & O'Connor, 2012, p. 475). Both Black superintendents and White superintendents tend to follow the same path toward superintendency. They both primarily begin their paths as teachers. Yet, as stated earlier, the number of principals and teaching job losses left a significant loss of Black teachers continuing the path in educational leadership. Additionally, the disparity exists in that it takes a significantly longer amount of time for the Black superintendent to reach the leadership role. Black superintendents were twice as likely as White

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superintendents to begin their leadership careers in a central office coordinator level, oftentimes involving fundraising, including grant writing, and mostly directed at grants for the Black student population (Tallerico, 2000). Black superintendents follow a path of teacher, assistant principal, principal, and various director positions before reaching what could be considered the career pinnacle. This route is different from White superintendents who tend to follow a path of teacher, assistant principal, and principal. In Hill's (2018) dissertation, he notes that a longer path is an obstacle that contributes to the attrition rate for those aspiring Black educators on the path toward superintendency. The likelihood that Black leaders become superintendents dwindles due to the lengthy career path and increased steps it takes for them; therefore, the Black superintendent is rarely capable of achieving his or her aspirations. (Kowalski, et al., 2010).

Table 2
Career Path Comparison by Race: Hill, 2018, Get in where you fit: Career paths for White and Black Superintendents.

White Superintendents							
Echo 1	Teacher	Asst. Principal	Principal	Exec. Director	Supt.		
Echo 2	Teacher	Asst. Principal	Principal	Supt.			
Echo 3	Teacher	Asst. Principal	Principal	Supt.			
Echo 4	Teacher	Teacher Coach	Inst. Leader	Supervisor	Director	Asst. Supt.	Supt.
Echo 5	Teacher	Dept. Head	Principal	Asst. Supt.	Supt.		
Echo 6	Teacher	Principal	Asst. Supt.	Supt			
Black Superintendents							
Delta 1	Teacher	Asst. Principal	Principal	Asst. Supt.	Supt.		
Delta 2	Teacher	Asst. Principal	Principal	Asst. Supt.	Supt.		
Delta 3	Teacher	Team Leader	Vice Principal	Principal	Exec. Director	State Coordinator	Asst. Supt. Supt.
Delta 4	Teacher	Dept. Chair	Director	Asst. Supt.	Supt.		
Delta 5	Teacher	Diversity Director	Exec. Coach	Assoc. Supt.	Supt.		
Delta 6	Teacher	Asst. Principal	Principal	Exec. Director	Asst. Supt.	Supt.	

Black educators take a longer path to become a superintendent due to numerous factors including motivation and age. "African American teachers were less likely than White teachers to seek promotion into school-level administration as evidenced by the completion of a master's degree in educational leadership or related field (DeAngelis & O'Connor, 2012, p. 475)   In DeAngelis and O'Connor's analysis (2012), the authors differentiated between age and race/ethnicity for acceptance rate between job offers. They found that age played a significant role in affecting the hiring process, as "older applicants had lower odds of receiving an offer than younger applicants" (p. 491), along with minority status playing a significant role in hiring as well. "[M]inority applicants registered significantly lower odds of receiving offers than nonminority applicants, controlling for these other factors. This is entirely the result of a marginally significant difference in job offer rates for minority applicants in urban locales, where 57.1% of minority applicants received job offers compared to 80.6% of nonminority applicants" (DeAngelis & O'Connor, 2012, p. 491). An aspiring Black superintendent would naturally be older than the aspiring White candidate who begins the career path at the same time because the Black candidate takes a longer path to reach superintendency. The candidate is then at an older age compared to the White counterpart. Age and minority status double the disadvantage of being hired. Throughout my career path, I was a teacher who became an athletic director, elementary principal, middle school principal, and high school principal. I felt it would fulfil all the criteria for a superintendent candidate. Despite effective and highly effective ratings in these positions, the many positions held in shorter increments became a concern articulated by school boards and hiring firms when I sought a superintendent position.

With Critical Race Theory tenets of normalcy of racism and interest convergence theory, aspiring Black superintendents will need to be aware of the extra responsibilities and career routes it takes to become superintendent. This will be addressed in the interview.

Experiential Preparedness: Mentoring and Networking

Both prior to employment and after employment, aspiring Black superintendents will be more successful through mentoring and networking. This establishes what Brunner and Kim (2010) identify as experiential preparedness. "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" (Brunner & Kim, 2010, p.227). This type of preparedness would include support for student achievement and accountability and related critical decision-making of day-to-day operations. Experiential preparedness for the Black superintendent includes professional relationships, mentoring, and networking fall into the category of experiential preparedness.

Fadhilika Atiba-Weza (2010), Executive Director of the National Alliance of Black School Educators found that mentoring experiences of African American educators was "critical to career satisfaction in the early years of the administrators" as well as "mentoring which occurred, however, was informal and not particularly structured" (para. 36). He noted a call "for an online community of learners is one of the many responses to the absence of organized mentoring and professional development programs for new superintendents" (para. 36). However, due to the lack of Black superintendents, matching a mentor who has experienced the same issues that the superintendent is facing is challenging. Among the reasons for this is the

fact that in situations in which there are no requirements for mentoring, those who choose to mentor more than likely would mentor those with whom they are familiar and/or are part of the same social networks. The absence of large numbers of African American school superintendents exacerbates that situation. Knight (1993). Networking with professional organizations that focus on the Black superintendent experience is critical to the recruitment, longevity, and prevention of attribution for the Black superintendent.

Access to professional organizations is another critical factor in experiential preparedness for the aspiring Black superintendent. "Participation of superintendents in professional associations provides opportunities for information sharing and in-service training, as well as the chance to meet with fellow superintendents. The superintendency is often a lonely position, and the opportunity to interact with others in the same role is a welcome change of pace. One of the most important opportunities provided by professional association membership is networking" (Glass, et al, 2000, p. 49). The Michigan Association of African American Superintendents and the National Alliance of Black School Educators are both organizations dedicated to supporting Black leaders in education.

However, according to Kowalski (2010), Black superintendents are more likely to lack mentors who are district school administrators, let alone fellow Black superintendents. Additionally, Black superintendents are twice as likely to lack mentors who are professors of school administration (Kowalski, et al., 2010). Although the superintendent is the chief executive officer of the school district, and the one who is held accountable for the affairs of the school district, there is no evidence that tremendous importance is placed on the manner in which he/she is prepared, and there are no requirements for ensuring that he/she engages in any sort of professional development upon assuming the position" (Atiba-Weza, 2012, para. 25). Atiba-

Weza (2012) also notes that other studies found that superintendents who mentor tend to mentor along gender lines. In other words, men would mentor men, and women would mentor women. It could be expected, therefore, that similar patterns would exist for ethnicity. Given that African Americans are disproportionately underrepresented in the superintendency, one would conclude that there are insufficient numbers of mentors for those who may wish to be mentored.

Access to mentor programs and organizations to receive support for experiential preparedness must be provided to aspiring Black superintendents as these avenues are limited due to the lack of Black superintendents currently serving or retired.

Personal Preparedness: Mentorship and Networking

As stated earlier in the history of superintendency, the amount of responsibility placed on superintendents has increased post *Brown*. In addition, the increased diversity in student populations brings racial issues to the surface that must be addressed. Also stated earlier, the superintendent must now be the master communicator, master politician, master negotiator, etc. As most Black superintendents find themselves in urban districts with limited funding and resources, increased levels of stress are bound to occur. "As people of color they serve to demonstrate the expected academic progress of their students. The result could be a heightened level of stress greater than that experienced by their White peers in leadership" (Johnson et al., 2020, p. 66). Stressors to the role of superintendent were examined as Black superintendents along with the coping mechanisms and resilience tools each used in Johnson, et al.'s (2020) report on *Resilience and the African American Superintendent*. The authors indicated the Black superintendents used "problem-based approaches to cope with stress, with emotion-focused coping as a secondary set toward coping" (Johnson, et al., 2020, para. 1). The study categorized the stressors in three types: problem-based, emotional-based, and maladaptive-based. The first

problem-based were considered a more direct approach to analyzing the situation, adjusting to

the situation, and reassessing, then planning as a means of adjusting to a situation, dilemma, or

crisis. The second method involves responding to situations emotionally and introspectively,

involving opportunities for "venting." The final factor is the more dysfunctional methods of

reacting to stressors. Maladaptive could involve unproductive methods such as substance abuse,

self-harm, or denial, eating disorders, etc. Factors that affect the superintendents' ability to use

coping strategies were influenced by the community for social support to act as "buffers" to

offset the stressors influencing that superintendent. The authors note the additional contemporary

stressors related to bigotry compounded the stressors that all superintendents face.

As many superintendents face stress and seek resilience through coping mechanisms in

their communities, the Black superintendent faces additional stressors. "African American

superintendents resultantly can find themselves searching for additional resources to compensate

for system issues related to economic pressure, time constraints, and cultural and class

differences. As people of color, African American superintendents additionally might find

themselves pressured by the communities of color they serve to demonstrate the expected

academic progress of their students. The result could be a heightened level of stress greater than

their White peers in leadership" (Johnson et al., 2020, para. 9). The results of the study

determined, from their methodology of a "small but geographically representative sample of the

present" (Johnson et al., 2020, para. 12), that overall, Black superintendents used the problem-

based approaches to cope with stress with emotional-coping strategies, a close second method.

"However, it is noteworthy to consider that neither of these trends rose to the level of white

might be considered highly effective coping" (Johnson et al., 2020, para. 29) . The

superintendents tended to focus on work-related issues to avoid the stressors of the current

political climate, especially in highly-politicized communities. The superintendents considered their resilience effective for their respective positions. The recommendations for this study indicated that graduate programs have a necessary obligation to prepare aspiring superintendents with practical issues and experiences related to diversity, especially when the stressors of providing adequate support systems in the emotional-factor of resilience are lacking in a field dominated by White men. The study stressed the necessity of providing resources and mentoring for Black superintendents in order to advance a more equitable representation in this field that is dominated by White males. As indicated for experiential preparedness, personal preparedness requires having support systems which can be found in mentoring and networking in order to address the personal stress associated with superintendency and the added stressors of Black superintendency.

In addressing the amount of stress involved in personal preparedness of the position, aspiring Black superintendents must be made aware of the impact it has on their personal well-being and coping skills to alleviate the stress. Community support, specifically family and friends, mentoring and networking on personal and emotional aspects of the job will be included in the interview.

Chapter Two Closure

The literature review for this study included the evolution of the superintendency from the 1860s until today. The superintendent position has evolved alongside its environment. As school districts grew, so did the responsibilities. This increased demand on superintendents has been reserved predominantly for the White male. The prospects for the Black superintendent have not fared well as educators and administrators post-Brown vs. Board of Education, Topeka, resulted in a reduced supply in the superintendent career pipeline. Obstacles such as these, along

with embedded aspects of Critical Race Theory that affect a Black superintendent's hire ability, have impeded the trajectory of increased diversity of superintendents despite the increased diversity of school populations. Additional obstacles include racism in governing bodies, higher expectations of Black superintendents, complexities of community relations, and lack of mentoring and networking for experiential and personal preparedness of Black superintendents. These obstacles not only interfere with a Black superintendent's ability to be hired, but also the Black superintendent's success and longevity. It is important to prepare aspiring Black superintendents with these realities as they enter this career pipeline, to recognize the tenets of Critical Race Theory as they continually infuse their decisions and the decisions of the school community. As aspiring Black superintendents seek positions, they will need to be equipped with the tools necessary to address these challenges and, ideally, overcome them.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

This phenomenological study's main objective was to understand Black administrators' career progression in their quest to become school superintendents in Michigan. The specific objectives included describing the career pathways of Black educational administrators intending to become district superintendents and their challenges in this journey as they align with the five Critical Race Theory tenets explicated in Chapters 1 and 2. The study also determined the critical support systems these superintendents relied on in this pursuit. To this end, a qualitative research methodology was used. This is because the study aimed to capture the superintendents' lived experiences in their quest to become school superintendents and created recommendations compiled into a toolkit that will equip Black administrators or candidates with enhanced preparation for becoming superintendents. My specific research questions were:

1, What are the career pathways for Black school administrators seeking to become district superintendents?

2. What hiring obstacles existed as you sought your first superintendent position?

3. What job-related challenges are you dealing with that you believe exist due to your ethnicity?

4. What are some hidden biases new black superintendents need to be aware of before their first day on the job?

5. What are some hidden biases new black superintendents need to be aware of before their first day on the job?

Research Design, Methodological Approach and Rationale

According to Szajnfarber and Gralla (2017), qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-statistical data to understand various phenomena, concepts, or experiences. Some forms of non-numerical data considered in qualitative research include visuals, audio, text, and narratives. Qualitative research mainly focuses on understanding what happened, why it happened, the motivations, and the opinions of those involved. "Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding an individual or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 4). Therefore, it is more of an in-depth inquiry into a happening or concept and its reasons. As Hammarberg, et al., (2016) note, qualitative research does not attempt to forecast the future. Instead, it gives an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon for those interested in making their deductions to help them know how to forge the future. Black educational leaders face many challenges in their journey of becoming school superintendents (Parker, 2009) and their minority experience is indicative in CRT's Centrality of Experiential Knowledge and the importance of documenting minority storytelling (Allen, 2016). A qualitative analysis of their experiences was necessary to understand the path and determine the obstacles that interfered with the Black leaders' career aspirations.

Some of the most commonly used qualitative research methods include ethnography, grounded theory, case studies, narrative research, historical reviews, and phenomenological research (Neubauer et al., 2019). My proposed research utilized the phenomenological approach. According to Neubauer et al. (2019), phenomenology involves trying to understand a phenomenon from the viewpoint of people who have experienced it. Phenomenology seeks to identify what was experienced, the way the individual perceived this experience, and the meanings of these situations from our subjective perceptions (Yuksel-Arslan et al., 2016). In the

United States, over 70% of school district superintendents are White (Modan, 2020). This means that aspiring Black educational leaders are much less likely to get appointed to the top leadership position. These efforts to be hired, along with their perceptions and meanings from these perceptions, were highlighted in order to equip aspiring Black superintendents, hiring firms, and school boards, with a toolkit of strategies for becoming and hiring, respectively, superintendents and, subsequently, create greater equity in educational leadership.

Reflexivity Statement

As a Black superintendent in my third year, I am aware of my own hidden biases having witnessed similar hiring practices in my career trajectory. I understand, am aware, and have met first-hand the obstacles aspiring Black leaders encounter as they work toward achieving their career. I began my career as a teacher, progressed to an athletic director, dean of students and assistant principal. Following that, I became an elementary, middle school, and high school principal. I did this to provide a well-credentialed résumé, assuming I would leave no stone unturned regarding experience in education. However, when interviewing, the incremental positions became a question of longevity in a particular position rather than an asset.

As a superintendent, I have continued to encounter the obstacles involved in serving an all-White governing board with both personal agendas as well as those who assume they serve to dictate assignments to, rather than working collaboratively with me. While all superintendents encounter school board members with personal agendas, I was given directives and expectations unlike White superintendents in the county and state. For example, I was told there was no reason I should have an administrative assistant congruent to every other superintendent in the county. Those analyzed were all-White superintendents who had administrative assistants. I was directed to share my calendar with all board members synonymous with a timecard, so all

members could check my whereabouts at all times including evenings. No other superintendent

in the county was being asked to do this nor given any similar demand. I was denied an

opportunity for an extension to my contract in alignment with the annual July schedule that

occurs with numerous other superintendents in the state. According to the U.S. Department of

Justice's Section VI article on discrimination, "a plaintiff may prove intentional discrimination

with other forms of direct evidence demonstrating that the "decision makers placed substantial

negative reliance on an illegitimate criterion in reaching their decision" (*Section VI- Proving*

Discrimination- Intentional Discrimination, 2021). When asking board members, the rationale

for these expectations, they had no legitimate basis for their decision.

I was hired as the first Black superintendent, or administrator, in the history of this

particular district. While my responsibilities and expectations increased substantially in

comparison to the previous, veteran superintendent, the salary package offered to me did not

reflect the increased responsibilities expected of me. The current divisive national political

climate increased racial tensions and divisions that permeated school board decisions, which

exacerbated racial tension. With an onboarding of five new board members, the new, all-White,

rural, working-class school board members indicated I was not entitled to earn a salary greater

than their individual salary regardless of credentials and experience, noting that I was their

employee and they were the employer. Despite my salary being competitive to fellow White

superintendents in the county, I was told by a new board member that what I was earning was

"shameful." They justified my earning a higher salary than their own by stating that I should be

doing twice as much as they do. Within my first year, the COVID-19 pandemic struck, furthering

the responsibilities and stressors thrust upon all superintendents associated with cancelled and

restructured schooling and events as well as working with an increasingly polarized and

politicized community. An NBC news analysis cited that "more than 160 districts in the United States have seen backlash over teaching or initiatives that emphasize race or gender, with some of that rancor being stirred up by national conservative groups that see the issue as a uniting political force" (VanderHart, 2021). The race-related politics and the rancor associated with it, added additional stress due to the uncertainty of my position as a Black superintendent. Fortunately, I acquired three long-term Black mentors who have been essential to continued growth and success in my field and support through the Michigan Association of School Administrators to guide me through these unrealistic expectations and responsibilities. This alerted me to the notion that other Black superintendents may be experiencing similar obstacles.

Population Sample and Setting

The sample consisted of 12 Black superintendents within Michigan. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants recruited from The Michigan Association of African American Superintendents (MAAAS). These members were accessible as there were only 22 Black superintendents in Michigan who have frequently met and collaborated via group texts and emails. According to Ames et al. (2019), the purposive sampling technique was used to subjectively select participants based on the researcher's judgment and experience. Advantages of using MAAAS include helping the researcher to save time and resources since it is relevant and targeted. Confirmation of the 12 Black superintendents who participated in this research were notified via email and provided information for the purpose of the study. The sample population included Black male and female superintendents from Michigan across various demographics of rural, urban, and suburban areas. The approach was also appropriate when the study population is limited, as in my study. Each participant had a follow-up phone conversation and follow-up email, which included a reminder of the purpose of the study.

Procedures

Obtaining approval through the WMU Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) (see APPENDIX A) was the first procedural step in the research process. Following approval, the 12 Black Michigan superintendents of rural, urban, and suburban school districts were contacted by phone and emailed the information describing the study and seeking the superintendents' participation. The superintendents' contact information was obtained through the Michigan Association of African American Superintendents. Twelve of the 22 Black superintendents in the state were selected on the basis of geographical location, specifically a varied sample of urban, suburban, and rural districts, along with a varied sample of male and female and a varied range of age groups and years of experience.

After initial contact, the participants received a consent form (see APPENDIX B) via email on a secured electronic device, double password-protected in a locked office. This consent form reiterated information regarding the study including its purpose, clarified the process, and outlined the criteria for selection. The study highlighted the measures that were be taken to guarantee the confidentiality of data to be collected. The letter also informed the targeted participants that they would be called shortly to schedule interviews, and that their identities remained anonymous throughout the research. They were informed about their ability to withdraw from the interview at any stage since participation was voluntary. The participants were allotted seven days to return the consent form. Once the consent form was returned to me, I scheduled the interviews by contacting participants via phone call or email. These online interviews (Zoom or WebEx) occurred within ten days of the contact.

A second email was sent out to the Black superintendents who did not initially confirm participation in the study. Three additional Black superintendents replied and created a pool of

12. Therefore, I utilized the 12 Black superintendents who replied to my invitation for this study.

After scheduling interviews with the participants, I met with each participant virtually at the agreed time and secured location. The interviews took between 40 and 60 minutes, which were recorded and transcribed. The interview started with an introduction and quick review of the purpose of the study and the research procedure. I also reiterated the measures taken to guarantee the participant's confidentiality, including acronyms or pseudonyms to conceal his or her identity. Participants were asked to complete the semi-structured research questions (APPENDIX F). The semi-structured approach allowed for the participants to provide their perspectives through the lens of their minority experiences as indicative of CRT's Centrality of Experiential Knowledge (Allen, 2016) beyond the specified interview questions. All interview questions applied member checking in order to confirm the information shared by the participant was correctly transferred. The recordings complemented the notes collected by the researcher during the online interviews and the answers to the enumerated discussion topics were transcribed and color-coded to align with presented topics and The Critical Race Theory tenets (Valentine, 2018). The data was secured in a double password-protected computer in a locked office and remains for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. The data will be deleted at that point.

Data Collection

This section describes the approach that was used to obtain data from the targeted participants. The qualitative research used online, in-depth interviews with Black superintendents to understand their lived experiences in ascending to the school district superintendent position. In particular, I interviewed 12 Black superintendents from varied urban, suburban, and rural

locations in Michigan, of varied genders, ages, and experience. The interview questions ranged from their aspirations to become school superintendents, challenges faced, and overall experiences. According to Ataro (2020), interviews in a phenomenological study should aim at understanding the meanings of events and the interactions of people during these events. Informed by this realization, my current research captured these superintendents' lived experiences and drew out detailed descriptions and meaning from them.

An email describing the research background and seeking the participants' inclusion was forwarded to them with an introductory letter attached (APPENDIX C). In the letter, I introduced myself, stated the study's purpose, clarified the research procedure, and highlighted the measures that were taken to guarantee the confidentiality of data collected. The letter also informed the targeted participants that they were to be called to schedule interviews, and that their identities would remain anonymous throughout the research (see APPENDIX C) They were also informed about their ability to withdraw from the interview at any stage since participation is voluntary. After scheduling interviews with the participants, I, as the interviewer, met them virtually at the agreed time and in a secured location. The interview was expected to take between 40 and 60 minutes. It started with a quick introduction and review of the purpose of the study and the research procedures. I orally reiterated the measures taken to guarantee the participant's confidentiality, including acronyms to conceal their identity. The participants were asked to sign the consent form in line with research requirements as described by Musmade, et al. (2013). This was completed orally as it was done virtually. The consent form confirmed that the respondents understood why the interview was being conducted and that they were divulging the information voluntarily. I also informed the respondents about my intention to use a recording device through Zoom or WebEx, which included a transcript provision. The device helped the researcher

maintain a recorded version of the interview to capture the respondents' verbatim comments for subsequent analysis. All the recordings were stored on the primary investigator's double password-protected computer in a locked office. The data will be deleted after three years upon the completion of the research. The recordings complemented the notes collected by the researcher during the virtual interviews and the answers to the enumerated discussion topics were transcribed and color-coded to align with presented topics and the five Critical Race Theory tenets (Valentine, 2018).

Instrumentation Data Collection and Instrumentation Procedures

I was the research instrument through which data will was collected via Zoom or WebEx meetings following the interview protocol (APPENDIX D) to assess Black superintendents' perceived aspirations and challenges of obtaining a superintendent position and designed a toolkit for superintendents and hiring agencies to build equity in superintendency. Participants were given the informational packets and an opportunity to ask questions at a scheduled date(s) and time(s) via the initial Zoom meeting.

Phenomenology involves the use of in-depth interviews as the primary method of collecting information (Creswell, 1998). To ensure a comfortable atmosphere and convenience for the participants, interviews for this study took place via a Zoom or WebEx meeting. I worked with each of the participants to determine the best time and secured location of the meeting to ensure privacy and convenience for the participant. A private room was secured by the researcher.

Decoding the interview data from the open-ended portion of the interview focused on interpretation of the stories that tell the experiences of the 12 Black superintendents. In the analysis process of the open-ended part of the interviews, the aim and goal was to recreate the

experiences of the study's participants intact. Through an axial coding process, themes from the semi-structured and open-ended portions of the interview were classified, ordered, and brought together into a consistent whole where relationships between themes and factors might begin to emerge through the axial relationship patterns.

Scheduling of the interviews was based on the availability of the participants. I attempted to schedule as many interviews on the same day as were reasonable for the participants provided there was enough time between interviews to ensure the transcription had been stored properly. A consent form was used to obtain agreement from subjects to participate in the study. An example of this form (APPENDIX B) is attached to this proposal. This document was reviewed and explained at the scheduled meeting prior to beginning an interview, with the option to continue through oral consent of the document, which was be transcribed, or I would discontinue the interview. No one participated in the interview until the consent document had been thoroughly reviewed, questions answered, and the consent document orally confirmed (Compton 2005).

At the meeting, I made it clear that potential participants do not have to participate in any follow-up conversations or meetings and that they had the opportunity to provide feedback to the transcripts should they wish, and that they may quit at any time. All information relating to a participant who withdraws would be destroyed. If the potential participant decided to provide oral, transcribed consent of the document and participate, the interview followed immediately. If not, the participant would be thanked and dismissed (Compton, 2005). The willing participants were provided with transcripts from the interview. The participants had a two-week window to review the transcripts and amend them through the feedback form (APPENDIX E).

Open-ended interviews of the subjects were conducted for this study using a general interview guide approach (Patton, 2002). The guide allowed for free conversation within a topic area while ensuring all questions were adequately covered in the interview process. The interview outline for this study was based on the research questions and is attached to this proposal as the interview protocol form (Compton, 2005) (APPENDIX D).

Each Zoom or WebEx video used Zoom or WebEx Video Transcription Services. Permission to transcribe the Zoom or WebEx interviews were obtained from participants as part of the consent process. Interviews were from 40-60 minutes in length depending on the participant. After the interview, participants were emailed a transcript of their interview and given a two-week window to provide feedback or amend their transcription (APPENDIX E). The feedback form was emailed and provided a return email confirming receipt of the form. These contacts were made only if there is a need to provide feedback or amend the transcription that has been collected or if responses to specific research questions were not addressed sufficiently in the Zoom interview. Participants were made aware of the potential for additional contact via feedback form prior to agreeing to participate in the study (Compton, 2005).

Interviews will begin in October 2021, and continue through November 2021. The results of the study were disseminated as a doctoral dissertation.

The interview protocol in qualitative interviewing were adapted from Charmaz (2003), utilizing questions from his or her protocol and questions developed by me. The first part was the development and use of the semi-structured interview protocol to further probe into the categories of themes presented in Chapter 1. It included the initial protocol of expressing appreciation for participation in the interview, clarification of the interview process and purpose of the study and provided clear communication that the Zoom or WebEx interview would utilize

transcription services for which the participant was provided a copy to review and provide feedback. Participants also received clear communication that they could withdraw from the interview at any time and that their transcript would be destroyed. The second part was the development and use of the open-ended interview protocol to elicit each participant's experiences including obstacles faced in pursuit of the superintendency, interpretations, and reflections.

Data Analysis

I used the thematic analysis technique to synthesize the research findings. According to Nowell et al. (2017), thematic analysis involves identifying similar themes from the information divulged by the study participants. The process started with listing participants' statements about their experiences about the subject of the study. Every comment or statement was recorded with the same level of attention. The statements were then counterchecked with the recordings for accuracy. The next step involved determining the key themes and factors from the statements. I related the study findings with previous research for similarities and differences. The last stage included drawing conclusions and recommending a toolkit for aiding Black individuals to attain a superintendency, ultimately increasing equity for the position. Some of the respondents' descriptions were included in the study verbatim, but others were paraphrased, and then color-coded into the enumerated discussion topics aligned with the five Critical Race Theory Tenets (Valentine, 2018).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research must incorporate credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability to ensure the research is valid and reliable (Korstjens & Moser,

2018). In my study, I applied all four components to ensure that the research upheld the ethical considerations of validity and reliability.

Credibility

Credibility is the trust and confidence that the researcher is providing true and accurate information from the findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Credibility is achieved through the use of triangulation, a process of combining methods to gain a more thorough understanding of the research. Triangulation is often a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods but using qualitative research alone can gain credibility by utilizing triangulation of sources in which different samplings can be used (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). In this study, I used triangulation of sources, combining three varied samples: 1. both male and female participants; 2. varied age groups and years of experience; 3. varied demographics of both urban and rural K-12 school districts in Michigan.

Transferability

Transferability is the ability for the researcher to apply the study into other situations or contexts. In this case, I applied the study of the Michigan superintendents to superintendents of other states. In the analysis, I applied thick description (Korstjens & Moser, 2018) in order to demonstrate that this study could apply in other circumstances, scenarios, or contexts.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability is the clear, consistent, and reliable method of research to ensure accuracy in the research process. Confirmability ensures that the findings emerge from the participants and not by the researcher's shaped preferences or personal bias (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This allows the analysis to be aligned with the purpose for the study and ensures that participants'

experiences are not altered by the researcher. In order to establish dependability and confirmability, I provided an audit trail to highlight each step of the data analysis (Korstjens & Moser, 2018) in order to ensure accuracy with the participants' responses. I provided an inquiry audit by allowing an outside person to review the research methods, process, and analysis to ensure the method is clear, consistent, and reliable.

Limitations

Although I have described the various procedures that were used in the research, some limitations were inherent. For instance, the research participants were Michigan, Black educational leaders who are current school superintendents. As a result, they may find themselves discussing the subject of the research among themselves. However, I tried, as much as possible, to schedule the participants on different weeks depending on the flexibility of the time allowed for the data collection phase. The participants were also made aware of the possibility of their personal biases that may influence their answers. I did everything possible to avoid creating the opportunity for applying biases to the answers. I piloted the interview protocol with two Black other superintendents before embarking on the study. This helped ensure that the research tool measured what it purports.

The study posed additional limitations including the potential for technology to fail, which could impact the participants' disposition when extended time for interviewing was needed to re-record or re-state the questions.

Another factor was the varied sample of years of experience each superintendent has acquired. His or her memory may have been skewed based on their positive or negative experiences in their current position over time.

Delimitations

I chose the qualitative method for this study to be the most appropriate as it allowed for the participant to voice his or her experiences confidentially and without limitations. I chose 12 Black superintendents in Michigan as it is a state distinctly underrepresented in comparison to the national average of 6% of all superintendents as Black (Tienken & Domenech, 2021). This was a strategic decision as the smaller percentage may indicate greater obstacles Black superintendents face in obtaining a position and a greater challenge in building equity in Michigan's K-12 educational system. I also chose to interview Black superintendents from varied geographical locations and varied genders to have a broad sampling of superintendent experiences. I made this decision in order to have a broad collection of outcomes to determine classification of themes. I chose those participants currently serving as superintendents as they will have had experience in their career aspirations.

Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent

The 12 Black superintendent participants were given a consent form (APPENDIX B) prior to the interview. It was re-examined at the beginning of the Zoom or WebEx meeting interview. This included the purpose of the study, allotted time for the interview, confidentiality of the study, transcription service and their receipt of the transcription, and the risk and benefits of participation in the study. The interview proceeded once their oral consent was provided.

Confidentiality of Data

In order to ensure confidentiality while performing the research, all data was stored in a double password protected computer in the locked office of the principal investigator. All data files will be in order and properly identified (Delabbio, 2006). The only people who have access

to the responses are the principal investigator, and the collaborating investigator included on the HSIRB form (APPENDIX A).

I will share the original data from the study with members of the committee only. I will not share the information from this study with anyone else and will keep all information confidential. Audio recordings of the interviews are stored in the double password-protected computer for three years after the completion of the study. After the study has been completed, the researcher will keep the interview transcripts on the double password-protected computer in the principal investigator's locked office for a minimum of three years (Kopy, 2006).

No identifying information about the school district, or any other identifying information was used in this study. All participants of the study signed an informed consent for participation in the study. Each interviewee was informed that the study is being used for academic purposes only. When the data was transcribed, each participant was given a participant-selected pseudonym so that other individuals who view the data are unaware of their actual identity. If names or other identifying information was revealed during the interview, it was eliminated or disguised in the transcript. Participants signed an informed consent form from which contained a second signature that indicated that they agree not to discuss the contents of the interview with any other participants.

Risks and Costs of Participation

Risk associated with this study could include the possibility of being identified. Subjects may not want to be identified due to continuing relationships with their school districts, as some of the issues discussed in the interviewing process may be sensitive in nature. I engaged in casual conversation to begin each interview and attempted to make each subject feel as comfortable as possible (Compton, 2005). There was minimal risk involved as participants were informed that

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they could withdraw from the study at any time and their data would be destroyed immediately

upon their withdrawal. Participation was voluntary.

An effort was made to protect the identity of study participants. Pseudonyms were

selected by the subjects. Every attempt was made to maintain confidentiality, including holding

Zoom or WebEx meeting interviews in private locations. Confidentiality was maintained by

carefully storing the data in a secure, locked principal investigator's office. The recorded

interview and transcripts will be destroyed three years after the study is completed. Transcripts

are also stored in a confidential manner as electronic material, which is saved on the principal

investigator's double password-protected computer and stored with the transcripts for at least

three years in the primary researcher's office at Western Michigan University. The electronic

material is double password-protected (Compton, 2005).

The cost of participation was the participants' time to engage in the interview and time to

engage in the review of the transcripts.

Benefits to Participants and Others

The Black superintendents in Michigan may have encountered obstacles and challenges

in pursuit of their current position that align with the tenets of Critical Race Theory. This study

allowed them the opportunity to share their experiences in a confidential setting. They were

allowed a voice in educational leadership that is currently underrepresented in K-12 education

(Tienken & Domenech, 2021).

Researchers, school boards, and hiring firms may be able to apply the themes that

emerged from the responses that have been synthesized and evaluated to identify patterns in

potential biases. They will apply these themes to build more equity in K-12 superintendent

positions. Overall, a toolkit was created to aid aspiring Black individuals to better prepare themselves to confront such obstacles as they pursue superintendency.

Data Collection: Location and Rapport

The study occurred throughout the state of Michigan. Participants were interviewed virtually through Zoom, and I used Zoom transcription services. The transcription included 40-60 minute interviews from each of the 12 Black superintendents. I began by introducing myself and allowing the participant to introduce himself or herself, establishing a positive rapport. I used the Adaptive Schools' (Garmston & Wellman, 1999) Norms of Collaboration by pausing, paraphrasing, and paying attention to myself and others; aware of what I was saying and how I said it. I then provided an overview of the purpose of the study and my role including an assurance of confidentiality. This was to build credibility and trust with the participants. Additional methods of establishing trust and credibility included reviewing each superintendent's leadership styles by reviewing their message on the school district's website. I maintained a respectful climate by conducting the interviews in a secured and private office and dressing professionally.

Managing and Storing the Data

All interviews were recorded and transcribed using Zoom Transcription Services to ensure accuracy. The transcripts were labeled and stored according to interview date and time and used a participant-selected pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. Each participant was provided with a transcript of their interview and an opportunity to comment as an addendum to their transcription. (APPENDIX E). The data is stored in the researcher's double password-protected computer and locked in the researcher's office. The data will be deleted three years

after completion of the research. Findings from data was presented and synthesized in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter Three Closure

Procedural methodology, including data analysis and interpretation, was described in Chapter III. Using a qualitative approach of interviews via Zoom meetings of the 12 of Michigan's Black superintendents, data was collected from the research questions and classified into themes as they pertain to Critical Race Theory tenets. Transcriptions of these interviews were provided to participants for their review and feedback in order to ensure credibility and trustworthiness. Clear protocol and interview procedures were provided throughout the process to ensure dependability. Limitations and delimitations in Chapter III were acknowledged to ensure meaningful conclusions and interpretations of the study. Chapter IV summarized the interviews of the 12 of Michigan's Black superintendents and the themes that surfaced from their responses to the research questions.

CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Chapter Four illustrates the profiles of the 12 participants interviewed in this study. Each participant agreed to a scheduled 40-50-minute audio-recorded and transcribed virtual interview. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, in accordance with APA transcription formatting, with the exception of specific locations and names deleted as presented in the initial invitation. Precise times for each interview varied due to the speed and elaboration with which each participant responded to the five questions presented. Data collected from these semi-structured interviews were color-coded into five thematic categories of Critical Race Theory (CRT) tenets: Permanence of Race, Challenge of Liberalism, Interest Convergence, Counter-Storytelling, and Intersectionality. Because CRT tenets are intertwined, the experiences of each participant fell into multiple categories to which careful consideration was applied to each response and its corresponding categories. Participant profiles in this chapter established the participant's framework for study, including the current state of the participant's position, the educational background of the participant, and the student population in the district the participants serve. These profiles present the viability of the responses from each participant as it applies to Chapter V's themes that emerged from these responses.

The participants included 12 Michigan Black superintendents from urban, suburban, and rural settings. Table 3 presents the trajectory of each superintendent in their career paths toward superintendency.

Table 3

Participants' Self-Identified Career Pathway Data

Career Pathways

	Teacher	Instructional Lead	Director	Assistant Principal`	Principal	Central Office	Assistant Superintendent	Superintendent	Degree?
P1	X	X		X	X			X	Y
P2	X				X	X	X	X	Y
P3	X			X	X			X	Y
P4	X			X	X			X	Y
P5	X	X			X		X	X	N
P6	X			X	X		X	X	N
P7	X			X	X		X	X	Y
P8	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	N
P9	X		X	X	X		X	X	N
P10	X		X		X		X	X	Y
P11	X			X	X		X	X	Y
P12	X		X		X	X	X	X	Y

Each participant was randomly assigned a corresponding number along with specific information withheld to ensure anonymity. As indicated in question one asking the superintendent to describe his or her career pathway, 11 of the 12 superintendents followed an extensive career pathway that aligned with Table 2 in Chapter 2 (DeAngelis & O'Connor, 2012), which found Black superintendents take a longer period of time in their educational pursuits, following more career paths toward superintendency than their White counterparts.

Interview #1

Participant #1 spent the majority of his educational career as a teacher in urban districts both in Michigan and out-of-state. The participant is a Black male who spent 13 years as a classroom teacher in multiple urban districts. He began teaching in a state other than Michigan and returned to Michigan to be closer to his family. Unable to return to his previous teaching position due to a hiring lockout in the district, he stayed in Michigan as a teacher. He then became an instructional specialist. After three years, he became an academic engagement officer, a position equivalent to an assistant principal. After serving as an assistant principal, he became an elementary principal. He then became a superintendent in an urban district for four years before accepting a position in a suburban district. It is important to note that Participant #1 is currently serving as the first Black superintendent hired in this suburban district with a 20% minority enrollment and a 5,193 student population (Michigan Public School Review, 2022). Participant #1 is in his fifth year as superintendent and holds a Ph.D. in education.

Interview #1: Cultural Competence

Throughout his educational career, Participant #1 addressed racial tension beginning in his classroom. The first step presented was to build positive relationships with students and build their self-confidence. He explained:

Whatever tensions were there, students understood that we were one class, and my goal was to make sure everyone had the best learning environment. As time evolved, there were some things we were desensitized to. I'm glad we're more conscious now of the well-being of others and people who have differences.

As an administrator, Participant #1 applied the same methods of building relationships with students to those of teachers and staff and stated:

More important than professional development, I used everyday interactions with

people, and as a building leader, the way you interact with students, you lead by example.

The way you interact with parents to have everyone feel as though they have a seat at the

table. Having an open-door type policy is a way to create a unified building culture. It has

to be done on a consistent basis, where I interact with teachers and treat everybody fairly.

When people look at me as a building leader, I set the tone. Being consistent is one of the

greatest tools to create that culture.

Interview #1: Search Firm Support

Participant #1 felt that national search firms were more equitable and provided more

support than the state search firms. He shared that he felt the state search firms were not very

supportive in the hiring process. He said:

The national search firms tend to be fairer. Some of the local search firms appear to

already have certain people in mind. In various interviews, I was told it would be a long

shot, or I was told that it would be too big a jump from where I was to where I was

trying to go. There were discussions without being exact about salary, which led me to

believe that people did not want to see me go from one particular salary to another as if

that jump was too big for someone coming from where I came from.

Participant #1 indicated his assertion that "some, not all," local search firms appeared to have

pre-selected candidates, resulting in a lack of support for all the candidates throughout the

interview process. Participant #1 had vast experience with interviews, having applied to "over

100 positions" in both state and national superintendent searches. He stated:

I do believe that some search firms have an idea of who they believe should

be the best candidate, or who they believe is the person that's best for the job. No matter how qualified I am, there will be something someone could pinpoint that could be a positive attribute for some, but a negative for me whether it's the size of the district I'm coming from, my years of experience, or whatever it is. People have a way of trying to morph the credentials to fit a particular community, to fit a proper fit.

Participant #1 expanded on what he considered an ambiguous term, "proper fit," to be what he considered the hiring firms' excuses for determining a pre-selected candidate. He stated:

I've had interviews where people say, 'we found someone who's a better fit.' What does that mean? What is a proper fit? That has no true definition, but it is something that can be used as an excuse not to select you.

Participant #1 also stated that the search firms limited his opportunities to specific urban locations. He shared that he was grateful to be hired into a suburban district, so he was not "boxed in" by the hiring firms. He stated:

We want others to have these positions and not go through the same thing. I was told by certain search firms where I needed to be. I was told that 'you need to apply for this urban district.' And I was thinking to myself, 'That's slightly bigger than where I am. Why would I do that if I had success?' I had to prove some people wrong and say, 'Okay. Let me go where you say I can't go.'

Interview #1: Board Agendas

Participant #1 asserted that school boards have hidden agendas that don't always pertain to race. He stated:

Regardless of your race, you could be in a community 100% all the same. If you were in

a community like that, people would still have their own agendas. They would still have their own motors. They would still have their own preconceived notions about you. We're always going to find differences. In my current role, that is a fact that people have certain agendas and they either attempt to push those agendas through you or have a plan to use you as a scapegoat for certain items that may not be taking place in a manner that they see fit from their group of personal viewpoints. There are motives and agendas constantly being pushed, and based on your ethnicity, you have to deal with performing at a high level all of the time as people are constantly looking for cracks in your performance.

Interview #1: Higher Expectations

As a result of Participant #1's interviews asserting pre-selected candidates were deemed as a "better fit," Participant #1 emphasized the need to maintain exemplary credentials to eliminate any doubt he was the best candidate for the job. He explained:

That's one of the reasons why academically I hold the highest credentials I possibly could career-wise. I've always tried to lead by example and maintain a crystal-clear record of everything so that those items could never be used against me.

Participant #1 attributed race as a factor in setting high standards and expectations for himself as a means to negate a racial stereotype. He stated, "You're constantly having to overcome stereotypes that some people put on regarding your performance and professionalism."

Interview #1: Mentoring and Networking

Participant #1 provided the advice for aspiring superintendents to be prepared to fully commit to the pursuit of the job, much like that of a personal relationship. He explained, "I would say that you have to pursue this in the same way as someone they are interested in when it

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comes to dating. There's certain aggression, certain proactivity that you have when you really want something."

Additionally, Participant #1 provided advice to seek out mentors to absorb knowledge from them and to start early in their educational career:

Throughout my career, I always looked at some of the people who were the best in the business. When I was a teacher, I reached out to principals that I thought were just dynamic. I would find ways to pick their brains. I still have those mentors. Seek those individuals that are setting trends or going above and beyond their position.

Interview #2

Participant #2 spent seven years in the classroom as an elementary teacher in urban districts before becoming a principal in the same urban district in which she currently serves as superintendent. She was a principal for 11 years, then served as central office director for curriculum and instruction, then as an assistant superintendent for two years. Participant #2 also served as an early childhood administrator. In total, Participant #2 served over 22 years in education. Participant #2 is currently serving her first year as superintendent after stepping in as interim superintendent three years prior in this urban district with a 90% minority enrollment and a 49,924 student population (Michigan Public School Review, 2022). Participant #2 holds an M.S. in early childhood education, teaching, and administration.

Interview #2: Cultural Competence

As an educator, Participant #2 taught kindergarten. Despite teaching children at such a young age, Participant #2 found it her duty to establish an inclusive environment, so students were comfortable talking about race. She stated, "We built bridges of understanding each other so that we're comfortable with each other's race." Participant #2 indicated that working with the

students was productive for establishing a culturally competent classroom, but later, as an administrator, working with staff posed a greater challenge, especially when the student population was predominantly Black and the staff was not. She stated:

> I was in a district at the time when the majority of the students were Black. One of our teachers overheard another teacher's tone; she was guessing the student's culture. It was gut-wrenching. It was a teaching session. We read about how our behavior toward students impacts them deep down, kind of pulling back the layers of why we behave this way.

Using the experience didactically prompted proactive strategies within her school. Teachers wanted to form a group of Black teachers that addressed the struggles and challenges they faced daily with staff and in the classroom, "struggles and challenges they may be facing that their counterparts do not," according to Participant #2, who supported their efforts and promoted professional development sessions in response to those challenges.

Interview #2: Search Firm Support

Participant #2 indicated that many of the barriers in the hiring of a superintendent related to internal pressures she put upon herself. This will be further explained in the Higher Expectations theme. She indicated that these internal pressures manifested throughout the interview process and prompted a need for more support from the hiring firms. Participant #2 interviewed three times for a superintendent position. She indicated that she felt the hiring firms had pre-selected candidates, a feeling that emerged from her experience in these interviews:

> I had never been a superintendent, but I was an assistant superintendent. That says a lot. My background was impeccable. I had never been terminated. The references I included were people across all the color lines, backgrounds, regional service agencies, and

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superintendents across the state. There was a candidate who had interviewed all over

the state, and when I Googled his name, he had reached a separation agreement. It was

his only superintendent's job and he'd been out of work for years. I interviewed for that

job, and he was hired. That district is reaping havoc now. I don't always want to use

race as a scapegoat, but we know the system is built for certain races, and it isn't our

race.

Participant #2 not only felt a less-qualified White candidate was hired but also felt that as a

Black female representing the lowest demographic in superintendency, the hiring firms provided

little guidance in the hiring process. She felt the process pre-selected candidates who received

preferential coaching and ignored the first-time superintendent candidates like her. She shared,

If it's the first time you've ever been a candidate, you have no idea. You can ask other

superintendents. However, I didn't know what questions to ask. There wasn't any

support for me. Those facilitators should take a little more time with first-time

candidates. I know some firms that gave a coach and coached those candidates through

the process. For this position, I got my own coach.

Interview #2: Board Agendas

Participant #2 acknowledged that while most school board members have personal agendas,

these agendas can sometimes include initiatives that benefit the school district. She stated:

I was the first African American and the first Black female superintendent. One school

board member wanted me to start a Black or diversity group, which is good. I believe she

always wanted to do this, but she needed an ally to get it done. The school board member

believed that she had found an ally to get it done, or even just to get the conversation

going. A small countywide superintendent board group had been created around

diversity, equity, and inclusion. The work is slow-moving, especially since most of our

districts are White. At least there are conversations going.

Later in the school year, Participant #2 was asked to join another group organized in the

community in addition to the school district. She said, "I guess it would be an inclusion group

here in [location deleted]. It is a group that promotes educating the community on the inclusivity,

equity, and diversity platform."

Interview #2: Higher Expectations

Participant #2 noted that there were other obstacles not related to educational levels

gained that could be considered as higher expectations.

One would be my mental state of mind. My first thought was that I shouldn't apply for a

superintendent position in a district that didn't look like the one I'd worked in for 23

years. They wouldn't want me there anyway. So I was reluctant to apply for any of those

positions. I thought that they wouldn't like me. Mentally, I had to overcome that and

think more of the work is the work, and what I bring to the table is much more than any

other person applying for the same superintendent position regardless of race and/or

experience.

She also summarized:

People applied with vast experiences from other urban school districts. They had

experiences in rural districts. They had experiences dealing with a diverse group of kids,

which I didn't. They were afforded these opportunities to build their experience base.

This would put me at a disadvantage and I didn't have that.

She noted another expectation:

The other thing that I did have to kind of overcome was the idea of a superintendent being Black. The whole idea is that all Black superintendents need to have the doctor in front of their name, or behind their name. It's not a requirement to get the job. So, if you were to come in, and you peel back the layers, you get all of the names of the Black superintendents in Michigan, and you look at their credentials, one would assume that that is a requirement. I don't want that to deter anyone from applying because they have that thought in mind.

Interview #2: Mentoring and Networking

Participant #2 recognized the value of and necessity for mentoring and networking. Mentors guide educators along their career pathways. Participant #2 shared:

I have a strong relationship with a curriculum director and longtime friend. She is one of the people I had a strong relationship with who was a member of the leadership training team. She and I kept in touch. She has trained numerous people across the state and has been a very valuable person to my success. And actually, this person was my coach because she was able to offer lots of feedback and was strong in her leadership skills and support. I don't think this is my number one reason; however, her help was what got me into this position; she prepped me. I've also held another strong relationship with this special education consultant from our local regional educational support agency. I still meet with her monthly.

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Interview #3

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Participant #3 served five years as a middle school history teacher before accepting the middle school assistant principal position, serving for one year before becoming the middle school principal. He was a middle school principal for four years before becoming the high

school principal for another five years. Participant #3 first became principal in a different state for a transformational school district of low-performing status. Overall, Participant #3 accumulated over 19 years in his educational career. He was offered and accepted the position as the district's assistant superintendent for the Human Resources Department. He then became a superintendent, currently in his fourth year, in an urban district with an 80% minority enrollment and a 5,266 student population (Michigan Public School Review, 2022). Participant #3 holds a Ph.D. in K-12 Administration.

Interview #3: Cultural Competence

Beginning his career in a predominantly Black urban school district, Participant #3 faced fewer challenges regarding racial tension among the students. Participant #3 stated:

Many of the students were of the same race. Their experiences were similar, so we didn't have many racial differences. I think there was a lot of curiosity when we dived into current event issues. I think it was all in the spirit of understanding the cultural perspectives of those students. It was never an approach of 'my race or my culture was superior to yours. For me, it was a pretty healthy discussion.

Participant #3's experience as a teacher differed significantly from his experience as an administrator. Faced with the disproportionality of his White female staff in comparison to his student population, Participant #3 faced greater challenges in establishing a culturally competent staff. He explained:

I transitioned to a school where the school was about 99% African American, but the teachers were about 80 to 85% White female, so you can imagine the cultural gap between the staff and the students they were servicing, the amount of disconnect that it caused at times. You have to attack that with training and professional development.

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This disconnect was attributed to the cultural misunderstanding between the students and teachers, adding to racial tension within the school. In order to address this gap, Participant #3 took action with his staff. He stated:

> We began to do this really authentic experience because for a lot of them it was the environments our kids were coming from, and they didn't understand why they were coming into the school behaving the way they did. The way they approached their learning wasn't what the staff thought it should have been. So we started taking visits into the community, into the neighborhoods. There would be events that our staff would go to in order to understand the community. The staff began talking with individuals in the community to better understand the culture because we're dealing with a cultural gap that's aligned with racial gaps. Teachers have to get an understanding of that before they can begin trying to connect with them. Particularly with African Americans, you have to know them and know you care about them before they will do anything for you.

As a result of Participant #3's efforts at bridging the cultural gaps between his staff and students through ongoing training, professional development, and authentic experiences through community interaction, students benefited both emotionally and academically. According to Participant #3, "We had some tug of wars, but we made some progress. We really improved achievement at the school."

Interview #3: Search Firm Support

Participant #3 had a different experience with search firms as he was preparing to go into the superintendent interviewing process and was instead appointed into the position of interim superintendent. He said, "it was very difficult to find positions that I thought would be a fit. And what I meant by that was the ones that aligned to my background, my educational experiences

and background." His intent was to research school districts so that he could answer the questions he anticipated being asked in the interview. He automatically thought he would be limited in the range of school districts in which he could apply. He noted, "I was already boxed into a traditional urban school district with a large percentage of free and reduced students. They may have had some struggles in terms of achievement and so forth." This ultimately led him to share that he felt his opportunities were limited to urban districts. He stated:

There were only a couple or so superintendent positions that were immediate. I recognize what I like, and I am immediately limited in the positions that I could go out there and apply for. Tied to that, though, is an African American candidate. I think we have to get beyond that. I think we limit ourselves based on what we think. What we think in terms of position we can apply for and actually get and we have to get beyond that now. Personally, I only want it to be in that kind of district. I never wanted to be in a different kind of district. One thing was, I'm really an urban educator, and I really believe that. That's really the kind of district that I will always kind of gravitate towards, but I know those barriers exist, you know, if we're trying to look at going into more affluent school districts.

Interview #3: Board Agendas

As an urban school district superintendent, most of Participant #3's school board members are Black. This is a contributing factor to Participant #3's perception of a lack of hidden board agendas. Participant #3 stated:

I'm in a really good situation. My board naturally takes on issues that are important to an urban community, or an African American or diverse Black or Brown community, or low-income community. They automatically take on those issues, and I think they

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expect me to do the same. The good thing is, I would be doing that if I wasn't a superintendent. My philosophy and values are aligned really well with the board's philosophy and values, so that's why it's such a good fit for me right now.

Interview #3: Higher Expectations

Intellectual competence is one concern Participant #3 shared in reference to holding high expectations of superintendents. He stated:

Individuals will challenge your confidence to see if you have the ability to lead a school district. I don't know if it's historically-based or racially-biased, but maybe both. I'm talking about intellectual ability, the ability to communicate well both written and verbally.

Another concern he noted was emotional intelligence, particularly attributed to being a Black male. Participant #3 stated:

Everyone always questions you when you come in as an African American superintendent. We're always perceived as not very competent or very intellectual. We're always depicted as Black males who can't handle their emotions. We're never perceived to be poised, calm, calculated individuals who manage their emotions and apply them to specific situations appropriately. When they see you and don't know you and they're just looking at your face or color or whatever, it's almost like, 'Was I not supposed to be competent? Was I not supposed to handle that well?' Those are the kinds of challenges we face.

Interview #3: Mentoring and Networking

Seeking out a support system was important to Participant #3 who found his mentors early in his career. "My first teaching job was given to me by my high school superintendent. I

kind of stayed connected with him." Establishing mentors early in his career provided career opportunities such as his first teaching job. Additionally, these mentors provided a bevy of knowledge to share with him. "I kind of soaked up a lot of knowledge that he gave me, and then he groomed me into administrative positions. He was obviously a person who supported me."

Additionally, the superintendent role model provided guidance for Participant #3 throughout his career. "That superintendent passed me on to another superintendent. He served as my mentor along with two other individuals who guided me through the interview process of becoming a superintendent." Participant #3, despite acquiring mentors throughout his career, recognizes the lack of mentors among the African American educational leadership community. He said, "I think we need to do a better job of supporting our colleagues, helping each other through the challenges we face as African American administrators." He indicated opportunities to network with other African Americans can occur through Ph.D. coursework, professional development, and the Michigan Association of African American Superintendents (MAAS). "I think that group is good. I think we need to do more of that so we can connect with each other across the state and keep each other informed and lifted up. Those things are always important to me."

Interview #4

Participant #4 began his career as a high school special education teacher. He then became the assistant principal in a neighboring urban school district for four years. He later became an elementary school principal in another urban school district, earning his Ph.D. at that time. Thereafter, Participant #4 became the middle school principal in a suburban school district for five years before accepting his first superintendent position in an urban district with an 86% minority enrollment and a 1,036 student population (Michigan Public School Review, 2022).

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This is Participant #4's fourth year as superintendent. Participant #4 holds an Ed.D. in educational leadership and policy studies.

Interview #4: Cultural Competence

Participant #4 recognized and celebrated the need for a diverse classroom environment as it contributes to student achievement. He noted that a rich environment included not only racial diversity but also socio-economic diversity. "We had racial diversity, but we also had poor white kids and rich, rich families. We had students from the trailer parks and children from CEOs like Chrysler." Participant #4 taught in a richly diverse school district that blended numerous cultural, socio-economic, and ability level backgrounds. As a special education teacher, he ensured his students were exposed to a dynamic curriculum and "made adjustments so they could flourish in that environment. I had to make adjustments to make sure students were being treated fairly and made modifications to create a perfect environment for them to be successful."

As an administrator, Participant #4 faced a greater challenge to ensure his staff was culturally competent. In order to do this, the training programs set in place intentionally allowed for staff to understand the population they served. He stated:

When I took the role as superintendent, I had to make sure staff understood the population they served. Many of the individuals were middle-class White women who didn't understand the diverse needs of the students. I've been very cognizant to hire diverse staff that [sic]represents the student population as much as possible. I took teachers through training so they have to be empathetic to care and go through relationships before they could educate them. We worked really hard for them to understand the extreme poverty, that they need to triage when they come to school. This

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is the biggest thing we implemented. We're not lowering expectations, but you have to

understand students if you want them to be successful.

Additional steps Participant #4 implemented included professional development directed at

poverty training, much of which came from Ruby Payne's *Framework for Understanding*

Poverty (2003) workshops as well as Eric Jensen's *Teaching with Poverty and Equity in Mind*

(2009) webinars.

Interview #4: Search Firm Support

Participant #4 felt that he was overlooked for a less qualified candidate during his

superintendent interviews. He noted, "But, of course, I'm saying people who I was part of a

search process were nowhere near as qualified as I. So, most definitely there have been times

where I was overqualified and they hired somebody else." He has told other aspiring candidates,

"I tell people all the time, search firms can lead you to a certain direction, but it's still about that

school board. The search firm is important because it shifts the mindset of that board."

Understanding the dynamics of the search firm is just as important. Participant #4 said,

"Getting to know search firms and their members is important as well because I went through a

certain search firm's leadership academy, and I knew I was going to get an interview for the

superintendent positions. I considered myself on their shortlist." However, he, likewise,

understood the inconsistencies in the hiring firm processes and felt there were less qualified

candidates hired through the Michigan search firms. "You know, there have been people that

others got a job that I applied for, and they don't even have anything close on their resume as

me." Additional concerns Participant #4 notes related to the Michigan search firms. He noted

that Michigan does not have a sunset law, a statute that terminates exposed information after a

defined period. Awareness that a superintendent candidate's prior history is exposed to the public is specific to Michigan which frustrated Participant #4. He stated:

> All your information was put out in the public knowledge, and after you're selected for an interview, everybody knows about it. I wasn't aware of that. If you don't get the job, your employer knows about it. That can be very unsettling.

Another concern Participant #4 acknowledged was hiring firms included the limitations of Black superintendent candidates. He felt the candidates were limited by the search firms to apply to urban locations. He stated:

> I thought quite honestly that would be limited to where I could start as superintendent because of the racial disparities in the country. I think it's gotten a little better because we have four or five African Americans in predominantly White districts. But in 2010, I would never have applied for those locations because people that look like me weren't going to get those positions.

Participant #4 stated that interaction between Michigan's Black organizations including the Michigan Association of African American Superintendents (MAAS) actively advocates for equity from Michigan's hiring firms, with the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB) in particular.

> They've kind of taken over as the primary search firm in the state for some crazy reason. We've [MAAS] had some detailed conversations about them being more dedicated to African Americans being put in the forefront. It was a struggle because in the beginning, we weren't getting any calls. We were only going to urban districts. I'm not an urban superintendent. I'm a superintendent.

Participant #4 also recognized that the national search firms tended to be more equitable than the Michigan search firms. "National sites automatically have been more diverse in their net because they're dealing with the across the country, but the Michigan search firms, we've had to talk to them about this."

Interview #4: Board Agendas

Participant #4's district school board is predominantly Black. With this in mind, the school board's values and agendas regarding diversity and equity match those of the participant's values and agendas. Clarity of roles at the beginning of his assignment was key to a successful relationship with the board. Participant #4 stated:

> You have to understand the history of the board, and if that board is a micromanaging board, or do they let the superintendent lead? I tell the boards during the interview, that if you're micromanaging, I'm not your guy. I'm not going to be micromanaged. I will leave.

As a result of that clarification on management, Participant #4 did not note any specific hidden agendas by school board members and that much of the experience requires a deep understanding of the dynamics of the community, including the political climate. He did not indicate any racially-related challenges with the school board but did indicate that much of the challenges were simply related to managing the school board in general.

Interview #4: Higher Expectations

Participant #4 acknowledged the first 100 days were crucial to establishing strong leadership as superintendent. "You have to establish that skill set in the first 100 days so people know you're not just talk." He noted that, as a Black superintendent, "you've just got to prove yourself a little bit more" in comparison to White superintendents. "You have to be very wary of

the bias. They may believe a White person more." Because of this, Participant #4 reiterated the need to prove himself more in the first 100 days.

Interview #4: Mentoring and Networking

Coalitions with Black superintendents across the state are important for providing emotional and informational support, especially with so few Black superintendents in the state. For Participant #4, making intentional connections is a necessity. He stated:

It's important to understand that the Black superintendent does not have a peer in the district. There are people who are empathetic and sympathetic, but they're not in your shoes. There are professional relationships that you can call if you have a question, but you can't be vulnerable in your own space when you're a leader.

Interview #5

Participant #5 spent her first three years as an elementary and middle school teacher. She then became a Title I Coordinator. She later accepted the position as an elementary school principal with the same school district. She was assigned the position of high school principal three years later where she remained for 11 years. Thereafter, she was promoted to assistant superintendent for learning and inclusion and later superintendent of the same suburban district with a minority enrollment of 22% and a 7,939 student population (Michigan Public School Review, 2022). Participant #5 holds an Ed.D. in educational leadership and policy studies.

Interview #5: Cultural Competence

Early in her educational career, Participant #5 met cultural competence in her classroom despite a lack of diversity. "One hundred percent of my students were African American. We talked about racial issues, but my students thought Blacks and African Americans were the majority in the world. We didn't have a lot of racial tensions in that environment." Once she

moved to administration at a different school, the student population changed as well as the teaching staff. Building more cultural competence by hiring a racially diverse staff to represent the student population was a greater challenge. Even her presence, after being hired, presented challenges. "I felt a lot of racial tension personally in that. In some ways, I felt like I was hired to appease the population. We don't see anybody who looks like us so they put me there." She was investigated for reverse discrimination, so she faced challenges between providing equity to a diverse student population while at the same time, dealing with a discrimination accusation after firing a White employee. "I was trying to balance the two worlds of dealing with what was happening to me while at the same time getting people to see the humanity of our students." Her administrative experiences of providing racial equity met with resistance from staff. She stated:

> I started to have conversations about implicit bias and providing culturally responsive teaching. I was met with pushback because we didn't have a lot of [minority] students. There was a thought that we didn't need to talk about this, and here's the African American coming in all sensitive.

Having a clear vision of providing a culturally competent staff upon her hiring helped keep Participant #5 steadfast in her pursuit despite the difficulties. "People complained before I even got here about my [racially ethnic] name."

Participant #5 addressed a need to be committed to a long process of ensuring a culturally competent staff. "You have a long way to go because some people will revert to their old practices. You have to believe in it enough to keep moving."

Interview #5: Search Firm Support

Participant #5 considered applying for a certain superintendent position and was told that

it might be a good idea to speak to someone working for the search firm. She made contact with a representative from the firm only to be told she was not qualified. She stated:

 I was a high school principal at the time. I was told I needed to be in the central office administration for three years before I could even think about moving into a superintendent's position. They said, 'even if you apply, I wouldn't take your name to the school board anyway.'

She noted that at the time the search firm was set up to pull eight names and took those names to the school board for review. So she did not apply. She speculated, "it's one of those things where there were these rules made up for me that didn't even give me an opportunity to be in front of the board when I don't know that those same rules are there for others." She did, however, interview for other superintendent positions and made it to the top two finalists for the position in this certain district. It was strange to her that she felt like that experience was very supportive. "I did feel that what was interesting was that it was the same search firm but for a different district." She noted that it was different due to the fact the search firm was more interactive with the interview for the urban school district and not as much for the suburban school district.

Participant #5 noted she felt search firms had pre-selected candidates. She stated:

My name surfaced quite a bit from focus groups across the community. There were two people in the search firms, one Black woman and a White man. The woman called me to apply for the position and told me she'd talk with her counterpart. He told me I wasn't qualified. The person they hired, it was the only job they'd applied for and got in.

Interview #5: Board Agendas

Aligned with the hiring firms' pre-selected candidates, Participant #5 felt the school boards often have hidden agendas that don't align with the district's mission. She stated:

I think before they even start looking at candidates, they're clear on what they're

looking for. What I notice is that the conversation is more on who they would feel

comfortable going to the bar and having a beer with. That's not the job. The job is to get

the work done. As Black people, they can't see us as those people they can hang out with.

That brings us down. We need to look at the list of candidates and ask who we can get to

move this district forward and be very clear on that. They're not using that litmus test.

Participant #5 faced criticism from a board member for not being "bubbly," but was defended by

a community member addressing the board member's implicit bias. She reported that the person

said, "You're upset because this Black woman in a White district who is getting things done is

not bubbly? You've never had a Black person in charge, and you've never had a woman in

charge."

Additionally, Participant #5 recognized that school boards often carry over personal agendas that

were not addressed by previous superintendents. She stated that board members are often

"talking about something you didn't even implement; they're carrying it over from the last

superintendent, but they're complaining about it because it's you."

Interview #5: Higher Expectations

Participant #5 did not explicitly state higher expectations but inferred the need to

maintain higher expectations to persevere despite the obstacles she faces. "I'm telling you,

someday you'll face issues related to race. You have to have the courage to know yourself and

talk about implicit bias. We have to be clear about leading courageously."

Interview #5: Mentoring and Networking

Facing the many obstacles involved in being a Black female superintendent requires a

strong network of support for Participant #5. "Having a strong network of support is good if I

have a variety of people in it. I want African Americans in my network. Some people really don't understand my experiences, so having those mentors is really helpful."

In addition to having a network of support from superintendents with similar experiences, Participant #5 emphasized the need to have a network of support within the district.

> I think it was especially helpful having a support system of people who actually get it. Parents would be passing around email chatter I would never be privy to. I would have other parent moles who would come back and say, 'At the next PTA meeting, they're going to ask you this,' and I would have the answer. It's been powerful to have those people surround you and support you, especially in this environment.

Interview #6

Participant #6 began her career as a high school English teacher in a different state. She moved to Michigan and continued to teach high school English in a suburban school district. She became the middle assistant principal for the last semester of the school year before her assignment as the middle school principal for the following school year. She held the position for nine years before accepting the request from the district superintendent to run the Human Resources department for another school district. She was asked to return to her previous school district to run their Human Resources department, which she ran for nine years before accepting her first superintendent of schools' position at that same district. It is important to note that Participant #6 did not interview for any of her administrative positions; she was appointed to these positions by the supervising administrators. Participant #6 is in her sixth year as superintendent of a suburban school with a 31% minority enrollment and 17,353 student population (Michigan Public School Review, 2022). Participant #6 holds an M.A. in Teaching.

Interview #6: Cultural Competence

Establishing provisions for a culturally competent classroom can be more manageable student-to-student than adult-to-adult, according to Participant #6. Faced with establishing equity for her students, she noted the "systemic barriers in place" set by adults often interfered with establishing a culturally responsive environment.

> For students to enter the pathway for Advanced Placement courses, teachers would say specific kids were headed toward that. A student of mine hadn't had the same experience as those in the gifted and talented track. The pathway for certain students wasn't the same, but that doesn't mean they can't have the same access and opportunity. We have to deal with what is going on here systemically.

Changing the culture is the reason Participant #6 was hired into a district with a predominantly White student population. She noted the school board had the initiative of promoting a culturally competent initiative, with the understanding that this initiative would take years to establish. She stated:

> Our teachers knew that this wasn't just a drive-by PD they were going to. First, we had to train our administrators, setting our strategic objectives as part of a dynamic plan. Our strategic objective is to become a part of a culturally responsive learning community. It entailed that our Human Resource department is trained and that there is diversity and representation through the teaching forces and support staff. We need to do extensive PD with our administrators and teachers, scaffolding it yearly. We're in our third year, and it has been challenging, even with the training. It takes time; it's not going to change a culture overnight.

Interview #6: Search Firm Support

Participant #6 did not have to go through a search firm because she was promoted to interim and then superintendent of schools. She did, however, state her concern for the limited opportunities that would exist had she competed as a candidate. "I often question as a Black woman, had this opportunity not presented itself, what the outcome would have been having competed. It is a challenging path, in particular, for the Black superintendent."

Interview #6: Board Agendas

Participant #6 identified the specific school board agenda was to implement an equity policy initially; therefore, she felt that she was hired solely to fill that equity policy. She felt that, although the board intended to have an equity policy in place, they were not truly committed to the equity policy considering the board stalled her efforts at hiring diverse staff members in the district.

Interview #6: Higher Expectations

Appointed to the superintendent position, Participant #6 acknowledged the higher expectations needed as a Black female superintendent. The first she mentioned related to competence:

> There was an immediate questioning in the community of my competence. 'How did she get appointed?' I didn't have my doctorate degree. 'We've never had a superintendent without a doctorate.' Recognizing the forces at play to see I didn't have the experience; it still would have been a struggle had I applied and competed. We're always questioned in terms of our competency. I have the dual of being Black and female, so I always have to be prepared, working ten times harder to make sure every 'T' is crossed.

She stated that she constantly questions if the challenges to making a more culturally responsive environment would have been easier if she were a White male. She indicated that the frustration emerges from having to prove her competence rather than working toward moving the district forward. "I think, if I were a White male, I would be able to set the same agenda and move it forward. Even more frustrating, when we try to bring on a staff of color, why can't we move this faster?"

Interview #6: Mentoring and Networking

Regarding access to strong mentors, Participant #6 stated, "As you stand on the shoulders of giants, you know who to reach." She noted in particular the need to reach out to other Black superintendents for knowledge and support and to help navigate through the constant challenges she faces.

Interview #7

Participant #7 taught high school English in an urban school district for three years before becoming an assistant principal. Afterward, he became the high school principal in another urban district. He left that position to become a high school principal in another urban district, serving four years. The district resized, and he became one of its new assistant superintendents, serving another four years. He left that district and became superintendent of schools in a neighboring school district. All of Participant #7's educational experiences occurred within urban districts. This is Participant #7's first superintendent position, one he held for 11 years in this urban district with a minority enrollment of 95% and a 2,149 student population (Michigan Public School Review, 2022). Participant #7 holds an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Administration.

Interview #7: Cultural Competence

Participant #7 made no indication that he faced racial tensions within his district, considering the 95% minority enrollment (Michigan Public School Review, 2022) in the urban district. Likewise, his staff reflected the same percentage. He did note that many of the inequities were the fiscal and facilities-related challenges of a low-income urban district embedded in the culture of poverty.

Interview #7: Search Firm Support

Participant #7 noted that search firms are hired by the school boards to be their hiring agents and not to support the candidates:

> I believe that the hiring firms do exactly what they're paid for, and that's to find the best candidate for the position. Those search firms aren't agents for me. They're working based on feedback that they're getting. They're working to do what they feel is in the best interest of the people who've hired them. They can't go in there and say, 'Hey, I think that you should hire this candidate' because their [search firms'] check is being cut because they're doing their [school boards'] bidding.

Additionally, he understands that participating in a candidate pool is less about being qualified and more about being the "proper fit." For Participant #7, a "proper fit" must be a mutual attraction. He stated:

> There is an assumption that they're looking for the best candidate. They're looking for the person that fits their profile, and that doesn't mean it's the best candidate. Am I going to be successful in a place that wants somebody different? We can save ourselves a lot of heartache if we only went to places that desired us in the first place.

Interview #7: Board Agendas

Establishing positive relationships with the school board immediately is the first priority as superintendent, according to Participant #7.

> I've been fortunate enough to have a school board that believes we're going to make decisions in the best interest of students. It's the least politicized place I've worked in, so I don't deal with a high level of politics. But it came about as a result of us having a shared vision. It does happen without me being humble enough to sit in a room with people who don't look like me but view things through the lenses of putting the best interests of the students first. The time it takes to cultivate those relationships is the most important thing I can do.

Interview #7: Higher Expectations

Participant #7 established the need to have a confident mindset based on what he could deliver to that district and ensure that what he could deliver was aligned with the school board's vision. "I had great success at a district whose school board thought I would be a puppet." Despite the school board's attempt to micromanage him, he was able to have great academic success in a multicultural district and used the data to present to them the initiatives he put in place were in the best interest of the students and led them to their success.

Interview #7: Mentoring and Networking

Participant #7 did not have a mentor. Rather, he established himself as a mentor. "I was told the only friend you have as a superintendent is your contract." He stated that he does have a strong connection with people, but that people came to him to seek advice since he became an administrator at such a young age. He learned by observing others in their leadership positions and absorbed the knowledge of what to do and what not to do. He said, "I've learned some

phenomenal things, but I've also learned what not to do. By watching people, and just paying attention, by the time I got here, I was ready for it."

Interview #8

Participant #8 taught Advanced Placement History for 16 years before accepting a department head position at the same high school. He was the department head for eight years before accepting a position as middle/high school athletic director/assistant principal for four years. He later became that high school's principal for six years before accepting the position of superintendent of schools in a neighboring school district. This is Participant #8's third year in his first superintendent position in a district with 27% minority enrollment and a 5,405 student population (Michigan Public School Review, 2022). Participant #8 holds an Ed.S. in educational leadership and administration.

Interview #8: Cultural Competence

Because Participant #8 was a history teacher, providing opportunities for cultural competence within his classroom yielded opportunities for critical thinking and inquisition and students' diversity represented equally in the staff. Students "had an opportunity to talk about that. They come from a different background and home life. What helped in their success is that they need to see people that look like them. That's huge." He also provided a mentoring program for Black males in his district and followed those students, collecting three years of data after providing them with opportunities rich in diversity such as reading *Dear Martin* (Stone, 2017), a novel about Treyvon Martin, and bringing in his sister to do a workshop. "Grades went up tremendously and discipline for the boys was almost non-existent." Participant #8 was attentive to the achievement gap faced by students of color. As an advanced placement history teacher, he

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recognized the need to have teachers who looked like the students in higher level academic courses to serve as role models and inspire them to take those high-level courses.

In working with staff as an administrator, Participant #8 worked with staff using role-play opportunities to create a more positive outcome with the minority student populations. He noted:

> One of the things I liked to do was role-play at staff meetings where I was a student. I'd write out a script for them based on things they actually observed. I'd play the reaction the teachers were getting. Then I'd say, 'Let's play it back." I'd give them a new script. What does the teacher do differently and how was the reaction different? That was very powerful.

Interview #8: Search Firm Support

Participant #8 mentioned that the search firm did not actually offer much support when it came to the process and application for the position. He had so little support that, when he was offered the position from the school board, the search firm presented the contract and his reply was," This is beyond embarrassing. That's not even what the job was posted at. You are asking me to start where the current superintendent started a decade ago, and if that's the way it's going to be, I'm happy where I'm at."

There was a point in the process he shared:

> I really appreciated that I had to answer two questions by video even though it was for all candidates. I thought that was great because not only could I answer them, but they got a chance to kind of get a sense of my passion and my personality.

Interview #8: Board Agendas

Participant #8 identified hidden agendas of the board related to hiring a person of color during the interviews. He stated that the school board hired a person of color whose platform promoted

diversity, equity, and inclusion. He said, "That's my hidden agenda, right up there with construction and everything. The fact that they hired a person of color, what did they think he was going to hire?" Participant #8 felt he was hired as a person of color, but that the board micromanaged when it came to hiring a more diverse staff. "They said, 'we didn't feel that would be a good fit'" in reference to hiring a minority administrator. "I don't know what that means. I don't get it." As a result, Participant #8 eliminated the roadblock by moving final decisions of building administrators to the central office administration rather than the school board making staff hiring decisions.

Interview #8: Higher Expectations

Participant #8 felt that one of the challenges in being a Black superintendent included people who took advantage of him because of his race. Maintaining consistent leadership contributed to the higher expectations held of him. "Some people think you're going to make a decision just based on your background, not looking at evidence and data." He felt that people questioned those decisions because he was a Black superintendent. "I had one mom ask for a school transfer. I told her we weren't doing any transfers. She said, 'If I was Black, you'd let me transfer.' He felt that he needed to maintain a stronger sense of competence and consistency because "we have some people that would like to be outside of their lane."

Interview #8: Mentoring and Networking

Participant #8 sought a mentor through retired superintendents across the state along with the MAAS.

> You have to have people that are going to give it to you straight, and help support you
> or fix anything. These people are key because, as a Black superintendent, you have to
> figure out who you can trust, who is really out there, and who has your best interests in

mind.

Interview #9

Participant #9 first worked for the United States government immediately after college. In his second year he became a career technical education teacher in an urban school district. Two years later, he became the assistant principal in the same school district. He later became a high school principal and was then promoted to central office as Director of Career Technical Education. He later accepted his first position as superintendent of school in another district. Participant #9 is in his fourth year of this position in an urban district with 94% minority enrollment and student population of 1,874 (Michigan Public School Review, 2022). Participant #9 is a doctoral candidate of Curriculum, Supervision, and Instruction.

Interview #9: Cultural Competence

Participant #9 held a different approach to establishing a culturally competent environment. "When you talk about diversity, you're talking about exposure, the levels of exposure that allows for intellectual growth." He felt that there was too much of an emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion that it interfered with students' opportunities to seek academic achievement.

> When you deal with all the -isms: racism, sexism, those are chasms we have to cross. Many people feel equity is the greatest thing across the board. But if you don't have it, an even playing field, and those who are being underserved, then you have those that are at the medium level, and those that are at an exceeding level if you have equality. If you're at a subpar level, you're still there if dealing with equity.

Participant #9 noted that his purpose for working is to serve children. "I don't serve adults attached to children. If you don't mix children in your introductory sentence, we're going

to have a short conversation." In doing so, he recognized the number of initiatives presented

regarding bias, equity, and race grew too long. He found he was "having to knock out the noise

of racism and systemic systems that were not geared for me to be successful; it's crazy."

One of the challenges in creating a culturally competent staff came from Participant #9's

experience in a turnaround school district.

It was my assignment after a school district was reconstituted was to release 75-80% of

the staff, mandated in order to receive funding. And that you have to change the name of

the school. That was hated because of the legacy and tradition, and I understood that. I

let them know that we needed to get our money. That closed the argument. But in

selecting the staff, I was responsible for interviewing and hiring, and the staff I hired all

looked like the students. I was able to amass a diversity of staff that matched the best

interest of the students.

Interview #9: Search Firm Support

Participant #9 was put into a peculiar situation by the search firm. The firm placed a

candidate back into the interview process after being eliminated. He noted:

The school board eliminated candidates after the first round, and it was down to two

candidates. I was one of the two remaining. The search firm brought back a third

candidate for the final round. The third person was put back in because he had

connections with the search firm, which he found out later through the school board

members I work with now. I was also contacted and told that I need to come in and do a

presentation. The other finalist pulled out of the interviews at the last minute, which

only left myself and the added candidate. I knew then that this was an added step to the

search firm process, and it became more about me becoming the first African American

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superintendent in the district.

Participant #9 acknowledged that, despite being hired for this position, the best candidate doesn't always get the job. "I learned that sometimes the best candidate doesn't always get the job. You have to deal with the political aspects of the school board."

Interview #9: Board Agendas

Participant #9 identified two types of school boards and their agendas: one that micromanages, and one that does not. "You have a policy board that works hand in hand with the superintendent and they deal directly with a policy that's at a 50,000 feet view." While Participant #9 preferred a laissez-faire school board, he also recognizes that, hired by the board, he must work with both types of boards. He stated:

Then there's the type of school board that are trying to negotiate themselves into day-to-day operations, which is the job of the superintendent. You have to be able to maneuver that because you work for the superintendent and everyone else works for you. You have to build those relationships with the board.

Interview #9: Higher Expectations

Participant #9 recognized the many microaggressions the community asserts on the Black superintendent resulted in him being held to a higher standard.

Being the first African American superintendent doesn't mean they want to follow you. There are many microaggressions you have to deal with politically because you can't appear as that angry Black man. You don't let them see you sweat.

Additionally, he added that "being a candidate of diversity, it can't be your shield. There is a challenge with who you are, that people can look at you from the surface, the exterior. You have to know how to deal with what people see."

Interview #9: Mentoring and Networking

Reaching out to other transformative leaders is the networking Participant #8 endorses. "You can see things other people don't see, and they can relate to what you're saying." Seeking like-minded leaders who follow the same path as transformative leaders is the only mentoring Participant #9 has used despite having additional professional circles. "What I found is that I would be able to bounce some formal aspects of the job. There are people in my circles that just can't relate to what I'm saying. So I'm stuck with the visionary, transformative leaders."

Interview #10

Participant #10 began her career as a special education teacher in an urban school district. She later became a school psychologist and teacher consultant for the county. She accepted a position as an elementary principal for a few years before moving into a middle school principal role. As the middle school principal, she started working as an assistant superintendent as well as the district's food service director. A few years later, she accepted the position of superintendent of schools in a different district. Participant #10 served as superintendent in three different schools over the course of eight years, all of which were urban districts with high minority enrollment. Participant #10 is currently in her fourth year in an urban district with a 79% minority enrollment and a 3,328 student population (Michigan Public School Review, 2022). Participant #10 holds a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership.

Interview #10: Cultural Competence

Participant #10 experienced a significant number of racial tensions while beginning her career as an educator. "The mayor's daughter was dating a Black man, and it was the time when there were skinheads, so we had a lot of racial tension." Participant #10's school district was also transitioning to one with a more diverse student population. To address the tension and promote

a more culturally competent environment, the district developed the slogan: "We build champions for life." The staff held conversations with the students who were treated poorly at off-campus sporting events. They talked about how it felt to be treated this way regardless of their ethnicity. Participant #10 felt that it was easier to talk about these situations as a person of color. "There was one teacher who was Russian. She didn't understand the racial tension between her and her students. I would go into classrooms and help my colleagues." Some of these racial tensions occurred in the classroom; others occurred in places such as the school parking lot with the participant's tires flattened once she became an administrator. She stated:

> I had a parent sit on the front porch across the street with a rifle and a sign that said, 'No
> Nigger is going to suspend my child.' They put up Uncle Sam posters
> around the school adding they want skinheads looking for the Black principal.
> Promoting culturally competent staff was difficult because I had one other Black teacher
> and a Black counselor in a staff of over 100. That was challenging because we had an
> equity plan, but people weren't willing to implement it. The whole culture wasn't ready
> for it. There needs time to build relationships. I thought I was coming in to implement
> this plan, but the culture wasn't ready at any level.

Interview #10: Search Firm Support

Participant #10 did not go through a hiring firm to get her position as superintendent of schools. She was contacted by one of the state hiring firms and asked to come to a meeting and the school board put the process out in the public to announce that this is the person they were going to hire. When Participant #10 first considered a position as superintendent, she was concerned that she would not have the opportunity. "I'm not putting myself through that. I don't know if the community was ready for an African American leader who has innovative thoughts

who's going to question what we're doing for students and for people in poverty and diverse cultures." Participant #10, while focused on her skill set, was not naive to the purpose of being recruited to this position. "They wanted someone who could implement this plan. I think they wanted the color of my skin, but they didn't want my mindset that I was going to move in that direction." She became a consultant for one of the search firms. She confirmed and clarified a few questions related to the comments and beliefs other superintendents of this study have made. She asserted that search firms are not often genuine. "I've seen so many times search firms say they want diverse candidates, and the candidate goes through all the process, and they are not genuine, or the board isn't genuine. Somebody would literally have to tell me 'I want you.'"

Interview #10: Board Agendas

Participant #10 felt she was hired to represent the student population and connect with them in a positive way after racial tensions surfaced alongside an increasing diverse demographics in the community. She felt "the board intentionally reached out to me because they felt I had the look, that I could speak out to families and represent them in a way that could make them feel safe." Having Black members of the school board revealed that, while she did not feel any overt biases, the board president, a Black woman, had been preoccupied with her success, holding her to a higher standard. "She was very fluent, and she was really concerned about my being successful, because she wasn't sure if they would get another Black person if I didn't do well."

Interview #10: Higher Expectations

As indicated on the board agendas, Participant #10's school board president held higher expectations as a result of the participant's race. The school board president was a Black female and, according to Participant #10, more concerned with her success than anyone else in order to

establish a legacy of Black leaders in the district. Participant #10 was not only the youngest superintendent in their district's history, she was also the first Black superintendent and the first Black female superintendent. These factors, combined with day-to-day responsibilities, imposed tremendous pressures, according to Participant #10.

Interview #10: Mentoring and Networking

Participant #10 participates in the state level of the African American superintendents' association (MAAS) but prefers reaching out to the national level. "I don't have that national level of African American superintendents. I feel like I missed that, so I will be part of that national level in the future." She provided advice for future candidates to reach out in Michigan for a mentor and to look for like-minded mentors. "I want somebody that knows urban schools. Getting the right personal mentor is just as important as getting a partner. It is imperative that we support each other."

Interview #11

Participant #11 began her career as an elementary teacher for six years. She became a teacher-leader for her school during her seventh year. She became an assistant principal for one year. All of this experience occurred out of state. She moved to Michigan to accept a middle/high school principal position. She was reassigned to the position of elementary principal then left Michigan to become a Pre-K elementary school principal as well as an associate superintendent. She left that district to become an assistant superintendent out-of-state before accepting her first superintendent of school position in Michigan. Participant #11 is in her second year as superintendent in an urban district with an 80% minority enrollment and a 15,297 student enrollment (Michigan Public School Review, 2022). Participant #11 holds a Ph.D. in educational leadership and administration.

Interview #11: Cultural Competence

Participant #11 did not experience much racial tension when teaching third grade. "I don't even think they realized there were differences." Her district's student population was increasingly diverse with a strong percentage of Black students. She stated:

At the time, it was predominantly African-American with a large percentage Cambodian as well as a growing Latino population. I also had White kids. Kids don't necessarily realize their friends were different races. When students in upper elementary began to break into their affinity groups, they were not able to articulate why, but there was some kind of connection they might have needed to start to feel, and again, I was trying to make sure that we had a very cohesive classroom. Racial tensions just didn't seem to be a factor, quite honestly.

While the students did not factor into racial tensions, Participant #11 did indicate that working with staff to eliminate racial tensions and recognize implicit bias became more of a challenge. She stated:

The fascinating thing about working with adults compared to working with children is that we do not always do much self-reflection. When you try to have a courageous conversation or just even dialogue, people automatically go on the defensive, saying, 'Are you calling me a racist?' when that was not even my intent. If we're having a con-versation about race, we've got to be able to lean into conversations that make us a little uncomfortable. The challenge is getting them to understand how to not be defensive.

Participant #11 illustrated her own uncomfortable experience in which she was unaware of her own implicit bias related to her reference of "low hanging fruit." She explained:

We were having a conversation in which somebody pointed out she felt it was triggering

her and was made to feel uncomfortable because you think about African

Americans in the U.S. Low hanging fruit is a throwback to slave days where

men and women were lynched; that was an insult. I share this example that we've got

to be able to have a conversation, and I expect the leaders and adults that are working

with young people in particular would be vulnerable to own up to when they may have

made a mistake. Certain things you just cannot say when you have colloquialisms that

may have been accepted in another time and you're just not necessarily aware of them.

We have them as a matter of conversation, then when you correct it, you understand that

it is powerful.

Participant #11 also included that, as she has matured, the conversations she is willing to

entertain have been smaller as she boldly stands on her beliefs, even if that means that it loses

relationships. She said:

I don't mean where you're getting into conversations with fisticuffs. Sometimes you want

to stand on something that you have strong feelings about, like LBGTQ+, but I'm of the

mindset that every child of every person I interact with, no matter what, I need to make

them feel welcome in my presence. Whatever my beliefs are, they are not as important as

making them feel welcomed. So when I have to correct folks, they might be offended, but

that's their issue.

Interview #11: Search Firm Support

Participant #11 noted:

I'm going to take two approaches to that question related to search firms because I had

two experiences. So for this current hiring firm, it wasn't a firm which I had ever worked

with before, and it was such a positive experience. What I mean by that is that as I talked

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to them, I knew that I was going into. I said that I know there's an interim; I want to be respectful of the process and I asked if this was basically a dog and pony show and we're just going through the motions because if the interim wants this role, I'm not going to even apply. It's an emotionally and time-consuming process.

Participant #11 explained that she was given a mentor through the search firm, a retired superintendent who was a Black woman. The mentor guided her in everything from interview questions to the clothes she chose to wear. Participant #11 said:

I planned on wearing just a pantsuit. She said, 'You're not a man. Once you get the job, you can wear pantsuits. You will look much more polished in a skirt suit.' These were small things I hadn't considered. We talked about jewelry. She told me to wear a pearl necklace and pearl earrings. Aspiring superintendents have to have that coachable spirit, willing to listen to people who have stepped into these roles.

While this experience was positive for Participant #11, the other experience was not. Two years prior, she sought a position through another hiring firm. She stated:

This particular search firm has a reputation of wanting to put candidates of color in the pool but knowing they don't really stand a chance. I told the search firm that I didn't expect to just get the job. I understand it's the board's decision. I understood all of those things. Here's where I became frustrated. The candidates' resumes were public. The candidates of color have skills. The board and the community really wanted a diverse voice. They didn't get past the first round. The search firms asked me to interview in a couple of communities where I'd be the only person of color. I told them they were not going to tokenize me.

Participant #11 identified another scenario in which she felt a less-qualified candidate was hired over her. "I was the only one with a doctorate degree. Our careers mirrored each other. The community loved me." Yet, when justifying hiring a White male over her, a school board member publicly stated the fact that he had adopted a Black child would provide more of an understanding for the complexities of diversity. Participant #11 said:

Here's where I got pissed, and I don't get pissed often. I am a Black woman married to a Black man with three Black children, and they don't think I'll understand the complexities of diversity? I don't want to go to a place where I force my way in trying to put a square peg into a round hole. It's not going to fit.

Interview #11: Board Agendas

According to Participant #11, board members who held longevity in the district had the most hidden agenda from previous initiatives they felt were not completed. She said:

There were some hidden biases that the board member didn't necessarily feel courageous enough to bring up with the previous superintendent. I was told, 'We need you to fix this, to fix that." I had to tell the board member to wait a minute. That's not what I do. The board member wanted to give me a breakdown of everything that happened twenty years ago. I had to say we'll address the things as they happen, but I'm not addressing something that happened in 2000. It may have been addressed, but not to that board member's satisfaction.

Interview #11: Higher Expectations

Participant #11 observed members of the community would not acknowledge the fact that she held a doctorate degree. Despite previous superintendents with doctorate degrees, she was not given that same level of respect. She stated:

I received several random emails from a man I've never met. His emails said he would

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never call me a doctor. He said, 'You're like Jill Biden. You're a fake.' He told me

how pretentious it was of me to use that title.

Participant #11 said that she is often faced with having to defend herself in situations like this.

She said, "People are always looking for the 'gotcha' moment."

Interview #11: Mentoring and Networking

A combination of both professional organizations and personal mentors guide Participant

#11 in her endeavors to be successful in her role. Participant #11 said that serving on boards for

organizations and programs she finds valuable provides an opportunity for networking,

connecting with people she can listen to and observe in leadership roles. Additionally,

connecting to previous superintendents who served in her position and being direct about asking

them to serve as her mentor helps to fill in some of the gaps she considered to be missing. "No

one is successful without their team."

Interview #12

Participant #12 began his career as a teacher, Dean of Students, assistant principal, and in

numerous out-of-state urban district positions over the course of twelve years, beginning his

career as a teacher for three of those years. He moved to Michigan and became principal in an

urban school district and later became an assistant superintendent for two years with the same

district before accepting his first position as superintendent of schools. Participant #12 is

finishing his second year in this district with a 99% minority population and a student enrollment

of 2,098 (Michigan Public School Review, 2022). At the time of his interview, Participant #12

accepted a superintendent position in a different state and much of the information was

conducted during the interview process. It is important to note that, because of this, Participant

#12's responses were brief, often accompanied by monosyllabic responses. Participant #12 holds a Ph.D. in Urban Education and Leadership.

Interview #12: Cultural Competence

Participant #12 focused on achievement gaps in order to address cultural competence in his school district. While teaching, he implemented a reading program specifically targeting students in high-poverty environments. Providing an opportunity for students to succeed academically was Participant #12's way of raising students out of poverty. "We didn't have any racial tensions in our district because there was very little diversity. Almost all the students were Black and from low socio-economic backgrounds."

Interview #12: Search Firm Support

Participant #12 noted that he thought the search firms were set up to assist school boards. However, he believes the larger the search firm the more of a level playing field it becomes for all the candidates. The larger search firm seemed to able to guide their attention more for supporting the candidates' needs. Participant #12 was currently working with a national search firm at the time of his interview. "I feel that the national firms were more of an advantage to me than the state level search firms. The national firms have more resources to pull from."

Interview #12: Board Agendas

Participant #12 said he knew coming into his district that the State of Michigan shared with him what he considered "a financial woe implosion" and that there were school board members who mentioned the need to financially care for the community. Participant #12 was able to use this information as a means of connecting with the students in the community. He felt that directing the hidden agendas of the school boards could be directed in a positive manner. He said:

I knew they were discussing closing the high school and that possible sponsorships to pay

in to save the school was an opportunity for me to connect with the community and save

the school. I knew this coming into the position and had a plan to connect not only with

the community, but the school board, and the students.

Interview #12: Higher Expectations

Participant #12 considered high expectations were more self-imposed than placed upon

him. "Getting my Ph.D. and motivating myself to become an urban superintendent were my

goals. That's why I attended urban superintendent training. I'm constantly setting high standards

for myself."

Interview #12: Mentoring and Networking

Participant #12 indicated that networking was particularly important for aspiring

superintendents. He stated that he had the support of his university professor who guided him

throughout his career. "My professor encouraged me to become an administrator and work with

urban school districts. In my graduate work, I had a second mentor who helped groom me to

become a superintendent in urban school systems." Additionally, membership in professional

organizations creates a strong bond of support when going into the urban districts. Much of

Participant #12's experience had been outside of Michigan, but once he moved to Michigan and

became a superintendent, he felt that members of the MAAS were "vital to my success."

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Chapter Four Closure

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Chapter Four presented twelve accounts of Black superintendent interviews including

their profiles and responses to the five interview questions. The superintendents were

intentionally chosen to represent rural, suburban, and urban settings in Michigan as well as to

represent both Black male and female experiences. The participants were all asked the same five

semi-structured questions in a virtual interview at their selected time. The research findings and

discussion of this qualitative study will be presented in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

This chapter explicates themes that emerged from the 12 participant interviews presented in Chapter IV. These 12 participants currently serve as superintendents in Michigan. All participants began their educational careers as teachers of various subjects and grade levels in the classroom. They followed career pathways that included administration in various capacities: assistant principals, principals, directors, central office administration, or assistant superintendents. The participants were both male and female and served in rural, suburban, or urban districts. The study's conceptual framework aligned with tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and its assertion that racism is a human-invented classification system, connected with power, in that it impacts the behavior, beliefs, values, and ultimately the decisions of a particular group of people (Davis & Bowers, 2019). Aligning CRT in the conceptual framework establishes the assertion that race is a factor in all pre- and post-hiring procedures of aspiring superintendents. The semi-structured interview allowed participants to respond to the initial questions as well as follow-up questions and add any additional information for elaboration. Data was collected from the transcriptions and coded into major themes aligned with the theoretical tenets of CRT.

Presentation of Themes

Infused in CRT's tenet of experiential knowledge (Delgado et al., 2001), the value of the nuances of the 12 participants' experiences will contribute to the awareness of the deficiencies in equity in leadership. The framework establishes the power of the Black experience through the lens of those experiencing it. These experiences are intersectional, affected by additional multi-faceted factors such as gender and socio-economic status (Valentine, 2018). As a result, I

presented the findings into five major themes in which 10 or more superintendents responded, and subthemes in which four or more superintendents responded. Table 3 summarizes the responses:

Table 4

Major Themes and Sub-themes

Themes and Sub-Themes	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12
A. **Cultural Competence**												
A1: In the classroom	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
A2: With staff		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
A3: With community							X			X	X	X
B. **Search Firm Bias**												
B1: Pre-selected candidate	X	X		X	X				X	X	X	
B2: Filling diversity pool		X		X	X				X	X	X	
B3: Lack of guidance	X	X			X			X	X	X	X	
B4: State firm unfairness	X	X		X	X				X	X	X	X
B5: Urban district restricted	X		X	X			X		X	X		
C. **Board Agendas**												
C1: Hidden agendas	X	X		X	X			X		X	X	
C2: Race-related agendas		X			X	X		X		X		
D. **Race-related High Expectations**	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
E. **Mentoring/Networking**	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X

Major Theme A: Cultural Competence

The National Education Association (NEA) defines cultural competence as the "ability to successfully teach students who come from cultures other than our own. It involves interpersonal awareness, cultural knowledge, and a skill set that together promotes impactful cross-cultural teaching" (Hawk, Sherretz, & Minella, 2017). CRT "encourages open discussions of race and discrimination as a major element of daily life in the United States" (Hodge, 2017, p.17). Achieving a culturally competent school district involves the ability to have these discussions. As each superintendent began their educational careers as teachers, cultural competence describes methods they practiced in the classroom, with colleagues, and with staff in order to establish a culturally competent school district. Participants indicated that greater challenges existed in establishing culturally competent staff as administrators in comparison to teaching in the classroom.

Sub-theme A1: Participants address cultural competence in the classroom.

Eleven participants addressed establishing cultural competence in the classroom. Urban superintendents, with the exception of one, and those with predominantly Black student populations, addressed race but did not indicate racial tensions in the classroom. All respondents to cultural competence in the classroom addressed the theme as a medium for understanding and building relationships with the students. Participants with less diverse student populations experienced more racial tensions and challenges in establishing a culturally competent classroom. For example, Participant #1, in a district with 20% minority enrollment who experienced racial tension as a teacher, focused on building empathy in her classroom, said, "We're more conscious now of the well-being of others and people who have differences."

Participant #2 taught kindergarten in a district with a 90% minority population. While she did not experience racial tension, she established an environment in which students felt comfortable to talk about race in her classroom.

Participant #4, in an 86% minority population district, attributed cultural competence in the classroom as it pertained to student achievement as a special education teacher, ensuring students were exposed to a "dynamic curriculum so students could flourish in that environment." He did not indicate racial tension in the classroom but instead, focused on equity in the classroom based on students with disabilities.

Participant #5 taught in an all-Black student-populated classroom. She experienced no racial tension in the classroom but did address cultural competency as her students "felt they were the majority in the world." She felt it was important for students to experience empathy by understanding there were other cultures in the world beyond their own.

Participant #6 addressed cultural competence regarding student achievement. She felt "systemic barriers" were set in place that prohibited minority students from achieving, resulting in racial tension in a student-to-teacher environment rather than student-to-student. Participant #6 identified those barriers as limiting students of color in advanced courses run by White teachers. She stated, "The pathway for certain students wasn't the same, but that doesn't mean they can't have the same access and opportunity."

While Participant #7 indicated he had no racial tension in the classroom, inequities did exist regarding the facilities in his urban district in which 95% of the students were of a minority population. His perception was that facilities were a greater concern than equity. "If I have to go someplace and fight for inclusion, then that's not a place for me. Pay attention to facilities. There are some other things that are equally important." While Participant #7 did not state that facilities

related directly to cultural competency in the classroom, crumbling infrastructure is a direct example of "separate but unequal schools" (Wells, 1993, p. 66) run by Black administrators. Black students remaining in neglected and underfunded urban schools reflects inequities that surface in a district that lacks cultural competence.

Participant #8 established a culturally responsive classroom as teachable moments where students could be inquisitive about various cultures. He used examples of questions: "Why do you have a rag on your head? I'm just wondering. Can you tell me more? We create an environment where people can be appropriately inquisitive." Participant #8 addressed racial tensions in the classroom as opportunities to learn about cultural differences in a diverse district of 49.1% Black student population.

Participant #9, despite being in an urban district, addressed racial tensions in the classroom from his minority student population. Dealing with gang violence and territorial wars, Participant #9 felt the best method for developing a culturally competent classroom was to "block out the noise." According to Participant #9:

> Shortly after someone was shot at a school they were trying to reclaim; we had some gangs there. It was a little hectic. Some days were just normal days, some I left with ripped suits. You have to create a foundation and meet students where they were. We were in the bottom 500. The thing is when you deal with -isms: racism and sexism, those are the chasms we have to cross before we can deal with intellect. If you don't have equity, you're on an uneven playing field.

Participant #10 faced significant racial tensions requiring her to establish a restorative circle practice addressing the many situations she faced in her classroom:

> The district was transitioning from poor White students to African Americans and

Hispanics. There were a lot of racial tensions. At the time, we had skinheads, so we had

a lot of conversations. We had grade-level meetings and class meetings. We had

restorative circles; at the time we didn't know that was the name for them. We would talk

about what we are, so we came up with the slogan: We built champions for life. We

talked about how, when we went outside to other districts for games, and we got treated

poorly, this created a shared experience that they couldn't believe they were [treated this

way], especially the White kids. So we talked about how people were treated in our

building, and they could remember how they went to this game and were treated poorly

as a whole team, no matter if they were White, Black, or Hispanic.

While there were many situations in which Participant #10 addressed racial tensions, she felt she

held productive conversations with her students. "We really would talk about the situations and

in my classroom, I always found it pretty easy."

Participant #11 established a cohesive third-grade classroom composed of

"predominantly African American, Cambodian, and Latino. At eight and nine, I don't think they

realized their friends were of different races." However, Participant #11 recognized that later in

their development, students had a tendency to "hang out in different affinity groups, and they

may not be able to articulate why there's this kind of connection." She felt that students were less

inclined to focus on these affinity groups but may have felt pressure to do so from adults

responding to the post-9/11 era at the time.

Participant #12 addressed cultural competence by focusing on the achievement gaps

related to the high-poverty demographics of his students. Teaching in a 99% minority urban

district, Participant #12 acknowledged no racial tensions, but the economic inequalities

associated with minority populations in urban districts directly affected academic

underachievement. In *Why Race and Culture Matters in Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap in America's Classrooms* (Howard, 2010), an achievement gap is a discrepancy in educational outcomes and access between various student groups in the United States, in particular, African-American, Native American, certain Asian-American, and Latino students on the low end of the performance scale, and their White and certain Asian-American counterparts at the higher end of the academic performance (p. 10). In presenting this discrepancy, Participant #12 acknowledged that, while there was no apparent racial tension, racial inequities did exist.

Sub-theme A2: Participants face challenges of cultural competence with colleagues.
Cultural competency in the workplace is vital for a collaborative and productive environment. Self-awareness of implicit bias, allowing for increased communication, and promoting a diverse staff are ways to establish a culturally competent environment. People tend to view the world through their own cultural lens, unaware that others may view the world differently (Nunez, 2000). Without culturally competent colleagues, a toxic environment of misunderstandings, lack of communication, and bias erupts. Ten participants, as administrators, experienced what they referred to as challenges in establishing a culturally competent staff resulting from an inability to recognize their own bias. Participant #2 focused on the bias of the teaching staff, referring to the tone of voice White staff members used toward fellow Black colleagues as "gut-wrenching." She supported the formation of a Black teachers' group to share the struggles they face and provide a network of support.

Participant #3 also used a didactic approach to address his predominantly White staff in a district with a high minority population. His approach was to immerse the staff in the community so the staff could be exposed to the environment and conditions in their students' experience. He stated, "Those serving, and the amount of tension and disconnect it caused at times, you had to

attack with training and professional development to give them cultural awareness." Training for staff was also a priority for cultural competence with Participant #4's staff.

Like Participant #3, Participant #4's staff was also disproportionate to the students they serve. "We had to make sure the staff understood the population they served. And many of them were middle-class White women who didn't understand the diversity of the needs of the students." Participant #4 sought to hire a diverse staff that reflected the student population, prioritizing the need for an empathetic staff. "We would care and go through relationships before [we] could educate the students. So we worked really hard for [the teachers] to understand them."

Participant #5 faced a more unique challenge with staff. She set a goal to increase the diversity among staff, removing the African American history teacher, who was White. When Participant #5 removed the White history teacher and replaced him with a Black teacher, she faced reverse discrimination charges. As a result of doing so, teachers feared the repercussions of addressing any subject regarding race or ethnocentrism. In an effort to promote more racially diverse staff who were "really trying to see the child for who they were and not make an assumption about the students, I'd say for that situation, I did a great job. But while being investigated and trying to get people to see the humanity of all our students, I feel like I made an impact, but I don't know if I was the most impactful."

As a superintendent of a predominantly White district, Participant #6 referred to cultural competence with staff as a "journey of equity" that spanned over 12 years. On-going training and ensuring that all staff are trained in diversity is a process Participant #6 recognizes as one that isn't "just a drive-by PD." She is committed to ongoing extensive training and "understanding and building relationships. It's not going to change a culture overnight,"

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The journey for equity was equally shared with Participant #7 who stated that "you create synergy around a shared vision for what you want to accomplish."

Participant #8 established cultural competency as an administrator by establishing a mentoring program with the Black male staff and students focusing on their academic success, utilizing staff to work with students by connecting them with higher education visits and businesses. By immersing staff in a partnership with the students, they built relationships that led to student success. "We had a student graduate with honors from Cornell. He is now the president of Adidas and comes in to say, 'I was you.'"

Participant #9 took an authoritarian approach to establish cultural competency with his staff. "I don't serve adults who don't attach themselves to children. If you do not mix children with your introductory sentence or statement, you have a short conversation with me. I spoke about the assignment of serving children and having to block out the noise of racism and system barriers that were not geared for me to be successful. Having a level of diversity and diverse background is the light that leads to intellectual growth."

Assisting staff with racial tensions was one of the reasons Participant #10 was asked to be an administrator. She worked to de-escalate issues between White staff and Black students. "I [would] go into the classrooms and help teachers with situations. One teacher couldn't figure out how to navigate the interracial [issues]. It often started with good intentions, but the teacher didn't handle it the way they could have."

Participant #11 stated the difference between working with staff and working with students. "The difference between working with children and working with adults is that we don't often do a lot of self-reflection." When dealing with racial issues, she said, "people

automatically go on the defensive." Participant #11 identified the need to recognize implicit biases and a willingness to have "courageous conversations" with staff.

Sub-theme A3: Participants address cultural competence in the community.

Four participants identified challenges with cultural competence in the community. While these challenges were all perceived to be obstacles that impede them from being more productive as an administrator, the core of these obstacles varied, and each participant held a unique perspective.

Participant #7 identified Black organizations in the community as an impediment to his productivity in a suburban district. The community was "all farmland with people who had no contact with minorities. They opened up subdivisions and it became more multicultural. It was the first time I dealt with the NAACP and African American Involvement Day. They were having these fights, and my energy is involved in helping young people, not this kind of stuff."

Unlike Participant #7, Participant #10, as mentioned in her profile, experienced blatant racism from the community, receiving race-related threats such as "No nigger is going to suspend my child" and finding Uncle Sam posters in the school and community.

Participant #11 faced these racially-motivated challenges by immersing herself in a community that wasn't racially diverse. "Travel outside your comfort zone. I had to make connections with groups that may not necessarily be my group."

Like Participant #11, Participant #12 used the obstacles faced within a minority community by redirecting the community to the school. "We faced a school closure, but we averted that by bringing in the community in a strategic planning process." He rallied the community to address the government's neglect of urban, financially-strapped, and academically

struggling districts. In this case, Participant #12 used the community as a means of establishing equity.

Major Theme B: Search Firm Bias

Eleven participants responded unfavorably toward search firms in one or more of the subthemes. According to Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003), Black superintendents were largely underrepresented due to the bias in the recruitment process conducted by search firms. According to their study, Black superintendent candidates rarely advanced to the second interview round in order to have a chance to be hired. The lack of support from Michigan search firms was expressed through various sub-themes by these 11 participants. Of the 12 participants interviewed, one of them had no response due to Participant #6's appointment to her position, eliminating the use of a search firm. However, Participant #6 did speculate the obstacles she could have faced had she been in a candidate pool. "I often question that as a Black woman, had this opportunity not presented itself in the same path in terms of this appointment versus competing."

Sub-theme B1: Search firms use pre-selected candidates.

Seven participants perceived search firms as having a pre-selected candidate in the candidate pool, which the participants perceived to be related to race. Moody (1983) attributes pre-selection to sponsored mobility in access to superintendent positions. This practice is operationalized when a hiring firm prefers one candidate over another. Aligned with the first tenet of CRT, Moody indicated that this practice was so accepted by Whites that it was considered a norm.

This process of sponsored mobility has been practiced for such a long time among whites that it has become second nature with them. It is an internalized part of their career ethos,

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and they assume that sponsorship will be forthcoming. In fact, it is almost a 'given' in the mind of the white aspirant (Moody, 1983, p. 395).

Participant #1 said, "local search firms tend to appear that they already have certain people in mind" even after what he considered to be his best interview.

Participant #2 was reluctant to apply, holding what he stated as a "fear that they didn't want a person leading the district who didn't look like them."

Participant #4 responded to the question of having witnessed a pre-selected candidate by saying, "Most definitely. There have definitely been times I've been overqualified, and they hired somebody else."

In another situation, Participant #5 felt "the rules are put in place for me that aren't put in place for others. There were nine other candidates, and one - it was the only job they applied for- and they got in."

Likewise, Participant #9 recognized the political aspects of hiring in which there is a pre-selected candidate. He stated:

> You know, the best person doesn't always get the job. In a situation in which another person had been put back into the process after he was eliminated. It was down to two candidates, and the search firm brought this gentleman back, and it made three candidates. The second candidate pulled out at the last minute, so it was just two of us. He had connections with the search firm."

Unlike other participants, Participant #10 is currently employed as a consultant for a search firm herself. She recognized that search firms have pre-selected candidates that steer diverse candidates away. She stated:

I kept encouraging this person, a female [to apply for a superintendent position]. The

community wanted her so badly. When she talked to my lead, the guy I worked with, he

didn't encourage her to move forward. I've seen so many times that they want diverse

candidates, but they're not genuine.

She witnessed first-hand that search firms "literally had one person they wanted," yet they

sought to pull in diverse candidates.

Participant #11 identified a specific instance in which the hiring firm selected a White

candidate over her, citing "he would understand the complexities of diversity" because he

adopted a Black child. "Here I was a Black woman married to a Black man with three Black

children, and [they] won't understand the complexities of diversity?" She, along with the other

seven participants mentioned, perceived search firms favored specific White candidates that

either mirrored their credentials or held what they perceived as inferior credentials.

Sub-theme B2: Search firms use Black superintendent candidates to fill the diversity

pool.

Because of the previous sub-theme of the perception that search firms have a pre-selected

candidate, six of the participants perceived their participation in the search firm's hiring process

was merely to fill the diversity pool. With the exception of Participant #1, all the respondents

from the previous sub-themes responded to this sub-theme.

Participant #2 stated, "the systems were built for certain races that wasn't our race."

Participant #2 indicated she was the only Black candidate in the hiring pool. As indicated by

Parker (2009), Black candidates included in a diverse pool of White male candidates consider

being included as disingenuous, as a perfunctory effort in providing equity in the firm's

candidate pool.

Participant #2 said that while he was getting the calls from search firms for positions, "I would never apply to Birmingham or Bloomfield. People that look like me aren't going to get those positions."

Participant #9 stated that search firms tend to pick White candidates as "they have a heavier hand on the scales" despite his perception that he was more qualified, as he stated, "the most qualified person doesn't always get the job."

As a consultant for a search firm, Participant #10 recruited diversity for a particular search firm, but she indicated that she felt sometimes she was simply filling the diversity pool without her having any real chances of being hired. "I was doing searches and I would hear them say they wanted diverse candidates. The candidates would go through the process, but [the search firm] was not genuine."

Participant #11 referred to the process as a "dog and pony show" in which she preferred not to invest "emotionally into this time-consuming process" just to fill the diversity pool. A particular search firm "had a reputation of wanting to put candidates of color into the search pool knowing they really don't stand a chance."

Sub-theme B3: Search firms lack guidance for Black candidates.

Seven participants responded that search firms lack guidance or support in their experience. While one participant indicated that the search firm is employed by the school board and serves the school board, the participants perceived the lack of guidance as an implicit bias in which firms provided more guidance and support for White candidates.

Participant #1 noted a lack of support for applying to districts that did not match his salary. The search firms "don't want to see you go from one salary to another that was too big a

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jump for someone who came from where I came from." Additionally, Participant #1, after going

through the process, was told by the search firm that "everything I did was wrong."

For Participant #2, the search firm lacked support when participating in her first

interview. She stated:

For me, for my first ever invitation to a superintendent interview, I think they could

have [provided] more opportunities to explore, to explain this whole process. You can

ask other superintendents or your superintendent, but I didn't even know what questions to ask.

There wasn't support there for me.

Participant #5 felt dismissed by the search firm, whereas White candidates were given

more guidance. "I know a couple of White candidates who not only did the search firm say,

'Here's what to do,' they were given a coach." That same search firm's consultant told her she

was not qualified and said, "I don't know if I would even bring your name to the board."

Participant #8 specifically stated that the search firms "didn't offer me a lot of

support." In particular, when Participant #8 was offered the superintendent position, he received

a contract offer by the search firm with a salary lower than what the search firm posted: "It was

embarrassing. They offered me a package from a decade ago. So no, they weren't as supportive

as they could have been." Participant #8 suggested more support from the search firms by

stating, "Just to get to the first interview, the process is cumbersome." He also noted that a search

firm spent more time with a candidate that "had connections with the search firm."

Participant #10 works for a search firm. Despite this connection, she often observed that,

because search firms are "not genuine," Black candidates are reluctant to go through the process

with them. Despite her efforts to recruit a Black candidate, the search firm consultant she worked

with "didn't encourage her to move forward."

Participant #11 experienced both ends of the support spectrum, receiving mentoring and coaching support from a Black consultant hired by the search firm. In a different instance, she received no support from another search firm. "They put candidates of color in, and their resumes are public, they're stacked up and not coming to play, but they don't even get past the first round." She indicated that the search firms tell the candidates directly, "I don't expect you to get the job."

Sub-theme B4: Search firms show signs of unfairness.

According to Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003), Black superintendents are underrepresented due to racial bias in the recruitment, selection, and hiring processes by search firms utilized by school boards. This lack of fairness results in Black candidates rarely advancing to the second round of interviews (Jackson and Shakeshaft, 2003). Eight participants interviewed acknowledged a lack of fairness with Michigan search firms in their experience.

Participant #1 stated directly, "In my opinion, some of the national search firms seem a little more fair."

Participant #2, as previously mentioned, stated, "I can definitely say we know the systems were built for certain races that wasn't our race."

Participant #4 noted that search firms manipulate the school boards. "The search firm is important because it shapes the mindset of that board." Participant #4 also noted the Michigan search firm's use of the sunset law, "they put all your information in public knowledge. If you don't get the job, your [current] employer knows you're looking, so that can be unsettling."

As previously noted, Participant #5 believed that the search firm lacked fairness from her experience. "They didn't even give me the opportunity to get in front of the board. I don't know if those rules are in place for others."

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As previously noted, "Participant #6 stated, "There are hiring firms that tend to lean a certain way. They have a heavier hand on the scales." She specifically cited a lack of fairness with Black candidates.

Participant #10, as previously stated, "Search firms say they want diverse candidates, but they go through the process and are not genuine."

Participant #11 was reluctant to immerse herself in the "emotionally time-consuming process," following up with the question, "I just want to know if it's a fair process."

Sub-theme B5: Search firms limit Black candidates to urban districts.

According to Moody (1971), Black superintendents were "systematically kept out of the top positions-and we still are" (p. 376), having been restricted to urban districts through his study in which Black superintendents "inherited school districts with grave financial problems" (p. 379). Because sub-themes emerged from four or more respondents, it is significant to mention the number of respondents who felt otherwise or did not consider urban district limitations in the interview. Of the 12 participants, seven felt the search firms restricted the candidates to urban districts, but of those seven, only three were serving in urban districts.

Table 5

Responses to Urban District Limitations by District Classification

	Search firms limit candidates to urban districts.	Search firms do not limit candidates to urban districts.	Did not address this topic
Currently serving in urban district	4		1
Currently serving in rural or suburban district	4	1	2

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Participant 1 perceived the limitations search firms hold toward Black superintendents. "There wasn't a great deal of opportunity for African American superintendents. So I could not just apply for the positions that were the glamor positions." When referring to his application to specific suburban or rural districts, Participant #1 added, "From a realistic standpoint of my position and the history of what has taken place there, sometimes it's not about how qualified you are, it's about the community."

Participant #2 did not identify search firms as restricting her to urban districts. Instead, she stated it was an obstacle she placed upon herself. "I was reluctant to apply to districts that didn't look like me. Mentally, I had to overcome that."

Participant #3 felt search firms assist in their limitations to urban districts, but preferred those districts by stating, "I am immediately limited in the positions that I can go out there and actually apply for." He followed up by stating:

> We have to get beyond that. Personally, I don't want to be in that kind of district. I'm an urban educator, that's the kind of district I've always gravitated toward, but I know those barriers exist when trying to go into other districts.

Participant #4 stated, "Quite honestly, I will be limited to where I could start off as a superintendent because of racial disparities in the country and the area."

Participant #7 accepted the fact that search firms restricted him to urban districts because "they're not agents of me; their check is being cut and they're doing the bidding." He stated that he did not mind being restricted to an urban district because he did not want to go somewhere he was not accepted. "It's not a matter of what's fair. If I had to go somewhere and fight for inclusion, then that's not the place for me."

For Participant #8, he recognized that search firms discouraged moving from an urban to a suburban district by offering him a reduced salary. "I was at [urban district] for 26 years. I'm in with the diverse community." Once he received the suburban position, it was less than his principal position in an urban district, and one that was offered to a previous superintendent "a decade ago."

Participant #9 said, "Being a candidate of diversity can't be your shield, but the path and the position that you're choosing is aligned with a particular situation and environment and it is not supposed to be." Participant #12 said that, because he started teaching in an urban district, "I was encouraged to continue in an urban setting. They saw in me what I didn't realize was my path to be an urban school leader."

Participant #12 did not take offense to the encouragement to follow an urban district path by search firms. "My mentor encouraged me to seek out urban districts, so the search firms helped me to get there."

Major Theme C: Board Agendas

School board members are elected to positions representing the community, and because of this, they are placed in a position of power and authority over the superintendent. The superintendent is subservient to the school board, which, according to a recent study by the American Educational Research Association (2020), tends to be composed of a majority of White males. This composition affected the relationship between the superintendent and the school board in this study. Only one participant served as a superintendent with an all-White school board, and one served with a predominantly White school board. These participants identified race-related board agendas. Four participants served with diverse school boards. These participants had varied results. Five participated with predominantly Black school boards; one

participated with an all-Black school board. These participants experienced no race-related

agendas. Two of these five participants answered with monosyllabic responses and offered no

elaboration. Of the respondents, five identified that school board members have hidden agendas

that they perceived to be related to their duties as school board members

Table 6

School Board Makeup and Superintendent Response

	Predominantly White School Board	Predominantly Black School Board	Diverse School Board	Race-related Hidden Agenda
Participant #1	X			yes
Participant #2			X	yes
Participant #3			X	varied
Participant #4		X		no
Participant #5		X		no
Participant #6	X			yes
Participant #7		X		no
Participant #8			X	yes
Participant #9		X		no
Participant #10		X		no
Participant #11			X	no
Participant #12		X		no

Sub-theme C1: The school board has hidden agendas placed upon Black superintendents.

Five participants responded that school board members had hidden agendas regardless of race. Participant #1 stated, "Let me just say this, regardless of race, people would still have their own agendas, their own motives. They either attempt to push those agendas through you or use you as a scapegoat."

Participant #2 noted race-related hidden agendas that were to promote more diversity. She said, "There's one board member who wants us to start a diversity group, which is good."

Participant #3 found hidden agendas that attacked his character by stating, "I don't know if it's historically-based or racially-biased, but individuals will challenge your confidence to see if you have the ability to lead a school district."

Participant #4 indicated he did not have an experience in which the school board had a hidden agenda, race-related or otherwise.

While Participant #5 did not experience hidden agendas within her district, she did indicate the need for having "those courageous conversations" when interviewing as a candidate. "[The school board] needs to have that conversation before they even look at a candidate. Is this person going to be accepted because of their ethnicity?"

Participant #6 identified a hidden agenda related to her competence after being appointed by the previous superintendent. She stated, "That in itself was a challenge, an immediate questioning of my competence. 'She doesn't have a doctorate. Why doesn't she have a doctorate? We've never had a superintendent without a doctorate.'

Participant #7 did not address any hidden agendas, responding, "I've been fortunate enough to have a school board that believes we're going to make decisions in the best interest of children. It's the least politicized place I've ever worked. I don't deal with a lot of politics."

Participant #8 addressed hidden agendas were evident based on hiring a person of color. He cited an agenda of diversity and inclusion as the agenda of the board. "The importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion is right up there with construction and facilities. That's your hidden agenda and that's really important."

Participant #9 stated that he experienced no hidden agendas from the board, "I've had a great board even in challenging times. Being able to lead the district, I can with children of color."

Participant #10 did not indicate any hidden agendas from her all-female, predominantly Black school board, but did offer some elaboration that may have selected a race-related agenda. She said:

> We had threats from the whole Trump situation about safety, so the board reached out to me because they felt I had the look to speak to families and make them feel safe. The board president is a Black woman who was very concerned with my success.

Participant #11 did not address any hidden agendas from the school board, stating, "that's not in my nature. People are looking for 'gotchas,' and I don't function that way. Going back and forth in these exchanges, I'll lose. There's no win in that for me, and I think that's one of the biggest challenges."

Participant #12 did not indicate any hidden agenda by his school board but did state "my relationship with the school board allowed me to use the community for a positive change."

Sub-theme C2: The school board has race-related agendas placed upon Black superintendents.

While Participant #1 noted that agendas exist regardless of race, he also indicated that there are hidden race-related agendas attributed to finding fault in a Black superintendent's performance. He stated:

I do believe that there are agendas constantly being pushed at you based on your ethnicity. You have to deal with performing at a high level because people are constantly looking for cracks in your performance, or you're constantly having to overcome stereotypes that people emphasize regarding your performance and professionalism.

As mentioned previously, Participant #2 experienced a race-related agenda from one of the school board members as a means to promote diversity in the district.

Participant #3, although he indicated he was unsure of racial bias, elaborated on a race-related agenda by stating, "We're always depicted as individuals that can't handle their emotions and situations appropriately. Everyone always questions you when you come in as an African American superintendent. As a Black male, we're not always perceived to be very competent."

Participant #6 addressed not only the questioning of her credentials and competence but also questioned a potential hidden agenda that restricted her ability to increase diversity in the district. "Our diversity was increasing, and to be student-centered, we did not meet the needs of our students. To increase [staff] diversity, I suggested we are going to go out for a national search, but they said, 'We have what we need.'"

Participant #8 addressed a concern that the school board's hidden agenda was race-related in that they limited his ability to hire more diverse administrators. "If we [school board] hired a person of color, what did you think he was going to hire?" Participant #8 attempted to

hire Black administrators, but received pushback, with school board members saying, "We didn't feel that would be a good fit" and limiting the superintendent's ability to hire Black administrators.

Major Theme D: Higher Expectations

There is a double standard at play when comparing the expectations between Black superintendents and White superintendents. According to Moody (1973), the conflict exists in which Black superintendents are expected to perform at a higher level of expectations than their White counterparts. In this study, seven participants acknowledged these higher expectations. These expectations are both self-imposed and imposed by the district and community either in the hiring process or during their term as superintendents.

Participant #1 stated, "We have to perform at a higher level each and every day. They're always looking for errors. Certain districts have dress-down Fridays. You never see me like this. They already put me in another category, so I always have to have that look every day. Participant #2 identified the expectations of having a doctorate associated with Black superintendents. She stated:

> The thing I had to overcome was the idea of a Black superintendent, that you're nothing
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> unless you have a doctor's degree, the whole idea that Black superintendents need to
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> have a doctor attached to their name. It's not a requirement of the job, but if you peel
>
> back all the layers, and look at all the Black superintendents hired, you'd think that was a
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> requirement.

In the hiring process, Participant #2 identified the difficulties she experienced with having impeccable credentials that could not equate to a less qualified White candidate. "We know the systems were built for certain races that wasn't our race."

Participant #3 perceived a higher expectation for him related to race. He noted that the school board scrutinized him for his intellectual ability, which his White counterparts would not have experienced. He stated:

Individuals will challenge your competence. When I say competence, you're talking about your intellectual ability. People are assessing your emotional intelligence, if you have the emotional intelligence to do the job. You have to be able to manage your emotions. Competence and intelligence are for me the two biggest challenges because we're perceived to be, as Black males, we're always perceived to be not very competent. We're not perceived to be poised, calm, intellectual individuals. Everyone always questions you when you come in as an African American superintendent. When I handle those things well, it's almost surprising.

Participant #3 identified this as a higher expectation because he perceived these challenges as one he constantly needed to uphold as a Black superintendent as individuals sought cracks in his performance, whereas he felt that those same individuals would not seek those same cracks in a White superintendent's performance.

Participant #6 recognized her challenge as a Black female. She stated:

I have the dual challenge of being Black and female, more made with White males in the district before me. They would not have challenged this person in that same space that I'm being challenged. So we always have to be prepared, working ten times harder to make sure every 'T' is crossed. The journey has been frustrating because I think even if I were a White male, would I have been able to set the same agenda and be able to move forward? Yes.

Participant #9 recognized race as a factor in establishing higher expectations of himself. "They don't know anything about you, but they look at you from the surface, the exterior." He added the challenges of maintaining a heightened awareness of the "angry Black man" stereotype.

Being the first African American doesn't mean they want to follow you. You cannot appear to be that angry Black man. You don't let them see you sweat. You're slow to speak, articulate, and to the point. I choose my words carefully.

Participant #10, perceived expectations placed upon her by the board to uphold a higher level of success because of her race and gender. The only Black female board member said to her, "You have to be successful because I don't know if we'll ever get another Black person if you don't do well."

Credentials afforded to White superintendents were dismissed by a member of the community for Participant #11. Despite having received her doctorate, a community member felt the need to email his lack of regard for this title. She stated:

You have community members and there's nothing you can do. So recently [a community member sent me an email that said, 'I will never call you Dr. You're like Jill Biden. You're a fake' He basically told me how pretentious it was of me to use the title when I'm not a medical doctor.

While many of her challenges were job-related, the heightened tension of race and political divisions added to her awareness of maintaining high expectations of herself because "people are always looking for gotchas."

Major Theme E: Mentoring/Networking

Eleven participants emphasized the importance of having support systems in place. Eight specified support systems within the state or national Black superintendents' organizations. Participant #7 did not emphasize the importance of support systems in place, indicating that "the only friend you have as a superintendent is your contract." While he did not elaborate, he does serve as a mentor himself for other Black superintendents in a Black superintendent organization.

Participant #1 emphasized the need to observe successful educators and seek their guidance. "I reached out to people I thought were dynamic and I would pick their brains." These were mentors from his first years of teaching and serve as his mentors today.

Participant #2 had a similar experience with establishing mentors early on. She developed a strong relationship with a special education consultant. She said, "We still meet monthly, one day for her views on race, one day for students with challenging needs. She continues to help me throughout my career."

Participant #3 specified Black superintendents' organizations, stating, "The African American groups are good."

Likewise, Participant #4 found support in Black superintendent organizations. He said, "I met African American superintendents across the state, and they wrapped their arms around me. We've made those kinds of coalitions." He noted the importance of reaching out to these superintendents who are not in his district. "The superintendent does not have a peer in the district, they're not in your shoes. You need those professional relationships so you can call those individuals if you have a question. You can't be vulnerable in your own space when you're a leader."

Participant #5 also addressed Black superintendent organizations, stating the need for "networking with other superintendents, and in our world Black superintendents in particular."

Participant #8 identified all Black administrators' organizations, including superintendents. She stated:

One of the things beneficial to me was the African American Administrative Network, whether they're principals or assistant principals. A retired superintendent served as my principal. She was the first Black superintendent in the history of the local county. I call her two to three times a week. You have to be with people who are going to give it to you straight.

Participant #9 sought like-minded individuals in his field to seek support. As an urban transformative leader, he reaches out to other urban transformative leaders. "The kind of challenge with a transformative leader is you see things other people don't see, so they can't relate to what you're saying."

Participant #10 stated she reached out to the state-level of Black superintendents' organizations. She said:

I don't have that national network of African American superintendents. I feel like you do want to join [state organization]. If you're in Michigan and ask for a mentor, they'll pair you up with a mentor. Personally, I said I want somebody who knows urban schools. That personal mentor is just as important as a partner.

Participant #11 varied in her experience both in-state and out-of-state, Therefore, she reached out to the previous superintendent in her position for guidance. In addition to this, she noted a variety of organizations to seek mentorship including Black superintendents' and community organizations.

Participant #12 had similarly varied mentors both in-state and out-of-state. Out of state, he established mentors early on. He said, "My university professors are my mentors, from the first one who urged me to go into education in the bachelor's program, to my master's program with one who supported me going into administration." Along with these mentors, he established networking through a Black superintendent organization. One member of the organization assigned him a mentor. "She set me up with another urban superintendent which was helpful."

Chapter Five Closure

This chapter outlines the five major themes and eight sub-themes that emerged from the transcripts of the 12 participants who presented the obstacles and challenges of their career paths as they pursued and served their superintendency. The challenges surfaced in recurring themes that included the provision of a culturally competent school district, specifically with staff. through the educators' careers. Search firm bias in various sub-themes emerged as an obstacle to hiring Black superintendents. Board agendas, whether personal hidden agendas or race-related agendas, interfered with the superintendents from progressing in their jobs. As superintendents, they recognized a higher level of expectations, whether imposed by the community or self-imposed, is placed upon them in comparison to their White counterparts. In order to navigate these obstacles and challenges, the participants emphasized the necessity of acquiring and maintaining mentors who empathize with the Black experience; in particular, affiliation with   Black superintendent organizations.

Chapter Six discusses the findings of this study and their relationship to the conceptual framework including the affectations of Critical Race Theory before hiring and after hiring. As a result of these findings, I will offer recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize the analysis of Chapter V's themes and sub-themes that emerged from Chapter V's data. Utilizing Critical Race Theory as a skeleton for upholding this body of research establishes my conceptual framework as CRT affects all obstacles aspiring Black superintendents face in both pre- and post-hiring. This chapter will synthesize those themes and sub-themes as they relate to the conceptual framework and research questions.

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the obstacles Black superintendents face, ultimately leading to a toolkit for aspiring Black superintendents to successfully attain a position and advance equity in the makeup of Michigan's superintendents, increasing the "22 superintendents that represent less than 4 percent of superintendents in the state" (French & Halpert, 2021). These toolkit recommendations are included in this chapter along with recommendations for further study.

Analysis of Major Results

To establish this toolkit for aspiring Black superintendents, 12 superintendents from urban, suburban, and rural school districts in Michigan were asked five questions regarding their leadership:

1. What was your career pathway toward superintendency?

2. How do you establish cultural competence?

3. What obstacles did you encounter with search firms?

4. Can you describe any race-related school board agendas?

5. What mentoring or networking systems do you have in place for support?

The questions were formulated to elicit responses addressing race-related obstacles the superintendents face in relation to both obtaining the position and executing the duties of the position. The superintendents were given the opportunity to openly share their experiences in their interviews. They were emailed the transcripts for which they were given the opportunity to review, revise, and resubmit prior to presenting the data for the study.

The conceptual framework presented in Chapter One illustrates that the five tenets of Critical Race Theory permeate the educational system. As Delgado (2001) noted in regard to the first tenet, the permanence of race, "racism is difficult to address because it's not acknowledged" (p. 34). Presenting the stories of the 12 Black superintendents in their experience acknowledges this tenet as they were provided an opportunity to share their race-related experiences.

Counter storytelling gives voices to marginalized people and serves to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or stories, especially those held by the majority (Delgado et al., 2001). Considering that "African Americans and other racial minorities also are rare at the superintendent level among the state's traditional public schools" (French & Halpert, 2021), experiences shared by a majority of superintendents in Michigan are not presented through the lens of the Black superintendent. Therefore, this study provided the opportunity for counter storytelling of the Black superintendent.

The second and fourth tenets that address implicit bias emerged, in this case, with the search firm hiring process. Search firms hired by predominantly White school boards act to serve the interests of the school boards. According to Shakeshaft and Jackson (2003), Black superintendents are underrepresented largely due to the implicit bias embedded in the search firm hiring processes. As presented in the data, each of the Black superintendents encountered one

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form of implicit bias when utilizing a search firm. One respondent did not encounter this bias because she was appointed to her position; her district did not employ a search firm.

The fifth tenet of intersectionality considers that various factors affect the Black superintendents' experiences, including serving in an urban, rural, or suburban district or serving and the gender of the superintendent. For example, those superintendents who served in urban districts with a high Black student population, and a staff and school board that reflected the student population, perceived minimal to no race-related challenges in comparison to districts with a more diverse population.

Emerging from CRT tenets from the interviews of the 12 Michigan Black superintendents were five major themes and 10 sub-themes that were developed and presented in Chapter Five. These themes and sub-themes were then categorized into two foundational themes applicable to a usable toolkit for aspiring Black superintendents: (a) preparation and (b) communication. Using Table 7 as a guide, I will share the results of this study.

Table 7

Foundational Themes Categories

Major Themes and Sub-Themes Participants Addressing the Themes and
Sub-themes

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12
Foundational Theme 1: Preparation												
A1: Black superintendents establish cultural competence in their school district in their educational careers.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
A2: Black superintendents face challenges establishing a culturally competent staff.		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
A3: Black superintendents must be cognizant of cultural conflicts in the community.							X			X	X	X
A4: Black superintendents will have an extensive career path with high expectations including the pursuit of a Ph.D.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
A5: Black superintendents will seek mentors early in their educational careers.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
A6: Black superintendents will obtain membership in a Black educators' organization.	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Foundational Theme 2: Communication												
B1: Unless appointed to a position, Black superintendent candidates must communicate clear expectations and open dialogue with search firms.	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
B2: Black superintendents will need to establish immediate clear and open communication with the school board.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Experiences of each of these 12 Black superintendents, while unique, developed the

foundational themes of both preparation and communication in overcoming obstacles throughout

their career paths. These foundational themes establish the toolkit for the success of aspiring Black superintendents. In this discussion, I will explicate these foundational themes as they surfaced from the data and provide recommendations for aspiring Black superintendents.

Foundational Theme 1: Preparation

In pursuit of a superintendent position, understanding the position and its responsibilities through training and educational experience serves as transitional methods of preparation. For the Black superintendent, the educational experience begins as a classroom teacher and involves establishing a culturally competent classroom. With the exception of one superintendent who did not respond to this question, each superintendent perceived the establishment of a school district that understands and appreciates cultures other than one's own as necessary for building positive and productive relationships that are the foundation of student achievement. Superintendents who served as classroom teachers in predominantly Black student-populated districts embraced culturally responsive opportunities. For example, Participant #3 stated, "We were building up our kids to send them out into a world that didn't look like them. We took our kids into a school where we built bridges for understanding each other so that we're comfortable with each other's race." Prioritizing culturally competent classrooms is supported by Tienken and Domenech's (2020) study in which "[d]istricts are more diverse than ever before. Compared to the 2010 survey, there was a slight increase in districts serving 51% or more students who were non-white" (p. 21). Establishing a culturally competent classroom prepares the Black superintendent for further establishment of a culturally competent district.

As teachers transition to administration, they grappled with the challenge of establishing culturally responsive staff. In response to the historical dismissal of Black educators following the *Brown vs. the Board of Education, Topeka, (1954)* decision, in which "[s]eventy-three

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percent of the African American role models in the education field were cut" (*Brown vs. Board of Education, Topeka 1954*, as cited in Hodge, 2017, p. 35), Black administrators struggled to provide equally diverse staff who match that of the district's student population. Data presented that these superintendents, while serving as principals or assistant principals, faced cultural challenges from White teachers who do not understand minority student populations. In order to address these challenges, they sought professional development, ongoing training, and immersive experiences for staff in the community in which they serve. Black superintendents recognized establishing a culturally responsive staff is a lengthy process, as Participant #6 referred to as "a journey of equity," and not simply a "drive-by professional development." Understanding these challenges and seeking opportunities to establish a culturally responsive staff prepared Black superintendents for the challenges they will face as superintendents within a district and its community.

Noteworthy is the recognition that the community may not be accepting of the Black superintendent, and Black superintendents are faced with emerging racial tensions. Those Black superintendents confronting this challenge immersed themselves in community organizations such as Girls on the Run, the Lion's Club, or city council meetings. Having a clear understanding of the community prior to serving as a Black superintendent was present in the data as a means of better preparing to serve the school district.

Another sub-theme for preparation is the extensive career pathways aspiring Black educators take in pursuit of the superintendency. These experiences as teachers and administrators begin the extensive career pathway Black educators face in preparation for serving as superintendents. As presented by Hill (2018) in Chapter Two, Black educators take a significantly longer period to reach the ultimate leadership role. White superintendents follow a

path of teacher, assistant principal, principal, and superintendent, with a total average of four educational positions. Black superintendents from this study also took a longer period to reach the ultimate role, serving a total average five or more educational positions and taking more time in these roles preparing as superintendents. As presented in Chapter Four, career pathway data from the participants in this study aligned with Hill's study and results in which 10 of the 12 participants took career paths of five or more educational positions before obtaining a superintendent position.

Following the career pathways, Black superintendents perceived the need to pursue higher education aligned with the expectations they must uphold. All respondents in this study either held a Ph.D., are currently pursuing a Ph.D., or addressed the perception of Black superintendents requiring a degree in their title. One superintendent acknowledged that a doctorate is not a requirement for a superintendent position, but Black superintendents, including this superintendent, perceived they are held to higher expectations indicative in the data. In alignment with Scott's study (1990), Black superintendents desired to be accepted as competent professionals by the general public" (p. 166). In response to that perception, holding a Ph.D. provides an added perceived benefit to obtaining a superintendent position and maintaining that position.

In order to achieve this acceptance and uphold these high expectations, Black superintendents sought mentors early in their careers who served as support systems throughout their educational careers. These mentors include former superintendents and administrators, college professors, and instructional leaders. Opportunities throughout their educational careers to observe and seek guidance, or to mentor others, are paramount to the success of Black superintendents, which prepare them to face the obstacles they encounter both in their aspirations

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and in serving in the position. Of particular concern was the need to acquire like-minded mentors, those who experience the same obstacles Black superintendents face, or those whose intersectional experiences mirrored their own. Urban Black superintendents sought urban Black superintendents as mentors. Female Black superintendents sought female Black superintendents as mentors and hiring firm coaches. These mentors are able to view their experiences through the same lenses and the additional heightened expectations White superintendents do not experience. Reaffirmed by Johnson (2020) as highlighted in Chapter Two:

African American superintendents resultantly can find themselves searching for additional resources to compensate for system issues related to economic pressure, time constraints, and cultural and class differences. As people of color, African American superintendents additionally might find themselves pressured by the communities of color they serve to demonstrate the expected academic progress of their students. The result could be a heightened level of stress greater than their White peers in leadership.

All superintendents require mentoring for support and guidance throughout their careers, but heightened expectations and additional stress placed on the Black superintendent enhance the need for mentors equipped with the same experience to better prepare the Black superintendent for success.

Networking through Black educators' or Black superintendents' organizations helps support and guide Black superintendents along with seeking mentors. All Black superintendents found value in either the state organization or national organization as a means to connect to fellow superintendents whose experiences are viewed through their cultural lenses. Because these organizations are dedicated to improving the Black experience and increasing the pipeline of aspiring Black educators, they seek to increase equity in the superintendency. In fact,

members of these organizations asserted themselves with hiring firms, specifically to increase equity in the hiring process.

Foundational Theme 2: Communication

The second foundational theme of communication applies to search firms and school boards as Black superintendents faced implicit bias with search firms and race-related agendas from school boards. In order to successfully navigate these obstacles, Black superintendent candidates indicated the need for clarity of the objectives from search firms as well as establish open and direct communication from school boards.

All Black superintendents who worked with a search firm experienced some form of implicit bias such as steering the candidate toward an urban district, adding the candidate as a presence of diversity despite having a pre-selected candidate, or simply ignoring the Black candidate by failing to provide them with support or guidance. Supported by Parker (2009), "Search consultants. . . had not really considered the possibility of hiring anyone other than white candidates. . . there was an underlying yet prevalent belief that black applicants were only really suitable for black or minority districts" (p. 17). As a result, Black superintendents expressed the need to be direct with search firms, asking if the firm had a pre-selected candidate, or if their presence was merely a "dog and pony show" by filling the diversity pool. They asked that search firms "save a lot of heartache" by directly stating whether they feel the candidate would be a "good fit" and allow the candidate to make the determination of moving forward in the process. The Black superintendents expressed the need to directly enlist a Black consultant as a coach in the search firm who understands the challenges the Black candidate faces. However, this presents a challenge, as there is only one Black search firm consultant in Michigan who happened to participate in this study. Requesting the search firm to provide clear communication

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and expectations for the candidate can better serve the overall process of hiring the best candidate for the position.

All Black superintendents expressed the need for an open and direct communication line with school boards. Overwhelmingly, Black superintendents emphasized the need for a positive relationship with the boards. In doing so, hidden agendas and race-related agendas obstructed the progress made with the superintendent and school boards. Prior to hiring, Black superintendents stated the need to ask directly if the school board was prepared to hire a Black superintendent and what the board felt that entailed. They asked direct questions regarding micromanagement. This upholds DiTomaso's (2013) understanding that "[i]t can be argued that these racist attitudes, without admitting overt racism, are the result of Whites believing subconsciously that they are entitled to a dominant relationship with Blacks (p. 5). Knowing this relationship in advance, through clear communication by bringing the hidden agendas and race-related agendas to the surface. allows for the Black candidate to determine if this is the type of relationship in which they wish to engage.

Recommendations for Aspiring Black Superintendents

My research presented the obstacles Black superintendents face throughout their educational careers in Michigan. Considering the demand for quality personnel to fill the positions of superintendents has increased (Frick, 2021) and the diversity of the student population in schools has increased (Tienken & Domenech, 2021), the top executive in a school district should not only be the best candidate but should also reflect the diversity of the state's student population. The disparity exists in Michigan's four percent representation of Black superintendents, half of the national average of eight percent (French & Halpert, 2021). In this study, Black superintendents provided data that contributed to a toolkit for aspiring Black

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superintendents to navigate through these obstacles to increase equity in Michigan's superintendent representation. With the data reflecting preparation and communication, I recommend that aspiring Black superintendents prepare by addressing the following:

1. Establish a culturally competent school district starting within the classroom.

2. Practice courageous racially driven conversations throughout the career pathways, working with mentors who experienced similar conversations.

3. Establish a diverse culturally competent staff committed to extensive, ongoing training and experiences that immerse themselves in the community.

4. Establish a politically duplicitous platform to engage in a diverse politically driven community.

5. Engage in community organizations and events as a means of responding to potential cultural challenges.

6. Expect to be committed to disrupting inequities, dismantling racism, and fostering inclusion in a school district.

7. Expect an extensive career pathway that may include the pursuit of a Ph.D. in response to higher expectations held of Black superintendents.

8. Seek trusted and experienced Black mentors and organizations including superintendents committed to providing support and guidance throughout the educational career.

These recommendations are in preparation for obtaining a superintendent position. While transitioning to become a superintendent, the following are recommended:

1. Assert direct communication with search firms, allowing for courageous conversations regarding implicit biases to materialize.

2. Assert direct communication with the community and school board members, bypassing

search firms' regulations that orchestrate a biased selection process.

3. Commit to establishing clear communication and positive relationships with school boards, determining a clear role prior to hiring.

4. Communicate the commitment to disrupting inequities, dismantling racism, and fostering inclusion with the search firms, school boards, community, staff, and students in a school district.

Clear communication with hiring firms and school boards serves similar purposes, exposing any hidden agendas or race-related agendas that obstruct the superintendent's ability to be successful.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study compiled Michigan's rural, suburban, and urban male and female superintendents to allow various unique Black superintendent experiences. Future studies could disaggregate these components as a comparative study of these experiences.

Future studies must examine search firms. Currently, there are only two search firms in Michigan with only one Black consultant. A comparative study of search firms in other states will determine if Michigan is limited in its representation, or if it is aligned with other states.

Future studies could examine the types of mentorships and networking organizations and their effectiveness in the rural, suburban, and urban districts. There is currently no formal mentoring program for Black superintendents, but there is a formal mentoring program for superintendents in Michigan. A study on the effectiveness of the mentoring program and the establishment of a formal mentor program for Black superintendents could be valuable in establishing more equity in the superintendency as mentoring bridges the gap between a qualified candidate and opportunities to serve.

Concluding Thoughts

My study provided a voice to Michigan's Black superintendents whose perceptions and experiences had never been formally shared nor revealed the challenges they overcome in order to successfully serve their districts. In doing so, the study served to offer insights into the underrepresented who do not match the shifting demographics in the state. The findings of this study reveal the insights through the lens of the Black superintendent in a qualitative study of half of the 22 Black superintendents in Michigan, and this number is not increasing. It is the intent of this study to provide a toolkit for aspiring Black superintendents to acquire positions in the top executive role in K-12 schools, ultimately leading to equity in the superintendency. Providing insight into these challenges and how the Black superintendents navigate these challenges revealed the recommendations that include adequate preparation throughout the educational career including establishing a culturally competent district, a lengthy career pathway laden with high expectations, and a trusted educational support system of mentorship. Clear expectations and communication with search firms and school boards allow for a positive and productive experience that can further the success and increase the representation of the Black superintendent in Michigan.

<div align="center">**References**</div>

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APPENDIX A

HSIRB Approval Letter

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: February 4, 2022

To: Brett Geier, Principal Investigator
    Kevin Simmons, Student Investigator for dissertation

Re: Initial - IRB-2022-14
    UNDERSTANDING THE ASPIRATIONS AND CHALLENGES OF MICHIGAN'S BLACK SCHOOL
    SUPERINTENDENTS: A TOOLKIT FOR BUILDING EQUITY IN THE SUPERINTENDENCY

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "UNDERSTANDING THE ASPIRATIONS AND
CHALLENGES OF MICHIGAN'S BLACK SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS: A TOOLKIT FOR BUILDING EQUITY IN
THE SUPERINTENDENCY" has been reviewed by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board
(WMU IRB) and **approved** under the **Expedited** 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior
(including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication,
cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group,
program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the policies of Western Michigan University. You may
now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific
board approval for any changes to this project (e.g., *add an investigator, increase number of subjects beyond the
number stated in your application, etc.*). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation.

In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of
this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the IRB or the Associate
Director Research for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Sincerely,

Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair
WMU IRB

For a study to remain open after one year, a Post Approval Monitoring report (please use the continuing review submission form) is required on or prior
to (no more than 30 days) **February 2, 2023** and each year thereafter until closing of the study.

When this study closes, submit the required Final Report found at https://wmich.edu/research/forms.

Note: All research data must be kept in a secure location on the WMU campus for at least three (3) years after the study closes.

Informational Consent Form

Western Michigan University
Educational Leadership, Research and Technology

Principal Investigator: Brett Geier, Ed. D.

Student Investigator: Kevin Simmons

Title of Study: Understanding the Aspirations and Challenges of Michigan's Black School Superintendents: A Toolkit for Building Equity in Superintendency

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "Understanding the Aspirations and Challenges of Michigan's Black School Superintendents: A Toolkit for Building Equity in Superintendency." This project will serve as Kevin Simmons' dissertation project for the requirements of the Ph.D. in Educational Leadership. The consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and review all the time commitments, the procedures in this study, the risks and benefits of participating. Please review this consent form thoroughly and contact me with any questions you may have.

What is the purpose of this study? The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges and aspirations of Black school superintendents in Michigan to provide a toolkit for building more equity in school superintendency. Simmons will serve as the principal investigator and interview participants about these challenges and aspirations.

Who can participate? Eligible participants include Black superintendents in Michigan, both male and female, ages 25 or older. These superintendents will be from rural, urban, and suburban areas. The first 12 respondents who meet the criteria will participate.

Where will this study take place? The interview will take place via online in a private, secured location to ensure confidentiality at a mutually agreed upon time. Email correspondence and phone calls will take place at any location.

What is the time commitment? The confidential online interview to assist with the doctoral dissertation will consist of one short 40-60-minute interview. By completing the interview, you will receive a 1-2-page executive summary for your review at your own leisure and is not included in the time commitment. The documented follow-up introduction and introductory email or phone call will require 5-10 minutes.

What will you be asked to do in this study? Should you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following?

- Engage in the 40-60-minute online interview with honest and thorough responses; To ensure accuracy, you will be recorded, and your responses will be transcribed
- Verify the accuracy of the transcription and provide any modifications you feel necessary via a follow-up email. The anticipated time commitment is 5-10 minutes.
-

What information will be assessed in this study? This study seeks to understand any challenges that are race-related and may impede a superintendent's success and longevity in the profession.

What are the risks of participating in this study? Risk associated with this study could include the possibility of being identified. Subjects may not want to be identified due to continuing relationships with their school districts, as some of the issues discussed in the interviewing process may be sensitive in nature. I will engage in casual conversation to begin each interview and attempt to make each subject feel as comfortable as possible (Compton, 2005). There is minimal risk involved as participants will be informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time and their data will be destroyed immediately upon their withdrawal. Participation is voluntary.

What are the benefits of participating in this study? Researchers, school boards, and hiring firms may be able to apply the themes that emerge from the responses that have been synthesized and evaluated to identify patterns in potential biases. They will apply these themes to build more equity in K-12 superintendent positions. Overall, a toolkit will be created to aid aspiring Black individuals to better prepare themselves to confront such obstacles as they pursue superintendency.

Are there any costs associated with participating in the study? The cost of participation is the participants' time to engage in the interview and time to engage in the review of the transcripts. **Is there any compensation for participating in this study?** There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected for this study? An effort will be made to protect the identity of study participants. Pseudonyms will be selected by the subjects. Every attempt will be made to maintain confidentiality, including holding Zoom or WebEx meeting interviews in private locations. Confidentiality will be maintained by carefully storing the data in a secure, locked principal investigator's office. The recorded interview and transcripts will be destroyed three years after the study is completed. Transcripts will also be stored in a confidential manner as will electronic material, which will be saved on the principal investigator's double password-protected computer and stored with the transcripts for at least three years in the primary researcher's office at Western Michigan University. The electronic material will be double password-protected (Compton, 2005).

What if you want to stop participating in this study? Participants will be informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time and their data will be destroyed immediately upon their withdrawal. Participation is voluntary.

Thank you for supporting this study. Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you may contact the student investigator Kevin Simmons (269) 767-1088, or email kevin.a.simmons@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research, 269-387-8298. The consent document has been approved for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by signed and stamped notification in the upper right-hand corner of this form. Do not participate in the study if this stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   Date

Introductory Letter

Western Michigan University
Educational Leadership, Research and Technology

Principal Investigator: Brett Geier, Ed. D.

Student Investigator: Kevin Simmons

Title of Study: Understanding the Aspirations and Challenges of Michigan's Black School Superintendents: A Toolkit for Building Equity in Superintendency

Action: You are invited to participate in an optional, short, 40-60 minute, confidential online interview to assist with the doctoral dissertation of myself, Kevin Simmons, currently a PhD student at Western Michigan University (WMU). By completing this interview, you will receive a 1-2-page executive summary of the results. This letter is a documented follow-up introduction from the introductory phone call you received today.

Background: I have been an educational leader for over twenty-five years, serving as an athletic director, elementary principal, middle school principal, high school principal, and superintendent. Along with his previous educational experiences and studies in the Educational Leadership program at WMU, I am interested in advancing equitable opportunities for Black superintendents not only in Michigan but across the nation as they are significantly underrepresented.

This study, entitled Understanding the Aspirations and Challenges of Michigan's Black School Superintendents: A Toolkit for Building Equity in Superintendency is designed to capture K-12 superintendents' perspectives and experiences regarding the challenges they faced as they aspired to become school superintendents in order to provide a toolkit for aspiring superintendents and build equity in K-12 superintendent leadership.

Conclusion: I would like to thank you for supporting this study and look forward to the scheduled interview. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me, (269) 767-1088, or email ksimmons46815@gmail.com

Interview Protocol

Western Michigan University
Educational Leadership, Research and Technology

Principal Investigator: Brett Geier, Ed. D.

Student Investigator: Kevin Simmons

Title of Study: Understanding the Aspirations and Challenges of Michigan's Black School Superintendents: A Toolkit for Building Equity in Superintendency
Script for Follow-up Phone Call to Potential Participants

Hello, my name is Kevin Simmons. I am conducting a study as part of my requirement of my Ph.D. in Educational Leadership through Western Michigan University and am requesting your participation for an interview.

The purpose of this call is to see if you are willing to participate in this study by reading and reviewing a consent document. If you agree to participate, we will then proceed to an interview about your experiences in pursuit of a superintendent position. You may have some questions regarding the study, which I will be happy to answer for you at this time.

Should you decide to participate, I would like to schedule a Zoom interview at your convenience. I will conduct the interview in a private, secured office. The interview should last 40-60 minutes.

Upon your acceptance, I will send you a consent form for you to review. You can look over these documents and contact me with any questions prior to the meeting. I will review the information and the consent form on the day of the Zoom interview to make sure to answer any questions you may have and ask you for an oral consent that will be documented through Zoom transcription services. Once the consent form is articulated, the interview can begin.

Once again, I really appreciate your willingness to participate in this study as an interviewee. May I schedule a meeting at this time to discuss the consent form and your possible participation in the interview?

Thank you and I look forward to meeting you on (date of the interview meeting). Please feel free to contact me at 269-767-1088 if you have any questions prior to the meeting.

-OR-

Thank you for considering participating in this study. I understand that you are not able to participate and really appreciate the time you took to speak with me and read the information regarding the study.

Script for Interview Follow-up Phone Calls to Participants

Hello _____,

Thank you once again for agreeing once again to participate in the study of Understanding the Aspirations and Challenges of Black School Superintendents in Michigan: A Toolkit for Building Equity in Superintendency. Your participation is very much appreciated in attempting to synthesize the information collected for this study. I would like to first ask for an oral consent of your participation which will be transcribed via Zoom transcription services. At that time, I would like to remind you that you do not have to participate in the interview if you choose not to do so and you may withdraw from the study at any time. You will be provided with a transcription of the interview and will be provided with a two-week opportunity to provide feedback from the transcription should you wish to do so. You will not be required to provide feedback.

Based on the information provided for you in the consent form, do I have your consent to proceed with the interview?

Once this time is established in the affirmative, I will say the following:

Thank you so much for your time. We will proceed with the interview. Once the interview is completed, you will be immediately emailed the transcription from the interview, along with the feedback form should you wish to amend any information included in the transcription. You will have two weeks to complete the feedback form. Please feel free to contact me at any time to discuss the study, ask questions, or any other reason related to the study. You may contact me at (269) 767-1088 or Dr. Brett Geier at 269-387-3897

-or-

If the respondent rejects consent, I will say the following:

Thank you so much for your time. I will immediately destroy the transcript and your response will remain confidential.

Feedback Form

Western Michigan University
Educational Leadership, Research and Technology

Principal Investigator: Brett Geier, Ed. D.

Student Investigator: Kevin Simmons

Title of Study: Understanding the Aspirations and Challenges of Michigan's Black School Superintendents: A Toolkit for Building Equity in Superintendency

Date: _____

Upon receipt of my interview transcription from Zoom transcription services, I would like to amend the following:

    1. Delete the following information:

_____

_____

_____

    2. Add the following information:

_____

_____

I realize I will have two weeks from receipt of this transcript to return the feedback form via email to ksimmons46815@gmail.com.

You may use additional lines as necessary. Please contact Kevin Simmons, (269) 767-1088, or Brett Geier (269) 387-3897 should you have any questions.

APPENDIX F

Exploration Inventory

Black Superintendent Exploration Inventory

1.Describe your professional career pathway before starting your first year as superintendent.

   a. How did you address racial tension among students in your classroom?
   b. In your experience, what are the key factors that contribute to the success of students from diverse backgrounds?
   c. What opportunities have you had working and collaborating in diverse and multicultural settings?
   d. In previous work experiences, what has been the greatest obstacle in developing a multicultural-competent staff?
   e. In what ways have you integrated multicultural issues as part of your professional development?

2.What hiring obstacles existed as you sought your first superintendent position?

   a. Do you feel that you've ever been passed over for a less-qualified candidate?
   b. In what ways did the hiring firm(s) support you in the process of being hired?
   c. In your experience, what are the key factors that the screening firms missed as important elements of their process with the hiring of a Black superintendent?
   d. For some superintendent positions, the application process and paperwork could be considered overwhelming. What would you believe to be some of the processes and paperwork obstacles that hindered your decision to apply for the superintendent position at a certain school district, even though you believed you were the best candidate for the position?

3. What job-related challenges are you dealing with that you believe exist due to your ethnicity?

4. What are some hidden biases new black superintendents need to be aware of before their first day on the job?

   a. What support systems did you put in place or were put in place for you related to being a Black education professional?

5. What are some hidden biases new black superintendents need to be aware of before their first day on the job?

    l.   What types of school board initiatives are you expected to implement that you feel are due to the fact that you are a Black Superintendent?
    m. What types of hidden school board agenda initiatives are expected that have been shared with you and are directly related to you as a Black Superintendent?