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Latina Superintendents:

A phenomenological study of superintendent-board relations

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**Latina Superintendents:
A phenomenological study of superintendent-board relations**

by

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Treatise

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DEDICATION

Primeramente quiero dedicar este esfuerzo a mis padres Elva e Isidro, quienes durante mis etapas formativas, en base a mucho esfuerzo y sacrificio me apoyaron y guiaron durante mi niñez, a la vez que me enseñaron la importancia de trabajar honradamente, y luchar lealmente para lograr mis metas, por lo que mi amor y agradecimiento es eterno y doy gracias a Dios por tenerlos y quisiera que estén orgullosos de los logros que su hija alcanza, que en lo fundamental son lo que ellos mismos fueron inculcando, llamándolo de otra forma; son logros suyos también.

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**Latina Superintendents:
A phenomenological study of superintendent-board relations**

Adriana Elva Tamez, Ed.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

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This study considered how being Latina, and all the variables inherent in gender and ethnicity intersect when a Latina is a public school district superintendent in Texas; specifically, how a Latina superintendent effectuates meaningful and productive superintendent-board relations. The study employed a phenomenological approach, and utilized semi-structured interviews, collection of artifacts, researcher observations, and a board of education member survey. Through the interpretivist paradigm, elements of gender role theory permeated the study. The notion of the *glass ceiling* as a barrier that women seeking executive level positions, such as the superintendency, emerged from the discourse of the study. Findings suggest that where professional skills, knowledge, and abilities are concerned there is no gender difference; however, the ability for women to be equally considered for executive level positions, such as the superintendency, suggests that disparity in practice continues to exist. Women are challenged to be equally considered for the superintendency. While women carry a presumably different challenge to balance work and family, the findings suggest that those who have attained the

superintendency were able to thrive amidst this challenge. The study also suggests that the three Latina superintendent study participants' practices in developing and maintaining effective superintendent-board relations sustained prior research in this regard. Where superintendents are strategic and purposeful in their efforts to develop and maintain effective superintendent-board relations, they thrive. In contrast, where superintendents are not strategic and purposeful in their efforts to develop and maintain effective superintendent-board relations, the superintendent's tenure is abbreviated.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

In today's society, school superintendents are charged with the responsibility for the overall administration of district school systems; they hold positions of wide influence in their communities and are held accountable for the educational success of students in the schools under their supervision. The current social, political, economic, and educational milieu suggest that the superintendent's role continues to evolve as tremendous pressure is exerted on public education systems, and school districts become larger and more diverse. Due to the complex nature of the job, the accomplished superintendent is expected to be visionary and to possess administrative acumen in several diverse, yet interrelated functions. One such school district function regards governance, specifically the relationship between the superintendent and a public school district's Board of Education. The superintendent-board relation is a unique phenomenon; wherein, a superintendent strives to develop a relationship with board of education members individually and collectively. While a school district includes numerous constituencies, such as students, parents, employees, alumni, elected officials, and at-large community members, the literature suggests that no relationship with any constituency may be considered more important than that between the superintendent and the board.

There is a proposed need to define those characteristics, which may be considered evidence of successful superintendent-board relations. Realizing that the functions of school districts are broad and complex in nature, the relationship between the

superintendent and the school board becomes an essential and important function that establishes a school district's level of planning and decision-making effectiveness. That the evidence of successful superintendent-board relations may suggest behaviors or characteristics specifically attributable to women is a phenomenon worthy of investigation. Juxtaposed against this interest, in particular, women's behaviors or characteristics, is that reflecting a Latina perspective. In essence, it is a consideration of the variables, i.e., issues of educational leadership, gender, and ethnicity that intersect and identify effective superintendent-school board relations.

The literature suggested a need to develop leaders, specifically superintendents of public school systems, with a consideration for the contributions that Latina superintendents may make or have made to public education in the United States. This consideration includes those perceived barriers that have been described to contribute to a growing gap in the pool of aspiring Latina superintendents. It is clear that the percent of Latina superintendents has not increased in public schools at the same rate as their White, female counterparts. The contribution of the Latina's culture and gender provide a focus for an examination of their association to effectuate educational leadership, specifically effective superintendent-board relations.

Statement of the Problem

The superintendency demands a particular skill set and demeanor to effectively manage the many functions that constitute the work of a school district. Critical to a superintendent's success is the ability to develop and maintain an effective superintendent-school board team to drive the district forward to meet its goals. The

identification of the requisite practices to effectuate such a superintendent-school board team is an area that requires additional research. In addition to this identification is the juxtaposition of the notion of how gender and ethnicity are variables in developing and maintaining superintendent-board relations. This study attempted to understand and identify characteristics that underlie effective superintendent-board relations, specifically as they related to Latina public school superintendents in the state of Texas.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to describe and analyze the characteristics of three Latina public school superintendents in Texas. The focus was on their behaviors and practices that suggested or demonstrated effective superintendent-board relations. The study sought to identify those cultural variables, if any, that informed their practices and behaviors.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

- 1) What are the traits and attributes demonstrated and utilized by Latina superintendents in Texas?
- 2) What are the characteristics and experiences as perceived by district constituencies that represent productive and effective Board of Education member and superintendent relations?; and
- 3) What are the characteristics and experiences as perceived by district constituencies that represent productive and effective Board of Education and superintendent relations?

Methodology

To answer the research questions, this study employed the phenomenological approach a subset of qualitative research design. Chapter three of this study offers a general discussion of qualitative research. Subsequent to the general discussion, this study focused on setting, participants, researcher, process, credibility, reliability, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and timeline of the research. The five basic tenets of qualitative research as defined by Merriam (1998) were utilized. They were:

1. Qualitative research is interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed.
2. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.
3. Qualitative research usually involves fieldwork.
4. It employs an inductive research strategy.
5. Qualitative research provides a study that is richly descriptive (p. 6-8).

Definition of Terms

There are terms particular to this study. The assigned usage of these terms follows.

Board of Education is the primary governing body of a school district in the State of Texas as per the Texas Education Code. The term Board of Education in this study is used interchangeably with the terms board and school board.

Ethnicity is used to refer to one's particular heritage, differentiated from the global term that refers to Latino/a. It is used to refer to one's heritage in terms of the

particular country of origin. However, in this study the terms Latino/a and ethnicity are used interchangeably.

Latino/a is a pan-ethnic label for persons of Latin American and Mexican/American descent. In this study, Latino/a and Hispanic are used interchangeably.

Significance

There is an abundance of literature that discusses leadership practices and behaviors. Authors, such as Yukl (2006) and Bolman & Deal (2003), have provided descriptions of practices and behaviors that represent effective leadership. A subset to leadership literature is that regarding the public school superintendency; wherein, the general notions surrounding effective leadership are focused on the work of superintendents. The nature of the superintendency evokes unique leadership practices and behaviors as suggested by such authors as Hoyle et al. (2005), Peterson and Fusarelli (2005), and Townsend et al. (2007). The literature to address leadership, in general, and the superintendency, in particular, is robust. However, it is only within the last decade that literature regarding leadership has included discussions pertinent to the practices and behaviors particular to Latinos. Researchers, such as Bordas (2007) are among the few who suggest the particular contributions Latinos offer as effective leaders. Beyond the general discussion of Latinos and their role as leaders, there exists a noticeable dearth of literature that addresses Latinos as public school superintendents, much less Latinas as public school superintendents. The concern for additional literature to address this dearth is compounded by the phenomenon surrounding superintendent-board relations. The Cooperative Superintendency Program at the University of Texas at Austin maintains 10

functions which constitute the work of the superintendency, one of which is Governance Operations, which involves superintendent-board relations. Ongoing research in the Cooperative Superintendency Program (Veazey, 2011) suggests the significance of productive and effective superintendent-board relations on the superintendency. This study is designed to specifically inform the unique variables inherent in the practices and behaviors of Latina superintendents in their work to nurture and maintain what may be considered effective superintendent-board relations.

Assumptions

The most essential assumption of this study regarded the sincerity, depth, and openness of the participants. The subject of this study addressed beliefs, practices, and personal histories that may not necessarily be topics the participants find easy to discuss. It was incumbent upon the researcher to establish a rapport with the participants such that it elicited open and frank discussions and responses through the research process. The style in which the case study method was employed and presented by the researcher was presumed to elicit uninhibited responses from the participants. The research subjects were Latina public school superintendents in the state of Texas. Their perspectives and experiences were either peculiar to or of a different manifestation during the discharge of the governance operations of the school district. This study aimed to verify this assumption and take them from uninformed assumptions to informed opinions.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations of the study included: 1) the study was limited to three Latina public school superintendents in the state of Texas; and 2) the results of the study relied on qualitative research data.

Limitations of this study included the necessary objectivity of the researcher, i. e. that the researcher was able to analyze and interpret data to reflect the intentions of the participants. The findings of the study only relates to three Latina public school superintendents in Texas. There are only 21 Latina superintendents in Texas; thus, the responses of the participants cannot be generalized to be applicable for all Latina superintendents. Finally, as a qualitative research study, utilizing the case study method, the study was limited by its nature and design.

Commented [KRA2]: This version is Latina and the other version is Latino.

Summary

The study of leadership in and of itself is a unique phenomenon. That a person, a leader, is able to effectuate productive and meaningful results for an organization continues to be a topic of great interest to anyone charged with the responsibility of leading an organization of any size or specialization. The realm of educational leadership, as one such specialization, includes a phenomenon regarding the relationship between the school district's chief executive officer, the superintendent, and the chief governing body, the board of education. Juxtaposed against the realm of educational leadership is the differentiation of gender and ethnicity of superintendents. This differentiation offers another, more narrowly defined phenomenon, which was the focus of this study.

This chapter introduced a study that proposed to consider how being Latina, and all the variables inherent in gender and ethnicity, intersect when a Latina is a superintendent. Specifically, the study proposed to consider and understand how a Latina superintendent effectuates meaningful and productive superintendent-board relations.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In today's society, school superintendents are charged with the overall responsibility for the administration of district school systems; they hold positions of wide influence in their communities and are held accountable for the educational success of students in the schools under their supervision. The superintendent's role continues to evolve as tremendous pressure is exerted on public education systems, and school districts become larger and more diverse. Due to the complex nature of the job, the accomplished superintendent is expected to be visionary and to possess political acumen in several diverse, yet interrelated functions. One such school district function regards governance, specifically the relationship between the superintendent and the district's Board of Education. There are questions that suggest inquiry into the inherent challenges that the superintendent role presents to women, in general, but to Latina women specifically is worthy of study. Realizing that the functions of school districts are broad and complex in nature, the relationship between the superintendent and the school board is an essential and important function that establishes school district's level of planning and decision-making effectiveness. This study aims to illuminate particular variables that intersect to comprise the framework for the professional experience of Latina public school superintendents in Texas, and their relationships with boards of education.

The literature review is organized into the following major topic areas: leadership and public schools, females as educational leaders, Latinas and educational leadership, superintendents and school board relations. While each of the major sections may stand

alone, collectively they provide the framework for the critical factors and skills, which are requisite to developing leaders, specifically superintendents of public school systems, and the contribution that Latina superintendents have made to public education in the United States. In addition, perceived barriers are described that contribute to a growing gap in the pool of aspiring Latina superintendents. It is clear that the percent of Latina superintendents has not increased in public schools at the same rate as their White, female counterparts. The contribution of the Latina's culture and gender provide a focus for an examination of their relationships to effective leadership.

Leadership and Public Schools

[Leadership is] “The art of getting people to do what they really don’t want to do and don’t feel equipped to do against a timeline they don’t believe in, with risks that scare them, to achieve an objective they believe at the beginning to be impossible.”

— Eric Gregory (as cited in Townsend et al., 2007)

Although definitions of leadership can vary widely, leadership can be defined simply as “the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (Yukl, 2006, p.8). Leadership can be considered a role that is either lonely and a very individualized concept, or a role that is collaborative through dyadic, group, and organizational structures.

Leadership style has been shown to be a major factor in the effectiveness of several different types of organization, and different leadership styles have been

identified as effective in different situations. Collins (2005) has acknowledged that successful companies benefit the most from leaders who fully understand leadership theory and practice these concepts in their capacity to lead.

In their work, Bolman and Deal (2005) recount the events of September 11, 2001, “911”, and the role that end-of-term New York City mayor, Rudy Giuliani, played in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. His personal and political issues created a somber atmosphere for him, with public ridicule part of his experience. However, the 911 events did not deter him from demonstrating leadership and assuming a very active role. Upon learning of 911 he did not sit back he sped immediately to the scene to witness firsthand the chaos, smoke, and bodies falling from the sky. His emotions were very apparent, as captured on film and audio recordings. He was tenacious and focused on leading efforts and creating an atmosphere of hope for a very downtrodden New York City. The man who had seemed forlorn and finished at the time of 911 was now greeted with cheers wherever he went. His ability to act, despite his personal circumstances, and engage his constituencies to share in his vision for a revived New York City has been identified as a near perfect exemplar of leadership.

Perhaps the two most widely accepted propositions about leadership are that all good leaders must have the right stuff – such qualities as vision, strength, and commitment that are essential to leadership – and that good leadership is situational, what works in one setting will not work in another (Bolman & Deal, 2005, p. 339).

Despite the apparent disparity between the widely accepted propositions about leadership, there appears a shared truth – studies have found shared characteristics among unusually effective leaders and other research has identified situational variables with leadership that works best. The research has not articulated any characteristic that is universally agreed upon; however, vision and focus come closest. Yukl (2006) named ten most important functions for enhancing collective work in teams and organizations:

1. Help interpret the meaning of events
2. Create shared vision
3. Build task commitment and optimism
4. Build mutual trust and cooperation
5. Strengthen collective identity
6. Organize and coordinate activities
7. Encourage and facilitate collective learning
8. Obtain necessary resources and support
9. Develop and empower people
10. Promote social justice and morality (p. 456-457).

There is no dearth of literature on leadership, which is most often addressed within corporate situations. Literature that addresses educational leadership, specifically the superintendency, is developing and parallels that of corporate leadership. A prior generation of literature has addressed the superintendency and focused on the issues of “books, buses and butts.” The ever-evolving literature concerning the superintendency is marked by many characteristics like those of corporate leadership. However, there is one

significant difference, superintendent leadership is potentially the single-most important determinant of an effective learning environment. Superintendents have significant effects on student learning and their knowledge of matters curricular and instructional is vital (Cambron-McCabe, Cunningham, Harvey, & Koff, 2005; Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005). While a superintendent's knowledge and understanding of curriculum and instruction is vital, this view of the unique qualities that characterize the superintendency argues that the necessary training needed may be found just as easily in schools of government, public affairs, business administration, and communications as in traditional schools of education (Cambron-McCabe, Cunningham, Harvey & Koff, 2005). No doubt, the leadership implicit to the superintendency is unique.

The modern superintendent has been the subject of several reviews (Blount, 1998; Crowson, 1987; Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005; Thomas & Moran, 1992; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). As one would expect, the superintendent's role has continued to evolve over the years as tremendous pressure has been exerted on our public education system. Prior to the 1960s, the modern superintendent was described as "the new executive in peacetime America" (Grogan, 2000, p.120) and was often referred to as a heroic symbol in the community. In the 1970s, the superintendency grew to be more political, and thus the role suffered from increased conflict with school boards (Boyd, 1974; Cuban, 1976). As the position became more associated with corporate leadership and politics in the 1980s, Blumberg (1985) created a disturbing image of the superintendent as an educational statesman or political strategist whose best tactics include mystification, cover-up, and tactical rules. The superintendent's role in school reform began in the early

1980s (Cuban, 1984; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986; Paulu, 1989). By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the superintendent's role in reform and re-structuring solidified and focused on de-centralization (Doyle & Tetzloff, 1992; McWalters, 1992; Tewel, 1994) with renewed interest in the role of the superintendent as an instructional leader (Björk, 1993; Glass, 1993a, 1993b; Hoyle, Björk, Collier, & Glass, 2005; Myers, 1992; Paulu, 1989). The resemblance of the superintendency to corporate leadership implied a clear understanding and articulation of the functions particular to a school district.

Ten Functions of School Districts

A Superintendent of Schools in the state of Texas assumes the overall responsibility for the administration of the district school system. Superintendents implement Board of Education policy and develop regulations, guidelines, and protocols that support that policy. They plan and set goals, in collaboration with the board, to enable the district to move forward with a common vision. Although there is a fair amount of delegation of duties involved, the superintendent is not relieved of final responsibility for actions taken under such delegation. The delegation of responsibility must be done within a well-organized plan, i.e., a "division of labor." The duties of the superintendent are broad and general in nature, but the one common, underlying trait that a superintendent must possess is the ability to be visionary. As described by Olivarez (2008), dynamic leadership by a superintendent integrates concepts from administrative, instructional and political leadership theories into real world applications. These concepts, which are embodied in Olivarez's *Ten Functions of School Districts* (2008), include:

1. Governance Operations
2. Curriculum and Instruction
3. Elementary and Secondary School Campus Operations
4. Instructional Support Services
5. Human Resources
6. Safety and Security Services
7. Accountability, Information Management, and Technology Services
8. External and Internal Communications
9. Facilities Planning and Plant Services
10. Administrative, Finance, and Business Operations

A brief description of each function is provided in the following paragraphs to give a perspective for understanding their integration into the operation of a school district under the leadership of a transformational superintendent.

Governance and operations are the systems that contain policies, regulations, and exhibits of the school board, i.e., how it is appointed or elected; how it is organized; how it conducts meetings; and how the board operates. This section includes by-laws and policies establishing the board's internal operating procedures. The school district Board of Trustees and the superintendent are the primary agents of governance. The ultimate purpose of governance is to ensure that there are gains in student achievement. Governance and operations set the systems in place that lead to the success of students.

Curriculum and Instruction departments work collaboratively with principals, teachers, and school/community members to create, implement, evaluate, and revise

educational programs, resources, and materials to ensure optimal teaching and learning to increase student achievement. Curriculum and instruction support all stakeholders in the educational community and are dedicated to providing the students with a challenging and rewarding educational experience to ensure that all students are prepared to enter a challenging and competitive global economy. All areas of the curriculum are aligned with state standards and are under continuous review by staff and administrators.

Teachers play a critical role in curriculum development through their participation on textbook adoption committees. Grade level and course curricula are reviewed as a part of this adoption process. All curricular changes must go to the school board for approval.

Elementary and secondary school campus operations are related to specific activities at the campus level. School based administrators provide instructional leadership and manage the day-to-day activities in schools. Administrators set educational standards and goals and establish the policies and procedures required to achieve them within each campus, and in accordance with local and state policy. School campus operations involve supervising other campus-based administrators, support staff, teachers, counselors, librarians, coaches, and other employees. Elementary and secondary school campus operations also involves the development of academic programs, monitoring students' educational progress, training and motivating teachers and other staff, managing career counseling and other student services, administering recordkeeping, preparing budgets, and performing many other duties. School-based administrators also handle relations with parents, prospective and current students,

employers, and the community. Responsibilities are often divided among many administrators, each having a specific function.

Instructional support services include activities that support and enhance student achievement. Instructional support team members plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate professional development programming designed to meet the needs of administrators, teachers, and other instructional staff. Coaching and mentoring is a critical component of a district's professional development program. Instructional support services programs are designed to provide coordinated support services that help students become and remain successful in school. While much of the work is provided in buildings, central administration of these efforts is needed to provide comprehensive, coordinated, systematic services to students, parents, and staff.

The function of human resources is to carry out the personnel functions of the school district. The department is responsible for staff recruitment, assignment, implementation of negotiated agreements, and retention of employees. The school district is a labor-intensive organization. The responsibility of Human Resources is to employ and maintain a high quality professional and classified workforce.

The primary function of safety and security services is to provide protection for the students, staff, and visitors to schools, and all other facilities, as well as provide for the safety and security of all district facilities and assets. Safety and security services in school districts take shape at both the campus and district level. Emergency response and crisis management plans provide a clear guide and direction for a variety of situations that can occur with directives, support, and protocol for handling.

Accountability, information management and technology include district's information technology infrastructure, including the implementation, support, and administration of the district's wide area network. Operation and support of management information systems, including programming services and custom database and report-writing services for financial, administrative, inventory, budgetary, accounting, grants-tracking, asset management, inventory and other applications are usually included. The accountability department's function is intertwined with this as it provides various data points on student data and is interfaced with technology.

The mission of external and internal communications is to provide accurate and timely information to the school community and the general public about the operations of the district. The department also supports schools and district departments with a centralized printing services operation. The communications department supports schools, departments and executive management with internal and external communications. Some responsibilities include media relations, employee communications, website development and maintenance, issues management, crisis communications, event management, parent communications, and graphic design.

Facilities planning and plant services are concerned with the infrastructure of the school district. These services manage the physical plant operations and facilities planning and construction departments, as well as the implementation of construction and upgrades through bond measures. The facilities planning department is responsible for identification and prioritization of long-range district-wide needs which includes management and maintenance of facilities. It is also responsible for management of the

design and construction processes, ensuring that all capital improvement projects align with budget and district technical guidelines while meeting the needs of the students and community.

Administrative, finance, and business operations are responsible for the complex job of managing the district's budget and investments. Administrative, finance, and business operations oversees a number of departments including accounting, accounts payable, budget, cash management, finance, payroll, purchasing, and special revenues. In addition to the day-to-day financial operations of the school districts, these departments produce reports and other documentation regarding the district's finances. Additionally, they oversee bond funds that are used for the construction of new schools and support facilities, as well as the renovation and updating of existing schools.

A successful superintendent is expected to be able to effectively manage and oversee all of these various functions and have substantial knowledge of each. Historically, the roster of successful superintendents is filled with men; however, the superintendency is a world that seems to be slowly opening to women, who many argue demonstrate skills and abilities not historically associated with men, but which serve the superintendency well.

Females as Educational Leaders

“Women are destined to rule the schools of every city” (Ella Flagg Young, cited in Blount, 1998, p.1).

Gender and personality appear to be important factors in leading (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003; Krüger, 1999, 2005; Young & McLeod, 2001). Krüger (2008) states “men and women deal with power and relationships

differently” (p. 161). Gender has been distinguished from sex in leadership research. The term *gender* refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. Male and female gender qualities (Bem, 1974; Osland, Snyder, & Hunter, 1998) are listed in Table 1. Although sometimes used interchangeably and incorrectly, the term *sex* refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women. Gender is one of the key barriers which women encounter as they ascend to the position of superintendent (Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999; Grogan, 2004; Shakeshaft, 1989). Shakeshaft (1989) explains that educational theories developed from a male centered or andocentric framework are a result of imbalanced and inaccurate research and are not representative of the female paradigm. Grogan (2004) suggests that it takes considerably longer for women to attain their first superintendency.

Table 1. Male and Female Gender Qualities

Male	Female
Aggressive	Emotional
Independent	Sensitive
Objective	Expressive
Logical	Cooperative
Rational	Intuitive
Analytical	Warm
Decisive	Tactful
Confident	Receptive to ideas
Assertive	Talkative
Ambitious	Gentle
Opportunistic	Tactful

Impersonal	Empathetic & submissive
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The idea that gender determines leadership style is controversial. Several global studies have provided evidence that women tend to exhibit a more transformational leadership style than men (Gibson, 1995; Kouzes & Posner, 1990; Rafiah Salim, 2007; Rosenar, 1990). In contrast, other investigators have concluded that leadership style is independent of gender (Butterfield & Powell, 1981; Campbell, Bommer, & Yeo, 1993; Ronk, 1993). For example, Powell (1990) analyzed data from numerous research studies and found that male and female leaders exhibited similar task-oriented and people-oriented leadership behavior.

Barriers to the selection of women as superintendents and their overcoming the *glass ceiling* in education have been described in the literature. Kowalski and Strouder (1999) described eight career barriers in a study of female Indiana superintendents: lack of family support, gender discrimination, familial responsibilities, lack of self-confidence, racial/ethnic discrimination, and personal lack of tenacity. More recently, Derrington and Sharratt (2009) replicated their own study which was performed 15 yrs earlier. They found that perceived barriers were the same; however, the importance that the respondents placed on certain barriers had changed (Table 2).

Table 2. Top three barriers (unranked)

1993	2007
Sex role stereotyping	Barriers to securing the position often self-imposed
Sex discrimination	“Good, old boys” network helps men, not women
Lack of role models/mentors to guide women into the superintendency	School board no well-informed regarding the qualification of female candidates

The educational system in the United States has traditionally been dominated by women, who as teachers have undoubtedly exhibited a major impact on the lives of untold numbers of children. They have dominated the field as teachers — however, their representation as top level district administrators is not as equally noticed. Prior to the 1970s, the superintendency was thought of in characteristically male terms (Grogan, 2000). Wilson (1980) declared, “the most successful superintendent is male, Anglo-Saxon, middle-aged, Republican, intelligent, and a good student, but not *gifted*” (p.20). Twenty to 30 years ago, women were not even in low-level management positions; however, it has been estimated that women now fill many principalship positions and hold 71 percent of teaching jobs in the United States. This trend is extremely important because it may demonstrate that resistance to women in management positions may be lessening. Despite the tremendous success of females in traditional roles such as teachers and principals, there continues to be a tremendous gap in the percent of women rising to senior level educational executive positions, including superintendents of school systems (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009).

Sudlow was a pioneer for women in the education field and was the first female superintendent of a public school in the United States (Christian, 1989), while Ella Flagg Young became the first female superintendent of a large city school system in 1909 (Smith, 1994). Female superintendents were previously considered a rarity with only 1.6 percent of all superintendents in 1928 (Montenegro, 1993). Although the position of superintendent of schools has historically been dominated by male educators, and while the number of women in this role has increased significantly in recent years (Blount, 2000; Montenegro, 1993), in comparison to the general population and the percent of teachers and principals who are women, there may appear to be a disproportionate underrepresentation of women as superintendents. According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), for example, during the 2008-2009 school year, only 196 of the 1075 Texas public school superintendents were female, which represents only 18 percent of all superintendents in the state (TEA, 2010).

An issue that has been raised by researchers concerns the impact that low representation of women in the superintendency has had as a variable in modeling and serving as an example for female educators to join the rank of senior district administrator, i.e., superintendents. There is a clear need to increase the number of female school leaders in order for women to see that aspiring to such is indeed viable and to provide mentors to help sustain their success in the job (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009; Magdaleno, 2006). A study by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) reported that the number of minority superintendents increased from 3.38 percent in 1970 to 5.25 percent in 1990 (Blount, 2000). By 1993, the percent of women

holding superintendent positions rose to 7.1 percent. Women currently make up approximately 22 percent of superintendents, up from 12-16 percent in 2000 (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999) and 6.6 percent in 1992 (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). This low percentage translates into fewer female role models for aspiring superintendents. Lack of role models for women has been cited in the literature as part of the reason more women do not get into the superintendency (Brunner, 1998). Recent data from a 2008 national survey suggest that female superintendents represent 34 percent of the 66 largest urban school districts in the United States (Council of the Great City Schools [CGCS], 2008), an increase from 22 percent in 1997. Ninety-five percent of female or minority superintendents in the United States serve districts with more than 25,000 students (CGCS, 2008). The statistical trends predict that it will take until 2035 before there will be a 50-50 gender ratio in superintendents (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009). The literature suggests that while progress seems to be taking place with regard to increasing number of females assuming the superintendency, there is juxtaposed with this phenomenon another that concerns itself with Hispanic females, Latinas, and their presence and value they may well add to the superintendency.

Latinas and Educational Leadership

The Hispanic population in the United States is uniquely poised to play a more significant leadership role domestically and internationally.

(Ramirez, 2005-2006, p. 85)

Projections suggest that Hispanics will comprise 17.8 percent of the population in 2010 increasing to 17.8 and 24.4 percent in 2020 and 2050, respectively (Borges-

Méndez, 2006; U.S. Census Bureau). Although all regions in the United States have experienced increases, the majority of this growth has been in the western and southwestern states. Factors contributing to this increase are a higher birth rate for Hispanics versus non-Hispanics and high levels of immigration from Mexico and Latin America.¹ Despite the increasing numbers of Latinos who are employed in education, there is a paucity of Hispanic females in senior-level educational leadership roles. Estimates for Hispanic superintendents range between one to three percent in the United States (Couch, 2007; Tallerico, 2000). In one study, the percentage of Latina superintendents was reported to be relatively low and had decreased from four to two percent between 1997 and 2008 (CGCS, 2008). There have been no large-scale studies focused on Latina superintendents and the critical issues involved in their career development published in the literature. The research studies that have been published are small, based on relatively few numbers, and largely descriptive in nature (Manuel & Slate, 2003; Méndez-Morse, 2000; Ortiz, 2000, 2001; Quilantán & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004). This low number is consistent with other reports that Hispanic females comprise only 1.3 percent of all superintendents in metropolitan and rural areas (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Quilantán & Menchca-Ochou, 2004). Several single-state studies support this national trend. For example, Latinas comprise only one percent of superintendents in California as compared to Hispanic males who make up seven percent (Gonzales, 2007). Likewise, the state of Washington also has published data reporting a scarcity of Latina

¹ U.S. Census Bureau defines Hispanics or Latinos as those people who classified themselves in one of the specific Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino categories listed on the Census 2000 questionnaire – Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban or other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino.

superintendents (one out of 296) despite a large Latino population (Gonzales, 2007). According to the Texas Education Agency's PEIMS data, students of Latino descent represent 45 percent of student enrollment, but only seven percent of public school superintendents are of Latino descent, and only two percent of all Texas superintendents are women (TEA, 2010). The data suggests that Latina superintendents are underrepresented in today's educational system. Despite this awareness, there remains a huge disparity in the ratio of Latina superintendents to the proportion of Latino students, as well as in the ratio to the number of national superintendents. The data suggests that the gap will widen nationally, estimating that Latinos will continue to be the largest and fastest growing minority, increasing from 12 to 14 percent of the United States population in 2000-2004 to approximately 25 percent in 2050 (Borges-Méndez, 2006). The need for Latina superintendents across the country, coupled with the observation that a majority of superintendents are near retirement age, suggest that there is a substantial opportunity for growth in terms of educational executive positions among members of this ethnic minority (Gilmour & Kinsella, 2008).

No large-scale studies focusing on Latina superintendents and the critical issues involved in their career development have been published in the literature. The research studies that have been published are small, are based on relatively low numbers, and are largely descriptive in nature (Manuel & Slate, 2003; Méndez-Morse, 2000; Ortiz, 2000, 2001; Quilantán & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004). However, Latinas are well aware of certain challenges and issues that face them in the educational workplace, especially when seeking promotions to senior leadership positions such as superintendents. However, the

body of research literature that validates these barriers is relatively small and based on small sampling sizes. Although several underlying reasons have been suggested and discussed, relatively little has been done to address the heart of the problem. Previous studies have focused on traditional societal factors and their contributory role in reference to the low percentage of Latina superintendents in the United States educational system. These studies have been largely descriptive and have relied on collected information regarding internal factors, such as gender stereotyping, commitment to family responsibilities, and the common belief, which is prevalent even among women, that certain careers are more appropriate for men and others are more appropriate for women. However, literature surrounding the notion of Latinas as leaders in its general purview has been addressed. In succession, the literature promotes the need to nurture and sustain Latinas as leaders. The literature suggests that as the nation's demographics shift and Latinos comprise a growing percentage of the general population, so should Latinos in leadership positions, especially Latinas. Incumbent upon these suggestions is the notion that the cultural markers that define Latinas provide a rich opportunity to effectuate a quality of leadership being promoted in the current social, economic and political milieu (Hardy-Fanta, et al., 2007; Hite, 2007; Holvino & Gallegos, 2008; Kellerman & Rhoades, 2007; Munoz, 2010; Wilkerson, 2009).

Perceived barriers facing Latina superintendents include the following (Manuel & Slate, 2003): school boards not actively recruiting women; a lack of opportunity in reference to gaining key experiences prior to seeking positions as superintendents; a lack of professional networks; the perception of school board members that women are

unqualified to handle finances; the perception that women allow their emotions to influence administrative decisions; the idea that the nature of a superintendent's work makes the superintendency an unattractive career choice for women; the idea that the nature of a superintendent's work makes it an undesirable personal choice for women; the perception that women are not strong leaders; the mid-management career glass ceiling; and a lack of mentor/mentoring in school districts. In a study of twelve Hispanic female superintendents, Ortiz (2000) found that the top three major explanations leading to the disproportionate placement of Latinas in the selection process were pipeline tradition, sponsored mobility, and executive appointment by personal contact. Another study of ten Hispanic female superintendents indicated that they had to display professional competence, strong self-identity and coping skills, and the ability to overcome organizational stressors (Quilantán & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004). These authors concluded that "school boards and search committees are primarily responsible for the appointment" (p. 127) of superintendents. For example, Ortiz (2000) states:

...for Hispanic women, the succession process is controlled by those who wish to bring order to the district and/or those who view the issue of ethnic representation as a means to restore stability to the district. Hispanic women are hired when it is perceived that it is the Hispanic community that is the cause of unrest in the school districts. They are also hired after a long history of unrest in the school districts (p. 564).

These observations indicate that common barriers exist between Latina superintendents compared to women superintendents as a whole, and research shows that there are

effective ways to overcome the gender bias in the workplace: consistently exceeding performance expectations; successfully managing others; developing a leadership style with which managers are comfortable; being an expert in a specific content area; and seeking out difficult or highly visible assignments. Different strategies, such as improving office support, allowing specialization, and providing incentives have been proposed in the past to assist women in obtaining the superintendent positions (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). However, a more recent investigation (Méndez-Morse, 2004) has emphasized that the single most important way to support the development of Latina superintendents was in the development of mentors and mentoring relationships. However, the results indicate that in the absence of traditional Latino education mentors, the Latina educational leaders in the study developed mentoring relationships with individuals outside of their professions who met their developmental needs. Although traditional mentoring practices were not available to them, they used the people who were available to them, including their mothers, teachers from early childhood, professional service providers and college professors, as well as their former principals. However, it is clear and essential that the number of formal mentoring programs needs to be increased substantially in order to meet the growing demand for Latina superintendents in the future. The following solution is outlined by Méndez-Morse (2004):

Those individuals teaching in educational leadership programs could form partnerships with district administrators or school board members to have conversations about any persons of color and women of color who are exhibiting leadership skills at the campus or district level and to examine the institutions'

policies and practices that are facilitating or impeding the identified potential educational leaders' professional growth. Preparation programs could ensure that the contributions of minorities, females or males, to educational leadership theories or models are included in the curriculum.

Superintendents and School Board Relations

Leaders who manage conflict best are able to draw out all parties, understanding their differing perspectives, and then find a common ideal that everyone can endorse (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002, p. 256)

A school board's purpose is to lead a school district by modeling good governance by practicing ethical and moral decision-making. Relationships between superintendents and school boards are one of the most critical challenges to a superintendent's effective leadership (Grogan, 2000) and are essential to the overall success of school districts. Building and maintaining effective Board of Education relationships are considered by many to be a continuous process (Townsend et al., 2007). Despite learning many strategies and leadership skills, aspiring superintendents are relatively inexperienced and often have not yet learned how to work effectively with school boards. One of the major reasons that can influence turnover of superintendents is their relationship with the Board of Education (Kowalsky & Strouder, 1999; Townsend et al., 2007). For example, Czaja and Harmon (1997) reported that the turnover rate of Texas superintendents was greater than the national average (19 v.13.5 percent, respectively) and that this difference was often associated with poor working relationships with the district's board. Areas where conflict can arise between a newly

appointed superintendent and a board of education are: 1) the differences between governance and administrative functions are not well understood and written policies and protocols are ill-defined; 2) non-adherence to legal and ethical responsibilities regarding confidentiality; 3) micromanagement of daily operations of the schools are not adhered; and 4) failure of the superintendent to fully understand the background, interests, and politics of board members in order to implement strategies and incorporate them into an effective governance team (Townsend et al., 2007). Differences between transactional and transformational leaders can lead to conflict (McMeekin, 2007). In this particular case, the conflicting leadership styles of a transformational superintendent and transactional school board members led to the superintendent's dismissal even though the school district was well-performing. Grogan (2000) states:

...the heightened need for finely tuned human relations skills, ones that allow superintendents to understand the diverse and often divisive groups they serve. Increasingly, superintendents are being asked to meet personally with interest groups and stakeholders. They are expected to have in-depth knowledge of the groups and know what their issues are and who the major figures are. And as issues and personages change, superintendents must work to keep abreast of the situations. Superintendents must devote a great deal of time and energy to build coalitions among their constituents and forge ties between schools and local communities. (p. 118)

A recent survey (Ramirez, 2005-2006) of 3,302 Latinos by the National Community for Latino Leadership, Inc., found that the four Cs of Latino leadership were

character, competence, compassion, and community servanthood. Character and competence were found to be equally important between Latino and non-Latino Whites. However, Latinos emphasized compassion, caring, respect, and community servanthood to a greater degree than non-Latino Whites. Ramirez (2005-2006) states:

The communal, collectivist and people centered orientation of Latino leadership values, coupled with preferred leadership styles that are empathetic and compassionate, point to a new way of thinking about leadership that runs parallel to new paradigms of leadership that are currently being discussed in leadership circles. (p. 86)

Latina superintendents must necessarily build upon these unique leadership qualities to effectuate solid working relations with boards. Most boards still contain a majority of men, according to the last two 10-year studies by AASA (2002). Women superintendents perceive some restrictive forces working against them being hired by boards. Nearly 82 percent of the 297 women superintendents in the AASA study (2002) indicated school board members do not see them as strong managers and 76 percent felt school boards did not view them as capable of handling district finances. Interestingly, about 43 percent of the 1,965 male superintendents agreed that boards tend to view women as incapable of managing a school district. Female superintendents tend to build more interpersonal relationships by interacting with all stakeholders, especially members of the board of education (Gilmour & Kinsella, 2008). These relationships required constant attention, nurturing, and communication. Feingold (1994) illustrated in a meta-analysis that females scored higher than males on trust and nurturance. Furthermore,

females were shown to be slightly more extroverted than men. His conclusions from the study were that women were stronger in relationship-oriented supportive styles, while men scored higher on instructive and controlling styles. Fennel (2005) confirmed the relationship-oriented style of women leaders. Strauss states (2002), “The power of collaboration comes from inclusion, not exclusion...It’s so fundamental to collaboration that I’ve made it the basis of the first principle: involve the relevant stakeholders.” (p. 39)

Summary

In summary, the literature reveals that effective leadership in any organization is critical. Early examinations of different leadership theories and styles clearly differentiate between leaders and followers.

Recent results from analyses of national and Texas school districts suggest that Hispanic females can be successful at all levels of education, including in the role of superintendent of schools. In view of the growing Hispanic population across the country and in particular in the State of Texas, as well as the great disparity in terms of Latina superintendents, there is a clear need to understand the unique factors and underlying issues which complicate the transition of Latinas from their traditional role as teachers to that of superintendents. One particular area that is of great interest and needs further study is that of superintendent-board of education relations. This key interaction may be considered to be a potential *Achilles heel* for any superintendent; that inexplicable discomfort or pain that could potentially lead to downfall. This may be especially true for Latina superintendents as there are few, if any programs focused on mentoring this unique minority group. Clearly, there is a requisite need to identify mechanisms and

develop mentoring programs to place Hispanic females in leadership roles as superintendents of schools and to effectuate successful board of education relations.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to ascertain what skills, abilities, talents, and preparation have been essential for Latina superintendents to effectuate successful superintendent-board of education relations. This chapter describes the research design and methodology that was used in this study for data collection, analysis, and interpretation, as well as the selection of participants. Key elements of this chapter include: (1) the problem statement, (2) the research questions; (3) a description of the analytical paradigm, (4) sample, (5) setting, (6) data collection, (7) data analysis, and (8) timeline.

Problem Statement

There is a requisite need for a study focusing on learning and interactive experiences of Latina superintendents with school boards of education as they relate to developing more effective relationships. Relationships between superintendents and school boards are one of the most critical challenges to a superintendent's effective leadership (Grogan, 2000) and are essential to the overall success of school districts. Building and maintaining effective board of education relationships are considered by many to be a continuous process (Townsend et al., 2007). Despite learning many strategies and leadership skills, aspiring superintendents are relatively inexperienced and often have not yet learned how to work effectively with school boards.

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to evaluate learning experiences of Latina superintendents in order to more fully understand the perceived

barriers they face in dealing with school boards. The overarching questions that the research proposal addressed were:

1. What are the traits and attributes demonstrated and utilized by Latina superintendents in Texas?
2. What are the characteristics and experiences as perceived by district constituencies that represent productive and effective Board of Education member and superintendent relations?
3. What are the characteristics and experiences as perceived by district constituencies that represent productive and effective Board of Education and superintendent relations?

Analytical Paradigm

This study followed a qualitative research approach using an analytical paradigm based on grounded theory, which is an emergent methodology (Charmaz, 1983; Glaser, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Qualitative research is a generic term for investigative methodologies described as ethnographic, phenomenological, naturalistic, anthropological, field, or participant observer research. Qualitative research has been loosely defined as "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). The relative value of qualitative and quantitative inquiry has long been debated by investigators (Patton, 1990). The qualitative research approach derives data from observation, interviews, or verbal interactions and focuses on the meanings and interpretations of the participants (Holloway & Wheeler, 1995). The technique differs

from quantitative research in which selected, pre-defined variables are studied.

Qualitative research makes allowances for more creative and in-depth inquiry into many and varied social phenomenon (Mertens, 2005). Several investigators (Merriam, 1998; Mertens, 2005; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003) support the validity of this approach to research. Hoepfl (1997) has suggested that qualitative researchers seek illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations, unlike quantitative researchers who seek causal determination, prediction, and generalization of their findings.

This research was designed to understand the characteristics and experiences demonstrated by Latina superintendents in Texas to effectuate productive and effective superintendent-board of education relations; it did not test a specific hypothesis. The data was collected from each superintendent using semi-structured interviews, voice recordings of interviews, observations, and field notes derived from observational analysis. Data was then coded based upon concepts defined in the literature, sorted and processed, and then analyzed to identify major emergent themes. The superintendent questions utilized to guide the semi-structured interviews and observational protocol were designed to provide descriptive data and expand on information gathered during the interview. My analysis of the data was compared to the research questions, in order to explore similarities and differences occurring among Latina superintendents. The interview information, recordings, and field notes were examined methodologically for consistency and accuracy.

Qualitative methods were necessary for the purpose of this study because the data collected was phenomenological by nature and not subjective to statistical analysis.

Qualitative research tools were utilized to gather relevant data to gain in-depth knowledge and insight into each participant's life experiences, behaviors, motivations, etc. The study described in this research was ideally suited to be qualitative as it utilized in-depth interviews, detailed narrative analysis, and observational *shadowing* to depict a holistic portrayal of the individual's experiences. Thus, the study was subjective in nature and involved a small sample size.

Sample

The sample size for this study was three Latina public school superintendents in Texas. This was a *purposeful* sample, which was based on the assumption that the investigator wanted to discover, understand, and gain insight, and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998). Much like gathering a team of medical experts to review and analyze a particular medical issue, based on expertise, experience, and competence, a purposeful sample is identified with participants whose role in the phenomenon will offer their information-rich perspective.

The participants for this study were selected using the following general criteria:

1. Gender being female.
2. Ethnicity being self-identified as Hispanic or Latin American descent.
3. Employment as a superintendent in a Texas public school system (K-12) for at least two years.
4. Willingness to participate in this study.
5. Commitment to the timeline of this study.

Setting

The study was bounded by the context of Texas public school districts. The three superintendents who comprised the sample group represented school districts in the state.

Data Collection

The Latina superintendents in this study were interviewed during the summer and fall, 2010. Three study sites were selected from school districts across the state of Texas. The rationale for including Latina superintendents from disparate state regions was that personal experiences, institutional policies, and school board practices may vary across the state. Thus, it was extremely important to capture information from Latina superintendents in different regions of the state in order to limit bias which may have entered into the study.

The current list of Latina public school superintendents from Texas was obtained from the Texas Education Agency and state associations of school administrators. From the general list, those Latina superintendents selected for invitation to participate in this study were identified by networking with leading (active and retired) superintendents, educational peers, and community (business, parents) leaders with knowledge of Latina superintendents in their particular region. Examples of questions to be considered in the selection process included, but were not limited to: (1) highest degree achieved; (2) years in public education; (3) years served as superintendent of schools; and (4) reputation for having effective school board relations. Next, superintendents were rank ordered, and an invitational letter requesting their participation in the study was sent to each of the top six individuals. The letter contained the following information: (1) a brief description of the

research project; (2) the rationale for her selection in the study; (3) an explanation of data collection methodologies; and (5) a request to participate in a one day preceptorship.

After receiving their written acknowledgement, three final participants were selected at random to participate in the proposed research study. Next, the individual's respective institutional review board was contacted to determine whether informed consent needed to be obtained for each data collection activity.

Interviews

The first step was conducting live, person-to-person semi-structured interviews. Individual and in-depth interviewing were used to collect data from the three Latina superintendents on two separate occasions. Each participant was interviewed twice for approximately 90 minutes each at a location of their choice over a period of one month (two visits). These observations coincided with the interview site visits and added depth to the interview data. Individual interviews addressed their experiences and the meaning of those experiences regarding their interactions with Board of Education members. The interviews were conversational in nature, and included both close-ended and open-ended questions that focused on the participants' perspectives concerning their leadership roles and experiences with their respective board. The interview followed a phenomenological approach designed to ask questions related to understanding the participant's perspectives on leadership. These interviews were audio-recorded with the consent from each administrator to verify significant personal experiences and how they have affected the nature of the professional relationships of the individual with the school board. A verbatim transcript of each interview was prepared and used for analysis. This approach

allowed Latina superintendents to describe their own experiences in an open-ended and non-threatening manner.

Interview Questions

In order to gain insight into this topic, the following questions were asked:

1. How has gender impacted your consideration of educational administration, the possibility that you could be an educational leader?
2. How has ethnicity impacted your consideration of educational administration, the possibility that you could be an educational leader?
3. What sorts of obstacles or challenges, if any, have you had to consider in interacting with school board members?
4. Are there any preparatory actions that you feel were taken that were different from non-Latinas who have aspired to educational administration?
5. Do current mentoring programs provide aspiring, as well as sitting Latina superintendents with the skills and tools necessary to successfully interact with board members?
6. What characteristics do you believe you possess that board members individually and as a group would say serve you to effect productive and effective board-superintendent relations?

Observational Protocol

The final step in the data collection process was to observe directly these superintendents for a short period of time and collect data on their naturally occurring behaviors in their daily job routines. This last step was extremely important as it verified

the ability of the individuals to put into practice what they say with regard to interactions with their school boards of education. This process is often referred to in terms of *data triangulation*. The observations of the three Latina superintendents in this study were conducted on a schedule mutually agreed upon by the participants and the investigator. The investigator remained as unobtrusive as possible during the shadowing event and took detailed field notes, which described the context of the individuals' leadership behaviors in situations such as administrative team meetings, a school board meeting, or other job related activities presented during the observational period. Observation is the process of gathering open-ended, first-hand information by observing people and places at a research site (Creswell, 2003). In this study, the investigator was a non-participant observer. An observational protocol was developed by the investigator that allowed for recording notes without being involved in the participants' activities. Field notes were taken during the observational period. After each observation, the investigator summarized and reflected upon the field notes to find areas of relationship between the interview responses and the research questions.

Data Accuracy

All data were processed, analyzed, and interpreted to identify major emergent themes. The process of triangulation was used to corroborate evidence gathered from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection (Creswell, 2003). This process involved analyzing each data source, i.e., interviews, recordings, etc., to discover evidence supporting a recurring theme. This practice ensured that the data derived from

this study was accurate since the information draws from individuals, multiple sources of information, and data collection processes.

Data Analysis

This study utilized criteria for judging quality and critically analyzing qualitative research as suggested by Mertens (2005). The criteria were credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

In qualitative research the credibility test asks if there is a correspondence between the way the respondents actually perceive social constructs and the way that researcher portrays their viewpoints; a researcher should seek to use as many of these strategies as possible, because the goal is to provide evidence from a multiplicity of sources of the credibility of the research (p. 254). The credibility test in this study included prolonged and sustained engagement, peer-debriefing, persistent observation, member checks, and triangulation.

The *prolonged and sustained engagement* strategy was employed as each interview was scheduled for a minimum of two hours. The *persistent observation* strategy was executed through the follow up phone conversations and exchange of e-mail messages. These phone conversations and e-mail exchanges took place after the initial findings per interview were shared with the respective participant.

Peer debriefing took place at several points after the data had been collected, transcribed, and initial coding had taken place. The researcher consulted with university faculty members whose expertise was in the area of research design and study, during

which time a review of emergent themes and data coding took place to arrive at agreement on same. In addition, discussions with peers and colleagues transpired to allow the opportunity to verbally articulate thoughts and ideas regarding emerging themes. In essence, peer debriefing was an opportunity to *think out loud* and have someone not intimately familiar with the details of the interview transcripts respond to the researcher's thoughts and ideas, as per emerging themes and ideas. Anonymity as regards participants' identity per transcript, emerging themes and coding was maintained during all peer debriefing activities.

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The *member checks* strategy, "which is the most important criterion in establishing credibility" (p. 255) was utilized to verify with the participants the constructions that were developed from the data collected and analyzed. A draft of the respective research report was shared with each participant, and follow-up phone conversation took place to allow the participant to verify and clarify the researcher's perspectives, as well as those of the respective participants.

Commented [KRA4]: Grammar. Should have an "a" inserted.

Commented [KRA5]: Or an "s" here if not the above "a".

The *triangulation* of data involved "checking information that had been collected from different sources or methods for consistency of evidence across sources of data" (p. 255). This study made use of investigator/evaluator triangulation; whereby, two professionals possessing terminal degrees in the study's area of concern, a team of graduate students, along with the principal researcher analyzed the data, especially the interview transcripts.

Transferability

In qualitative research, the burden of transferability is on the reader to determine the degree of similarity between the study site and the receiving context. The researchers' responsibility is to provide sufficient detail to enable the reader to make such a judgment. Extensive and careful description of the time, place, context, and culture is known as "thick description" (p. 256).

This researcher kept in her possession the digital recorder containing the interview recordings. Thus, the researcher could easily listen to each interview in various settings, and develop an appreciation for the subtleties and nuances present by the respective participant's tone of voice and inflections. The verbatim transcripts from the respective audio recordings of each interview were typed onto letter size paper; in addition, copies of these transcripts were enlarged at 300 percent and these pages posted on the walls of the researcher's home office. The oversized copies of each transcript as posted on walls allowed the researcher to visually capture terms, patterns and themes that may not have been as easily captured on regular, letter size paper. Repeated listening to voice recordings of interviews and producing oversized copies of transcripts, provided this researcher additional opportunities to critically interpret the data at hand and produce a truly thick description of the phenomenon that was studied.

Dependability

Dependability is concerned with the protocol to be used in the study, which details each step in the research process. The structure and contents of this study, Chapter 3, Methodology, delineated the protocol of the research process for this study.

Dependability suggested a structure that can be replicated, to yield the same level of findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability means that the data and their interpretation are not figments of the researcher's imagination. Qualitative data can be tracked to its source, and the logic that was used to interpret the data should be made explicit (p. 257). This study assured confirmability by way of audio recordings of each interview, verbatim transcripts of the recordings, and the researcher's field notes. These mechanisms allowed the means for the data to be traced to its original source.

Timeline

The investigator established the following timeline to collect data, interpret and analyze the data, and prepare the final research report:

1. June 2010 – identified and selected participants for study;
2. June through December 2010 conducted two interviews of each participating superintendent;
3. December 2010 through February 2011 – conducted initial data interpretation and analysis;
4. March 2011 – prepared final manuscript of research report;
5. April 2011 – presented research report to doctoral treatise committee.

Limitations of Study

Although qualitative research produces in-depth data and comprehensive information in an effort to seek a wide understanding of the entire situation, the research

technique uses subjective information and participant observation to describe the context, or natural setting of the variables under consideration, as well as the interactions of the different variables. A limitation of this study was the relatively small pool of Latina superintendents in the state of Texas. Thus, the extremely small sample size resulted in an inability to generalize the findings of this study to other populations. Another limitation was that data could not be verified for validity, as the study was based upon the critical assumption that the responses of the participants were accurate and honest reflections.

Other factors identified that might have been limitations of the study included:

1. The inclusion of only Latinas in the study design;
2. The interpretation of questions/answers to provide credible data analysis;
3. The disposition of the superintendents answering the questions to provide credible and supporting evidence;
4. Limited geographical area in which the study was conducted.

Qualitative methodology may not establish the cause of certain events. In addition, it cannot be assumed that the phenomenological descriptions provided in this study were representative of the experiences of all Latina superintendents with school boards.

Summary

This chapter focuses on defining the research problem and methodologies that were used in analyzing case studies of three Latino public school superintendents across the state of Texas to address the fundamental research questions:

- 1) What are the traits and attributes demonstrated and utilized by Latina superintendents in Texas?

- 2) What are the characteristics and experiences as perceived by district constituencies that represent productive and effective Board of Education member and superintendent relations? and
- 3) What are the characteristics and experiences as perceived by district constituencies that represent productive and effective Board of Education and superintendent relations?

This section provides a description of the overall research strategy, including sample size, data collection and analysis, and study limitations. It further described the sample selection process, description of participants in the study, methods for data collecting to include conducting interviews, observations, and shadowing superintendents.

Recent results from analyses of national and Texas school districts suggest that Hispanic females can be successful at all levels of education, including in the role of superintendents of schools. One particular area that is of great interest and may be considered to be a potential *Achilles heel*, that source of inexplicable pain or discomfort, which may lead to downfall for any superintendent, is that of superintendent-board of education relations. This may be especially true for Latina superintendents as there are few, if any programs focused on mentoring in this unique minority group. Clearly, there is a requisite need to identify mechanisms and develop mentoring programs to place Hispanic females in leadership roles as superintendents of schools and to effectuate successful board of education relations.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Demographic Summary

The sample participants were selected based on criteria as presented in Chapter 3, the Methodology chapter. They were selected from a very limited pool of 17 Latina public school superintendents in Texas. Six potential participants were initially identified, out of which three were initially chosen, based on cursory knowledge of and acquaintance with these individuals; however, after contact with these superintendents, one was unable to commit to the time constraints of this study. The superintendent selected to replace this first-round finalist participant met the same criteria as the others and agreed to participate. Ultimately, two participants were superintendents in small rural communities, and the third participant was a superintendent of a mid-size school district, one of several in a large metropolitan area. The participants represented 16 years of combined superintendency experience, in a total of four different school districts. Following is the background narrative for each participant, with a pseudonym assigned to each. The narratives were prepared by the author, based on a review of the interview transcripts and interview voice recordings. They are not a verbatim recollection; rather, they are meant to be biographical in nature, to provide the reader a background from which to better understand and situate the three participants.

Superintendent Gloria Hernandez-Gomez

Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez was born in a mid-sized Texas border city. Shortly after her birth, her parents moved the family to the Mexican city immediately across the Mexico-United States border. This move was precipitated by the fact that both

maternal and fraternal grandmothers were aging. Hernandez-Gomez recounted that such a move comes from parent values where you have to take care of your elders. At the same time that Hernandez-Gomez was completing the 6th Grade in Mexico, the last surviving grandmother died and the family returned to Texas.

Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez was a stellar student, all along receiving academic accolades and successfully completing the 6th Grade in Mexico; however, upon enrollment into the Texas public school system, the system decided that she possessed limited English proficiency, and she was retained in Sixth Grade and placed in the Special Education class. At the end of that academic year, still having not mastered the English language to bureaucratic standards, she was retained in Sixth Grade once more. This would be her third time in Sixth Grade. She was placed with a teacher, a male, who she stated taught with tough love. During this year her academic abilities were recognized, despite her limited English proficiency, and she was timely provided individualized accelerated instruction. Through these efforts her Special Education designation was rescinded and she progressed through the mainstream program. The subsequent years actually revealed Hernandez-Gomez to be a high performing student, and upon completing the high school course of studies, including matriculation in advanced classes, she was ranked third in her graduating class.

Hernandez-Gomez did not necessarily appreciate being removed from the Special Education class; it was there that she found her friends and was comfortable. Her transition to the mainstream program was quite a challenge, and it was during this period that she began to contemplate dropping out of school. She said, *I was so happy*. It was

through her father's intervention that she came to realize that dropping out of school was not an option. Even while her family had lived primarily in Mexico, her father worked as a migrant farm worker in the United States. When the entire family was reunited and lived in Texas, other members of the family joined Hernandez-Gomez's father to work in the fields. She did not work in the field, since she had been considered by her parents to be a sickly child and her father *babied* her. On one occasion, when Hernandez-Gomez was sharing her frustrations and contemplating dropping out of school, her father took her to visit one of his work sites, and impressed upon her that if she were to drop out of school her life too would be that of a migrant farm worker. Without question, he impressed upon her the value of education. Hernandez-Gomez offered that this as one example of how influential her father was in and on her life.

Due to limited family financial resources, Hernandez-Gomez worked during her senior year in high school in order to have the extra monies necessary to participate in the numerous senior class activities, such as Prom. Having taken courses in office procedures, she was able to find work in the school district's finance office. This was an important step for her, as it offered her experience and opportunity to sharpen her financial skills, and these served her well later in her career as an administrator. During this same time, Hernandez-Gomez discovered numerous college migrant programs that provided grants and scholarships for students from migrant worker backgrounds. The Ohio State University had one such program, and because of her outstanding academic performance, she was offered a full scholarship; however, her father would not allow her to accept the offer. In response, Hernandez-Gomez did not enroll in college, but went to

work full-time and became engaged to be married. Her fiancé was her high school sweetheart. Her father did not want her to get married and on her wedding day took her aside and told her she should not get married, accept the offer from The Ohio State University and go to college. She explained to her dad that unfortunately that was a missed opportunity and she was wed.

During Hernandez-Gomez early married years, one of her sisters lived with her and her husband. The sister was in college, and very often Hernandez-Gomez would help her sister with her studies. On one occasion, Hernandez-Gomez's husband suggested that she should enroll in college to attend the same classes as her sister. By doing so, she would hear firsthand what the instructors were saying and teaching, which in turn would make it much easier to assist her sister. Hernandez-Gomez did so, and thus began her college education. However, she continued to work and enrolled only as a part-time student. Seven years would pass before Hernandez-Gomez would complete her baccalaureate studies. While enrolled in college, she worked in the local school district's business office. Her aspiration was to complete her degree in business administration (accounting) and avail herself of job promotions within the district's business office. No doubt, her work ethic and productivity noted her as a valued employee. While completing her degree, she was approached by a member of the district's bilingual education department. A district administrator suggested to Hernandez-Gomez that due to her bilingual ability, she should consider becoming a bilingual dyslexia specialist teacher, for which there was a great need. She was introduced to the district's alternative certification

program, and availed herself to earn her teaching and specialist certifications and to transition from the district's business office to the classroom.

Hernandez-Gomez's undergraduate studies might not have occurred. Her father's initial denial to allow her to attend The Ohio State University, her being married and the need to contribute to family finances derailed any college plans. Her husband intervened, and according to Hernandez-Gomez, that provided the impetus for her to consider pursuing a college education. Her husband's prompting and "giving permission" as she said, was indicative of the supportive and cooperative relationship they shared.

Throughout their marriage Hernandez-Gomez' husband was supportive, as she pursued her baccalaureate and advanced degrees, accepted professional positions, and raised their three children. For example, she pursued her doctoral studies at the University of Texas at Austin, her husband's work schedule was arranged so that he drove with her each week from their border community home to Austin, and while she attended classes, he cared for their only child at the time. Along the way, as her jobs required relocation, her husband followed along. They shared a romance and love born in high school. The occasion of their first date is special memory, and is celebrated each year.

When Hernandez-Gomez began her teaching career as a bilingual dyslexia specialist, she was the only one in the field. There were academics at the local university who had formulated theoretical constructs in this specialized field; however, these ideas had not been implemented by a practitioner. Hernandez-Gomez forged a professional relationship with the two professors whose work addressed bilingual dyslexia, and she became the practitioner to implement and demonstrate their ideas, activities, etc. The

number of students under her tutelage who successfully completed and passed the state's mandated high stakes test and who were mainstreamed out of special education increased as a measure of her success. After two and a half years as a teacher, she was promoted to the position of bilingual facilitator. Along with this promotion came criticism from peers, suspicious and concerned that she was being placed in an administrative position without holding mid-management certification. She was encouraged to pursue graduate studies in curriculum and instruction, continuing to be a pioneer in this specialization. Even after earning certification and her Master's degree, school administrators were reluctant to heed her advice or direction. They challenged the idea that someone from the proverbial ivory tower of central administration could offer advice and direction if that person had never been a principal.

Hernandez-Gomez did not hesitate to take on the challenge and requested placement as an administrator at the campus with the highest need in the district. She was courted by such a campus's principal to become their Assistant Principal, with all its pertinent duties, along with serving as the unofficial campus instructional facilitator. Her professional duties and challenges were many, but this did not deter her momentum towards leading academic achievement for all students. Her success did not go without notice. During this period, she received an unsolicited call from the Cooperative Superintendency Program at the University of Texas at Austin, informing her that the program had received not the usual one, but two letters of recommendation on her behalf. She was strongly encouraged to apply for admission into this highly competitive doctoral program. After much soul searching and repeated contact from the cooperative

superintendency program director, Hernandez-Gomez successfully applied and began her matriculation in the doctoral program. While this presented a wonderful opportunity for her, it also presented rather significant logistical challenges.

The classes for this program were scheduled for each Monday of the academic year, with the first beginning at 9:00 a.m. and the last ending at 10:00 p.m. The drive to and from home and the University of Texas at Austin campus was a six-hour drive, each way. Each week, with toddler in tow, she and her husband would leave home very early to arrive at Austin, in time for her classes. During the day her husband would babysit their child until classes ended for the day, and they made the long trek back home. The trip was arduous and the commitment great, and were it not for the support of her husband, she was not sure how she would have been able to complete her course of studies during the first summer of the program. With the start of the first fall semester of courses, the program secured employment for Hernandez-Gomez, and her husband found work in the Austin area. The secured employment would end after the first year, and she needed to find work during her second year of studies. This did not pose a challenge, since she was sought out by the superintendent of a San Antonio area school district to join his team. Knowing of her quality work and experience in a school district's finance office, she was courted to become the district's area administrator for business and finance. She served in this position up to the very hour of her second child's birth, signing district documents up to the moment she was being taken into the delivery room.

Subsequent to her second child's birth, Hernandez-Gomez and her husband moved back to their border community. Her parents were aging and she wanted to be

closer to them. Upon learning of her intentions, the superintendent of a local school district seized the opportunity to court her and offer her a position as bilingual teacher and later Deputy Superintendent. This desire to move, once again, and the impending job offer did not come without challenges to her marriage. For the first time, her husband was concerned that he had always been the one to move, and now while he was enjoying his work he was once again being asked to move with his wife. He challenged Hernandez-Gomez; however, this challenge to their marriage yielded an even stronger partnership between them. The move occurred, and they both secured employment in the same district.

During these years of professional progression, Hernandez-Gomez had completed her doctoral course of studies, but had not produced her dissertation to earn her doctoral degree. It would be over the course of nine years that she completed course work and earned her doctoral degree. She completed her dissertation and successfully defended her work while teaching struggling bilingual students. In one sense, she served as model for them to remain steadfast in their efforts. They had to study and successfully pass the state mandated test, and she had to complete and defend her dissertation. Subsequently, she gave birth to a third child and was also promoted to be the district's Deputy Superintendent. In short order, the superintendent announced his retirement for the end of the given school year. The district's Board of Trustees considered how they might conduct a superintendent search, ultimately agreeing that a search might not be necessary, since they agreed they had a well-qualified in-house candidate in the name of Hernandez-Gomez. She applied and was hired as the district's superintendent. She is currently in her

fourth year as superintendent; although, she was never a principal, never sought a job, except for her very first, since she was always courted to fill a position. She believes her greatest responsibility is to be an advocate for kids.

Superintendent Mary Ann Rodriguez

Superintendent Rodriguez is currently in her third year as superintendent of a school district of approximately 12,000 students, located in a major south central Texas city. The district is one of seventeen school districts located within the metropolitan area. Its student demographics reflect some of the lowest socio-economic status in the state. She has announced her resignation effective with the end of her current contract, which ends approximately thirty days from the end of the current academic year. When she departs the district, she will have completed 18 years of service in the district in various capacities, ending with the superintendency.

Rodriguez was born and raised in the same city where she now works. She was the second eldest of eight children. Her father completed high school; however, her mother did not matriculate beyond Ninth Grade. This did not deter from her parents' belief in and support of education. From her earliest childhood, Rodriguez recalled that her parents always bought books for them to read to the children, or for her and her siblings to read on their own. The daily newspaper and current issues of numerous popular magazines were always present in their home. Her parents were quite literate and aware of current events and knowledgeable about many topics as a result of their reading. As an example of how much value was placed on education, when the oldest child was ready to enter middle school, the family moved to a neighborhood that was zoned to a

school with a strong academic reputation. This also poised the children to attend one of the largest high schools in the city. The children were raised to believe that there was nothing they could not do, and thought was never given to any of them not going to college. Rodriguez elder sister, the oldest sibling, was quite bright and talented. Her success set the standard for Rodriguez and the other siblings. In virtually every case, Rodriguez lived in the shadow of her older sister. With high school graduation approaching, Rodriguez applied to, was accepted and offered a full scholarship to Stanford University. However, her father suggested that due to the ancillary expenses that the family could not afford, she not attend Stanford. Her father counseled her to seek enrollment into one of the four colleges in the local area. Her sister was already enrolled in one outstanding university; however, Rodriguez, seeking to chart her own course and not be in her sister's shadow, applied to and subsequently enrolled in another local university. Following her father's counsel, she also boarded at the university, even though it was minutes away from their home. Her father suggested that living on campus would be a good experience, as well as allow more space at home for her younger siblings who were growing. Rodriguez' attendance at the university proved to be a good experience for her. During this time she became involved with on campus activities, which allowed her to develop her leadership skills. She also earned her Bachelor's degree in early childhood education in only three and a half years.

Upon graduation from college, Rodriguez shared an apartment with her sister and began teaching. She would teach for four years and pursue graduate studies at the same time. During this time she also came to realize that while she enjoyed teaching, she

wanted more. She was introduced to a local agency whose work involved providing parent education classes to residents of a local government housing project and went to work for them. She was married during this period and her husband, upon completion of Law school, was offered a job out of the area. They relocated, and as it happened the agency for which Rodriguez was currently working had a contract to provide services in her town of residence; thus, she continued working with them. Within a year Rodriguez and her husband would return to their hometown, and she would continue to work for this community agency for a total of 13 years.

At the age of 39 years, Rodriguez found herself divorced and the custodial parent of her two children. While she had very much enjoyed her work with the community agency, considered it an amazing think tank and her great fortune to be surrounded by forward thinking people, she nonetheless had to consider her future. She was encouraged to earn her doctorate, and applied to and was accepted into a curriculum and instruction doctoral program at the University of Texas at Austin. She was progressing nicely when one of her professors suggested she consider the university's cooperative superintendency program, which was known for preparing top quality leaders. She expressed that she had no aspiration to be a superintendent, but was counseled by that same professor that the essence of good leadership was the same despite a program emphasis, and she should pursue admission to the program. Rodriguez did pursue, was admitted, and transferred into the Cooperative Superintendency Program. When doing this, she also concluded that she would seek whatever available certification she could *just in case*.

When Rodriguez decided to pursue doctoral studies, because of the demands of the program's course of studies, she prepared to move to Austin. In discussion with her two children, they were very excited for and supportive of her, but informed her that they were not going to move with her. Instead, they would remain in town and live with their father. Rodriguez was stunned. She continued to prepare to move, but reconsidered what she would do with the family homestead, at first thinking she would lease it for the duration of her stay in Austin. However, after further consideration, she realized that the homestead was an important variable in providing a familiar place for her and her children when she would return for weekends or holidays from Austin. Thus, she withdrew sufficient monies from her annuity to pay the mortgage on that house for one year, and she rented an apartment in Austin.

Upon completion of her doctoral course work, she returned to her hometown. She went to work with the school district of which she is currently the superintendent. Her first position with the district was as administrator of its early childhood campus. She accepted the position in order to establish herself in the district, with the aspiration of one day becoming the district's Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. That was as high a position as she considered. Her tenure as early childhood campus administrator was brief, being promoted to become the district's Human Resources director. Rodriguez credits this position as providing her some of the most valuable knowledge, skills and experiences for use as a superintendent. When Rodriguez began to work in the district, she had completed all but her dissertation to earn her doctorate. The dissertation would be completed over a period of ten years from the time she completed

her doctoral program, with the trauma of her mother's death during this time making it all the more difficult to complete her dissertation. The year she would finally be awarded her doctorate, her oldest child was earning his bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at Austin, and her youngest was graduating from high school. It was an exciting time for her family.

Subsequently, Rodriguez did become the district's Deputy Superintendent, primarily its chief academic officer. She was very much enjoying her work when the then superintendent announced his retirement effective the end of the current school year. She was approached by several board members at the time and encouraged to apply for the position. She was unanimously selected to be the next superintendent.

Prior to assuming the superintendency, Rodriguez was never a principal. She had spent 13 years of her career outside of a school district. Except for one year, besides her graduate studies, she has worked in her hometown. The past 18 years she has worked in only one district, the district whence she will soon be retired as superintendent.

Superintendent Louise Vasquez

Superintendent Vasquez is in the midst of serving in her second superintendency. Her combined years as superintendent number seven, with this being the fifth year where she currently serves. The district has an enrollment of approximately 1,100 students, 98% of whom are Hispanic. The district is located in a small rural community halfway between the Mexican border and San Antonio, Texas.

Vasquez was born and raised in a small community with a population of approximately 300 located in west Texas, where her family was involved in ranching and

farming. Her father was Texas born and her mother was born in Mexico. She attended the local public schools; however, local for the community included a 16-mile bus ride each way between home and high school. Her family was involved in the local Catholic community, which included her own participation in the church youth group. When Vasquez was 15 her father suddenly died, and as the oldest child, she was challenged to share the burden with her mother to continue to family's farming and ranching operations. Her father's death would have a profound influence on Vasquez; however, his impact on her while he was alive left innumerable, indelible positive marks. She was given the confidence to operate farm and ranch equipment, which served to give her a confidence to believe there were no limits to what she could do. She could aspire to do whatever she put her mind to do, regardless of her gender. Upon graduation from high school, she attended a nearby university, and because of her love of writing, she majored in broadcast journalism. However, while in college she was married and her focus shifted. She transferred colleges and ultimately earned a bachelor's degree in English and pursued a teaching career.

She was raised to value service and give back to one's community, to make a difference in one's community. This value of giving back, coupled with her personal academic experience greatly influenced her conscious decision to return to her home community and teach at her alma mater. She had received excellent grades in school and felt she was a good student; however, in college she struggled. She could not understand how this could be. She realized that her peers were better prepared. She vowed to return to her home community, to be a teacher, and to do all she could to ensure this would not

happen to another student from her home community. All indications were that there was a position available aligned with her qualifications; however, final approval to hire rested with the school district's Board of Trustees, which seemed reluctant to hire Vasquez. Being both anxious and tenacious, as well as filled with youthful zeal, Vasquez took it upon herself to visit with each board member and learn their reasons for hesitating to hire her, or reasons why she did not meet their hiring criteria. The principal of her alma mater who had recommended her for the job had, in fact, resigned since the board was not approving the recommendations. In addition, she had received a firm offer from a neighboring district, where getting a job was always difficult. She wanted to get at the heart of the issue, one way or another. In her presence the board voted unanimously to hire her and she became one of the high school's English teachers.

Vasquez learned that "pretty much when I got into teaching, it was pretty clear to me that if I wanted something and I believed in it for kids, I had to advocate for it. If it was through my principal or superintendent. If not, I'd go straight to the board and ask to be on the agenda." The challenge was now to prove herself, and in so doing developed her passion for education. Within two years she was named English department head, the University Interscholastic League coordinator, junior class sponsor and student council sponsor. Despite the naysayers, the groups which she sponsored became involved in state level competitions and became recognized in their respective sweepstakes. In her own words, "anytime I've been challenged with 'it can't be done,' well just watch – just watch."

During her teaching tenure, there was high principal turnover. The campus had five principals in three years. She was convinced that it was incumbent upon the teachers to provide the necessary consistency for the students. Thus, she accepted any charge from her administrators, and completed each task with distinction. This was noticed by her most recent principal, who proposed she return to school and pursue a Master's degree. In the midst of her very hectic work life she enrolled in a weekend Master's program. As she was completing her degree, she was approached by her principal to become curriculum facilitator, which she did. Within a few months, however, the principal left and Vasquez was appointed as interim principal. This occurred during her fourth year of teaching. She was asked to permanently assume the principalship, but having a small child at home she refused; however, she moved to the elementary campus to become its Assistant Principal. The superintendent had also asked her to become the district's bilingual coordinator, but she resisted, since she wanted to stay on the campus in hopes of becoming its principal. She remained on the elementary campus, and in addition she assumed the bilingual coordinator responsibilities.

At this same time, she was approached by one of her professors from the Master's program, who asked her to consider completing the necessary classes to earn her superintendent's certification. She had no aspiration to become a superintendent, but was counseled that holding another certification would not impede, but only help her career. One of her classes was an internship. The internship would be completed under the direction of her district's new superintendent, who coincidentally was a woman. She worked closely with the superintendent, which often times included working on Saturday

and Sunday. As the final project of the internship, she was handed a brochure presenting the search for a new superintendent in a neighboring district, and told to prepare her resume as if she were applying for the position. She completed the project and submitted it to her superintendent, specifically asking that with that project she had completed the internship and earned an “A.” Her superintendent agreed.

Vasquez received a phone call from a search consultant, explaining that he had received and reviewed her application for the superintendency. He had included it among those being presented to the board for their consideration, and they now wanted to interview her. Vasquez was stunned, questioning how and from where he had gotten her application. He revealed that her superintendent had forwarded her resume to him. In turn, she called her superintendent who encouraged her to accept the invitation to interview before the board, explaining that it would be good experience for her. She advised Vasquez to just be herself. The district and the interview were a two hour drive away from her home, and were scheduled for one evening 8:00-10:00 p.m. She would be the last of those to be interviewed. While it would be customary for the spouse to accompany the applicant, Vasquez decided to forego this, thinking that the interview was simply academic. The interview began as scheduled; however, the interview continued two hours longer than scheduled, ending at midnight. During the two-hour drive home, Vasquez contemplated that whoever would be hired for that superintendency would be lucky, being impressed with the dynamics among the board members that she witnessed. The following day she received a phone call from the search consultant, informing her that she was the first and only choice for the position. Upon hearing the news Vasquez’s

superintendent shared that she had never heard of anyone who had every applied for their first superintendency and actually got called for an interview, let alone being offered the job. She was 32 years old.

Vasquez visited with her husband about the superintendency prospect. As he had been for each of her career and education choices, he was very supportive. Upon accepting and beginning her tenure as superintendent the family relocated. Unlike previous superintendents who had rented one certain house in the community as the superintendent's residence, Vasquez and her husband chose to act differently. They purchased an older Victorian home in the area that was in need of repair. Once again, Vasquez unobtrusively set a new standard for how she conducted business. During this same period, Vasquez was recommended for admission in the Cooperative Superintendency Program at the University of Texas at Austin. She was accepted and when she began her doctoral studies, she would travel each week along with her husband. While she attended classes her husband would care for their two children. At every turn, he was unceasingly supportive of her.

When Vasquez accepted her first superintendency, she had just been named as the next principal of the school where she was serving as Assistant Principal. The board president, upon learning of her plans to move away, attempted to convince her to stay, and talked to her husband with hopes that he would intervene in her decision. Vasquez reminded the board president that as principal she would be making less than her predecessor, which she found to be unfair as a woman and as Hispanic. She would not concede to what she believed to be an unfair situation.

Her tenure in that first superintendency was marked by numerous achievements. During her second year, a dear friend informed her of a superintendent vacancy in another district and based on what this friend had learned, the district seeking a superintendent seemed a place where Vasquez' skills and talents could be put to good use. Coincidentally, at the same time Vasquez had been invited to assume a key central administration position in the state's second largest school district. She decided to apply for the superintendency at the same time considering the large school district opportunity. Both opportunities became available to Vasquez, but after consultation with her husband and children, she and family agreed that the superintendency in the smaller district would fit their family needs better. She continues to serve in this district, and at the end of each of her annual board appraisals her contract has been extended to the fullest term allowed by law, a witness to her success as perceived by her district's Board of Trustees. Vasquez is completing her seventh year as a superintendent, having never served as a principal.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

I started reading a lot of leadership journals and I started seeing the barriers that women had to face. I thought pretty much it was a good ol' boy system. They [board] chose the superintendent, so how would they ever choose a female superintendent, much less a Hispanic female superintendent.

Louise Vasquez, research participant

The purpose and design of this research seeks to understand how the experience of three Latinas informs and is manifested in their professional lives as public school superintendents in Texas. Particularly, this research seeks to understand how these Latina superintendents develop and maintain professional relationships with their respective Board of Trustees members. Through the use of semi-structured interviews with each participant, observations and board members' survey results information was gathered, which served as the basis for the research findings and analysis. While all information was considered valuable to the research, the semi-structured interviews, the respective voice recordings and verbatim transcripts of same, were used as the primary tool in the analysis phase of this study.

This chapter is structured to respond to each of the study's two research questions, one major section per question. The responses to each research question take form by way of the major themes that were identified through the data analysis. Within each major thematic category are variations related to the theme. In each unit of analysis, the theme and pertinent literature are juxtaposed to most fully inform an understanding of the phenomenon at hand.

The research questions this study has sought to answer include:

1. What are the traits and attributes demonstrated and utilized by Latina superintendents in Texas?
2. What are the characteristics and experiences as perceived by district constituencies that represent productive and effective Board of Education member and superintendent relations?
3. What are the characteristics and experience as perceived by district constituencies that represent productive and effective Board of Education and superintendent relations?

In order to best respond to these research questions, data for the research was compiled from four sources: semi-structured interviews, direct observations, review of documents, and a board member survey. There were two semi-structured interviews with each participant; direct observations of a board of trustees meeting for each district; review of newsletters, board communiqués and assorted superintendent-board correspondence for each district; and a board member survey was completed by two members from each district. Data analysis was applied through Strauss and Corbin's three stages of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Triangulation of all three data sources informed the findings (Mertens, 2005).

There were five major themes identified in the analysis of the data, and these are addressed in turn under the research question whence they were identified. The five major themes that were identified are:

1. Seeds of leadership;
2. Empowerment by example and suggestion;
3. The Latina perspective;
4. Nurturing relationships one-by-one;
5. Nurturing relationships collectively.

Question 1: What are the traits and attributes demonstrated and utilized by Latina superintendents in Texas?

Seeds of Leadership

The personal experiences of leaders offer valuable insights on the sustained impact family and childhood experiences have had on their lives. Incremental changes, day-to-day events, specific events or crises are predictors for leadership development. It has been suggested that parents are the most important part of a child's environment and can determine, to a large extent how the child turns out (Harris, 1998). Those raised in joint/large families learn to absorb diverse experiences, became more adaptable, and understand the richness of relationships. And, some were raised to have a short-term perspective with a dictum of "whatever you do, do it well, and I am with you." The socialization process was characterized by a blend of nurturance and discipline. The sense of worth and intrinsic confidence developed during the formative years possibly created the foundation for the drive to achieve and excel which became evident in the early years of their professional pursuits (Sahgal and Pathak, 2007; Robbins, 1996; Coopersmith, 1981). The values and convictions that have steered leaders through their life journey include respect for people (regardless of class, money, or status),

adaptability, contentment, sacrificing to achieve, and a strong sense of duty, hard work, education, compassion, and integrity (Sahgal and Pathak, 2007). The personal experiences of the participants in this study resonate with the literature. The seeds of their leadership were planted amidst their life experiences in their families and throughout their childhood.

Setting the standard

When telling her story, Superintendent Vasquez shared,

I was very lucky that I had my extended relatives, one being my grandmother and my great aunt, living close to me. My grandmother was a big influence in my life and you know, definitely a very good storyteller. She would just fill my mind with ideas and stories so, you know, I just loved being around her because she would tell me all kinds of stories and she would invent things. The key thing was to always teach me a lesson. There was a moral to every story she told me. I learned about values and character and all that through them. And, doing what is right, and fighting for what is right. Doing things the right way the first time around instead of trying to get away with as little as possible. I think the work ethic I got from them, from my community, from my extended family and of course, my grandmother and parents. It was always about wanting to get back and make a difference in your community.

Vasquez, further in her story, recounted her self-confidence and how it was instilled by her father.

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I think it was, a lot of it was my dad, I think. He knew, he said “you are very smart. You can do whatever you want to and be whatever you want to be.” Never made me feel like I could only be so much. The sky was the limit...That’s right. Since we were little, we were out shooting because he never had a boy to take hunting, so he would take us hunting. We would go trapping. I learned to trap, you know, he had us driving tractors when some of his men didn’t show up and he needed extra hands to run the tractor so they could load up the bales...He would pretty much let us do whatever. We never knew there was a limit between what a girl could do or couldn’t do.

As an example of her values coming from her family, Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez, while telling her story and recounting her family’s move to Mexico to care for her aging grandparents offered, “you know, it comes from parent values where you have to take care of your elders.” As she was recounting her father’s influence on her life, she recalled a time when she was contemplating dropping out of school. She offered,

My father made it very clear. He did not want me to drop out. He took me to the field and said if I dropped out, I would have to work in the fields. He also gave me direction; he said if I dropped out, this was going to be my life. Even though he pampered me, I had an easy life as a migrant. I was the skinniest of all my sisters and siblings. I was sick with anemia so he kind of babied me. That year that I was supposed to drop out, he made it tough. He said this is what it is going to be like. “I’m pampering you because you are my special child, you’re sick, but whether you are sick or not, you are going to work in the fields. Your siblings are

going to go to school and you are going to come earlier with me and you will be away from your mom.” So that kind of woke me up...Daddy and I had a very close relationship. He kind of spoiled me. That was the reality. I forgot about dropping out, because I knew what was expected of me.

Superintendent Rodriguez discussed what she considered the most significant part of her childhood, as she was telling of her parents influence on her.

The first four are girls, then three boys, and a girl at the end. I tell you that because probably the most significant part of my childhood is that my parents always believed in education, in a good education. There were always lots to read at home. My father graduated high school, had one year of college, but never graduated from college. My mother went, probably through 9th or 10th grade, but both were significantly very literate. My mother has since passed away, but education was always a very strong focus for my parents, where we were always raised to believe that we could be whatever we wanted to be. I think that is the most significant part of my childhood. I would tell people sometimes that my father raised my sister and me like sons, since we were the oldest. There wasn't any reason that we couldn't do whatever we wanted to do. There was always a strong focus on education...my parents believed so much in education that when she [oldest sibling] finished elementary school (in those days you went up to the 6th grade) my parents sold the house and moved so we could go to another middle school and another junior high that were more, in those days, college prep schools...my parents moved so we could be in the high schools they thought were

the better high schools. There was always that focus on education. There was never a thought in my mind that we wouldn't be going to college. We never thought about that.

Life altering experiences

As each participant was telling their story, each shared at least one experience, which they considered traumatic or life altering. The experiences left indelible marks on their respective lives that would establish a fundamental attitude about how they would henceforth act. The experiences demonstrate how trauma can be opportunities for growth.

Superintendent Vasquez' father experienced an accident and suddenly died. She was 15 years old at the time. Her father's death would dramatically alter her home life, especially her role in the family. While this experience was traumatic, the lessons learned from her father along the way, subsequently served her well to manage the situation.

My father, however, had an accident and passed away when I was 15. That was a big trauma, because, you know, I was daddy's girl and didn't want to disappoint him. Everything that I ever did was to make him proud and to make sure that he – I'm going to do the best I can and I'm going to do it for my dad. So, yeah, when he passed away when I was 15, it made me realize that I could not depend on anybody else, but to really make it through...when he passed away, I was the oldest. I'm the oldest; running the ranch, making sure the cattle were rounded, fell on my responsibility at 15 years old. So that is when I realized, oh my God. I felt for my mom because she didn't really know how to run the ranch or the farm and people were taking advantage of her, because it was just us girls, you know. That

is when I realized that this is never going to happen to me. I had to make sure that I went to school, for him to, to make him proud wherever. If he was in heaven, I'd make sure he was looking at me and being proud of me.

Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez had two experiences of which she spoke, that were traumatic and changed her forever. The first experience occurred when she was a student in elementary school.

I went to school all the way through 6th Grade [Mexico], you have an elementary graduation, it is a big graduation...I won a competition similar to UIL. I went to regionals and placed within my region. I went to state and came in 2nd place. Came to the United States and thought I was top-level. Coming from Mexico it is different. Right away I am labeled in groups A, B, C, D. I was low because of the language. They put me in the lowest performance...It was the lowest economic school district and the school as well. I was put in 6th grade class with a bilingual teacher who was speaking English. She was bilingual, through ESL and right away was put into Level D...I was retained. When they put me in 6th grade, even though it should have been 7th grade...then I got retained because I didn't master the language...they put me back in 6th grade for two years. You start with a setback plus you are labeled wetback. Kids can be mean. It was tough.

Another experience Hernandez-Gomez recounted occurred during her adult years, yet she emphasized how this traumatic experience greatly influenced her personal and professional life. She had completed her doctoral studies, had been offered a position near her hometown and was prepared to move back and be near her extended family. This

would imply her husband relinquish his position and move with her. For the first time in their marriage, he challenged her choice. She stated,

...then he was pulling his way and I was pulling my way. Then I lost my dad. It was traumatic. Then is when he realized that we are not going anywhere. Not even that faltered me. That is when he noticed, he said, “you still,” I said, I still. I’m lost. I am devastated, but I’m more stronger than ever because if I can endure the loss of a man that has meant everything, he is my father. You have a choice, I don’t care what. I’m not going to quiet my voice to meet half way. It didn’t change.

Superintendent Rodriguez spoke of two experiences that she claimed were traumatic. She was an adult when both experiences occurred, but as with Hernandez-Gomez, stated they were important in her development as person and professional. She recounted from her experience preparing to begin her doctoral studies.

I was quite happy. I went to work there when I was 28-years old, and things happen in your life, and things change, and I ended up getting divorced. I was in my late 30’s when I got divorced, I was almost 39, I have two children by that time...I really needed to rethink my life. I traveled all the time, I couldn’t do that anymore I had these kids and was responsible for them. What am I going to do? What am I going to do? My [employer] was very supportive of education and they had been telling me I should go back and get my Ph.D. You just never make time for it. Well, I said to myself, this is it...I would commute at night...I always thought I could never be a principal. So, I decided I was going to get all those

certificates... my goal was to go back to a school district, something that was more stable for raising kids. I remember when I found out about the mid-management program, it was almost a 60-hour program. I almost cried all the way home thinking how am I going to do this...In that program one of my professors said to me have I ever thought about applying for the superintendency program. I said oh no, I've never been a principal...I got into [superintendency program], I had to do one year of course work, and I had to move over there. That was really traumatic for me, too...I had gone to look at apartments. I thought I would rent the house...the kids said to me that they were so happy that I was going to school, but they made the decision that they were not going to go with me. They were going to stay and move in with their dad. I said, oh my God. Well, if that is what you want to do...Then I felt this is what I have to do now.

Subsequently, Rodriguez became concerned with not disrupting the lives of her children. She had decided to rent her home in order to afford renting an apartment while she was away completing her doctoral coursework.

Then I was panicked because my son said to me, "what are we going to do when you come on the weekends? Where are we going to be?" I thought, he's right, what are we going to do...then I started thinking...I hadn't found anyone to rent the house...I started thinking that I needed to do something different, what can I do? I have to have money somewhere, what can I do? Then I remembered I had annuities. I cashed out enough annuities to pay for the house for a year so I could live in the apartment and have the house all paid up... I found a one bedroom and

the first few months I was there, I was so depressed. I couldn't even study, I couldn't focus. It was so hard to be in this one bedroom apartment all by myself without the kids, without your friends, your family. I said to myself that I was here for one purpose. You need to get over it and move on. So I did. I finished the year.

At another point in the interview, when returning to the topic of her doctoral studies, Rodriguez stated that a few years would pass from the time she completed her coursework before she would complete her dissertation. She discussed the difficulty she was having focusing and concentrating on her dissertation work.

Oh my god. That is enough to kill you. You are disconnected from the college and your research...there are days you think you are not going to finish. In the years I came back, my mother passed away and it was a real blow to me. I spent like six months were I just couldn't get back to it. Finally, I went to see my chair, and he and I talked for a long time. I guess I just needed to get it out. I knew that was something that my mother wanted me to do and I don't know why, I just couldn't deal with it. Finally, I go back into the swing of things...it took me 10 years...when I graduated...my son was finishing at U.T. with his B.A. degree. My youngest son was graduating from high school, so [it] was a banner year for us.

The support of spouses, family and loved ones

Every participant spoke of the impact their spouses, family and loved ones have had on their lives. Specifically, the participants offered numerous instances to

demonstrate how their spouse and family have supported them along their professional journey. Following are a few to illustrate this perspective.

Superintendent Vasquez spoke of her husband, who beginning from the time she returned to school to earn her Master's degree, was supportive and encouraging of her, including his providing childcare when she was not able.

During the weekend that I would be going to school, he would go up there with me, and at time we would be taking babies with diapers and he would be in the hotel taking care of the kids while I was in the classroom taking classes...Oh, yes, that was one of the keys and the barriers that you have to overcome. You have to have that supportive spouse that will help you through it...he would take off Saturday morning or Friday nights with me...he would be changing diapers and take them to get breakfast, entertain them, while I was at school.

Vasquez was enrolled in a superintendency internship course and the final product was a simulation activity, preparing her dossier as if responding to a published superintendency search. Unknown to her, it was officially submitted by her internship supervisor. She was called for an interview, which happened to go quite well.

[Vasquez superintendent] said I'm glad that, you know, they selected you. You can go through the process and you'll have an idea of what it's like when you are really ready to go and look for a superintendency...I told my husband, I'm just going for this interview, you stay with the kids, don't worry about it, I'm just going for an interview...I told him I was just going for practice...[on way home] In the back of my mind I was thinking whoever go that job would have a great

system...I thought I had no chance, I didn't even have principal experience. I was not even worried...the next morning I get to work and secretary tells me there is someone on the line that wants to talk to you...he [search consultant] was like, they have decided they want you as superintendent. I said, *What?* I about fell out of my chair...I called my husband and told him I really needed to talk to him...so, anyway, we go to the house and I tell him that I just got a phone call from the district and they are offering me the position. He said, *WHAT?!...*He said are you really serious about this? He said he would support me in either way I wanted to go.

During the time that Vasquez was deliberating to accept the position, her current district had already decided and board approved her appointment as principal of the elementary school. The board president was not happy that she was entertaining the idea to move and he approached Vasquez's husband. "My husband said [to the board president] it was my decision to make and he was going to support me in whatever she wants to do."

The district where Vasquez would first become superintendent required she relocate. Initially, her husband remained behind, but within a short period he moved to join Vasquez and her children. They decided to purchase a home, instead of renting. The house they purchased would be considered a "fixer upper" and the extended family became involved to make ready the home.

My husband and I looked and found this; it was a house that was pretty much in disrepair. It needed, it was one of those fixer uppers. It was a Victorian house. It

was the best thing we could have done. It needed a lot of work. This is perfect. My husband is a very handy person, has a hardware store so we could fix it...we bought the house. My husband's family, some are professional painters, some are plumbers. Everybody, an army arrived at the house and in two weeks we got it fixed up...It took a lot of work from the whole family. We have fond memories of that. My family would come from Midland, Odessa, Presidio and Mexico. They would come in to help us fix it up. They all just arrived for all those different places...

Vasquez cited another example of her spousal support upon her decision to begin doctoral studies in Austin. "I decided to leave my five-year contract and my superintendency behind and move to Austin to work on my doctoral degree." Her husband and children moved with her.

Hernandez-Gomez did not attend college upon graduating from high school. Since her father had not allowed her to accept the scholarship and attend the Ohio State University, she claims to have acted somewhat in defiance and instead prepared to marry her high school sweetheart. As newlyweds, Hernandez-Gomez's younger sister was living with the couple. She was also attending college and struggling. Hernandez-Gomez would come home from work and help her sister with her homework. She credits her husband with providing the impetus for her to attend college.

One day he said, "I see you every night working with your sister. Why don't you just go with her and go to school together and that way you can hear what the teacher is saying and you can help her." I actually got his permission to go to

college. I said, “Really, will you let me?” That was me asking his permission. He said sure.

Hernandez-Gomez earned her undergraduate degree over the course of seven years, enrolling in classes only during the summers, and working fulltime the remainder of the year. It was a continual struggle for her to remain focused on her studies; however, when her first child was born something stirred within her.

When I had [my first child], something changed. This baby was my baby. She was part of me. She had been part of me from day one, from conception. I wanted to protect her. I went from taking two-three classes, not going only summers...I would only take 2 or 3 hours, and then drop one. I wasn't really serious about it. That baby transformed my way of thinking. I became more responsible, more diligent, went more than summers. Went to work, went to school, and then my last semester, I took 21 hours because I wanted to get it over. I ended up being in the hospital, but I graduated.

Hernandez-Gomez went on to tell that once she had earned her undergraduate degree in business, she was working in the school district office and was approached to consider becoming a teacher.

He [husband] is supporting me and I already have a baby. He is being Mr. Mom. I told him they were telling me that I could be a [specialist] teacher. The pay is even more than accounting. In accounting they are offering me maybe \$20,000, teaching will be \$25,000. I will be making \$5,000 more and only working ten months. He said, don't be a fool, take it. I said they are going to take \$400 from

my paycheck, he said “just pay it, go through the program and I’ll support you.

You are excited about being a teacher.” Here I am still consulting with him.

Hernandez-Gomez would attend graduate school, at a later date, to work to earn her Master’s degree. She was challenged through her work to work to earn her mid-management certification.

I was told they would pay for me to take a class that is available for everyone, they would pay for my master’s if I would just start going. He [husband] supported me. He told me to just go with it. I’m not going to say everything was just perfect. He would sometimes get an attitude and we had a little bit of those attitude kind of issues that he would give me that I wasn’t doing my share.

Overall, he was very supportive.

When Hernandez-Gomez had the opportunity to work on her doctoral studies at the University of Texas at Austin, her husband would arrange his work schedule to accompany her to and from the university, since her classes were scheduled throughout the day each Monday. My first year we are commuting with a toddler, taking her along. We had a van. We took a 7” TV and that is how we entertained our baby, and took toys. That was for a whole year.” The situation required that Hernandez-Gomez move to Austin during her second year of doctoral studies.

The second year we are going to move...he didn’t want to move...I told him I was going to find an apartment and take [the children] with me. He told me he was not moving because he didn’t have a job, and in a year “you finish so I wish you would leave the girls here with me.” I told him the girls need to be with me.

He said ok, if that is what you want to do...I'll come to visit you. It doesn't last.

By the end of August he is saying he is moving. He couldn't stay there without me and the babies. He was going to look for a job and we both found one.

Superintendent Rodriguez did not offer instances or experiences that highlighted spousal support throughout her professional journey. She noted that only once, when her husband first completed law school that she followed him to a different city; however, this would only last one year and he would return to their hometown. There was no mention of a significant life decision that would preclude a notable level of spousal support. She was in a longtime (13 years) work situation when she divorced from her husband. This prompted her to reconsider her future, especially since she would need to care for her two children. This experience was significant for Rodriguez as she traversed to being an independent woman.

Empowered by example and suggestion

The guidance, encouragement, example and advice offered by others can have a significant impact on how one decides to act. The influence of others in whom trust and confidence has been placed, what they may say or how they may act, can affect how someone will choose. In the case of female executive leaders, it has been consistently cited that they were able to move from management levels into the executive levels in great part due to others who mentored them (Edmondson Bell, 2010; Bronznick & Goldenhar, 2009; Maryland, 2008). This does not imply that deference was shown to them in job placement simply because they were female, but because of a process whereby they were able to establish themselves as a viable candidate for the executive

position. Through the process of mentoring, female executives were guided and supported as they considered career options, as well as given strategic advice in brainstorming ideas. For female executives, there was a challenge to identify others who might share their gender perspective and the seemingly insurmountable odds of attaining an executive level position. In particular, the challenge to balance personal and professional life was and continues to be a significant variable to be addressed by those who aspired to or assumed an executive level position (Edmondson Bell, 2010; Simard & Gilmartin, 2010). Female executives consistently have achieved the executive level only after it was suggested to them that they could fill the position, and then encouraged to proceed through the application process. It was the power of suggestion by someone they respected and admired that encouraged the female executives to consider such a position. In most cases the suggestion comes by way of a professional peer. Alternatively, a spouse or family member offered the suggestion that compelled an executive level aspirant to act (Isaac, Griffin, & Carnes, 2010; Metz, 2009; Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007). Whether it was a formal or informal mentor relationship, the process of encouraging and supporting women to consider executive level positions has most often been the experience of their being empowered because of another person's influence.

Possessing a sense of self

Self awareness is one of the first stepping stones to being a successful leader. A leader has to understand that what she brings to the table is valued and important. Self awareness is also concerned with authenticity, which implies a leader is being true to oneself, to one's values and beliefs (Edmondson Bell, 2010). Self-confidence is the key

to resiliency, being able to consider that given the same skill set, a woman can do the job just as well as a man (Simard & Gilmartin, 2010).

During my visit with Superintendent Vasquez, she shared how her father was an important influence on developing her self esteem. The way he spoke to her and the activities in which he involved her aided in developing her self confidence.

A lot of it was my dad, I think. He knew, he said you are very smart, you can do whatever you want to do and be whatever you want to be. He never made me feel like I could only do so much. The sky was the limit...since we were little, we were out there shooting...he had us driving tractors...he would pretty much let us do whatever. We never knew there was a limit between what a girl could do or couldn't do.

Vasquez also shared her early life, and the influences that helped shape her values and beliefs.

My grandmother was a big influence in my life and you know, definitely a very good storyteller...the key thing was to always teach me a lesson, there was a moral to every story she told me. I learned about values and character and all that through them, and doing what is right, and fighting for what is right. Doing things the right way the first time...I think the work ethics I got from them, from my community, from my extended family. It was always wanting to get back and make a difference in your community.

Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez, while sharing her story cited a significant experience in her life that shaped her sense of self awareness and self confidence took

place while she was transitioning from attending school in Mexico to Texas public schools. She was currently in her third year of 6th grade, second year of being retained in Texas' 6th grade. She referred to her teacher of that year.

That's who I am. It comes from realizing that I was in a class that way, if that teacher had not taken the time to care about me, I would have a path of dropping out. I was being frustrated, kids were being mean. The way when he took me out of that cycle, the kids were still being mean, but the teacher challenged me to high expectations. I was able to succeed and able to overcome. One teacher in my life.

While sharing about her challenges with childbirth, as well as job situations, Hernandez-Gomez mentioned how her values were very important to her, specifically mentioning faith, trust and courage.

You know what I think has helped is a balance of who you are – faith, trust. Now people don't give trust, they waste time being distrustful and I trust. I've always trusted people. I'm not saying that I have not been broken-hearted, but I never let the disappointments change who I am and lose the beauty of what trust gives by being fearful and distrustful...you have to lead with courage. You cannot be fearful. You also have to follow your heart. Your heart is your spirit...I balance my values of God for paying back what people have done for me.

Superintendent Rodriguez cited on more than one occasion that her parents consistently reminded her siblings and her that they could do whatever they put their minds to.

However, Rodriguez cited one period of time as pivotal in her journey of self awareness.

You know when I think I realized it – when I was in college...I took a class at the social work school, and he [instructor] was really good with us. He had that desire in us and he helped us organize ourselves as students, and he appointed me to be the lead person. That was when I realized that maybe I had some leadership skills. Before that time, I never thought about it...I thought wow, you know, gee, I didn't even think about it until that point. I think I really blossomed in college, in those days on my own.

When recounting how she prepared for her superintendency interview, Rodriguez noted that she was not concerned about anything related to superintendent roles and responsibilities.

Yes, as a matter of fact, when I was preparing for my superintendency interview, I felt like, I didn't even need to read theory or anything like that. By this point, if you don't know how you think about things or your outlook, then you have no business interviewing for the job. Instead, I decided to read a book by Arianna Huffington about being fearless. Yes, something like that. I felt that I needed to read that just to give me the boost that I felt I needed to go into the interview with confidence.

Special people

In addition to spouses, family and loved ones, each participant identified individuals who had impacted their professional lives. These individuals were noted for guiding the participants not only along their careers, but also the journey to prepare for whatever may come, especially in availing themselves of higher education opportunities.

These special individuals inspired hope and in most instances introduced the participants to possibilities, which heretofore they had not considered as options. A special dimension to being considered by the participants was that of being female. As executive level professionals, being a female brought about unique concerns, and mentors to share this were limited.

Superintendent Vasquez recounted her experience with her mentor who was assigned as part of the TASA superintendent's academy. They did not meet regularly, and in her opinion he did not serve much purpose, since he often did not have the answers for her questions this situation led her to seek answers on her own.

I think all my mentoring came in an informal way...there is just not enough of us to really guide or put that flavor into the mentoring program that is going to work for Latinos...It ended up being – I was more of a resource to him than he to me...in reality, I don't think it was that beneficial, because I really wanted somebody who was a female or that could experience – if I had issues or concerns like look at my kids – I had a 4, 6, and 8 year old – who could I talk to about that because they wouldn't have known because their spouses were taking care of their kids...They weren't trying to be a mother and a superintendent at the same time.

Vasquez shared about opportunities that came her way, without her seeking them. She was being noticed for her performance, and her superiors responded, encouraging her to continue her education as well as offering new and advancing professional opportunities.

Actually, the first person to notice was my superintendent. It was really fun. He had been my high school principal....after he came in, there was nothing that he would ask me to do – well can you take care of this problem and I'd sure I'd do it. So then he said have you thought about going back to school. I said no, I had just finished school and I'm really busy here. He said I really need to go back to school.

Vasquez went on to discuss her experience as she was completing her Master's degree studies and her internship under her first female superintendent.

...when I was finished with that, one of my professors asked me if I wanted to go ahead and take my superintendency classes. I was like, why would I want to do that? You know, you just never know, you might as well work on it now that you are in the rhythm, getting your classes on the weekends, so you might as well finish it off...I was signed up for an internship...I was doing my internship under [new superintendent] so she would ask me to go [with her]. We were doing a bond issue, we were doing all kinds of things for the district...I was thrilled because I had seen all these great things coming into the district...I thank her for that experience now because a lot of what I've done in the superintendency was exactly what she was doing.

Vasquez' culminating project for this internship class was responding to a superintendent search brochure. She would prepare her dossier as a simulation, but it was actually submitted by her own superintendent to the course's professor. The professor, unknown to Vasquez submitted it to the search consultant. While the superintendency

was not something she considered at the time, her superintendent and professor thought differently.

When I submitted it to the professor, the professor said why don't I just submit it to the search consultant for that district. She said that is a good idea and he can give us some feedback on it. Well, he got it and he [told the professor] he was taking it to the board.

Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez discussed her numerous jobs throughout her career, highlighting how she did not set out to be a teacher or administrator. It was through the invitation and intervention of others, her teaching and administrative career has taken shape.

I'm working in the school district, in accounting...but a person in curriculum and instruction come to be and says why don't I become their bilingual and dyslexia teacher? I don't even know what dyslexia means. I said I'm in accounting, I already have a job. She said you are bilingual, you know Spanish very well, I can get you into a program and you can be a teacher...so she got me into a program and I got excited...I knew how to do this job. I was having a great time...then within two years, they said they needed me in central office...I had two wonderful coaches [university professors]. They were teaching me. I was teaching with great mentors...I became a very effective teacher because I have coaches from day one...I had two great mentors that were coaches who helped me with the theory that I put into practice.

Unknown to Hernandez-Gomez, others were taking note of her performance and nominated her for the Cooperative Superintendency Program at the University of Texas at Austin.

He told me he had two nominations, most people only get one, but you got two... [he said] I think you should send me a portfolio. I told him I didn't know if I wanted to. He told me that I owe it to the people who took the time to recommend me, but if you are not interested, then you might as well tell them. He had about 100 applicants at the time, and he was only taking 50...When we are going for introductions, the director is telling us how privileged we are to be there and what this program has done, that it is top in the nation, what it's about and what a difference has made in so many lives...I thought, oh my god, I'm being blessed to be in this group here.

Hernandez-Gomez continued about her time at the university, citing the influence of another professor, a female professor, and her influence regarding her family and doctoral studies. The professor's intervention was precipitated by Hernandez-Gomez's dilemma with her husband and children remaining in their hometown while she attended the university.

By August, the professor tells me a family stays together. If you are going to survive this program, you are not going to make it with them down there. I told her [husband] didn't want to move, so she told me to move my children. I said that means I'm going to have to find a daycare. She said you do what you have to do – children should be with you. He is either going to come with you or stay at

home. [the professor] is giving me advice. She said my children need to be with me. That was profound.

For Hernandez-Gomez, no one had the influence on her like the then director of the Cooperative Superintendency Program. She recounted several instances where his guidance directly impacted her professional decisions. She began with one experience while working as a finance area administrator in a school district.

I was at a board meeting on the budget discussion, someone follows me [after meeting] and they pointed a gun at me. I go panic, I have anxiety, I fear for my life...I go through anxiety attacks, I don't know what to do, then late after I've calmed down, I call Dr. [X] and say I want out. My life is more important, my husband is saying the same thing. My former professors are helping me find a job. Dr. X said in this business you have to have courage. You've been in [x] district one year, you really haven't proven anything, you've started but you have nothing to prove until you put those things into place. I had a bomb one time, threatened with a bomb, and I'm going to tell you that you cannot change destiny. You cannot be fearful. In this career you have to have courage. If you leave right now, then they have done what they wanted to do. They wanted to scare you, because I think if they wanted to kill you, they would have killed you behind the scenes. They are trying to scare you...he is my number one hero in education. Whatever he says is like God talking to me. He is an angel, my hero in education. I don't want to disappoint him. He means a lot in my life, in my career, in my education. I still have tapes where sometimes I just put in a tape just to hear him, that is how

meaningful, these are tapes, he is powerful... [his] influence was very critical. He taught me that leaders become followers. You are leaders of leaders, but there is also some following to do. I followed his advice.

Superintendent Rodriguez was a classroom teacher for four years, but was plagued by a nagging curiosity about other opportunities outside of the traditional classroom. She came upon a job advertisement that was posted by a local agency dedicated to providing adult education opportunities, including parenting classes, to adults of low-income area students. She applied, was hired to work for this agency, and continued for 13 years. She recounted with fondness her experiences with the director of the agency and other staff, and the impact they had on her professional life.

I would say in my adult life that I was very – my years were very privileged years for me to work directly with Dr. [X], to be a director and to sit in his staff meetings every Monday morning, and to listen to his ideas and his wisdom. He is definitely a mentor. He was on my dissertation committee. He was superintendent in [this district]...as a matter of fact, the little school that I started was named for him...It was just so wonderful for me. I was so happy that I could do this for him. For me, this was my gift to him...for me it was such an honor to be able to – to me, that was the greatest thing to give back to him...he has been a good mentor to me, a very important mentor in my life. He was part of my dissertation committee. He was always fostering leadership in me...I think so much of what I learned in my adult life, becoming a leader, has a lot to do with the 13 years that I worked there.

When Rodriguez left the agency after 13 years, she pursued her doctoral degree. She had initially enrolled in the Curriculum and Instruction program, but because of a suggestion from one of her professors, she transferred into another doctoral program at the University of Texas at Austin. It was yet another example of how a suggestion would effectively change her career path.

In that program, my professors said to me have I ever thought about applying for the superintendency program. I said no, I've never been a principal. They said to me that it didn't matter, it was a leadership program. You are a leader; you don't have to be a principal. I told them I hadn't thought about it. They said they thought I should apply. I applied and got into the CSP program.

Upon completion of her doctoral program's course work, Rodriguez returned to her hometown. She knew she had to find employment. Her next job would begin the 18-year tenure she has had in her current district. She did not have to search for a job.

Dr. M was the superintendent here at the time, and she called me up and said she had heard that I was back in town. I told her yes, and she said are you looking for a job. I told her that I wanted to go work in a district. She told me to come on over and they would see what they could do. I took a job with her.

When asked whether she had any specific mentor assigned to her, she recounted her experience, which was similar to other Texas superintendents. All first-time superintendents in Texas are required to attend the TASA superintendent's academy, during which a mentor is assigned.

They assign you a mentor in your area. That was good for me...I felt very fortunate because Dr. F from [X] district was my assigned mentor. He was real good to me. He talked to me and I could ask him questions and things like that. The other thing that I felt really good about was – that I felt really good about too, was that when I became superintendent, [MM] was a superintendent in [district]. I had known her before...I was happy to have her; it was almost like she was my mentor also. It gave me someone to buddy up with, to go, when I went to the big region superintendent meetings, where there were a bunch of superintendents, I can go and sit with her.

When opportunity knocks

As each participant shared her story, a common feature was revealed. Except for the first job, their subsequent professional experiences came about somewhat effortlessly. In some cases, including ascending to the superintendency, the protocols of completing applications were followed; however, these seemed perfunctory. The participants' professional performance was consistently stellar; whereby, opportunities “came knocking.” They were empowered by their stellar professional performance.

Superintendent Vasquez began her career as a high school English teacher in her native school district. True to those values instilled by family, she wanted to return to her alma mater and give back. Obtaining this position was a challenge. While a neighboring district had already offered her a contract, she nonetheless remained hopeful her home district would do the same. After several board meetings with no decision to hire her, she took it upon herself to visit each board member individually and discover why she had

not been offered a contract. Soon, thereafter, she was offered a contract and she began her teaching career. In short order, her efforts were recognized and additional ancillary duties were assigned to her.

[I taught] five years, yeah and then I was kind of pushed into administration, kind of much after my third year. I was pretty – after my second year I was made English department head, and then I was UIL district coordinator, and I was junior class sponsor, and I was student council sponsor – pretty much everything they wanted...I was done [with Master's program]...so he [principal] asked me to interview [curriculum facilitator], so I thought okay, it might be good. So I interviewed and I got the job. By January he had been offered a job somewhere else...well, he left by February, so it made me the interim – kind of shoved me into the fire and made me the interim principal there...it was four years going into my fifth year of teaching. They asked me if I wanted to take the principalship at that time...I had my son so that is when I said I didn't want to take the principalship. I don't mind being an assistant principal but I can't, it was just too demanding.

Vasquez was transferred from the high school to assume the assistant principalship at the elementary school. During her first year, the district received a new superintendent who asked Vasquez to take over the bilingual program.

I told her I would do it but my interest was to really be a principal and to stay at the campus. She said I could stay at the campus but I needed to help her with the bilingual program...I was really working with her under that department. By the

end of the year, I was exhausted. I was doing lots of things that were exciting but on my god, this is a lot of stuff, and a baby. By then I had my second one. My poor husband, I was always gone.

It was noted earlier in this study's findings that Vasquez, upon completion of her superintendency certification internship course, had completed a simulation application in response to a superintendent search brochure. It was this same superintendent who conspired with the internship course professor to submit Vasquez application in reality, upon which Vasquez was called for an interview and subsequently hired as that district's superintendent. Vasquez recounted, "So two weeks before that I had become the new principal on campus, but my application had already been turned in – this was just supposed to be practice." Nonetheless, Vasquez had secured her first superintendency, without even purposefully searching.

Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez was the one who demonstrated the most work locations of the three participants. While all three participants held a variety of positions, Hernandez-Gomez was the one whose positions had been in various settings. These relocations, however, had not impeded her ability to easily find employment. It was also noteworthy that Hernandez-Gomez did not begin her career as a teacher, becoming a teacher only after being approached and encouraged to do so. It was also noteworthy that she did not pursue her undergraduate studies immediately after high school, but did so only after being married, working, and assisting her younger sibling complete her own college assignments. None of this withstanding, once she earned her teaching credential, her career from teacher to superintendent demonstrated a history of performance that

earned her positions, most of which came her way with little if any search effort on her part.

I'm working in the school district, in accounting...But a person in the curriculum and instruction comes to me and says why don't I become their bilingual and dyslexia teacher? I don't even know what dyslexia means. I said but I'm in accounting, I already have a job. She said you are bilingual, you know Spanish very well, I can get you into a program and you can be a teacher...I knew how to do this job, I was having a good time...then within two years they said they needed me in central office. Someone said they needed me in management...so my third year, by December, I had a full-time job at central office as bilingual facilitator.

As Hernandez-Gomez moved into central administration, there was a negative reaction from principals. They challenged how she, who had never been a principal or campus administrator, could know what it was like "in the trenches." Without this experience, how could she offer them direction? Hernandez-Gomez requested to be placed as an administrator on a campus. She wanted to rectify this situation, and requested placement on the highest need campus in the district, where she was assigned as Assistant Principal and instructional coordinator.

Then someone nominated me for the U.T. Austin, [two professors] who had been my ACP instructor and part of my mid-management professor...I get selected. I'm now in Austin...The second year of the classes start...I had to find a different job. I found a job in San Antonio, so I was commuting...I had to find a job as an area

administrator of business and finance [through the recommendation of university professor]. Then I get pregnant.

Hernandez-Gomez continued to work in San Antonio during this pregnancy. It was a difficult pregnancy, and she decided to return to her hometown to be near family and receive the necessary support for the duration of her pregnancy.

My family will help me and help me raise this baby, so I need to resign from this job. I will keep the job until August when the baby is born, after the baby is born, I'm leaving.... [consigned to bed rest] I never neglected by job, to the day I am delivering they are coming in for signatures. [superintendent] and I use technology to develop a balanced budget...I have the chief accountant taking my role but I'm consulting with her. And that is the day I'm delivering and going through c-section. I'm signing; the doctor said I was ready to go through surgery so he stops me from signing. I'm so excited with the job; I don't even feel the pains. The day before I had the surgery, the lady says that I'm having contractions. I told her I didn't even feel them...I left [district] with great references.

Hernandez-Gomez returned to her hometown. When the local district's superintendent learned of her return, she was immediately offered a job. This was short lived, since she was soon offered another position in another district.

I went back to [hometown] and they give me a job in my home school as an instructional facilitator... [the superintendent] calls me and he had worked with me in [San Antonio]. He calls me in as a consultant over the summer. I come in as

a consultant to help them with finance and compliance. Then he says he has an opening for deputy superintendent. I said I already had a job.

Hernandez-Gomez accepted the position and became the district's deputy superintendent. Within one year, the superintendent announced his retirement, and the district's board began considering the process to search and select the next superintendent.

They were going to have to do a search...they made me interim superintendent, I feel very honored...then they had a conversation among themselves. Did they want to do a search or do we have someone in house? They all said we think we have someone in house, why don't we ask her to apply...I had a 7-0 [vote to hire].

While Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez demonstrated the most relocations for living and work, Superintendent Rodriguez had the least. She has worked in only three different locations throughout her career. She only searched for her first job. The others came by suggestion or recruitment.

As soon as I graduated from college I started teaching...as much as I loved teaching, I felt wasted like there was something more that I wanted to do. In graduate school I learned about this program called [advocacy program]. I thought, wow, that is what I would really like to do. One day I found an opening in the newspaper and I applied...I said this is great. I got the job and I was real excited. I did it for two years, was on the Board of Directors...I was back here in this district on the board...I was already married and my husband was graduating from law school and he got a job in Laredo. We were getting ready to leave and

[program director] approached me and said, hey, I understand that you are relocating to Laredo. I told him I didn't have a job yet. He told me he had a contract to do some teacher training, would you like to do that contract for me? I said sure...When I was coming back, [program director] told me, I have a job for you - do you want to work for me? I spent the next 13 years working [at that program] and I just really loved it.

Rodriguez may well have remained with that program, but she divorced and was concerned for her future and that of her two young children. She had traveled a lot and was challenged to rethink her life.

I really needed to rethink my life. I traveled all the time. I couldn't do that anymore. I had these kids and was responsible for them. [program director] is very supportive of your education and they had been telling me I should go back and get my PhD. You just never make time for it. Well, I said to myself this is it. I've got to make a plan, I'm going to go back and get my Ph.D. and go back and get every certificate I can get...in that program, my professors said to me have I ever thought about applying for the superintendency program? I said oh no, I've never been a principal. They said to me that it didn't matter, it was about leadership. You are a leader, you don't have to be a principal...I applied for the program and I got in...When I finished, while I was up there, I finished my course work, and in May I needed to go home...Dr. [X] was superintendent here at the time, and she called me up and said she had heard that I was back in town. I told her yes, she said are you looking for a job. I told her that I wanted to go work in a

school district. She told me to come over and they would see what they could do. I took a job with her as the administrator of the early childhood campus...I stayed in central office doing all those things. Then a superintendent came in and he said he didn't have anyone in HR. I don't have anyone there. I think you can do it. He transferred me over there. At first I was really hurt because C and I was my forte, but I really came to love HR...I was in HR for almost 5 years, and I applied for the Deputy Superintendent position, and I got that. It put me back over C and I. The superintendent position opened and I applied for it. I never set out to be a superintendent...when I leave at the end of the year, I will have 18 years in this district.

The Latina Perspective

Each participant was female and Hispanic, i.e., Latina. There were two questions asked of each during their respective semi-structured interview, each of which was concerned with this perspective. One question specifically asked about each participant's female perspective, and the other asked about the Hispanic perspective. The responses to each did not stay within the specified parameters; consistently, the female and Hispanic perspective became enmeshed, one with the other. The responses were coded to identify two sub-themes, which are titled: carrying the torch, and balancing work and family.

Carrying the torch.

Two participants were quick to respond that being a Latina had an impact on their rise to the superintendency. The third, while consistently stating that being Latina did not

necessarily impact her journey, nonetheless, offered several comments specific to this perspective.

Superintendent Vasquez recounted the time she was preparing to relocate to assume her first superintendency.

For 20 something years there was a house...that had been rented or leased by the superintendent. That was the superintendent's house and they would lease it.

Well, when I got there and starting inquiring into it, I was actually the first woman superintendent and the first Hispanic superintendent that they got there.

The guy that was, the man that owned the ranch house decided that he was really going to jack up the price. He was going, whatever it was, \$450, he was going to charge \$850 or something ridiculous. Okay, is it because I'm Hispanic...I was not going to subject myself to that man, deciding he is going to tell me how much rent I'm going to pay when I know how much the other superintendent was paying. I was going to buy my own house.

Vasquez shared how her first experience with a female superintendent awakened within her own fledging notions about the challenges to be faced by a female superintendent.

When she came on board, I thought maybe I could do that...I think that was when I started realizing that, you know, somewhere down the line, no any time soon...but I think the most important thing was I realized that, yes, I can do it but it is going to take me a while to get there...and I think more so I started reading a lot of educational leadership journals and I started seeing the barriers that women

had to face, you know. I thought pretty much that it was a good ol' boy system.

They chose the superintendent so how would they ever choose a female superintendent, much less a Hispanic female superintendent. Along with that came issues of culture. How were they going to take me? Were men ready to accept a female leader? I saw a lot of issues she had to deal with because she was the first female in the district. She had to deal with a lot of things that a male would never have had to deal with...she would listen. She was taking into consideration feedback...she decided to change her mind for the right reasons but people didn't see that...I thought it was very unfair that they didn't really see that she was trying to be more inclusive. Also, living by herself. She was divorced.

Where they would criticize her for – she's living by herself and she doesn't have a companion to go with her places.

Vasquez took note of how the community responded to her being superintendent, the first female for the district. She internalized these considerations and offered the following.

I always felt like I would always be judged tougher than any male would, so I always tended to overdo things. If I'm going to do something, it is going to be done twice as well. It is going to be done to the best. They are going to say, wow, we've never had this done to this level. I always exceeded, I just wanted to exceed any of their expectations. That was always my goal. If I failed, I not only failed myself, I was failing a lot of women who would be coming after me because you know what? If there is a female superintendent, they give them the opportunity

and things go wrong, it will take them 10 years before they hire the next female. They wouldn't think twice about that with a male. They would hire the next male with no problem. If it's a female, they will think twice before they hire another female....when there are males that perform poorly and yet the next day they hire the same kind, male or Anglo and they don't think twice about them. A female, I just felt oh my god, if I fail, this is really going to make us go back ten steps.

When Vasquez was discussing her superintendency experience, and was asked about the Hispanic perspective, she included the female perspective, as well. She specifically mentioned her role to carry the torch for others.

It was majority White even though, maybe here it was very segregated and so therefore the people of power were on this side of the rail road track. All the positions of prominence in the community from mayor on down were pretty much white. I guess in looking at the struggle and what I represented coming in as being the first female and Hispanic. It was like, ok, if I fail miserably, then I know – I have to carry that torch because so many are behind me that could come. Their doors might be closed because they are female or Hispanic. It wouldn't have mattered if it were a white or Anglo. It would probably matter if I failed, these are my characteristics. I guess in really looking at that from the minority Hispanic perspective, it was "I have to succeed." There was always that extra drive there because I have to do it because so much depends on it. If I don't, it not only affects me, but could affect many others that could come in my place. I felt there was a door that was open, the opportunity was given, and I had to make it wider

for others to come through...Some of the comments that I heard from some of the board members when I first got here said that they had expectations for me. That I would be a role model for their young Latina girls, they would key me into something that they could also become. That is something that I craved, I wanted, because there are just so many of us that could inspire others to go into education and become leaders. Wow. What a legacy to leave. That was really something that I also looked forward to.

Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez provided a slightly different perspective than Vasquez. She was not so overt in her sensitivity to her own role as a Latina; however, she was very aware of the greater Latina experience.

Right now that you are asking, on a conscious level it has always been interesting to see that the majority of your teachers are females. But as you progress into the top it is the opposite. You see more males taking the leading roles of top-level administration and I'm talking superintendents. They are much more led by males...The top level is your superintendent and CEO. If we are really, fully represented and we want to know about teaching and learning, you see the numbers decreasing. Why we are not having – we have great teachers, great leaders, which is teaching and learning, which is a primary focus of our business. Why don't they trickle up? That has been an influence on me. Why could we build capacity because superintendents have to be very much in tune with the primary role of our business, which is teaching and learning. So that has been an inspiration or kind of an unconscious decision to say at one time. I never thought

of being a superintendent. I never thought of it...In regards to gender, I'm not saying aspire, but I want to make a mark saying I was in the majority of leaders, that as a female, as a majority, what it matters in the heart of education, I can represent and be the main teacher, the leader teacher.

When asked how ethnicity has impacted her journey, Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez recounted her childhood experience and how it has continued to impact her work today.

If I were to remember the label that was given to me by a counselor, who said I would never be a teacher because I had a heavy accent, kids are not going to be able to understand you, you will never be able to communicate unless you get rid of your accent. That came from being raised in Mexico, born in the United States, being an English language learner. It was labeled to me that I couldn't have that. Now that, as I'm moving to teaching I was considered a successful teacher, and from there – actually, the opportunities came to me – and they said now we need you in central office, now we need you other there...I accepted those challenges, but you go back to the word ethnicity and how it influenced me, I think it comes back to what I said about not wanting, not wanting one of my children to become a statistic...I need to be aware of that so you just can't let a phrase stop you from what you need to do. Then I don't think you should make an issue of it.

Superintendent Rodriguez was specific to mention that being a female was never an issue for her; however, she also offered very specific remarks about the female experience in the work place.

For me, gender was not an issues in terms of, that I could achieve something. I never thought I couldn't because I was a woman that was never a factor for me in believing that I could achieve or accomplish something... I really believe it was because it was the way I was raised by my parents to believe that I could do whatever I wanted to do... [however] I face them every day in my job. My, it's funny because every now and then when I complain, my father reminds me and tells me, "don't ever forget this is a man's world." I tell him, "I don't daddy, I see it every day of my life." And I do, I know that, from my perspective, men do better in the superintendency programs in terms of being taken care of, it's a good ol' boy network where the men take care of each other. I see it. It's not that they are not nice to me or disrespectful to me, they are respectful to me. It's just this world where a man has it easier than a woman in leadership positions.

Superintendent Rodriguez was specific to note the limited occurrence of female superintendents in Texas.

I think it's a cultural kind of thing and that men have always been looked at as the head or the leader in our society. Even though I grew up in the era when women were just coming into their own, I think it still prevails. It's not out there as much, but I look at myself and this county where there are 15-16 superintendents and right now it is just two women superintendents...yes, you know it's always rare for there to be a female superintendent. It's pretty rare.

When asked about how being Hispanic has impacted her consideration of educational administration, Superintendent Rodriguez shared a similar perspective as her gender has impacted her journey.

My parents always taught me to be proud of whom I was, to be proud of my Hispanic heritage. It was never an issue for me. I also, I went to high school in a predominantly Anglo high school. That is probably where it made more of a difference to me because in the advanced classes, there were only four of us who were Hispanic and the rest of the students Anglo. I also went to school in a high school where at the time, there were a lot of students who were very wealthy. I came from a working class family, so it was a little different, but within my family, we all excelled because we were raised that way. To be very driven. To be very competitive...I think our background, to be very competitive and to be very driven, you don't really see those things as obstacles...I never saw it as a barrier, but knew it existed.

While Superintendent Rodriguez was steadfast in her personal convictions about the impact of gender and ethnicity on her own self awareness, she nonetheless was cognizant of their impact on the greater Latina experience.

I think as a female you always have to be two times better than the male. I mean I really believe that a man can fail at a district as a superintendent and he'll just go down the road and he'll get hired again. For a woman, I think it can ruin your career. You can never be hired again. You do have to be assertive and get out there and not be afraid.

In a follow up phone conversation with Superintendent Rodriguez, she stated, “I don’t consider myself a role model for women, in general, but I am very conscious of my role and how I can set an example for the women in my organization.” She offered that she wants for women in her organization to recognize that they, too, can aspire to and achieve a position as the top administrator in a school district or any organization.

Balancing work and family.

The notion of balancing work and family was a prominent feature for each participant. Two of the participants offered numerous instances regarding the challenge to be actively involved with their family, while advancing in their careers. At each career juncture that would involve a relocation, these participants consciously and purposefully considered how it would impact their family. In some cases it was not the challenge of relocating, but simply the job opportunity’s potential impact on the participant’s home life. The third participant made her most significant career move based on her family reality at the time, but this was the only identifiable experience in her challenge to balance work and family.

Superintendent Vasquez was challenged early in her career to consider the importance of her family, and this might be compromised by her work. She had to make some choices.

I got married after my second year in college...and didn’t have any kids for the first couple of years, but by my third year I had a baby. I had my son so that is when I said I didn’t want to take the principalship. I didn’t mind being an assistant principal, but I can’t, it was just too demanding. I finished off the year and they

asked me if I was willing to take an assistant principalship. By that time I had already finished my Master's and when I was finished with that, one of my professors asked if I wanted to go ahead and take my superintendency classes...so anyway, decided to move to the elementary as an assistant principal and went back to school to work on my superintendent certification at the same time...during the weekends that I would be going to school, [husband] would go up there with me, and at times we would be taking babies with diapers and he would be in the hotel taking care of the kids while I was in the classroom taking classes.

When Vasquez assumed her first superintendency, it required her relocating two hours away from where she was currently living.

My husband stayed behind because of the business. I moved with my three kids, 4, 6, and 8 years old each. [I was not going to leave them behind], no, that was a part of me, you know, I was trying to be super woman and I was saying I can do it all. I didn't want to give up anything for something else. I really wanted to be a mom and I wanted to be a great mom, so how could I be that when I give them up for a career? I can't, so I took them with me...The best thing about it was it was right across from the school. My kids and I would go walking in the morning. It was a small school, so literally, I would take them to one end of the hallway and I would just go to my office at the other end. If my kids needed anything, they would just go to mom's office and I was right there in the same building. They didn't have to call me for anything. It was just perfect. In the afternoons, from my

office, I would see my backyard, so my kids would come over there. In the afternoon, I hired an older lady to watch the kids while I was at school, but I could just look out my window and there are my kids playing in the backyard. It was beautiful. It was a great experience...I decided to leave my five-year contract and my superintendency behind and move to Austin to work on my doctoral degree...my husband moved with us during that time...oh, yes, they were never an option. They [kids] were coming with me.

It was during Superintendent Vasquez time in Austin that she was alerted to the superintendent vacancy in her current district. At the time, she was also interviewing for a top-level position at the second largest district in Texas.

At the time, Dr. X with [district] had also interviewed me for a position. That is where I really wanted to head. My sister was living there, both my sisters were living [in that area], and I wanted to be there, be together...So anyway, I got called for the interview [for this district] and it was one of those things again, you feel that magic, golly, it would be nice to work – my kids came down with me and my husband did too. I said I'm not making any decisions without taking them into consideration. I had dragged them, they had done things for me and I needed to make sure they are okay with it. They were not happy with the idea of going to [big city] even though they loved my sisters and wanted to be closer to them; they just didn't like big schools.

When Superintendent Vasquez was deliberating as to which offer she should accept, she consulted with her family, to discover things they had thus far not shared with her. This information went far to help her decide on which offer to accept.

I was having a dilemma because I didn't know whether to go to [big city] or come here. I asked my husband and kids what they wanted to do...they said they wanted [here]...my husband as not looking forward to going to another big city...[when visiting big city] the whole time they were there, [kids] were glued to TV waiting for me to get home. The whole time they were there, they were worried about mom being on the road for 45 minutes...every day we were just thinking they were going to call and tell us you had an accident.

As Vasquez reflected on her career choices, especially becoming a superintendent, she shared one of her biggest concerns:

...probably one of my biggest issues I had once I got into the superintendency and saw how demanding it was and all the things I had to do. Did I just get into it too quickly and what are the repercussions? How are my kids going to grow up and am I going to feel so responsible if they are traumatized by all this. You just never know. Sometimes it's like they are in a fish bowl, the whole time everything they do...That is a hard way to grow up as a kid. What if my kids grow up to be traumatized and something happens to them, all because I wanted to be a superintendent. I didn't think about my kids. One of the superintendents was superintendent of the year; she went through the same experience. We got to talking at one of the conferences and she told me, "I was exactly like you're

thinking right now. My kids are fine.” Just talking to her about the experience, she had two or three kids also, they were now all teenagers and they are so responsible. What they had to do made them extra responsible, they are great kids. She said, so if anything, it helps them. They are not going to be hurt by this; they are going to be very responsible. I have faith in her and said okay. I believe you. Sure enough, my son is a college student, he just graduated last year, he is a very responsible kid, does not get into trouble. He is very good and very mature for his age. I bet a lot of women out there think the same thing. If you could just talk to someone else who has been through it.

Vasquez continued discussing how her children and husband have been an integral part of her journey.

Leaving them behind was never – it never entered my mind. They were a part of me. If I wanted to do this, it was with them with me – my husband and I decided that yes, he was going to stay in [hometown], but even that was only two hours away. When I decided to move to Austin to go pursue that doctoral degree, the choices – he couldn’t be away from them because they needed their dad. We all moved or I don’t do it. My husband has been very supportive and so he said ok, I guess we’ll move. So he moved with us to Austin to be there with the kids.

Vasquez offered some particular insights into the value to her of having an assigned mentor that was part of the TASA superintendent’s academy. These insights particularly concerned themselves with her perspective as a female and a mother who is a superintendent.

In reality, I don't think it was that beneficial because I really wanted somebody who was a female or that could experience –if I had issues or concerns like look at my kids – I had a 4, 6 and 8 year old – who could I talk to about that because they wouldn't have known because their spouses were taking care of the kids. If I wanted to talk to them about what they grow up to be...well, they wouldn't know about that experience because it wasn't the same. They weren't trying to be a mother and a superintendent at the same time. A lot of the things that I think, I kind of just had to deal with it on my own...I couldn't have had those conversations with a male. They would probably have thought I was crazy. Those kinds of things, maybe even leadership styles. It's just very different.

Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez noted that her children and husband were crucial to her life, and spoke of the birth of her first child as a point in time when her focus changed. She claimed it made her more responsible.

When I had [first child] something changed. This baby was my baby. She was part of me; she had been part of me from day one, from conception. I wanted to protect her...I wasn't really serious about it [school and work]. That baby transformed my way of thinking. I became more responsible, more diligent.

This commitment was reaffirmed when Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez began doctoral studies. She had two children by this time, and she and her husband had decided that he would remain with the children in their hometown, since family could help with childcare.

We had family support there. By August, Dr. X [University of Texas] told me “a family stays together. If you are going to survive this program, you are not going to make it with them down there.” I told her that he [husband] didn’t want to move so she told me to move my children. I said that means I’m going to have to find a daycare. She said you do what you have to do. Children should be with you...that was profound.

When Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez was pregnant with her third child, she experienced complications and her doctor ordered bed rest. She was working in San Antonio at the time, and submitted her resignation so she could remain home as ordered; however, she continued to work from home for the duration of the contract. She remained committed to work, even in the midst of pregnancy concerns.

I told him [superintendent] while I was pregnant, I’d finish budget. I never neglected my job. To the day I’m delivering, they are still coming in for signatures.

During her next career move, Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez became deputy superintendent in a district, but her husband had not yet moved back. This caused some concerns in the household.

This is how we do it for a year. We come here and I’m working here and he is commuting. I’m a deputy superintendent and I bring the kids with me, that is non-negotiable. I come over here, bring my kids over here...by the third year we are having issues. My [children] are feeling, especially my [daughter] – someone told her that his father had gone single and now they’re divorced because he ended up

with another lady and had a baby...she started having that discussion, she starts getting sick about it even to the point that I have to take her to a psychologist. It's not real, we are fine...we are really dysfunctional. I keep thinking we are functional...he's [husband] done so much. It's like a sacrificial lamb. He has done so much for me, which is true. He has been supportive... [he didn't want to move] I said okay, if that is the way, then let's make it legal...then I lost my dad. It was traumatic. Then is when he realized that we are not going anywhere...he resigned and moved back...that has made us stronger. It's not because I win. It was not about win-win, or lose-lose, or someone winning. It understood what our priorities are, I asked the kids do you want to move, the kids did not want to move, they like it here.

Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez shared how the demands of the job have required she be creative with enjoying quality time with her family.

I wasn't so sure [about schedule], my meal time, like today, I'm not going to have a meal with them, but I can tell you that they will be waiting up for me. They are going to take a nap and they are going to be waiting and I will do ice cream, we will do something, unless I get to midnight. I will call and I'll let them know I won't be going. I still go and give them a kiss and they will wake up and say they are glad I'm home. Today I had a hard day and [daughter] sends me a message – mom, I love you, don't stress out...I don't go home and take my issues. It is a sacred place and they don't need to invade my house. They may invade my mind, but not anybody else's frame of mind. I may be thinking at night, but there is no

reason to add that turmoil to my family, there is no need. My children know, I don't bring issues. We have discussions about the learning, the teaching, homework issues, like any normal family. But not from the mind of the superintendent.

When Superintendent Rodriguez became divorced, this caused a traumatic experience. She had to consider her future, her career, her children. Her remarks about this time in her life were the single occasion she discussed a concern about balancing work and family.

I was in my late 30's when I got divorced. I had two children by that time. I had a 10 year old and a 7 year old. I really needed to rethink my life. I traveled all the time, I couldn't do that anymore. I had these kids and was responsible for them. What am I going to do? What am I going to do?...I began doctoral studies...I only had one year of course work, and I had to move over there...the kids said to me they were so happy that I was going to school, but they made the decision that they were not going to go with me. They said they were going to stay and move in with their dad...I understood that it was only going to be a year anyway. I didn't need to disrupt their lives. Then I was panicked because my son said to me, "what are we going to do when you come on the weekends? Where are we going to be?" I thought, he's right. What are we going to do...I cashed out enough annuities to pay for the house for a year so that I could live in the apartment and have the house all paid up...I would drive home every two weeks and on Thursday night, because I would get there late, I would cook. I would take beans already made

and stuff like that, so I could get home so the kids could have their meal. They wanted my cooking. I was with them all weekend and on Sunday we would just hang out.

Question #2: What are the characteristics and experiences as perceived by district constituencies that represent productive and effective Board of Education member and superintendent relations?

Nurturing Relationships One-By-One

The relationship between a superintendent and individual board of education members is a curious phenomenon. The strategies that are utilized by superintendents to develop these relationships are unique to each superintendent. The superintendent's beliefs about such relationships are also a variable to consider. In addition, the perspective of individual board members about this phenomenon is also essential. In this study, each participant was allowed the opportunity to offer their perspective on superintendent-board member relations. Board members' perspectives were elicited by way of an online survey distributed to two board members from each represented school district.

Superintendent Perspective

Superintendent Vasquez did not hesitate when asked about her perspective on her relationship with the district's board members. She commented on the need to maintain integrity, not to compromise one's values and beliefs, which in the end affect the trust that is essential for a productive relationship with board members.

You need to know where you are going to stand. If you don't know yourself, you are going to get yourself into situations that you wish you hadn't gotten yourself into. You have to know yourself. I think you also have to know what things you are willing to fight for. You need to fight for those things regardless of what happens. Never compromise your values, never compromise your beliefs. This is who you are. If you want to do it to please board members, you are in the wrong business. You just can't do that. You are not going to survive. I think they will respect you for standing up and doing what you believe in your heart is right because they will know where you stand at all times. If you start compromising with this person or that person, they you've lost your true identity...They have to develop that trust. We have to be in sync to know that I'm going to do things that are good for kids and the reason that I would have that authority to spend up to \$50,000 is when I know that is going to benefit our kids. I'm not going to go out there and spend it to circumvent what the board wants. That is not the case. I know they would have the next person here pay. I don't want that.

Superintendent Vasquez cited one example of how she worked to maintain a working relationship with board members. This example cited one of her rare challenges, but she offered it as she was discussing how she has had to establish boundaries with board members.

Well, we had one board member that just got on I guess it was in July or early August. He is a CEO of a non-profit but he is used to being the head. He and I have butted heads because he feels that as a board member he is going to do the

same things he does. I just throw it back into his face and say, “well if it’s personnel issues, do you take all your personnel issues to your board?” He says no, so I told him I could handle personnel issues, he doesn’t have to worry about that...He knows where I stand and I will tell him if he pushes over the boundary, I push him back. It’s gently telling him that this is your role, this is my role. You stay on that side and I’ll stay on this side. I don’t want to do your job and I don’t want you to do my job. It has been a challenge, but it is a good challenge. I guess because I haven’t had to deal with it before, anybody that really wanted to step over.

Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez spoke of very specific strategies she utilized to establish a productive relationship with board members.

I think the challenges you are going to know is sometimes their perceptions, especially when you have new board members coming in...what is your role as a board member and what is your role of the board. I think you have, for me, it has been communications, developing – how to overcome the challenges... [we had] two new board members, totally opposite of what the agenda was. One of them I said I care deeply because I have a son and I want to make sure that he has better or the same opportunity that I had but no less. The other one said that they just wanted to be part of it...we have to learn how to work with each other. We have conversations and these are conversations that I don’t have over the phone. I also want you to know that these are conversations that I would say that I would like to have a conversation with you, what is the best time...yes, face-to-face. Body

language tells you a lot. The eyes tell you a lot. The face-to-face interaction tells you a lot. If I follow, if I say something that they don't like, I don't know what he is thinking but with body language, it tells you. Then you start. I get better at what I want to get across. My job is not to get him upset; my job is for them to understand the position.

Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez offered that her relationship with the board president is critical, and described how she involved the president in her efforts to develop relationships with board members.

The first thing I do is tell the board president about it. I have a process. I'm going to have a conversation with Mr. so and so because I think we have a misunderstanding or I just want clarification...my board president will know what I need to address. Then we will have a conversation and I'll go back and say this is clarified, we agreed and we'll move forward. Then we will never – let's say the person I had the issue with calls the board president and says that I did this – she is going to take you by surprise. Well, no, this is what she said and this is what she is trying to do.

Superintendent Rodriguez did not offer any specific instances of meeting with individual board members, any sort of one-on-one interaction with board members. Subsequent to my interview with Rodriguez, I followed up with a phone call, specifically asking if she met with board members individually. She stated that she maintained an open door policy with board members; however, did not initiate one-on-one meetings with board members, other than her weekly scheduled meeting with the board president.

Board survey results

Item #2 of the survey distributed to board members stated: *During a given week, how much time does the superintendent spend communicating with you?* There were three response choices: *0-1 hour, 2-3 hours, More than 3 hours*. There were six respondents. Three respondents marked *0-1 hour*, and three respondents marked *2-3 hours*. No respondent marked *More than 3 hours*.

Question #3: What are the characteristics and experiences as perceived by district constituencies that represent productive and effective Board of Education and superintendent relations?

Nurturing Relationships Collectively

This question is distinguishable from research Question #2 by its focus on the collective nature of superintendent-board relations. However, as each superintendent discussed the notion of superintendent-board relations, it was suggested that there is very little if any distinction between the strategies or characteristics that differentiate individual member-superintendent relations from collective board-superintendent relations. Much of the effort and focus is the same for individual and collective concerns.

Superintendent perspective

Superintendent Vasquez began her discussion about board-superintendent relations with comments regarding the “fit.” During her comments she acknowledged need to be cautious, lest she be perceived as a “know it all” outsider.

It depended on places. I know that there were certain places that I would never have applied. I would kind of feel like I would definitely not have an opportunity.

Maybe I was just making that up but for me, it was certain places – you’ve got to have the fit – you’ve got to really fit in with the board, the leadership, the direction, and there are certain battles that you really don’t want to necessarily fight. Maybe later on in your life, but there are certain things you want to fight for and so this one in particular, I felt the board was ready for that change...I could see expectations, in setting those expectations, and not wanting to settle for less than what I think kids deserve. Sometimes I have to catch myself and think if they are from here, am I offending them by telling them this isn’t good for your kids – I know better because I’m an outsider, and I always think back as to how I’m going to present it because I don’t want to come across that way. The end result should be that we should all want better for our kids.

Superintendent Vasquez was concerned that the board and she are united in their expectations and hopes. She discussed the strategies she utilizes to engage and educate the board, as necessary.

I have to be very strategic about how I say it or how I can help them take ownership of high expectations. Maybe sometimes before I realized it, oh my god, I think I just – it’s not intended to create antagonism. I’ll come around and ask what they think. In the end, we all want what is good for kids. Sometimes they just don’t see because they have not gotten out of the community. I bring them videos and pieces, and things to open their eyes. I don’t blame them; I just know that maybe their experiences have not taken them out of this community. What they know is what they know. It’s not because they don’t want to know any

better, it's because that is all they know. It's my job to create that excitement of what can be and what the possibility is out there...and then developing the trust. From the very beginning, they would not have allowed me to do, or would not have supported me doing a lot of things that we did that were pretty radical...it was with that vision of why we need to do this. It's always trying to get them to see the big picture.

Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez shared similar ideas as Superintendent Vasquez, when discussing some of her strategies to establish and maintain productive superintendent-board relations. She discussed the necessity of a good "match," the necessity of having the board united in their efforts, and her strategies used to establish boundaries between her role and that of the board.

People sometimes – we need to be cognizant of some of the realities – don't let that paralyze you. You are you and you feel that the district is a good match; you put out your name. If it doesn't, it's their loss and maybe it wasn't going to be a good match...when I came in I inherited a board that was kind of divided so it was bringing the board together. And how do we do that? We set our goals, we set our operating procedures. We knew how we were going to behave towards each other. Those operating procedures are how we behave with each other...How we were going to operate between the superintendent and the board, and how we are going to address situations that become challenges. Some of the challenges come when people want to tell you who to hire, who shouldn't be there...Only one time have I had to have a serious conversation, I said we are crossing boundary lines.

Yes, and we said the only person you [board] supervise is me. Don't tell me you want to write up Principal A because of this. Those are personnel issues... There are going to be times you agree to disagree, but you have to have the courage to do, you have to make recommendations. Don't dwell on it... But you need to do what – don't take it personal – move on... ultimately, they have to vote their voice. Don't dwell on it. It's not personal.

Superintendent Rodriguez had a simple response, when asked to discuss board-superintendent relations.

Oh my god! That's the bane of my existence. I was appointed superintendent in the spring, and we had board elections in November [of that year]. I lost my majority so from that time on, I have had – the board and I have had a contentious relationship... almost immediately. It has been really, really tough. I said to you when you first came in that I resigned. I resigned because the board pressured me into resigning – they didn't want to renew my contract. There is nothing that I can do to make – at the end of the day, it is all personal. They didn't pick me so they didn't want me. Anything I do, they scorn – it seems there is nothing I can do to make them happy... I have always been respectful to them and given them their due. I was raised to be that way, to be polite to people and to respect people who are in authority over you. I've continued that practice because I feel it is important. I always recognize and give them credit, they deserve the credit, and they are elected officials of the district. We just haven't been able to see eye to eye. It's not really about issues where they could say we don't want you to do this

– we want you to do this. It’s nothing about that. If you ask them they can’t even give you the issue of what it has to do with.

During a board meeting that I attended, I made note of an incident where the district’s business officer was addressing the board. At one point, Superintendent Rodriguez interjected, and was immediately dismissed by a board member. The board members’ dismissive tone of voice appeared to be rather rude; thus, I addressed this with Rodriguez.

[Subsequently, another board member] came to me on some other matters, and she said to me, she said, “when the time is right, I would like to talk about how, she said, you know, we don’t have to like each other but we also shouldn’t be rude and disrespectful to each other. I think this needs to come up. I don’t know when we are going to have that chance.” I asked her if she would like to give me an example of that. She pointed out that example; she asked me, “What is her problem?” That was the rudest thing she had seen. “What do they want from you, blood? You are already resigning.” She caught on to it.

Rodriguez ended her interview with these comments.

Here is my philosophy, not my philosophy, an observation, I think. Maybe it sounds crazy to you, I don’t know. I’m – I’ve said this to a few people before – I also feel like I’m a single, Hispanic female, don’t have a spouse, that in a lot of ways the board feels like, to a certain extent, that they can be more disrespectful than they normally would be because I don’t have anyone to defend me. I seriously believe that. If I had a husband, in the Hispanic culture, they would feel

like they were offending me, and in turn offending him. I don't have anyone to answer to so they feel like they can say or do with me however they want. They take advantage of me because they see me as a weak person, without a defender or protector. They wouldn't treat a woman who had a spouse like that because in their culture, they would feel like they were insulting the man.

Board survey results

Item #3 of the survey instrument distributed to selected board members, stated: The superintendent maintains effective and productive board-superintendent relations. The response choices were: *Strongly Disagree*, *Somewhat Agree*, *Agree*, *Strongly Agree*, or *No Response*. There were six survey respondents. The response tabulation: 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, and 5 = *Strongly Agree*. No other choices were marked.

There was also included a space for respondents to add comments regarding this question. The responses included:

- She keeps us posted regularly on district business
- The superintendent's failure to communicate effectively
- Anytime issues on personnel arise, student/parent issues, fiscal concerns, property damage, education programs/initiatives, solicit personal feedback and advise on given topics listed above.
- Superintendent is continually notifying of any updates, changes, and anything we need to know. She works hard to keep well-balanced communication with the board at all times.

- She is very informative and includes us in everything we need to know about. Concerns and issues and also accomplishments.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings as a result of the data being processed, analyzed, and interpreted to identify emergent themes. The themes identified were:

- Seeds of Leadership (Addressed under research question #1)
- Empowered by Example and Suggestion (Addressed under research question #1)
- The Latina Perspective (Addressed under research question #1)
- Nurturing Relationships One-By-One (Addressed under research question #2)
- Nurturing Relationships Collectively. (Addressed under research question #3).

The following chapter will present the conclusions drawn, based on the analysis of the data collected, as ascribed to the above named themes.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Statement of the Problem

The superintendency demands a particular skill set and demeanor to effectively manage the many functions that constitute the work of a school district. Critical to a superintendent's success is the ability to develop and maintain an effective superintendent-school board team to drive the district forward and meet its goals. The identification of the requisite practices to effectuate such a superintendent-school board team is an area that requires additional research. In addition to this identification is the juxtaposition of the notion of how gender and ethnicity are variables in developing and maintaining superintendent-school board relations. This study attempted to understand and identify characteristics that presume to represent effective superintendent-board relations, specifically as they relate to Latina public school superintendents in the state of Texas.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to describe and analyze the characteristics of three Latina public school superintendents in Texas. The focus was on their behaviors and practices that suggest or demonstrate effective superintendent-board relations. The study sought to identify those cultural variables, if any, that inform their practices and behaviors.

Commented [KRA7]: This entire paragraph makes no sense. "The purpose" and "the focus" and "the study sought"? The last one mentions "those cultural variables but I don't see what "those cultural variables" she is referring to. Cisneros, page 115, makes complete sense when you read it. And, she repeats this exact section in "Conclusions" on page 145.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the traits and attributes demonstrated and utilized by Latina superintendents in Texas?
2. What are the characteristics and experiences as perceived by district constituencies that represent productive and effective Board of Education member and superintendent relations?
3. What are the characteristics and experiences as perceived by district constituencies that represent productive and effective Board of Education and superintendent relations?

Methodology

This study employed a phenomenological approach as a subset of qualitative research design. The inherent discourse of the study was dialogic, from which was created a reality. Its reality, its heuristics, was constructed through the process of understanding how the participants, the actors, perceive their situation.

Epistemologically, the study was based in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity; thus, the participants' personal perspective and interpretation drove the study. The study utilized four sources of data to inform the research findings: two semi-structured interviews with each superintendent participant; field notes from attendance at a board meeting in each representative school district; review of assorted superintendent-board communiqués; an online survey was completed by two board members from each district. Data analysis utilized Strauss and Corbin's three stages of coding: open coding,

axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The five basic tenets of qualitative research as defined by Merriam (1998) were utilized as the foundation for the data analysis process.

Summary of Findings

This study revealed how the traits and attributes demonstrated by Latina superintendents in Texas intersect with their efforts to produce and maintain productive and effective board of education and superintendent relations. The findings of this study sustain previous research regarding women as executive level leaders in various industries (Isaac, Griffin, & Carnes, 2010; Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Metz, 2009; Carnes, Morrissey, & Stellar, 2008; Kruger, 2008), as well as women as executive level leaders in education, i.e., superintendents (Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999; Grogan, 2004; Shakeshaft, 1989). The study sustains previous research in all sectors that gender difference is not a variable as regard executive leaders' abilities to meet opportunities and challenges of a given industry. Common to both men and women are the necessarily particular knowledge and skills to manage and lead in a given industry. What continues to be a variable, which this study sustains, is a woman's ability to move up the promotion ladder and into executive level leadership positions. Despite women's success in education and mid-level management, such as teaching and the principalship, few women make it to the executive level, such as the superintendency. In essence, this study sustains the fundamental notions of gender role theory (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009; Kowalski & Strouder, 1999). A review of each of the five major themes,

which emerged in his study, will be provided in the following sections to inform the findings. These themes are:

- Seeds of Leadership;
- Empowered by Example and Suggestion;
- The Latina Perspective;
- Nurturing Relationships One-By-One;
- Nurturing Relationships Collectively.

Seeds of Leadership

The personal experiences of leaders offer valuable insights on the sustained impact family and childhood experiences have had on their lives. Incremental changes, day-to-day events, specific events or crises are predictors for leadership development. It has been suggested that parents are the most important part of a child's environment and can determine, to a large extent how the child turns out (Harris, 1998). Those raised in joint/large families learn to absorb diverse experiences, became more adaptable, and understand the richness of relationships. And, some were raised to have a short-term perspective with that proverbial dictum of *whatever you do, do it well, and I am with you*. The socialization process was characterized by a blend of nurturance and discipline. The sense of worth and intrinsic confidence developed during the formative years possibly created the foundation for the drive to achieve and excel which became evident in the early years of their professional pursuits (Sahgal & Pathak, 2007; Robbins, 1996; Coopersmith, 1981). The values and convictions that have steered leaders through their life journey include respect for people (regardless of class, money, or status),

adaptability, contentment, sacrificing to achieve, and a strong sense of duty, hard work, education, compassion, and integrity (Sahgal & Pathak, 2007). The personal experiences of the participants in this study resonate with the literature. The seeds of their leadership were planted amidst their life experiences throughout their childhood and in their families.

Empowered by Example and Suggestion

The guidance, encouragement, example and advice offered by others can have a significant impact on how one decides to act. The influence of others in whom trust and confidence has been placed, what they may say or how they may act, can affect how someone will choose. In the case of female executive leaders, it has been consistently cited that they were able to move from management levels into the executive levels in great part due to others who mentored them (Edmondson Bell, 2010; Bronznick & Goldenhar, 2009; Maryland, 2008). This does not imply that deference was shown to them in job placement simply because they were female, but because of a process whereby they were able to establish themselves as a viable candidate for the executive position. Through the process of mentoring, female executives were guided and supported as they considered career options, as well as strategic advice in brainstorming ideas. For female executives, there was a challenge to identify others who might share their gender perspective and the seemingly insurmountable odds of attaining an executive level position. In particular, the challenge to balance personal and professional life was and continues to be a significant variable to be addressed by those who aspire to or have assumed an executive level position (Edmondson Bell, 2010; Simard & Gilmartin, 2010).

Female executives consistently have arrived to the executive level only after it was suggested to them that they could fill the position, and encouraged to proceed through the application process. It was the power of suggestion by someone they respected and admired that encouraged the female executives to consider such a position. In most cases the suggestion comes by way of a professional peer; however, a spouse or family member can offer the suggestion that compels an executive level aspirant to act (Isaac, Griffin, & Carnes, 2010; Metz, 2009; Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007). Whether it is a formal or informal mentor relationship, the process of encouraging and supporting women to consider executive level positions is most often the experience of their being empowered because of another person's influence.

In this study, each participant shared their experiences where others had empowered them by their example, especially other women, or by their leadership behaviors. They were also empowered by others who suggested opportunities to them. In these instances, the participants had not thought about the opportunity as viable or timely; however, upon the suggestion by someone they trusted or admired, the suggestion became an attainable reality. It was most interesting to note that each participant shared that they were empowered first by their own sense of self -- their self confidence, their self awareness -- before they were empowered by another.

The Latina Perspective

This study was designed to identify how being a female and being a Hispanic impacted the participants' role as a superintendent. The research process discovered that where the three participants were concerned, there was no distinguishable difference

between their identity as a female or as a Hispanic. The female and Hispanic variables interacted with one another throughout their Latina perspective. The study also discovered that each of the three participants purposefully considered their role to balance work and home life.

The study sustained previous research that suggests women leaders are most successful when they pair stereotypic male (agentic) behaviors with stereotypic female (communal) behaviors (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Isaac, Griffin, & Carnes, 2010). Thus, the challenge for these women is to not only be good at their craft, but at the same time be good at managing their family demands. The challenge for executive level women remains to balance work and family.

The participants provided evidence of embracing this challenge as they spoke of their matriculating through graduate studies, traveling with spouse and children in tow; the spouse being willing to relocate on behalf of the participant; and the participants emphatic statements that having their children be with them when relocating was non-negotiable. They remained committed to their studies and work, consistently receiving excellent performance evaluations; however, they remained ever mindful of their role as spouse and mother. In the case of the participant who was divorced, her limited response to this seeming challenge to balance work and family sustained previous research that suggests such is the case for single or divorced women (Cheung & Halpern, 2010).

The participants discussed the awareness that by their lives, their work, they were carrying the torch for other Latinas. They were very much aware that their success or failure would impact opportunity for other Latinas who might come behind them. They

spoke of such attributes as being courageous, fearless, self aware, and self confident as essential to effectively perform their jobs and fulfill their family demands. In order to integrate their family roles and work roles, the participants were redefining their own norms for being a good mother and being a good leader. They considered family their highest priority, and dedicated themselves to finding solutions to make it work. In so doing, they are making their roles more compatible than they were under the larger society, and setting a new standard for other Latinas who might come behind them (Isaac, Griffin, & Carnes, 2010).

The participants were keenly aware that there are far too few women, Latinas, in the superintendency. They cited on numerous occasions the fact that the educational ranks were filled with women as teachers and principals, yet how very few female, Latina, superintendents there are. Their comments in this regard were consistent with previous findings (CGCS, 2008; Quilantan & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004; Ortiz, 2001, 2000). Once again, the participants were aware that their success as a superintendent was essential to open the doors for others. This takes place not only by their presence in the superintendency as a model for others, but also as a learning opportunity for boards of education; wherein, they realize that women are as viable a candidate as men, if not more so.

The study's emergent theme, the Latina Perspective, sustained prior research that suggests the notion of a *glass ceiling*, that "apt metaphor for the widespread observation that despite entry of women into nearly all fields traditionally occupied by men, women remain virtually nonexistent or present in token numbers in elite leadership positions"

(Carnes, Morrisey, & Geller, 2008, p. 1453). In addition, it is imperative to foster an institutional environment where women's careers can flourish in the context of their family responsibilities. This requires institutional commitment, flexibility, and creativity in the appointment and promotions process (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Neill, 2010).

Nurturing Relationships One-By-One

Building effective superintendent-board relations is a continuous process. An effective superintendent knows that building a solid relationship with the board must be a priority. The superintendency comes with endless high-priority tasks; however, none may be considered more essential than getting to personally know the board members and their interests, goals, and passions (Gilmour & Kinsella, 2009; Townsend, Johnston, Gross, Lynch, Garcy, et al, 2007; Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005; Peterson & Fusarelli, 2005).

Each participant recognized that their relationship with board members is very important. My observations of the participants' interactions with their board members demonstrated this. However, as the study revealed, what was most noteworthy were the strategies utilized by each participant to develop board member relations. One note of interest, each participant, when referring to members of the district's board, referred to them in the possessive form, e.g., *one of my board members*.

One participant, currently in her fifth year as superintendent at this location, has had little board member turnover. Early in her tenure, the participant visited with each member and through various conversations came to know each, but more importantly, they came to know her and of her expectations. Her demeanor and style are equally

professional and charming. She exudes an air of confidence and tenacity. Without question all indicators demonstrate that her performance has been stellar. The combination of these factors situates this participant as one who enjoys effective and productive board relations.

The second participant spoke about two specific strategies she utilizes to get to know her board members. First, when she has need for clarification or wants to address an issue raised by a board member, she purposefully sets an appointment to meet in person. She will not conduct business over the phone, since she is equally interested to engage in conversation and witness the board members body language. The other strategy she utilizes with newly elected board members; she sets an appointment to meet with them, to learn about them, hear their purpose or reason for seeking election to the board, and acculturate them to the ways by which the board operates.

During my visit with the third participant about board relations she did not offer any specific strategy she utilized to effectuate individual board relations. Subsequent to our face-to-face visits, I purposefully made a follow-up phone call to her, seeking additional information I may have missed in this regard. She confirmed that she does not set appointments to meet board members, but practices an open door policy to meet with them as they request.

The results of the survey that was distributed to two board members from each representative school district do not support any particular finding, nor sustain any previous research in this regard. There was an even split among respondents when asked: During a given week, how much time does the superintendent spend communicating with

you? Three respondents marked “0-1 Hour” and the other three respondents marked “2-3 Hours.” No respondent marked “More than 3 Hours.”

The emergent theme, Nurturing Relationships One-by-One, sustains prior research and suggests specific strategies utilized by three Latina superintendents to effectuate effective and productive superintendent-board member relations.

Nurturing Relationships Collectively

Critical to a superintendent’s success is the ability to develop and maintain an effective superintendent-board team to drive the district forward to meet its goals. There are numerous variables that interact with one another to allow the superintendent-board team to develop and thrive. How these variables are managed most often are among the superintendent’s most important roles (Townsend et al., 2007; Cambron-McCabe, Cunningham, Harvey, & Koff, 2005). One variable is the superintendent’s work to develop and maintain individual superintendent-board member relations; however, how these relationships are coalesced to create a superintendent-board team is an equal if not greater challenge for the superintendent (Gilmour & Kinsella, 2009; Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005). A superintendent-board team implies a unified belief and effort to increase student learning, and proposes a shared vision that everything the district undertakes has as its aim doing what is in the best interest of its students. This does not presume there will be complete agreement among all board members on every issue, but there is consistent agreement on the board’s focus to do what is in the best interest of children. This includes agreed upon protocols that establish a set of operating procedures by which board members and the superintendent agree to handle their duties. Building

and nurturing a board member team focused on moving the district forward must be the centerpiece of the superintendent's daily work (Townsend et al., 2007). One of the major reasons that can influence turnover of superintendents is their relationship with the board, which further emphasizes the critical nature of superintendents' developing and nurturing effective superintendent-board relations (Townsend et al., 2007; Kowalsky & Strouder, 1999).

This study sustains prior research that suggests the importance of building and developing a board team. By Texas law, a school district board of trustees (education) in the State is comprised of seven members, with the superintendent as an ex officio member. The adage, *work to create a team of eight*, is often used to refer to the ideal scenario. In this study, the participants offered their perspectives and strategies utilized to develop and maintain an effective board team.

The participants discussed how critical it was to maintain a good relationship with the board president. They held regular meetings with their respective board presidents, discussing such items as upcoming meeting agendas, ongoing business, as well as issues rose by particular board members. One participant shared her meetings with the board president are essential to avoid other members arriving at mixed conclusions, or any confusion about a given issue. This strategy allows the board president to clarify and affirm what the superintendent may have said.

The participants discussed the nature of their interactions with the board based on professionalism and courtesy. They were unanimous in their desire and strategy to treat the board with due respect, based on values and beliefs, as well as the fact that the board

members are elected officials. One participant shared an experience where a newly elected board member's behaviors were not consistent with established protocols. While the superintendent addressed the behavior, it was also addressed by a fellow board member. The participant offered this as an example of the peer coaching that could be found among the board members, and an important factor in maintaining agreed upon protocols. Another participant shared how the board president and she meet individually with new board members. Their goal is to become familiar with them, but also to inform them of the agreed upon operating procedures. The participant was enthusiastic when discussing how well she feels her board functions because of these operating procedures. She suggested they represent a set of shared values and vision of how they will conduct business and remain focused on their primary reason for existence, to be advocates for children.

The third participant spoke of her frustrations with the district's board. Soon after her appointment as superintendent, an election was held and the configuration of the board changed. The majority of the board was newly elected and had not chosen her to be superintendent. She expressed that this fact did not serve her well, believing that nothing she would ever do would please them. In her opinion, it had become a personal matter, and they simply wanted her gone. When I attended a board meeting in the district, I observed an interaction between the participant and one of the board members. The board member dismissed the superintendent in a seemingly rude manner. My observation was confirmed by the participant and another board member. Thus, I felt compelled to learn of any special efforts the participant may have exerted to address her dilemma of building

superintendent-board relations. During the one-on-one interviews and a subsequent phone conversation, the participant did not suggest any special efforts in this regard. The seeming inability of the participant to develop a good working relationship with the board, and her soon-to-be in effect resignation sustain previous research in this regard.

One of the items in the survey distributed to board members stated: The superintendent maintains effective and productive superintendent-board relations. The choices of response were: *Strongly Agree*, *Somewhat Agree*, *Agree*, *Strongly Agree*, and *No Response*. Of the six respondents, one marked *Strongly Disagree* and the remaining five respondents marked *Strongly Agree*. The single respondent to mark *Strongly Disagree* was a board member in the district where the superintendent has announced her soon-to-be effective resignation.

The literature suggests productive and effective superintendent-board relations are critical to move the district forward to reach its goals of increasing student learning. Two participants' characteristics and behaviors in this study affirm this suggestion. In the same manner, the third participant whose characteristics and behavior do not appear to be aligned with the board, and whose resignation is imminent, sustains prior research in this regard.

The emergent theme, Nurturing Relationships Collectively, sustains prior research and suggests particular strategies utilized by three Latina superintendents to develop and maintain effective superintendent-board relations. The study suggests that where purposeful and strategic methods are utilized, effective and productive superintendent-

board relations exist; conversely, the absence of purposeful and strategic practices yield a shortened superintendent tenure.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the characteristics of three Latina public school superintendents in Texas. The focus was identifying their behaviors and practices that suggest or demonstrate effective superintendent-board relations. The study sought to identify those cultural variables, if any, that informed their practices and behaviors.

The literature is replete with facts and information that demonstrates the lack of women in executive level positions. This study sustains prior research that suggested the issue is not about women's abilities, skills and knowledge in a given sector. There is substantial evidence to demonstrate that women are essentially equal in their ability to effectively fill an executive level position. The issue surrounds the notion of gender role theory and the proverbial "glass ceiling." The challenge confronting hiring bodies, such as a school board, is the challenge to expand its pool of potential candidates, free from the preconceived biases of the traditional male centric roles ascribed by society. Those responsible to hire, as well as those entrusted with conducting the executive search, must make themselves open to the fact that women can well fill the executive role, and also fill the home/family role, where this may be perceived issue for the search consultant or board. It's not an either-or choice, but awakening to a new era and redefinition of role expectations. Two of the study's participants were married with children. Among their children, the oldest was a freshman in college. Thus, these participants assumed the

superintendency, while raising children whose years might be considered the *high maintenance* years. These two participants have moved upwardly through the ranks of their careers without compromising their value for, belief in and commitment to both work and family. The participant who was divorced with older children, while not currently in the midst of her children's *high maintenance* years; nonetheless is like the other two participants – they have all developed stellar dossiers, and served as superintendents where their districts have received accolades during their tenure. Each of the participants was evidence that Latinas can balance work and family and achieve measureable success. While each of them spoke of and exhibited strong self-confidence, they are nonetheless fully aware that even in 2011, there still exist barriers for Latinas to overcome. They each remain committed to carry the torch for those Latinas who may come behind them.

Superintendent-board relations are critical. In the case of two participants, they purposefully worked to develop individual and collective relations with the board. One-on-one meetings between superintendent and a member; the board president and superintendent meeting with new board members; reviewing agreed upon operating procedures during board retreats or with board members, individually; and peer coaching taking place between board members. These are all examples of strategies utilized by two of the participants, and survey responses and their own comments suggest these efforts are producing effective board relations. Unfortunately, in the case of the third participant, her efforts to develop and sustain productive board relations were not seemingly sufficient for her to be espoused as one of the *team of eight*. However, I propose that her

impending resignation does sustain prior research; one of the major reasons that can influence turnover of superintendents is their relationship with the board.

The study was a form of phenomenological research. The research was concerned to study the experience from the perspective of the individual participants, the three Latina superintendents. The study was robust with factors and information that were powerful for understanding each participant's experience, providing deep insights into their motivations and actions. For example, Superintendent Vasquez offered how she is motivated to this day by her father's memory, by including her in his farming and ranching operations, she grew up to believe that it didn't matter if you are boy or girl, you can do whatever you put your mind to, and always give back to your community. Superintendent Hernandez-Gomez was retained in Sixth Grade twice, upon moving from Mexico into the Texas public school system, the frustration, shame, and anger she felt drives her every effort to advocate for all children. Superintendent Rodriguez was raised to value education and believe she could be anything she wanted to be, she remained confident and self-assured, even as she prepared to end her tenure as superintendent.

A noteworthy discovery of the study surrounds the fact that each of the three participants ascended to the superintendency without ever serving as a school principal. There was no particular discovery of emergent thematic information to suggest variables or factors to influence this fact; however, by its very nature this discovery deserves special note.

The study was concerned with attributes and characteristics of three Latina superintendents in Texas. The study discovered three Latina superintendents who were:

Authentic – remaining ever faithful to their values and beliefs;

Tenacious – prepared to challenge and make the necessarily difficult decisions;

Advocates – they were steadfast in their efforts to do what is right for kids;

Torchbearers – to prepare the way for other Latinas who may come behind them;

Balanced – they were equally mother, spouse, daughter, sister and superintendent.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study provide implications for practice. The implications include the following:

1. School district Boards of Trustees are challenged to consider a diverse pool of candidates when conducting a superintendent search;
2. Search consultants enlisted to assist in a superintendent search must necessarily do their part to increase institutional commitment, flexibility, and creativity in the identification and appointment of Latina candidates;
3. If a Latina has previously served in a district where a superintendent search is about to be undertaken, or is currently taking place, it is incumbent upon the board to remain unbiased toward Latinas, and equally consider them as they consider male candidates
4. Latinas who aspire to or are currently serving in the superintendency must necessarily challenge themselves to build their capacity to develop and maintain productive and effective superintendent-board relations.

Implications for Further Study

The study provides the following implication for further study. The implications for further study are:

1. A study, which seeks to analyze current professional development or mentoring programs for Latinas and building their superintendent-board relations capacity, and as necessary develop a new model that aligns prior research with current reality;
2. A study, which seeks to analyze and understand perceptions of individuals, especially as regard potential female candidates, responsible to conduct superintendent searches on behalf of public school district Boards of Trustees in Texas.
3. A study, which seeks to analyze and understand the career path of superintendents.

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