ABSTRACT

KINGSBERRY, FRANCEMISE ST. PIERRE. Protective Factors and Resiliency: A Case Study of how African American Women Overcome Barriers en route to the Superintendency. (Dr. Paul F. Bitting).

An underrepresentation of African American women in the superintendency exists in K-12 public schools. There is also a lack of research on their leadership and experiences in education. Although the number of women superintendents has increased over the years, the superintendency remains a male-dominated field and African American women remain in the minority. Consequently, African American female superintendents have to overcome many obstacles including race, gender, negative stereotypes, and limited opportunities. Further, African American women seeking the superintendency have to prove they are worthy to hold the position. In general, superintendents face numerous challenges due to the nature of the position itself, without having to account for race and gender.

The purpose of this case study was to understand and describe the ways in which African American women superintendents have been resilient in attaining and maintaining the superintendency despite their underrepresentation in the position and in the literature. Protective factors in resiliency theory (Henderson & Milstein, 2003) has been used as a framework to analyze ways in which African American women superintendents have dealt with challenges in their position and overcome them.

Four current African American women superintendents from urban and rural school districts in a Southern state participated in this study. Their tenures as superintendents ranged from one to four years. The participants identified barriers they faced en route to the superintendency, challenges within their superintendency, and strategies they employed to overcome these barriers. They also provided their own definitions of resiliency. In addition,
each participant shared advice for African American women superintendent aspirants to overcome barriers and hopefully, improve their chances of attaining the position. Further, the participants’ disclosures of strategies highlight ways that using protective factors is helpful in overcoming hardship and building resiliency. Various themes were evident in this study related to barriers in obtaining the superintendency. They included the intersection of race and gender, negative perceptions of women and African Americans, the lack of opportunity afforded to African American women, culture, and discouragement from others. Themes centered on challenges within the superintendency were balancing between work and her family, stress, negative perceptions of African American women, and unforeseen challenges.

Participants used both Internal and Environmental Protective Factors to overcome their barriers. Within the strategies utilized to overcome hardship, the following themes were displayed: Promoting shared responsibility, employing interpersonal skills, being direct, nurturing relationships with the Board, finding viable solutions, navigating through politics, being fair, knowing who the gatekeepers are, utilizing site-based management, seeking input from mentors, and making own decisions. The emergent themes derived from the overall data were: Having faith, having confidence, having a strong support system, and being prepared.

by
Francemise St. Pierre Kingsberry

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APPROVED BY:

Dr. Paul F. Bitting
Committee Chair

Dr. Susan C. Faircloth

Dr. Lance D. Fusarelli

Dr. Gregory E. Hicks
DEDICATION

I am eternally grateful to my Heavenly Father for always opening doors of opportunity for me. Every great accomplishment I have achieved is because He has favored me. As it is written according to Philippians 4:13, “Through Christ I can do all things.” I look forward to seeing how this work will positively impact the lives of others.

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BIOGRAPHY

Francemise Kingsberry is native of Newark and Maplewood, New Jersey and was born to Haitian immigrants. After completing her Bachelor’s degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) in 2002, she became a Teach For America (TFA) corps member and taught 3rd grade at an inner-city school in Downtown Atlanta, Georgia and 4th grade Reading, Language Arts, and Social Studies in an inner-city school in Henderson, North Carolina. After meeting the two-year commitment to TFA, she became a teacher at KIPP South Fulton Academy in East Point, Georgia where she taught 5th grade Reading and Writing and Language-Arts and 6th grade Literature.

Because of her desire to further her career in Educational Leadership, Kingsberry earned a Master's of School Administration degree from UNC-CH in 2009. Prior to graduating with this degree, she served as an Assistant Principal at Royal Elementary School in Louisburg, North Carolina for about four years. In 2012, Kingsberry decided to pursue her doctorate as a full-time student at North Carolina State University.

Kingsberry is active in her community serving as a pastor of Rebirth and Renewal Church International. She has also volunteered with Franklin County Schools and currently resides in Youngsville with her husband, Hassan T. Kingsberry, Esq. and her three beautiful children, Hassan II and twin girls, Keren, and Kelyn.
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To the remarkable participants in this study—thank you for being ready and willing to take part in this study. Your warmth, wisdom, and grace as you shared your personal and professional lives with me have inspired me. Because of you, I am hopeful that more African American women aspirants to the superintendency, such as myself, will achieve this goal and never see it as impossible.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

One significant effect of the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) decision was the displacement of African American administrators (Alston, 2005; Coffin, 1972; Fultz, 2004; Horsford, 2007, 2009; Horsford & McKenzie, 2008; Sizemore, 1986; Tillman, 2004a, 2004b). Why would integration, which seemed like a good thing, mean a loss of jobs for people of color in educational leadership?

Over 40 years ago, in his pioneering dissertation on the African American superintendency, Moody (1971) was the first to examine the African American superintendency and the characteristics of school districts before they hired African American Superintendents. He posits, “One outgrowth of the desegregation struggle has been the emergence of more African American administrators” (p. 3). He found that African American superintendents were hired where there was a predominantly African American Board of Education, a majority of students of color, and a primarily non-White community.

Thirty years later, Dawkins (2004) found similar results to that of Moody (1971) in his research on African American superintendents in Michigan—African American superintendents were limited in number, had a large population of African American students or African American board members in their constituencies, and served in areas that had significant financial problems.

The challenges facing African American administrators, at large, is even more striking when looking at African American female superintendents. The literature shows a
clear underrepresentation exists of African American women in the superintendency (Alston, 1996, 1999, 2000; Bell & Chase, 1994; Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999; Brunner, 2000; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Gewertz, 2006; Glass, 2000; Grogan, 1996; Jackson, 1999; Kowalski et al., 2011; Pigford & Tomsen, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1989; Sharp et al., 2004; Tallerico, 1999, 2000). As Alston (2005) states, “In these United States, persons of color represent 10.9% of the nation’s teachers, 12.3% of the nation’s principals, but only 2.2% of the nation’s superintendents. Women and persons of color, nevertheless, go largely underrepresented as superintendents” (p. 675). Although women have occupied a significant portion of educational leadership programs and administrative positions (Grogan, 1996; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999), interestingly, women in general have been underrepresented in the superintendency. According to Shakeshaft (1989), in 1928, women comprised 1.6 percent of all superintendents. Bell and Chase (1993) reported 65 years later that only 5.6 percent of superintendents are women. Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, and Ellerson (2011) posit that the current representation of percentage of women superintendents is the highest ever reported at 24.1%.

In general, women have dominated the teaching force, at all levels, since the start of the twentieth century (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). However, in 2000 men held over 86% of the superintendencies in the United States (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, and Ellerson, 2011). According to Kowalski et al., (2011), [Although] the percentages of females and persons of color in the superintendency have increased over the past decade. Nevertheless, both groups continue to be
underrepresented because their presence in the position does not reflect the diversity of both the total national population and the total student population in public schools. (p. 85)

There continues to be a disparity, by race and gender, in the attainment of the superintendency and the amount of time it takes for African American women to become superintendents compared to their White counterparts. Furthermore, the superintendency is becoming progressively more challenging for African Americans, especially women (Alston, 1999; Jackson 1995; Moody 1983, 1995). When African American women find success in gaining these positions, they are usually found in inner-city areas wrought with challenges or older suburban areas (Venable 1995).

In addition to the scarcity of African American women in the superintendency, Allen, Jacobson, and Lomotey (1995) purport that there is also an exiguous amount of research conducted on African American women in the area of educational leadership in general. The literature is scant on information concerning their career goals, the constraints they face as they pursue their goals, and the roles of mentors and sponsors in the advancement of their careers. In her study, Tallerico (2000) posits that the current practices for selection of superintendents, particularly women and people of color, is attention-worthy, timely, and significant for three reasons: a large amount of vacancies for superintendents are expected in the near future, a growing number of women occupy leadership preparation programs and administrative positions which are pathways to the superintendency, and lastly, there is a
limited amount of research on how gender and race/ethnicity can add to the pre-existing body of literature on the hunt for superintendents and their selection.

African American women are said to be a double minority in the area of educational leadership particularly in the superintendency. Andrews and Simpson-Taylor (1995) coined this phenomenon as a “double whammy,” and Doughty (1980) refers to this as the “double bind;” this is the intersection between gender and race. The “double whammy” notion is defined as adverse race and gender-based stereotypes that cause problems in the workplace for women of color, especially as it relates to matters involving job promotion and advancement (Andrews & Simpson-Taylor, 1995). To this end, Jackson (1999) states, “Black women superintendents grew up doubly marginal in society, as females and African Americans” (p. 141).

The lack of representation of African American women in the superintendency persists during a time when the racial and ethnic make up of American schools is changing. According to the U.S. Department of Education website:

From fall 2001 through fall 2011, the number of White students enrolled in prekindergarten through 12th grade in U.S. public schools decreased from 28.7 million to 25.6 million, and their share of public school enrollment decreased from 60 to 52 percent. In contrast, the number of Hispanic students enrolled during this period increased from 8.2 million to 11.8 million students, and their share of public school enrollment increased from 17 to 24 percent. The number of Black students enrolled during this period fluctuated between 7.8 million and
8.4 million, and Black students' share of public school enrollment decreased from 17 percent in 2001 to 16 percent in 2011.

This shows the increase of minority students in America’s public schools.

In 2000, Alston posed the question, “Where are the Black female school superintendents?” Fifteen years later, the African American women superintendent is virtually absent from this position. What is the plausibility of African American women becoming a superintendent after attaining a degree given the scant number of African American women superintendents in southern states? Who are the women who have been successful in rising to the superintendency? What made them resilient in attaining this position?

**Statement of the Problem**

Research shows that race (Alston, 1999; Goffney & Edmundson, 2012; Kalbus, 2000; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Simmons, 2005) and gender (Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999, 2003; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Goffney & Edmundson, 2012; Grogan, 1996, 2005, 2008; Loder, 2005; Robinson, 2004; Shakeshaft, 1989; Tallerico, 2000) are barriers in the promotion of African American women to the superintendency. According to Alston (1996), there are five constraints (or barriers) faced by African American women seeking to become superintendents: a lack of awareness of how to navigate politically within the administrative structure; a lack of role models; exclusion from the “old boys” network, support systems, or sponsorship; the perception of society that African Americans are incompetent leaders; and a lack of a system for identifying potential African American aspirants to administrative
positions (p. 63). In speaking about the recent resignation of three notable African American women superintendents, Gewertz (2006) states that both current and former leaders had to overcome negative stereotypes and repeatedly had to prove their capability, making their already challenging jobs even more challenging.

Tallerico (2000) speaks of “unwritten rules” or barriers that hinder women and people of color. These are criteria that headhunters and search consultants use to inform their superintendent searches and hiring practices. One of these barriers, gatekeeping, restricts the access of African American women to the superintendency. In particular, women and people of color are deprived of some opportunities for recruitment because they are not viewed as qualified as defined by “nonminority” males (p. 31). There are both indirect and overt biases that limit the advancement of African American women. According to Tallerico (2000),

These procedural routines and professional norms [utilized by headhunters and search consultants to narrow down their candidate selections] defining ‘best qualified’ can be considered indirect ways that women and people of color are more likely than nonminority males to become stuck behind particular gates. (p. 32)

As a result, African American women do not obtain superintendencies as quickly as their White counterparts (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Further, Kowalski and Brunner (2011) posit:

To be sure, only within the last 20 years have researchers aimed their attention specifically at women superintendents and superintendents of color. Without focused studies of women and superintendents of color, both groups may continue to lack
appropriate role models; to believe themselves substandard because they do not fit the
norms found in leadership and superintendency literature (studies primarily of White
men); to find themselves practicing in ways not mentioned in books on the
superintendency; and indeed, to experience limited access to the superintendency
positions because criteria for hiring are based on White male norms. (p. 16)

There is a need, in particular, for the study of African American women superintendents and
their perspectives.

African American women continue to be underrepresented in school leadership
positions. Those who have successfully attained their positions have had to face and
overcome barriers enabling them to use their negative situations to become resilient leaders.

Is the problem a lack of degree attainment, a lack of experience, or a combination of both?
Are the stories of African American women superintendents ones of resiliency? If so, what
skills or strategies did they employ to attain their positions? Which aspects of protective
factors have been utilized as a strategy for success?

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this case study is to understand and describe the ways in which
African American women superintendents have been resilient in attaining and maintaining
the superintendency despite their underrepresentation in the position and in the literature.

This work seeks to highlight their perspectives on potential barriers to becoming
superintendents. Protective factors in resiliency theory (Henderson & Milstein, 2003) is used
as a framework to analyze ways in which African American women superintendents have
dealt with challenges in their position and overcome them. As stated by Jackson (1999), the voices of African American women leaders need to be heard “loud and clear” (p. 157).

**Research Questions**

The research questions for the study are:

1. What are the barriers that African American women face in accessing the position of superintendency?
2. How do African American women superintendents define resiliency?
3. What methods, procedures, and/or processes have African American women superintendents employed to overcome barriers to the superintendency?
4. What are the challenges African American women have experienced within their position as superintendent? How have they overcome these challenges?

In this study, barriers are obstacles faced by the participants en route to the superintendency. Challenges are the problems and difficulties they have faced within the position.

**Significance of the Study**

superintendents in the literature, then, become invisible, leaving no trail for other African American women to follow” (p. 87).

There is a need for the perspectives of African American women superintendents. Although there is literature on the experiences of “Blacks” and “women” this most often does not refer to African American women (hooks, 1989). Bloom and Erlandson (2003) posit, “Failing to acknowledge that White women retain White privilege; women of color do not hold a color privilege, thereby making African American women’s experiences similar in some ways to women in general but deviant from the White female norm” (p. 344). While African American women face some of the same challenges all women face in seeking the superintendency, there are those that are unique to being African American.

According to Tillman and Cochran (2000), since 1987, little research has specifically highlighted the challenges of African American women superintendents. This particular population should be studied because “the tenacity and resilience of those Black women who meet the challenges of the superintendency and are successful has not been studied extensively” (Alston, 2005, p. 676). Through this study of African American women superintendents and the protective factors of resiliency theory (Henderson & Milstein, 2003), it is the hope of the researcher that this work will not only add to the existing body of literature on African American women in the superintendency, but that it will also increase the number of inspiring African American women superintendents.

**Definition of Terms**

*Barrier:* Anything that prevents or obstructs passage, access, or progress (The Free
Brown v. Board of Education (1954): The U. S. Supreme Court ruling that segregated schools, thus violating the 14th Amendment of the U. S. Constitution.

Double Whammy: Adverse race and gender-based stereotypes that cause problems in the workplace for women of color, especially as it relates to matters involving job promotion and advancement (Andrews & Simpson-Taylor, 1995).

Facilitators: Ones that help to bring about an outcome (as learning, productivity, or communication) by providing indirect or unobtrusive assistance, guidance, or supervision (Merriam-Webster, 2014).

Glass Ceiling: The obstacles that women who attempt and aspire to senior management positions face (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986).


Protective Factors: Characteristics within the person or within the environment that mitigate the negative impact of stressful situations and conditions (Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

Resiliency: The process of, or capacity for, outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990).

Superintendent: The name given to the executive level position at the top of the educational hierarchy in the United States. Public school superintendents are typically appointed by a school board of five or more lay individuals who are the elected
representatives of the school community known as a school district (Grogan, 2005).

Chapter Summary and Overview of the Study

The first chapter of this study provided an introduction, context, and rationale for the study. Guiding research questions, significance of the study, and a brief definition of terms have also been discussed in this chapter. Chapter 2 reviews the current literature on the history of African American women in Educational Leadership and the superintendency more specifically. A discussion of the barriers to the ascension of African American women to the superintendency is provided. Resiliency theory, as a framework, is also chronicled. Additionally, a literature review of studies pertaining to African American women superintendents and resiliency can be found in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 discusses the methods used to conduct the study and to gather and analyze the data. In this chapter, a description and rationale for the research design of the study is provided. Details on the sample selection, data collection and data analysis procedures are discussed. Finally, in the trustworthiness segment, is an account of the description of protection, researcher’s subjectivity, ethical considerations, limitations, and delimitations of this study. Chapter 4 provides the findings of the study. In particular, it displays a detailed case study for each participant, portrays a cross-case analysis of the participants’ responses, and advice for African American aspirants to the superintendency. Chapter 5 imparts a discussion of the findings, the implications for future research and practice along with the researcher’s conclusions.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this case study is to understand and describe the ways in which African American women superintendents have been resilient in attaining and maintaining the superintendency despite their underrepresentation in the position and in the literature. This work seeks to highlight their perspectives on potential barriers to becoming superintendents. Protective factors in resiliency theory (Henderson & Milstein, 2003) is used as a framework to analyze ways in which African American women superintendents have dealt with challenges in their position and overcome them.

Through an evaluation of past literature and research studies regarding African American women in leadership positions and more specifically as superintendents, this study seeks to discover which strategies have been employed by these women as they overcome barriers to their ascendency to the superintendency and well as the barriers they have encountered within their current positions. More specifically, this study will explore how these women have been resilient in their attainment of the superintendency.

The first section of this literature review describes the history of African American women in Educational Leadership. The second section deals with the history of the African American Superintendency; it includes the impact of the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education (Brown)* (1954) and the reversal of the *Plessy* principle. The third section focuses on African American women and the superintendency. An overview of dissertations and
studies on African American women superintendents as well as the barriers they face is also provided in this section. The fourth portion of this literature review covers the history and components of resiliency theory and protective factors in particular. The chapter is concluded with a summary of major themes in the research and a discussion of how this study will add to the extant literature.

**History of African American Women in Educational Leadership**

According to Turner (1976), although laws were created to prevent African Americans from learning to read, schools were established for the African American population starting in the mid 1700s through the 1850s. Following the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, the federal government made a concerted effort to provide former slaves with basic education; additionally, military commanders established many of these schools (Turner, 1976). According to Alston (2000), “A more specific look at African American women showed that after 1892, African Americans did not relent in their efforts to secure education” (p. 527). The majority of teachers during this time were African American women (Alston 2000). During the Reconstruction period, the federal government helped African Americans to create freedmen’s schools and to integrate White schools. Alston (2000) maintained that when White southerners regained control, however, they resegregated schools, thus limiting the educational opportunities for African Americans.

African American teachers also played a vital role in the establishment of freedmen’s schools. Mary Chase, a freedwoman founded the first freedmen’s school in the South; Mary Peake, another freedwoman established a school in Fortress, Monroe, VA, which was
foundational to Hampton Institute (Turner, 1976). Other notable African American women educators such as Fannie Jackson Coppin, Charlotte Forten Grimke, Lucy Laney, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, and Fannie Barrier Williams, began their teaching careers as Southern elementary school teachers and went on to establish schools, ranging from elementary to college for African Americans (Alston, 2000; Turner, 1976). Most of these schools established in the South were private and were funded by philanthropic organizations such as the Daniel Hand Fund, the Southern Education Board, the George F. Peabody Fund, and the Anna Jeanes Fund (Alston, 2005; Turner, 1976). Although African Americans found allies in the establishment of schools, there were also those who challenged their progress.

Despite challenges, African Americans secured administrative positions. Between 1820-1900, a few African American women, in particular, held such positions. According to Collier-Thomas (1982) and Shakeshaft (1989), African American women started getting educated at regular schools and some universities; they also represented approximately two-thirds of all African American teachers. Alston (2000) and Shakeshaft (1989) assert that while some managed public schools, most of these women not only founded their own schools and taught there, but they also served as the administrators.

From 1900 to 1930, women were generally elementary principals and county/state superintendents (Alston, 2000). However, women, in general, were underrepresented in leadership positions, especially minority women (Alston, 1999, 2000). More specifically, African American women were predominantly elementary and secondary teachers and when they were administrators, they were over elementary schools (Collier-Thomas, 1982). White
men have dominated almost all positions in school administration with the exception of the elementary school principalship since 1905 (Shakeshaft, 1989).

According to Alston (2000), “Black women’s involvement in school administration [was] quite limited beyond the role of the principal” (p. 526). Although African American women were considered to be central office staff (Tillman, 2004b) who served as supervisors, they still had to report to White county superintendents (Alston, 2000). Alston and Jones (2002) describe them as being early/mid-20th-century African American women “de-facto” superintendents often referred to as the “Jeanes Supervisors.” They increased in number during the 1930s; there were approximately 200 Jean Supervisors (Tillman, 2004a). They were college-educated, master teachers and administrators and were primarily sent to southern states to help improve problems in education (Alston, 1999, 2005; Alston & Jones, 2002). In addition, these women served as negotiators, crisis managers, staff developers, personnel specialists, resource allocation specialists and ultimately, disseminators of information (Alston & Jones, 2002; Sanders, 1999). They faced some of the same problems other working women and African American women have dealt with in terms of their relationships with White men, such as matters of power, gender and race (Botsch, 1996; Smith, 1997).

According to Ethridge (1979), there weren’t any African American superintendents prior to 1954 and there was less than a dozen serving as assistant superintendents. When the Brown decision was implemented in the 1960s and 1970s, many African Americans were displaced from their jobs as teachers and administrators (Alston, 2005; Coffin, 1972; Fultz,
One negative result of this decision was that the number of women superintendents declined in the early 1970s from 9% in the 1950s to 1.3% in 1971 (Blount, 1998).

**History of the African American Superintendency**

Moody’s (1971) groundbreaking dissertation was the first to examine the African American superintendency and to examine characteristics of school districts before the hiring of an African American superintendent. Before this work, research was scarce on this particular subject. Tillman (2004b) affirms, “As such, a focus on the Black superintendency did not begin to evolve as a distinct area of research until the 1970s” (p. 283). Moody’s work is centered on the state of districts with African American superintendents who were appointed before 1971. In his research, he considered the circumstances and background prior to the appointment of Black superintendents such as the district’s finances, community demographics, students, faculty and staff and board members. Before 1966, it was unrealistic for an African American to hold a position higher than an assistant superintendent over special projects, Director of Human Resources, or Administrative Assistant for Minority Affairs. The battle for desegregation created the need for an increased number of African American administrators.

According to Moody (1971),

One outgrowth of the desegregation struggle has been the emergence of more Black administrators. At first, the demand was for more Black principals. But as Blacks increase their representation on school boards and demand more participation in
school matters, the emphasis is shifting in some areas to a demand for Black superintendents. (p. 3)

Moody (1971) sought to fill the gaps in the literature in the following areas: the African American superintendency; uniqueness or lack thereof of districts led by African American superintendents; trends in districts that may hire African American superintendents; and provide a forum for African American superintendents to discuss their challenges and provide support for fellow African American superintendents and future African American administrators. He hypothesized seven factors surrounding the African American superintendency and the districts they led: (1) districts that hire African American superintendents were in financial trouble; (2) districts received Title I funds; (3) these districts had more students of color than Whites; (4) were increasing in the number of people of color in the community; (5) districts had a non-White school board; (6) districts had a dramatic increase in the non-White faculty and staff; and (7) the percentage of African American superintendents would increase within these districts.

Moody (1971) studied 21 large, city school districts that employed African American superintendents with predominantly African American student populations. He found that these superintendents were seldom hired in districts that had adequate resources or that had programs that sufficiently met their educational needs. The seven hypotheses were validated in his study.

He also found that the three conditions met by districts that hire African American superintendents are: “A majority Black Board of Education, majority non-White student
population, and a majority non-white community population” (p. 21). Additionally, he discovered that “The non-White teaching staff in eastern school districts did not reach a majority after the selection of a Black superintendent” (p. 21). Moody concluded, “The data presented in this study reinforces the concept that Black educators have not achieved equality of opportunity” (p. 22). As supported by Moody, desegregation impacted the African American superintendency and educators in general.

The Impact of Brown v. Board of Education on African American Leadership

Contrary to Moody’s claim, the Brown (1954) decision had a significant effect on the displacement of African American administrators (Alston, 2005; Coffin, 1972; Fultz, 2004; Horsford, 2007, 2009; Horsford & McKenzie, 2008; Sizemore, 1986; Tillman, 2004a, 2004b). In his book entitled The Black superintendent: Messiah or scapegoat?, Scott (1980) speaks of the effect of integrating schools on the position of African American superintendents. When schools were segregated, there was more opportunity for African American superintendents. Although the emergence of African American superintendents greatly impacted approximately 100 school systems nationwide during the period of 1968-1974, they remained unnoticed. Until the late 1960s, they were usually placed in exceptionally small and mostly African American rural school systems in the South and Southwest. While African Americans found more opportunities for advancement in school systems that were segregated versus those that were integrated, Scott maintained that desegregation efforts in the South actually reduced the number of African American administrators.
Not only were African American administrators displaced as a result of *Brown v. Board*, they faced significant challenges within the districts they led. Many of these African American superintendents found what they learned in school administration courses left them without adequate preparation for the pronounced difficulties they faced; this included leading school systems where the majority of students underperformed in basic skills and poorly funded (Scott, 1980, p. vii). Similar to Moody, Scott (1980) supported the finding that African American superintendents were often hired to run school districts in financial trouble where students lacked resources to meet their educational needs.

In the 1970s, there was a slight increase in the number of Black superintendents. According to Sizemore (1986):

Moody (1971), Jones (1985) and Scott (1980) agree that the increase of Black superintendencies is due, in part, to appointment of many Blacks to urban school systems with high percentages of minority students. Additionally, Scott predicted that there would be an increase in the number of Black superintendencies in school districts with high minority populations because of critical financial conditions and educational problems accrued from years of neglect and deprivation. Accordingly, these unwanted superintendencies would be available for Blacks, and recruitment would be unnecessary (Scott, 1980, p. 188). The emergence of Black superintendents can be viewed as another stage in the long struggle for equity and excellence in public schools for Black people. (p. 189)
More than three decades later, Dawkins (2004) found similar results to that of Moody (1971) in his research on African American superintendents in Michigan. Dawkins found that African American superintendents were limited in number, had a large population of African American students or African American board members in their constituencies, and served in areas that had significant financial problems.


Brown (1954) was the landmark decision that overturned the Plessy doctrine of “separate but equal” (Tatum, 2007). While Urban and Wagoner (2009) state that the ruling was “legally decisive,” they do, however, maintain that “the ruling left several issues undecided, including how quickly and to what extent desegregation was to take place” (p.
After a second ruling in *Brown*, the ambiguity of desegregating “with all deliberate speed” became apparent. Urban and Wagoner (2009) state:

This ruling reflected the realities of the situation. Although the Supreme Court was clear in the enunciation of legal principles, it took into account its own inability to guarantee enforcement of its rulings. Therefore, enforcement depended initially on the willingness of whites to comply and, later, on the pressure brought to bear from further judicial rulings and public opinion. (p. 341)

Although there was a ruling in place, compliance was left up to local education agencies and politicians. Urban and Wagoner (2009) further state:

Although school desegregation had been mandated by the 1954 *Brown* decision, implementing that decision proved far more difficult than most proponents ever imagined. Although some early progress was made in the border states, where public sentiment was mixed, the South experienced only “token” integration, with small numbers of carefully chosen black students attending white schools. (pp. 365-366)

One major implication of *Brown* on leadership was that Black educators were displaced (Alston, 2005; Coffin, 1972; Fultz, 2004; Horsford, 2007, 2009, 2011; Horsford & McKenzie, 2008; Sizemore, 1986; Tillman, 2004a, 2004b); “Yet history tells us that many Black teachers, principals, and to a lesser extent, Black superintendents lost their jobs as a result of the *Brown* decision” (Tillman, 2004b, p. 285). As a result, de-facto segregation prevailed for many years after *Brown*; schools shut down—(all-Black schools were closed so
that Blacks could attend White schools or so that Blacks could no longer go to school)

(*Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, 1964).

Integration eventually took place even though in some places this was only done in name. Coffin (1972) in his article, “The Black Administrator and how he’s being pushed to extinction,” describes a situation where an African American principal who at a recently integrated school, found that his duties changed significantly—he was in charge of maintenance, transportation (minus bus routes), and lunches. Coffin (1972) states:

Although the effect of discrimination against black administrators is the same in the North and South, the means used to reduce their numbers in the South are more overt. Black administrators are vanishing in the South because control of desegregation is vested in the same power structure that controlled and struggled to retain segregation in the first place. (p. 34)

Coffin felt that this “power” was utilized to remove African American principals from their positions. Whereas, prior to Brown, African American administrators had more responsibilities, after this decision, they found their duties and responsibilities limited, leaving them with a reduction of power (Coffin, 1972; Tillman, 2004a, 2004b).

**Challenges to Brown v. Board and America’s Resegregation**

The *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1, et al.* (2007) case was viewed by some as an “explicit reversal of the landmark *Brown* decision of 1954 (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954)” (Horsford, 2009, p. 172). Although it was a split 4-1-4 decision and not a complete reversal of Brown, it made using race a factor for
assignment plans in order to achieve racial equality in K-12 public schools in Seattle, Washington and Louisville, Kentucky unconstitutional (Horsford, 2009). Without the ability to purposefully balance races in schools, the resegregation of the United States had arisen (Green, 2008; Kozol, Tatum, Eaton, & Gandara, 2010; Orfield, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2010). Green (2008) states:

In recent years, frustration and avoidance have all too often come to characterize ongoing efforts to maintain and further school desegregation in public schools in the nation and even in the South. Indeed, substantial numbers of African Americans continue to live in southern suburban areas where school resegregation has become the norm. (p. 391).

Additionally, Green (2008) maintains, “Resegregation is often manifested within ostensibly integrated schools, schools that are merely desegregated” (p. 405). Tatum (2007) posits:

For students of color, the return to segregation means the increased likelihood of attending a school with limited resources. We know that 90 percent of highly segregated Black and Latino schools have high percentages of poor children; however, at most highly segregated White schools, middle-class students are in the majority. (pp. 14-15)

With the likelihood that Black superintendents will lead high-poverty schools populated with mostly Black students (Moody, 1971), careful consideration, policies, and changes should be made. Although African American women superintendents are suited to lead in these challenging circumstances, they are lacking in these positions.
African American Women and the Superintendency


Jackson (1999) recommends that a comprehensive list of past and present African American superintendents be compiled; this recommendation stemmed from the absence of a database of women in administration. Tyack and Hansot (1982) purport that the dearth in statistical reporting was no mistake, stating:

Amid proliferation of other kinds of statistical reporting in an age enamored of numbers—reports so detailed that one could give the precise salary of staff in every community across the country and exact information on all sorts of other variables—data by sex became strangely inaccessible. A conspiracy of silence could hardly have been unintentional. (p. 13)
According to Glass and Franceschini (2007), the most recent and available database only identifies superintendents by race or gender and not by both categories. Due to the lack of statistical reporting, scholars have had to look at the limited research on African American women superintendents in order to gain knowledge about their history. According to Revere (1989), before 1956, whether or not an African American woman superintendent existed remained virtually unknown. However, Revere found one such exception: Velma Dolphin Ashley. She was superintendent over the Boley, Oklahoma school district from 1944-1956. When she resigned, her husband assumed the position as her successor. In the 1970s, only three African American women superintendents were reported; in 1982, this number increased to 11; in 1983, there were 16; and in 1985, there was a total of 29 (Revere, 1989). In 1989, there were 14 African American superintendents; 1991, there were 19 (Bell and Chase, 1993). Jackson (1999) reports 32 African American women superintendents in 1993 and 33 in 1996. Alston (1999) reports 45 superintendents in 1995. Table 2.1 portrays the number of African American women superintendents based on studies.
Table 2.1

*Number of African American Women Superintendents Based on Research Studies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of African American Superintendents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>1 (Revere)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>3 (Revere)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>11 (Revere)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>16 (Revere)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>29 (Revere)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>14 (Bell and Chase)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>19 (Bell and Chase)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>32 (Jackson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>45 (Alston)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>33 (Jackson)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Adapted from Table 9.1, (Jackson, 1999)

The number of African American women superintendents has the capacity to potentially decrease. In recent years, Gewertz (2006) focused on the resignation of three notable African American women superintendents. With an already limited number of African American women superintendents, this change was significant. In addition, Gewertz states that both current and former leaders had to overcome negative stereotypes and repeatedly have had to prove their capability making their already challenging jobs even more challenging. These stressors may serve as a deterrent to African American women aspirants to the superintendency. In order to gain insight on the experiences of these African American women superintendents, it is necessary to review the findings of research on this topic.
Overview of Research Studies on African American Women Superintendents

Alston’s (1996) quantitative dissertation sought to identify constraints and facilitators to African American women superintendents as they pursue the superintendency through a feminist lens. She also wanted to find out whether African American men and women superintendents differed in their perceptions of serious issues they faced and constraints and facilitators as it relates to their success as superintendents. This study supports the need for Black women to couple their experience with education in order to become superintendent. In order to attain top-level administrative positions in a school district, African American women have to pursue a more circular pathway to the superintendency. The top five constraints faced by African American women superintendents according to Alston (1996) are:

1. Exclusion from the “old boys” network, support systems, or sponsorship;
2. Lack of awareness of the political maneuvers necessary within the administrative structure;
3. Lack of role models;
4. Societal attitudes that Black lack competency in leadership positions; and
5. No formal or informal method for identifying Black aspirants to administrative posts.

(p. 63)

Jackson’s (1999) study focused on the biographies of 32 African American women superintendents in the year 1993-1994. She delineated four notions paramount to transcending barriers for the African American woman. They are:
1. The support they received while growing up along with their experiences prepared them for leadership. They took advantage of opportunities as they presented themselves but found like their White and male counterparts, their time in charge was limited and that there was high turnover.

2. Despite difficulties faced on the job, they maintained optimism.

3. They realize that the superintendency is “life in a fishbowl” and have come to terms with their newfound public persona.

4. Their preparation is a result of their educational backgrounds (e.g. doctoral degrees, robust experiences in the field, and healthy connections to their communities); they have enjoyed meaningful life experiences as educators.

Grogan and Brunner (2005), commissioned by the American Association of School Administrators, conducted a nationwide study on women in the superintendency and women in central office administration positions. They surveyed 2,500 women superintendents and 3,000 women in central office positions. Of this number, 723 superintendents and 472 central office personnel responded. Thirty percent of the total population was women superintendents. In the 2000 study, eight percent of those who participated identified themselves as superintendents of color compared to the seven percent who were women and 10 percent of women who held central office positions in the 2003 study. Grogan & Brunner (2005) found that superintendents of color were more likely to be hired where school boards were more diverse. African American women superintendents, in particular, do not obtain the superintendency as quickly as their White colleagues. In
addition, while the majority of women superintendents and women superintendents of color surveyed believe they were hired by the board to be instructional leaders, eight percent of African American women superintendents versus three percent of their White women counterparts believe they were also hired to be community leaders.

African American women superintendents were twice as likely than White women to articulate that they were hired to be change agents and twice as likely as the whole population of superintendents of color to say they were hired to lead efforts in reform. Minority superintendents often felt that they were burdened with having to repeatedly prove themselves.

In 2010, the American Association of School Administrators conducted its most recent decennial study on school superintendents. Of the 1,867 respondents to the survey, 1,800 (96.4%) were White and 67 (3.6%) were people of color. The distribution of the participants of color was: American Indian or Alaska Native 27 (1.5%), Asian 5 (0.3%), Black or African American 36 (2.0%), Hispanic or Latino 36 (2.0%), and Other 4 (0.2%). African Americans only made up 2% of the superintendents who responded to the survey. The following section presents a summary of the survey’s findings based on gender and race/ethnicity.

**Gender and race/ethnicity.** According to Kowalski et al. (2011), since the 2000 study, the percentage of women superintendents has greatly increased, from 13.2% in 2000 to 24.1%; this is the highest percentage ever reported. On the average, women superintendents were older and had more teaching experience than their male counterparts. Women were
twice as likely to have had 20 years of teaching experience prior to becoming an administrator. White women reported that the main reason for being selected to their current position was “to be an instructional leader;” White men cited “personal characteristics” as the most important reason they were selected in their positions (p. xvi). On average, men become superintendent at an earlier age than their female colleagues. Over half of the men attained their first superintendency by the age of 45; they were also four times more likely than women to attain the superintendency before the age of 36. In addition, the White respondents were more likely to become superintendents before the age of 46 and more twice as likely to have had more than 12 years of superintendent experience at the time of the study. Regardless of gender or race, superintendents stated a high level of job satisfaction. People of color were extensively more likely to see community diversity as a benefit than nonminority respondents. Also, both the minority group and the White group respondents fell in the range of six to 10 years when it came to teaching experience. Minority group respondents were more than twice likely to report that they had experienced discrimination en route to the superintendency than their White peers.

Daye (2007) conducted a study on the perceptions of five African American women superintendents of their experience through a lens of resiliency. She sought to discover their views on the impact of race and gender on their roles as superintendents; the participants also discussed how they dealt with any perceived race and gender constraints. Daye’s selection of participants did not include any measures of success, tenure, or other factors; she focused on participants who were sitting superintendents and the type of districts they worked in. Three
themes emerged from her study: competence; attitudes and attributes; and mentors, models, and support systems. Competence is knowledge of the job to show capability of the job tasks, skills needed to do the job, having ample preparation preceding the position, and a variety of preparative experiences on the way to the superintendency. The theme “attitudes and attributes” deals with professional and personal characteristics held the participants that were positive in nature; however, some of them were viewed negative in the context of their roles as African American women district leaders. The last theme “mentors, models and support systems” involves the need for mentorship, role models and support systems expressed by the five participants.

Horsford’s (2007) dissertation used standpoint and critical race theory as a framework. She sought to expand the literature on the perspectives of eight, retired African American superintendents on African American education during the resegregation era. The research revealed three counternarratives that contest the mainstream views on desegregation and African American education. Horsford (2009) affirms the value of segregated schools and the negative impact desegregation has had on African American students and their communities.

Herring (2007) focused her dissertation on the professional experiences and personal accounts of Georgia’s first African American woman superintendent in Georgia. This includes, the career pathway, career barriers, and the personal and professional experiences of Beauty Pool Baldwin. The researcher sought to gain insight on the career strategies she Ms. Baldwin during her professional career in order to share these strategies with other
African American women aspiring to educational leadership. Narrative inquiry was the methodological approach in this study. The five key findings of the study are:

1. The importance of obtaining the appropriate education and certification;
2. Mentoring is essential for professional growth and development;
3. There is a great benefit in giving attention to cultural sensitivity and race relations for African American women with administrative positions
4. African American women administrators should make it known, there interest in advancement; and
5. There is a need for personal support from family and friends for African American women seeking the superintendency.

In her study, Vaughn (2008) focused her research on African American women superintendents in Texas in the year of 2006-2007. Using narrative inquiry, five participants were able to disclose their stories on the barriers they faced en route to the superintendency. She found seven barriers: (1) predominantly White school districts, (2) search firms, (3) White boards of educations, (4) race, (5) gender, (6) the unwillingness that African American women have to relocate, and (7) fear of applying for the position. In addition, there were three barriers that the participants in the study faced as superintendents. They were: perception of incompetence, different philosophies from the school boards, and gender. The strategies that these women utilized were: building positive relationships, becoming knowledgeable of the superintendent position, having a spiritual background, showing integrity, and developing a networking system/mentorship.
In P. Johnson’s (2010) qualitative study, she looked at the perceptions of seven African American women district level administrators from the Piedmont, Southeast, and Eastern regions of North Carolina to find out what barriers and challenges they faced en route to the superintendency. This was a phenomenological study conducted through a black feminist lens using two frameworks: the work of Alston (1999) on the top constraints to the superintendency experienced by African American women and Jackson (1999) on the success indicators identified by African American women superintendents. There are three major barriers and challenges that limit the career advancement and opportunities for African American women leading schools in North Carolina based on P. Johnson’s study are:

1. Oppression which centers on institutional, societal and political barriers;
2. Selection which refers to the screening, selection, and hiring practices of superintendents by Boards of Education and search committees, and
3. Disconnection, which deals with limited access to power connections and the absence of support systems and formal and informal professional networks.

She maintained that there is almost non-existent literature on African American women in North Carolina.

Odum’s (2010) dissertation is a qualitative, phenomenological study centered on sixteen women of varied ages, race, and marital status who were superintendents in the 2008-2009 school year. She sought to gain understanding of their work lives, including their resilience and the barriers they faced, in order to learn how these women were successful in attaining their positions. The superintendents were either African American or White. Odum
found that “conflicting career and familial demands” was a frequently stated barrier and that networking was the most commonly stated strategy for success.

In her qualitative, phenomenological study, Brown (2011) sought to highlight the perceptions of African American women on their recruitment and retention to the public school superintendency. She interviewed eight African American women who had previously served as or were sitting superintendents from four Southeastern states; the women were either the first to be superintendent in their districts or in their states. Her research used black feminist concepts along with standpoint theory and transformative leadership as a framework. Among other conclusions, she supports the importance of mentorship and networking to recruitment and retention in the superintendency.

Escocebo’s (2011) dissertation was a mixed, descriptive qualitative and causal-comparative quantitative study that used motivation theory as a framework. She also looks at feminist theory, critical race theory, and resiliency in her research. Forty-nine minority women district level administrators in the state of California participated in the study. She sought to describe the career (extrinsic) and personal (intrinsic) factors as perceived by K-12 minority central office women administrators who facilitated or inhibited their promotion or desire to pursue the superintendency. Two major findings that relate to this study are: directors rated the specific factor “fear of failure” as the most important inhibitor to the superintendency; and few minority subjects wished to pursue the superintendency. She also found that intrinsic motivators encouraged and raised the desire of participants to pursue the superintendency. Minorities in her study were vested in their educational roles but didn’t
desire to take part in the political arena unless they were supported, mentored, and recruited for the position. In one of her recommendations, she discusses the need for states to record demographic information on educators’ ethnicities and the positions they hold.

B. Johnson (2012) conducted a qualitative study on six African American women who had served as superintendents in at least two school districts; she wanted to comprehend how they responded to barriers and adversity in their roles while emphasizing a focus on issues dealing with sexism and racism. Johnson used Patterson and Kelleher’s (2005) Dimensions of Resilience as a framework for the study. Some of the challenges faced by the participants were their interactions with a dysfunctional board. They recognized the importance of having a supportive board and frequent and open communication with its members.

**Barriers/Challenges faced by African American Women Superintendents**

Women, in general, face many constraints as they pursue the superintendency (Brunner, 1999). In particular, African American women superintendents are confronted with unique challenges in education such as an increased number of diverse students and the need to hire capable and diverse personnel from a limited pool of applicants to educate these students (Alston & Jones, 2002). Alston (1999) acknowledges that although African American women face some of the same barriers as White women, their experiences vary. Research shows that race (Alston, 1999; Goffney & Edmundson, 2012; Kalbus, 2000; Peyton-Caire et al., 2004; Simmons, 2005) and gender (Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999, 2003; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Goffney & Edmundson, 2012; Grogan, 1996, 2005, 2008; Loder,
2005; Peyton-Caire et al., 2000; Robinson, 2004; Shakeshaft, 1989; and Tallerico, 2000) are barriers in the promotion of African American women to the superintendency. This intersection of race and gender is complex; Pigford and Tonnsen (1993) claim that because society views African American women as second-class citizens due to race and gender, this makes gaining victory over internal barriers a daunting task.

Alston (1996) stated the following as constraints that African American women faced en route to the superintendency based on her research:

1. Exclusion from the “old boys” network, support systems, or sponsorship;
2. Lack of awareness of the political maneuvers necessary within the administrative structure;
3. Lack of role models;
4. Societal attitudes that Black lack competency in leadership positions; and
5. No formal or informal method for identifying Black aspirants to administrative posts.

(p. 63)

**Glass ceiling.** Alston (1999) suggests the notion of the glass ceiling presents two barriers to women:

1. At the general management level, women must “possess credibility and prestige, strong advocacy of at least one influential person higher in the company, and pure luck;” and
2. A wall of tradition and stereotype that hinders women from entering senior levels due to blockages in their way. (pp. 81-82)
The term Glass Ceiling refers not only refers to gender equality between women and men, but it also “embraces the quest of all minorities and their journey towards equality in the workplace” (Wilson, 2014). Originally coined by Hymowitz and Schellhardt in a Wall Street Journal report in 1986, the term glass ceiling represents the obstacles that women who attempt and aspire to senior management positions have faced.

**Unwritten rules and gatekeeping practices.** Tallerico (2000) maintains that “unwritten rules” govern the criteria that headhunters and search consultants use to inform their superintendent searches and hiring practices. Gatekeeping practices hinder the access of African American women as they seek to ascend to the superintendency. In terms of access to the superintendency, the selection of superintendents is to be regarded as a “flow process involving the passage of applicants through a variety of channels” which may have unique or multiple starting points (p. 19). When applicants have prior experience, they are able to matriculate through the initial screening of search consultants on behalf of school boards. Those with experience as superintendents, assistant superintendents, or high school principals find the gates typically open the widest. Applicants who find the gages closed or partially open, are generally those who have served primarily as elementary principals and other educational administrative roles.

Many consultants and board members favor applicants who have both building and central office level experiences. They also prefer those who have had high school principalships versus elementary because secondary experience and central office positions are viewed as “tougher, more demanding and therefore, better preparation for the pressure-
packed role of the superintendency” (Tallerico, 2000, p. 30). These applicants are thought to be more qualified. When quality is defined in this traditional way, it reinforces a long-lasting norm in educational administration and benefits White males over the majority of women and people of color.

White men continue to dominate the superintendency, the assistant superintendency, and the high school principalship (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). According to Collier-Thomas (1982), African American women are usually principals of elementary schools; they also tend to follow more circular paths to the superintendency (Alston, 1996). Consequently, holding the traditional view of what makes one highly qualified to serve as a superintendent, has a potentially adverse effect on both women and people of color because this reduces the opportunities that these groups have due to the favoring of White men (Grogan & Henry, 1995).

**Cultural norms.** Cultural norms help to restrict the movement of minorities and women in educational leadership such as social prejudices, both racial and gender stereotypes, and androcentric notions of leadership (Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Tallerico, 2000). Grogan and Henry (1995) found that “the superintendency continues to be constructed as a male arena” (p. 172).

In her research, Tallerico (2000) found copious examples of prejudicial gender stereotypes held by some board members such as assumptions that men candidates were stronger disciplinarians and capable of executing non-instructional technical duties than women. Participants in this study detailed their experiences with overt biases based on their
experiences with both school board members and search consultants. Consultants, repeatedly voiced this perspective, “I won’t just put minorities into the finalist pool. I’m always going to go with the best qualified” or “I’m going to bring the best candidates forward for this job…I will not bring somebody up because they are female or because they are Black or because they’re Hispanic.” These quotes demonstrates how “best qualified” serves to limit women and people of color in education administration.

**Race and gender.** In her study of six African American women in leadership positions in education and in the private sector, Robinson (2004), found that these women saw gender as their greatest barrier. She also identified isolation and intraracial discrimination as additional barriers for African American women in supervisory positions. Intraracial discrimination has its roots in slavery and the practice where people are treated better because they are light skinned, have straight hair, and facial features that resemble that of White people—thin (Russel et al, 1992).

Jackson (1999) shares that all of the African American women she interviewed were self-confident in their identity because since race and gender were interconnected, labels didn’t concern them; thus, they found it challenging to link certain situations and career decisions to their race or gender. However, she did mention that several participants did at times feel gender was more of a factor versus race (Jackson, 1999). Conversely, Shorter-Gooden (2004) posits that African American women are confronted with the challenge of finding strategies to deal with racial and gender bias. There are several forms of this racial and gender bias according to Shorter-Gooden. She maintains:
Instances of being made to feel invisible; being sexually harassed, or hearing racial slurs; in encountering biased hiring and promotion practices; or in the onslaught of negative and stereotypical cultural messages about Black women that are rife in the media. Yet in spite of the centuries-long-legacy of racial and gender discrimination directed at African American women, little is known about the strategies that they use to cope with and handle these ongoing threats. (p. 407)

The double whammy and the double bind. The way African American women, as a whole, experience the world is distinctive from others who are either Black or women; they deal with sexism and racism (Alston, 1999; Collins, 1990). Collins-Thomas (1982) affirms that the historical experience of the African American women is “different” from that of African American men and White women although they can relate to some of the similar problems faced by both counterparts (p. 174). Due to having more family and leadership responsibilities at an earlier age than their White colleagues due to taking care of younger siblings, some African American women tend to be assertive, more capable, and skilled in the managerial facets of their jobs (Alston, 1999).

African American women are said to be a double minority in the area of educational leadership particularly in the superintendency. Andrews and Simpson-Taylor (1995) coined this phenomenon as a “double whammy” and Doughty (1980) refers to this as the “double bind”; this is the intersection between gender and race. The “double whammy” notion is defined as adverse race and gender-based stereotypes that cause problems in the workplace for women of color, especially as it relates to matters involving job promotion and

Peyton-Caire, Simms, and Brunner (2000) highlight the need for research particularly in the area of the double bind. The maintained:

Although we adamantly embrace this scholarship on gender and the superintendency, we must acknowledge the underexplored juncture where gender and race collide and the particular experiences of women of color – within the ranks – take on a deeper and peculiar meaning. Indeed, [their voices] have not been prominently heard in the educational administration arena. Whereas gender is an indispensable variable in such inquiry, it is alone insufficient in revealing the intricacies of these women’s experiences and encounters during their plight. (p. 517)

They stress the importance of not only hearing the voices of African American women, but also the need for enhancing the limited scholarship on their experiences and difficulties.

Given the various barriers faced by African American women, how do these women overcome their challenges and hardships? The next section provides a discussion of the need for research on African American women superintendents and resiliency theory.
African American Women Superintendents and Resiliency

“It is well-established that the racial/ethnic minority experience in the U. S. is characterized by many stressors, including but not limited to, acculturation, discrimination, socioeconomic hardship, and marginalization” (McLauglin et al., 2009, p. 356). More specifically, according to Alston (1996), African American women superintendents have to combat racism, institutional sexism, and apathy. Alston further posits, “These women not only have a strong sense of efficacy, but they are empowered and are deeply caring about their mission—to serve, lead, and educate children” (p. 682). Alston also maintains that notwithstanding the scarcity of African American women superintendents and the overwhelming obstacles they have to face, these women are “flourishing” in their jobs (Alston, 1996).

Jackson (1999) states that while the number of African American women superintendents are few, they exemplify “human adaptability, strength, and accomplishment” whenever they had the chance to serve as superintendents (p. 142). Despite their “flourishing” in their jobs, Alston (2005) acknowledges that the persistence and resilience of African American women superintendents and their successes have not been studied considerably.
Resiliency Theory

After reviewing the literature on resiliency theory, no universal definition is found although there are similarities (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). According to Werner (2000), scholars from various disciplines such as child development, pediatrics, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, and education have studied resiliency. Masten, Best, and Garmezy (1990) define resiliency as the “process of, or capacity for, outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (p. 426). Higgins (1994) also define resilience as the “process of self-righting and growth” (p. 1). It is the “ability or process of remaining in-tact in the midst of potentially and often destructive environmental factors” (Morales & Trotman, 2004, p. vii). It is the premise “that people can bounce back from negative life experiences and often become even stronger in the process of overcoming them” (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 2). Richardson et al. (1990) suggests that it is “the process of coping with disruptive, stressful or challenging life events in a way that provides the individual with additional protective and coping skills than prior to the disruption that results from the event” (p. 34). Similarly, Wolins (1993) defines resiliency as the “capacity to bounce back, to withstand hardship, and to repair yourself” (p. 5).

The lens in which researchers have viewed resiliency has changed in recent times. Henderson and Milstein (2003) purport,

The resiliency research, along with the theory and helping strategies emerge from it, offers a more positive and a more accurate perspective. It offers hope based on
scientific evidence that many, if not most, of those who experience stress, trauma, and ‘risks’ in their lives can bounce back. (p. 3)

It calls for more of a focus on strengths instead of deficits. They further posit, the research of resiliency, as a theory is movement from a pathology-based medical model of human development to one that is a proactive wellness-based model. This model centers on the “emergence of competence, empowerment, and self-efficacy” and focuses on successes instead (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 3).

In the past, resiliency theory has focused on children and adolescents, however, more recently, “an understanding of how adults exposed to both personal and work-related stress bounce back is just emerging…it appears the process of resiliency building is similar for children and for adults” (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 5). Benard (1991) typifies resilient children as those who are socially competent, who have life skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and those who are proactive. These children have a sense of purpose and have a hopeful outlook about their future. They are motivated to do well in school and in life, are goal-oriented, and have special interests.

Higgins (1994) maintains that resilient adults, similarly to resilient children, enjoy positive relationships, are skilled at problem solving, and seek self-improvement. These adults are also motivated to attain educationally due to their motivation for motivation. They are not only decisively involved in social change and activism, but also tend to consider themselves to be religious or spiritual. Resilient adults are also able to derive understanding and utility from their past experiences with stress, trauma, and tragedy. Higgins found that
many of the adults who found themselves to be resilient were not always or thought to be resilient as children.

**Protective factors.** According to Benard (2004) and Morales and Trotman (2004), individuals use protective factors to surmount conflict and stress. “Protective factors are characteristics within the person or within the environment that mitigate the negative impact of stressful situations and conditions (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 8). These factors can be both internal and external and are portrayed in Table 2.2.

On the subject of protective factors that emerge in the lives of academically resilient students, Gordon (1995) describes them as being “those that moderate the impact of stress on competence; that is, stress does not have as deleterious an impact on competence when accompanied by protective factors” (p. 240). Masten, Best, and Garmenzy (1990) claim, “Protective factors moderate the effects of individual vulnerability or environmental hazards so that adaptational trajectory is more positive than would be the case if the protective factor were not operational (p. 426).
Table 2.2

*Internal and Environmental Protective Factors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Protective Factors: Individual Characteristics That Facilitate Resiliency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gives of self in service to others and/or a cause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Uses life skills, including good decision making, assertiveness, impulse control, and problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sociability; ability to be a friend; ability to form positive relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sense of humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Internal locus of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Autonomy; independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Positive view of personal future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Capacity for and connection to learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Self-motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Is “good at something”; personal competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Feelings of self-worth and self-confidence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental Protective Factors: Characteristics of Families, Schools, Communities, And Peer Groups that Foster Resiliency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Promotes close bonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Values and encourages education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Uses high-warmth, low criticism style of interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sets and enforces clear boundaries (rules, norms, and laws)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Encourages supportive relationships with many caring others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Promotes sharing of responsibilities, service to others, “required helpfulness”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Provides access to resources for meeting basic needs of housing, employment, health care, and recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Expresses high and realistic expectations for success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Encourages goal setting and mastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Encourages prosocial development of values (such as altruism) and life skills (such as cooperation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Provides leadership, decision making, and other opportunities for meaningful participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Appreciates the unique talents of each individual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Wolins and Wolins (1993), there are seven “resiliencies”, which are internal characteristics, usually embodied by both children and adults. They are initiative, independence, insight, relationship, humor, creativity, and morality. Despite the levels of problems individuals have experienced from exposure to dysfunctional environments, they can foster any one of these internal resiliencies, and resiliently overcome any “damage” caused by the problems. Further, both negative behavior and resiliency behavior are demonstrated as individuals face family dysfunction or other environmental stresses (Wolins & Wolins, 1993, pp. 4-10).

Resiliency is more than a group of traits; it is a process (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). While some individuals have genetic predispositions that promote resiliency (Werner & Smith, 1992), many of the characteristics connected with resiliency can be learned (Higgins, 1994). Werner and Smith (1992) speak to the multifaceted nature of resiliency in their research, stating, “Resilience is the response to a complex set of interactions involving person, social context, and opportunities” (p. 89).

The process of resiliency. According to Benard (2004), resiliency is a “dynamic and contextual process” where individuals are focused on their strengths versus their weaknesses (p. 37); similarly, Morales (2000) views educational resiliency as a process. Resiliency
literature has not centered on “specific processes by which the factors result in outstanding academic achievement” (Morales & Trotman, 2004, p. 4). In addition, there is a lack of focus on the cyclic and sequential process of resiliency (Morales, 2000; Morales & Trotman, 2004). The majority of resiliency literature focuses on the identification of protective factors while neglecting the process by which protective factors lead to resilience. To this end, Morales (2000) conceive that it is important to garner a deeper understanding of how protective factors function— “their sequence, their origins, and how they work with each other” (p. 18). The Resiliency Cycle is a five-step process that demonstrates how students grow in their resiliency (Morales, 2000). The following present the steps of the Resiliency Cycle:

1. The student realistically and effectively identifies/recognizes her or his major risk factors.

2. The student is able to manifest and/or seek out protective factors that have the potential to offset or mitigate the potentially negative effects of the perceived risk factors.

3. The protective factors work in concert to propel the student toward high academic achievement.

4. The student is able to recognize the value of the protective factors and continues to refine and implement them.

5. The consistent and continuous refinement and implementation of protective factors, along with the evolving vision of the student’s desired destination, sustain the
Summary of African American Women Leadership Literature

African American women have been tenacious in their pursuit of education. They have been instrumental in establishing schools and have been vital to the teacher workforce (Alston, 2000; Collier-Thomas, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1989; Turner, 1976). As trailblazers for the academic enhancement of the African American community, they have offered their leadership in various ways.


Since then, while there has an increase in the number of African American women superintendents, there continues to be an underrepresentation of these women in the superintendency (Alston, 1996, 1999, 2000; Bell & Chase, 1994; Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999, 2000; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Gewertz, 2006; Glass, 2000; Grogan, 1996; Jackson, 1999; Kowalski et al., 2011; Pigford & Tomsen, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1989; Sharp et al., 2004; Tallerico, 1999, 2000).
As also noted in the research, not only are there a limited number of African American women superintendents, but there also exists a dearth of research illuminating who these women are, their leadership styles, and their experiences (Alston, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2005; Bell & Chase, 1994; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999, 2000; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Gewertz, 2006; Glass, 2000; Grogan, 1996; hooks, 1989; Horsford, 2007, 2009, 2011; Horsford & McKenzie, 2008; Jackson, 1999; Pigford & Tomsen, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1989; Sharp et al., 2004; Tallerico, 1999, 2000; Tillman, 2004; Tillman & Cochran, 2000).

**Barriers faced by African American women.** “While black women and white women may face some of the same barriers in their advancement to positions of leadership, their experiences do differ” (Alston, 1999, p. 83). Some of the barriers African American women face en route to the superintendency are: race (Alston, 1999; Goffney & Edmundson, 2012; Kalbus, 2000; Peyton-Caire, Simms & Brunner, 2000; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Simmons, 2005); gender (Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999, 2003; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Goffney & Edmundson, 2012; Grogan, 1996, 2005, 2008; Loder, 2005; Peyton-Caire et al., 2000; Robinson, 2004; Shakeshaft, 1989; Tallerico, 2000); gatekeeping practices (Tallerico, 2000); glass ceiling (Alston, 1999); and cultural norms that are prejudicial and biased in nature (Grogan & Brunner, 1995; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Tallerico, 2000). Given these barriers, “The tenacity and resilience of those Black women who meet the challenges of the superintendency and are successful has not been studied extensively” (Alston, 2005, p. 676).
Limitations of existing studies. While there are numerous studies on the superintendency, both on men and women superintendents, there remains a paucity of research on African American women superintendents, their experiences, and the barriers they have faced en route to the superintendency (Alston, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2005; Bell & Chase, 1994; Blount, 1998, 1999, 2000; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Gewertz, 2006; Glass, 2000; Grogan, 1996; Jackson, 1999; Peyton-Caire, Simms & Brunner, 2000; Pigford & Tomsen, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1989; Sharp et al., 2004; Tallerico, 1999, 2000; Tillman, 2004a, 2004b; Tillman & Cochran, 2000). In the literature reviewed, some of the studies have focused on both White and African American women or African American men and women or have lumped African American women superintendents into the same categories with other people of color; however, the experiences of African American women superintendents are unique and different from others despite having some commonalities (Alston, 1999; Alston & Jones, 2002; Collins, 1990; Collins-Thomas, 1982; Peyton-Caire, et al., 2000).

Gaps addressed by this study. Most of the studies on African American women superintendents are qualitative, phenomenological or narrative inquiry, and uses (Black) feminist theory and critical race theory. However, this study, while qualitative, will use resiliency theory as a framework; only a few dissertations centered on African American women superintendents, have done this; none have looked at protective factors, specifically, as a way of showing resiliency. In particular, this study will look at the way in which protective factors assist African American women superintendents as they have sought and
attained the superintendency. It will extend the body of knowledge on a unique and distinct case, African American women superintendents.

Chapter 3 discusses the methods used to conduct the study and to gather and analyze the data. In this chapter, a description and rationale for the research design of the study is provided. Details on the sample selection, data collection and data analysis procedures are discussed. Finally, in the trustworthiness segment, is an account of the description of protection, researcher’s subjectivity, ethical considerations, limitations, and delimitations of this study. Chapter 4 provides the findings of the study. In particular, it displays a detailed case study for each participant, portrays a cross-case analysis of the participants’ responses, and advice for African American aspirants to the superintendency. Chapter 5 imparts a discussion of the findings, the implications for future research and practice along with the researcher’s conclusions.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter provides a description of the methodology employed by the researcher in order to explore her research questions. The following segments present an explication of the design, participants, procedures, instrumentation, analysis and trustworthiness. In the design section, the rationale for qualitative research and multiple case studies is given. The participant portion details how participants were chosen using snowball sampling. A detailed explanation is offered in the procedures section of how the study was conducted. The instrumentation segment of this chapter outlines the interview protocol and how documents were utilized in this study. Following this, data analysis procedures are provided. Finally, in the trustworthiness segment, is an account of the description of protection, researcher’s subjectivity, ethical considerations, limitations and delimitations of this study.

Through an evaluation of past literature and research studies regarding African American women in leadership positions and more specifically as superintendents, this study seeks to discover which strategies have been employed by these women as they overcome barriers to their ascendency to the superintendency and encountered within their current positions. More specifically, how have these women been resilient in their attainment of the superintendency?
Research Design

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Because a deeper understanding of the perceptions and experiences of current African American women superintendents is needed, this study requires a qualitative, multiple-case study approach. Through qualitative research, as explained by Creswell (2013), there is a value in hearing the direct perspective of participants who are actively engaged in the area that is being studied. “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). This has been done through an interpretive/constructivist perspective because the purpose of the research is to understand and describe the experiences of the participants (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative methods subscribe to three features in the data collection process: “(1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents” (Patton, 2002, p. 4). The gathered data can be categorized into “major themes, categories, and illustrative case examples” (Patton, 2002, p. 5). Validity is then established through triangulation.

Merriam (2009) has identified four characteristics that are common to all forms of qualitative research:

- The focus is on process, understanding, and meaning;
- The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis;
- The process is inductive; and
- The product is richly descriptive. (p. 14)
Some additional characteristics that are more or less common to most qualitative studies are:

- The qualitative research is emergent and flexible, responding to the changing conditions of the study in progress;

- The investigator often spends a substantial amount of time in the natural setting of the study, often in intense contact with participants. (pp. 16-17)

By using qualitative methods, this study provides a more rich illustration of the experiences of African American women superintendents. These perspectives and experiences need to be heard due to the continued underrepresentation of African American women superintendents in the superintendency and dearth of research and the unique experiences of these women.

**Rationale for Case Study**

Case studies are common to qualitative research (Stake, 2000). Like other types of qualitative studies, case studies search for meaning and understanding; the primary instrument of data collection is the researcher; and the final product is richly descriptive (Merriam, 2009). As defined by Creswell (2013), the case study approach is a:

Qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g. observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes. (p. 97)

Yin (2009) maintains that case studies investigate a “contemporary phenomenon in depth and
within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18).

According to Merriam (1998b) “A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes…in discovery rather than confirmation” (p. 19). The case study design is appropriate for this study because the particular phenomenon—the barriers faced by African American women superintendents en route to the superintendency—can be closely and critically examined. In particular, this study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the processes used by African American women in attaining the superintendency and the processes used to overcome these challenges thus demonstrating their resiliency.

**Rationale for Multiple-case/Collective Case study**

Multiple case studies are valuable because they can be employed as “a common strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalizability of your findings” (Merriam, 1998a, p. 198). Yin (2009) suggests that it is analytically beneficial to have two or more cases because of the “possibility of direct replication” (p. 61). It is of great importance that through the replication process, the enhancement of theory can occur (Yin, 2009).

Yin (2003, 2009) maintains that the findings of multiple cases are frequently considered to be more convincing, stronger and more significant than single case approaches. According to Stake (2006), multicase or multiple-case studies are comprised of a collection of cases where the single case is of significance because each case shares a mutual quality or condition. The cases are bound together categorically. Having an understanding of the
“quintain”—the case in its entirety—is essential. Each individual case, in its natural setting, brings more insight to the phenomenon itself (Stake, 2006).

**Sample Selection**

To identify the potential participants for this study, the researcher used snowball sampling, which is also known as chain or network sampling. Snowball sampling is possibly the most common form of purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009). Glesne (1999) maintains that snowball sampling is the acquiring of “knowledge of potential cases from people who know people who meet research interests” (p. 29). After contacting several organizations of superintendents/administrators, the researcher found that there was not an available, updated list of superintendents by race and gender. Consequently, there was a need to secure participants using referrals from current superintendents and administrators in the southern state. After reaching out to various administrators for referrals, the researcher corroborated the names with the list of superintendents provided by the state’s department of education. The researcher identified six potential candidates who met the study’s criteria. According to Creswell (2012), researchers usually recommend that four or five participants be interviewed in case study research. Of the six potential African American superintendents, four were interviewed across the Southern State in this study.

Merriam (2009) advises that selection criteria are needed in choosing the participants or sites to study. African American women superintendents who were current superintendents at the time of the study, in this case, met this criterion and were the unit of analysis. Further, these women have all met the required educational and professional
experience criteria for superintendents in the Southern State as determined by the department of education.

**Procedures**

The researcher recruited each potential candidate by phone. After a brief introduction, the researcher informed the potential participants of the purpose of the study and acquired their verbal consent to a face-to-face interview. Next, the researcher emailed an informed consent form (Appendix A) to the consenting participants and requested that they complete the attached biographical survey (Appendix B) and to provide their résumés and any forms of media that would be helpful to the study. The Interview Protocol Guide (Appendix C) was also provided in the email as an attachment. After each participant had time to review them, interviews were then scheduled by phone (Appendix D). Participants had the option of returning the documents via email or in a self-addressed envelope provided by the researcher.

The researcher also collected relevant data about the schools and districts that the participants led, electronically. The data included school websites, district’s website, and the department of education’s website and any other supporting materials about each candidate. Additionally, the researcher collected data from the biographical questionnaires themselves.

**Data Collection**

Yin (2009) suggests six types of data to collect: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts. In particular, this study utilized the following data sources: a brief biographical questionnaire, semi-structured in-depth interviews, field notes, and other documentation provided by the
participants. A more detailed explanation of each source of data used in the study will be provided below.

**Document Analysis**

Document analysis was a part of this study because documents are a “ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator” (Merriam, p. 139). For example, participants were asked to submit a copy of their résumés via email or by (postal) mail. The résumés provided key information such as a history of roles and responsibilities held by each participant, as well as a detailed listing of their memberships and affiliations, awards, and educational background.

Participants were also asked to provide forms of media (such as news articles, announcements, websites, etc.) prior to the interview. The researcher triangulated the responses of the superintendents to the data found in the collected documents.

**Interviews and Field Notes**

Prior to conducting a face-to-face or phone interview, the researcher emailed each consenting participant a copy of a brief biographical questionnaire, which consists of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gain an understanding of the participants’ personal and professional background; it provided information that may not be obtained by other documents or in the interview.

Next, the researcher scheduled a one-on-one, semi-structured interview with four participants that lasted approximately one to two hours. Two of the interviews were in person. Due to time constraints and distance, the other two interviews were conducted by
phone. Yin (2009) posits that through in-depth interviews, the researcher may acquire facts or opinions on events. The purpose of an interview is to gain qualitative depictions of the participants’ life experiences as it relates to how they interpret their meaning (Kvale, 1996). The interview is the researcher’s primary data source as it is very essential to gathering data (Yin, 2009). The researcher followed an Interview Protocol Guide and tried to set the participants at ease so that they felt comfortable and able to easily communicate their experiences (Kvale, 1996). The interviews were digitally recorded and held at the site of the participants’ choice.

Open-ended, semi-structured questions were asked and field notes were also taken. Glesne (1999) stresses the importance of utilizing field notes to record relevant information that will aid in data analysis. Body language, facial expressions, and voice inflections were also recorded in the field notes as a supplement to the actual, recorded data.

**Analysis of Data**

“Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making sense” (Merriam, 2009, p. 175-176). After coding the interview transcriptions by hand, the researcher conducted both within-case and cross-case analyses in order to identify, compare, and understand the challenges faced by the participants as well as the strategies they have utilized in accordance with the protective factors in resiliency theory. According to Stake (2006), each case is investigated so that there is an understanding of that specific unit in its totality. Stake states,
In multicase study research, the single case is of interest because it belongs to a particular collection of cases. The individual cases share a common characteristic or condition” (p. 4). Both similarities and differences are also studied across cases to develop meaning of the cases in context. This within-case and cross-case analysis enables the researcher to “recognize the case as an integrated system” (Stake, 2006, p. 3). Commonly, in multicase studies, the following research methods are employed: observation, interview, coding, data management, and interpretation (Stake, 2006, p. 29). Consequently, these methods were employed in this study.

In the initial phase of analysis, the researcher coded all of the data (i.e. transcripts, field notes, and archival data) in search of recurrent themes by highlighting significant statements, quotes, or statements that demonstrated how the participant experienced the phenomenon. While reading through the data, the researcher jotted down notes in the margins to record her thoughts and ponderings; this process is called coding (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), “Coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data. The designations can be single words, letters, numbers, phrases, colors, or combinations of these” (p. 173).

Next, the researcher organized the data into “meaningful clusters” by eliminating extraneous, repetitive, or overlapping data and derived themes from the data (Patton, 2002, p. 486). Themes were then collapsed to encapsulate repeated patterns that were present across the data (Merriam, 2009). Special attention was paid to challenges the participants faced,
strategies they used, and any supporting evidence from themes discussed in the literature review in order to answer the research questions of the study (Merriam, 2009). The researcher created a master list of the themes and their descriptions for further analysis due to the understanding that the coding process is an iterative one. Files were also generated for each theme and corresponding, supporting data.

In the second stage of analysis, themes were compared across cases in order to discover commonalities and differences in order to develop a better understanding of the phenomenon (Stake, 2006). As the researcher moved from case to case, the coding process also moved from being inductive to more deductive because she wanted to ensure that the final codes at the end of her analysis were supported with strong evidence (Merriam, 2009). Figure 3.1 portrays the data analysis process followed by the researcher.
Figure 3.1 Researcher’s Data Analysis Process

Research Validity and Reliability

According to Merriam (2002), “All researchers aspire to produce valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner. And both producers and consumers of research want to be assured that the findings of an investigation are to be believed and trusted” (p. 22). To ensure that internal validity is present in the study, the research must make sure that the findings are “congruent” with “reality.” Merriam (2002) maintains further, “In qualitative research, the understanding of reality is really the researchers’ interpretation of participants’ interpretation or understandings of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 25). As an African American woman and an administrator, the researcher is able to interpret and understand some of the
challenges faced by the superintendents as well as some of the “protective factors” they employed to overcome such barriers and become resilient in obtaining their position. Merriam (2002) stresses the significance of understanding the perspectives of participants, illuminating the complexity of human behavior in its context, and offering a full interpretation of what is happening. As a result, the researcher triangulated the data using a combination of interviews, observations, and document analysis (Merriam, 2002).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) were the first to define reliability in qualitative research as “dependability” or “consistency” (p. 288). For consistency and dependability, the researcher triangulated the data and also used multiple methods of data collection. According to Stake (1995), verifying data from the interviews, artifacts, and field notes allows us to “see if what we are observing and reporting carries the same meaning when found under different circumstances” (p. 113). This process gives credibility to the researcher’s findings. In addition, the researcher coded the data several times in order to look for consistency in coding as well as recurrent patterns.

Member checks were also used as a means for certifying internal validity or credibility. The researcher afforded the participants with the opportunity to give feedback on the emergent findings in order to lessen the possibility of misconstruing the meaning of what they shared and their perspectives on what is actually going on (Merriam, 2009). The participants were also able to review their own interview transcript and provide feedback to the researcher. However, only one participant provided the researcher with feedback.
Description of Protections

Before participants were interviewed and data were collected, Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures were followed. This was to ensure that the participants’ rights were protected and that the collected data remained confidential. The participants were advised of their rights, the purpose of the study, and that the data would be available for their review to ensure the veracity of the information. Participants were also assured that their identities would be concealed. Each participant received an informed consent form (Appendix A). The form disclosed to the participant that her participation is voluntary, notify her of potential harms and risks, and inform her that she may withdraw from the study if she so desires (Glesne, 1999). Consent forms will also be emailed to the participants to be reviewed, signed, and returned during the interview.

Because of the small pool of African American women superintendents in the state, adequate measures were taken to protect the identity of each participant. Pseudonyms were utilized in order to guard the identity of the participants, their school districts, graduate institutions and/or any other type of identifying information. The pseudonyms will be given to the participants in alphabetical order based on the order that the interviews have been conducted. Audio-recordings were conducted only with the participants’ permission. No specific references will be made in oral or written reports that will link the participants to the study. In addition, transcriptions of the recordings will be provided to each participant for her approval and/or revisions.
The collected information is kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data are stored securely in locked and password-protected storage and will also be encrypted so that only the researcher, who has the password, can get in and see it on the drive. Each participant was sent a transcription of her interview, without any identifiers, in an email with a generic message so as not to link her to the data. Any supporting documents (in paper form) have also been locked away in a safe using a lock and key. In addition, the researcher created a crosswalk table which was kept in a password protected file in a location separate from the identifiable and de-identifiable data so that a coordinated analysis of the various forms of data (resumes, newspaper clippings, interviews, etc.) could be conducted and the identities of the participants protected; thus, the researcher was able to match the identifiable data with the de-identified interview data in a secure manner.

**Researcher’s Subjectivity and Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). The role of the researcher according to Merriam (2009) is to be a “careful, systematic observer” (p. 118). According to Patton (2002) a researcher must:

- Learn to pay attention;
- Write descriptively regarding their field notes;
- Know how to separate trivial details from important details; and
- Use rigorous methods to validate their observations. (pp. 260-261)

This ensures the trustworthiness of the researcher’s interpretation (Glesne, 2009, p. 151).
Patton (1990) maintains, "The ideals that of absolute objectivity and value-free science are impossible to attain in practice and are of questionable desirability in the first place because they ignore the intrinsically social nature and human purpose of research" (p. 55). Therefore, the researcher’s perspective is vital to this research as she is a part of the pool of potential (Black) female administrators because she is an African American woman of Haitian descent who has served as an elementary school administrator and who may one day pursue the superintendency.

To remain as objective as possible, the researcher has triangulated the collected data. Through the method of triangulation, the researcher has used multiple sources of data to crosscheck the validity of the various forms of collected data and her findings (Merriam, 2009). In doing so, triangulation ensures that she is interpreting the data in a lucid and objective manner. In addition, the researcher has used reflexivity, a strategy of validity, to self-reflect (Merriam, 1998). Because she understands the sensitive nature of the quintain, the researcher has also reflected on her own experiences as an administrator. She has taken copious field notes, jotting down her thoughts, revelations, and impressions as a part of the self-reflection.

Subjectivity Statement

Born of Haitian descent in the inner city of Newark, New Jersey, the first five years of the researcher’s formal education was in a small, Catholic school with a predominantly African American student population. While the teachers were mostly African American, the administration was an all White one. When the researcher’s family moved to the small,
suburban town of Maplewood, New Jersey, she attended public school for the first time. She became accustomed to being in classes where she was one of the few students of color, if not the only one. While this was not a limitation, the researcher was a stellar student and worked hard to excel in classes.

After high school, the researcher attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts as a double major in Management and Society and Sociology. It was during this time that the course of her life changed. At UNC-CH, the researcher not only met the man who would later become her husband but she also decided to embark upon the journey of becoming an educator. The researcher endeavored to join the cause of providing an excellent education to all children regardless of their backgrounds and situations particularly in urban and rural areas. She joined Teach For America (TFA) and after graduation, the researcher moved to Atlanta, Georgia to teach third grade. When she married Hassan Kingsberry, she relocated to Durham, North Carolina and taught fourth grade in Henderson, NC, thus, completing her two-year commitment to TFA. The next year, the researcher moved back to Atlanta, Georgia to teach at a Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) school, a charter school in Southeast Atlanta. There, the researcher taught the fifth and sixth grade until she decided to be a stay-at-home mom when her first-born child was born.

Although the researcher enjoyed being a teacher-leader, she wanted to have a broader impact at the school-building level. Accordingly, the researcher and her family relocated to Youngsville, NC so that she could pursue her Master’s degree in School administration at
UNC-CH. She was hired in the second year of the program during her internship to serve as the assistant principal of Royal Elementary School in Louisburg, NC. After administrating for almost four years, the researcher applied and was accepted into North Carolina State University’s Education Administration and Supervision program as a full-time, doctoral student; she also decided to become a stay-at-mom again when her son was born. Upon completion of the necessary requirements of the program, she secured her North Carolina Superintendent licensure and currently holds an Educational Specialist certification.

**Limitations of the Study**

“Part of demonstrating the trustworthiness of your data is to realize the limitations of your study” (Glesne, 2006, p. 169). One limitation of this study was time. The interviews were between one to one and a half hours. The researcher was conscious of the participants’ busy schedules so she tried to ask the questions from the interview protocol and not prolong their time beyond that. The researcher was unable to interview two of the participants in person—one of the participants was away at a Board retreat and the distance was too great between the researcher and the other participant; phone interviews were conducted instead. This could have affected the type of response the researcher obtained because face-to-face contact was not made. In addition, the researcher was also unable to conduct follow-up interviews with the participants due to the interest of time. This may have affected the depth of clarity of the data.
Chapter Summary

The qualitative design and multiple case study approach of the study was explained in this chapter. Chapter 3 began with an overview of the study, which included the purpose and research questions. Research design, sample population, description of protections, data collection and analysis, reliability and validity, researcher’s bias, researcher’s profile, and limitations were also included in this chapter. Snowball sampling was used to recruit potential participants in a Southern state. The participants included current African American women superintendents.

Data was collected through a biographical questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and the collection and review of physical artifacts. Interviews were recorded and transcribed and kept in locked and password-protected storage and was encrypted to protect the participants. Measures were taken to protect the identity of each participant. Pseudonyms were given and the data was de-identified. Chapter 4 provides the findings of the study. In particular, it displays a detailed case study for each participant, portrays a cross-case analysis of the participants’ responses, and advice for African American aspirants to the superintendency. Chapter 5 imparts a discussion of the findings, the implications for practice, policy and future research, along with the researcher’s conclusions.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Review of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this case study was to understand and describe the ways in which African American women superintendents have been resilient in attaining and maintaining the superintendency despite their underrepresentation in the position and in the literature. Protective factors in resiliency theory (Henderson & Milstein, 2003) has been used as a framework to analyze ways in which African American women superintendents have dealt with challenges in their position and overcome them. The research questions for this study were:

1. What are the barriers that African American women face in accessing the position of superintendency?

2. How do African American women superintendents define resiliency?

3. What methods, procedures, and/or processes have African American women superintendents employed to overcome barriers to the superintendency?

4. What are the challenges African American women have experienced within their position as superintendent? How have they overcome these challenges?

This chapter depicts the findings of this qualitative case study.

Through face-to-face and telephone interviews, the findings of this chapter were acquired. The chapter is divided into five sections. The first part provides profiles of the four study participants and how each participant defined resiliency and resilient leaders. The
second section displays the major barriers each participant faced en route to and within the superintendency. In the third section, the emergent themes show which strategies were employed by the participants to overcome the barriers they have faced. The fourth section provides a comparison and evaluation of characteristics utilized by the participants that have fostered resiliency-building through internal and environmental protective factors (Henderson & Milstein, 2003) in overcoming their adversity. The final section offers advice for African American women aspirants to the superintendency and summarizes the findings of the chapter.

**Participant Profiles**

The findings are a small sample of a limited number of African American women superintendents. These findings are not representative of all African American women superintendents nor are they conclusive. Due to the small population size, the researcher has made every effort to keep the participants anonymous. Therefore, the data has been de-identified and the participants have been given pseudonyms. The names of the four participants in this study are: Dr. Anderson, Dr. Burton, Dr. Charles, and Dr. Daniels. Pseudonyms were also used for school districts, programs, counties, universities, cities, and other people mentioned in the interviews.

A total of four African American women superintendents took part in the study. As suggested by the literature review, African American women superintendents tend to be placed in urban school districts highly populated by minority students. This study includes superintendents from both urban and rural school districts. Two superintendents serve urban
districts and two superintendents serve in rural districts.

Table 4.1 portrays demographics of the participants of this study. Of the four participating African American women superintendents, 1 (25%) is between the ages of 40-44, 2 (50%) are between the ages of 45-49, and 1 (25%) is between the ages of 55-59. Currently, three of the women are married and one is divorced. One superintendent does not have any children, while two of them have two children, and one of them has one daughter and four stepchildren. Three of the participants hold Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degrees and one holds a Bachelor of Arts. Two participants are graduates of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and two are graduates of predominantly White institutions. All of the participants hold both Master’s and Doctorate degrees.

Table 4.1

Demographic Profile of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>HBCU</th>
<th>Undergrad. Degree Region in U.S.</th>
<th>Master's Degree Region of U.S.</th>
<th>Doctorate Region of U.S.</th>
<th>Type of District/County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anderson</td>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burton</td>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniels</td>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These African American women superintendents lead school districts which range in size from as small as approximately 1,200 students enrolled in 4 schools in one district to as large as almost 4,300 students enrolled throughout 10 schools in another district. Table 4.2
below lists the superintendents, the number of students, and the number of schools in each district.

Table 4.2

*School District Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Student Enrollment</th>
<th>Primary/Pre-School</th>
<th>Elementary</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>High/Specialty</th>
<th>Alternative</th>
<th>Total Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neal</td>
<td>1265</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poole</td>
<td>2392</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purdue</td>
<td>4361</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlon</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information from Table 4.3 below reveals student demographics for each county by race. In this study, two superintendents lead districts with majority students of color and two lead school districts that are predominantly White.

Table 4.3

*Student Demographics by Race and School District*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Multi-Race (2 or more races)</th>
<th>Pacific Islander</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neal</td>
<td>0.53%</td>
<td>0.76%</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>23.73%</td>
<td>63.38%</td>
<td>4.85%</td>
<td>0.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poole</td>
<td>0.54%</td>
<td>0.84%</td>
<td>30.35%</td>
<td>37.75%</td>
<td>24.41%</td>
<td>5.98%</td>
<td>0.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purdue</td>
<td>0.17%</td>
<td>1.19%</td>
<td>7.66%</td>
<td>23.57%</td>
<td>60.81%</td>
<td>6.47%</td>
<td>0.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlon</td>
<td>0.65%</td>
<td>0.65%</td>
<td>3.26%</td>
<td>77.12%</td>
<td>15.76%</td>
<td>2.51%</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comparative Data on Participants**

Table 4.4 reveals the following information regarding the four superintendents:
1. The range of years served, as superintendent, is 1 to 4 years.

2. Two of the four superintendents have just completed their first year in their position.

3. The number of years that the superintendents have worked in the field of education ranges from 16 to 35. The average number of years worked in education is 25.25.

4. All of the superintendents are career educators.

5. All of the superintendents are in their first superintendency.

6. One of the four superintendents was appointed to her position while the others went through an interview process.

Table 4.4

*Professional Demographics of Superintendents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superintendent</th>
<th>Anderson</th>
<th>Burton</th>
<th>Charles</th>
<th>Daniels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Years in Current School District</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Years as Superintendent</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Superintendencies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Years in Education</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Educator</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected or Appointed to Superintendency</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>Selected</td>
<td>Selected</td>
<td>Selected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.5 provides information on the types of degrees attained by the participants. All four of the participating superintendents hold Master’s degrees; all the participants hold Superintendent’s Licenses and two superintendents earned an Educational Specialist degree. Further, two superintendents hold Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degrees and two hold Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degrees in Educational Leadership and Administration. The budgets of the school districts led by these women range from $15 million to $43 million. Student demographic information for the 2014-2015 school year was obtained from the Southern State Department of Education website.

Table 4.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degrees Attained by Study Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anderson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case Study #1: Dr. Anderson

Dr. Anderson was appointed superintendent of a small, rural school district with a budget of approximately $15 million. The school district is comprised of approximately 23.73% African Americans, 63.38% Whites, 6.67% Hispanics, 0.53% American Indians, 0.76% Asians, 4.85% Multi-race students, and 0.08% Pacific Islanders. At the time of the interview, she was just finishing up her fourth year as the superintendent of her district and nearing her retirement date that at the end of the month. Her age range is between 55-59
After being an educator for 35 years, she excitedly exclaimed, “It’s time for me!” Dr. Anderson is very passionate about her job. Her drive and determination to reach the highest level of educational leadership and love for children pushed her to aspire to the superintendency.

Dr. Anderson is a very warm and inviting person and holds the ability to make people feel like family. Dr. Anderson has a laid back nature and she greeted the researcher with a friendly hug which quickly put her at ease; this made the interview feel more like a conversation versus an interview. Although she was more casual in her attire the day of the interview because it was a Friday, she stated, “Everyday, I’m sharp, from head to toe because that in itself, commands respect.”

Born and raised in Neal County, Dr. Anderson is a first-generation college graduate who has only worked in one school district. Her father did not graduate from high school and her mother was only a high school graduate. Raised in a single-parent home and the fifth of eight children, Dr. Anderson was not a stranger to responsibility. She started out as a Speech Pathologist, and then went on to become an Assistant Principal. From that position, she served as the county’s Exceptional Children Director and as the Assistant Superintendent for Administrative Services. She has also served as the Human Resources Director and the Director of Student Services. After six years of service as Assistant Superintendent for Administrative Services, she was promoted to Associate Superintendent for Administrative Services. Six years later, Dr. Anderson was appointed Superintendent of Neal County Public Schools. Pursuing the superintendency was a “natural transition” for Dr. Anderson. She
stated, “I have the drive and the desire in that whatever I am doing, I want to go to the highest level. And as a school administrator, being superintendent is the highest level so that’s what I pushed toward doing.” Interestingly, she applied for the superintendency in Neal County twice before and was rejected, but she eventually was appointed to the position by the Board of Education (Board).

It is interesting that Dr. Anderson does not have any mentors. Reflecting on her career, she posited:

I don’t think it would’ve made much of a difference anyway if I had one. I think this is because I gained so much experience along the way. I worked around superintendents and directors so I gained a lot of experience and knowledge from doing that. I was very confident when I got in this position.

Her confidence was a result of two factors: her mother’s support and encouragement and her educational preparation from Ascend University, an HBCU in the South. She describes her work as “top-notch.”

Dr. Anderson has enjoyed various accolades and honors during her tenure as an educator and community member. Most recently, Dr. Anderson was honored along with three other volunteers from various regions of the U.S., with a national award for their “dedication to providing children from economically disadvantaged communities with free books to own.” Dr. Anderson also received an “Intriguing African American Women Tribute to Present and Past” award; this is an honor bestowed to prominent people of color who have not only impacted their communities but they have also helped others to advance. She is
described by the presenters of the award as “courageous, self-reliant, intuitive” and as one with an “impeccable sense of pride in everything she does.”

Dr. Anderson is also a graduate of the Southern State’s Excelling Superintendent Enhancement Program. This three-year program entailed eight face-to-face meetings with a cohort of superintendents across the state that were able to network, reflect on the effectiveness of their leadership, discuss educational trends, and the establishment of personal and professional goals aligned to district and state goals and standards. Dr. Anderson served as Mayor of Bennett, a small town in Neal County for six years and served as a Town Clerk for several years. She is in numerous organizations and clubs. All of these feats were accomplished while she served as an educator.

**Case Study #2: Dr. Burton**

Described by community leaders in her home state as “very personable” and exuding with “confidence and leadership,” Dr. Burton was selected to be superintendent of Poole City Schools after undergoing a rigorous interview process. There were more than 24 applicants from four different states competing for the position. Poole City School District is comprised of approximately 2,400 students ranging from grades Pre-K to high school and has an operating budget of $28 million. There are 0.54% American Indian, 0.84% Asians, 30.35% Hispanic, 37.75% African American, 24.41% White, 0.13% Pacific Islander, and 5.98% students with two or more races. The district has open enrollment; therefore, students from other districts are able to pay a small, nominal fee in order to attend Poole City Schools. Dr. Burton is between the ages of 45 to 49 years. She is married and has no children.
Dr. Burton “did not come from a highly educated family.” As a result, she learned early on the importance and value of education. Her mother has an eighth grade education and her father obtained his GED at the age of 32. In particular, Dr. Burton’s future as an educator was greatly impacted by two members of her family, her sister who is 12 years older and her grandmother. When she went to Kindergarten, her sister actually left for college. She recalls attending a few college classes with her sister. In the education classes in particular, Dr. Burton remembers thinking that the subject made sense to her even at the age of 11. She feels that this realization “kind of set the course” for her. She also shared another experience that made her want to become an educator. She reminisced:

I went with my grandmother who could not read and write, to the voting booth to select the candidates and pull the lever for her. I can just remember, clear as a bell, standing there, looking at my grandmother like, now, I am ten and you are 80; what is wrong with this picture? But I understood that education was the missing link here…really, it was probably at that moment I realized I wanted to be an educator because at ten I knew I had a power that she didn’t have…and bless her heart, she signed her name with an “X” until the day she died. So those things helped along the way.

Dr. Burton received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Speech Education and then went on to receive a Master of Science degree in Organizational Communication. She eventually earned a Doctorate of Philosophy in Educational Administration. As a graduate of the Patton Superintendent Academy, she along with other participants, were recruited from various
sectors such as education, private, and government to be trained over a ten-month period to assume positions in full-time, top-level managerial positions in urban public school districts. The total package was valued to be over $60,000. It included travel to various districts across the U.S. Patton Academy participants engage in professional development for two years. Dr. Burton is also a graduate of the Southern State’s Excelling Superintendent Enhancement Program similar to Dr. Anderson. Within her career, Dr. Burton has received several *Principal of the Year* awards from the Merrick Association of Secondary School Principals. She has also been actively involved in various committees and Board of Directors in Merrick State and nationally.

In her career, Dr. Burton has served as a high school English, Drama, and Speech Teacher in grades 9-12, a high school Assistant Principal, Interim Testing Coordinator, middle school Principal, Director of Research and Staff Development, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Chief Academic Officer of a large urban district, State Director of K-12 Curriculum and Instruction, and as the superintendent of Poole City Schools. She has successfully completed her second year as superintendent in Poole.

Two male superintendents have mentored Dr. Burton throughout her educational leadership career and influenced her to pursue the superintendency. Interestingly, although she had worked for several women superintendents, she found the men to be more encouraging and supportive. She stated:

I was mentored by really strong, actually, male superintendents who really encouraged all phases of my leadership; they encouraged me to do more in my career.
It’s interesting because most of the people who’ve been most encouraging have been male superintendents even though I have worked for a couple of female superintendents. It was the male superintendents that have been the most supportive and encouraging.

Dr. Burton’s desire to increasingly impact the lives of young people has also been a motivating force. She maintains, “I do think what I do is a calling; I really do because we are improving the quality of life for kids.” To this end, she seeks to provide young people with the message that education can open up many opportunities for them as it did for her.

Case Study #3: Dr. Charles

Dr. Charles was chosen by the Board of Education to serve as superintendent of Purdue City Schools, an urban district with 4,361 students. The district’s operating budget for the 2014-2015 school year was $13 million. She described the selection process as being “probably one of the most thorough [processes] in the Southern State.” The student racial demographics in her school district include: 0.17% American Indians, 1.19% Asians, 7.66% Hispanics, 23.57% African Americans, 60.81% Whites, 6.47% Multi-race students, and 0.14% Pacific Islanders. Dr. Charles has successfully completed her first year as superintendent and this is her first position in this school district. Her age range is 40-44, making her the youngest of the participants. She is divorced with two daughters who are in college. Dr. Charles was a lateral entry, high school Science teacher, a visiting Instructor and Alternative Licensure District Coordinator, a middle school Assistant Principal, a middle and high school Principal, Director of Teaching and Learning, Assistant Superintendent for
Curriculum and Instruction, and then Superintendent of Purdue City Schools. Her first administrative position was actually in the high school where she had been a teacher. Although Dr. Charles was a pre-med major in college and didn’t attend school to become a teacher, when she taught, she discovered that she “had a gift for reaching people, especially hard to reach students.” In 2013, Dr. Charles took part in S. O. A. R. Academy, a national and selective program geared towards preparing senior administrators for their first superintendency.

When Dr. Charles was hired to lead Purdue, the Board of Education named the following superlative criteria that made her the “best fit among the three finalists” for the school district because of:

Her commitment and focus on what is best for students; unwavering support for teachers; knowledge of curriculum; positive feedback from staff and the community; her vision and strength as a strategic planner; experience as a teacher, assistant principal and principal; leadership experience at the central office level; use of data in decision making; her collaborative leadership style; and experience with diverse student populations.

One Board member spoke enthusiastically about Dr. Charles and said:

We spoke with a lot of parents and teachers who have worked with Dr. Charles, and the thing that struck me was how much people absolutely loved her…[they used] words like ‘phenomenal’ and ‘super star.’ It was almost too much. I feel extremely grateful we got her; I think she’s going to be a game changer for this city.
Dr. Charles’ decision to pursue the superintendency was due to “a lot of encouragement from [her] colleagues” and from the understanding that she “could affect change, at a large scale.” She has felt that she has followed a traditional route to the superintendency. Although she felt tentative about applying for the job because she was not familiar with Purdue, she did after much consideration and being called by someone in the district who wanted her to apply for the position. Her impetus to apply, in particular, came from some of her colleagues, teachers she actually supervised as an administrator, parents, and her mentors. Her experiences, coupled with professional development on DuFour’s and Avid trainings, led her “to a larger district transformational change kind of leadership.” After discussing her interest in becoming an administrator with her superintendent, she was promoted to Assistant Principal. Because she wanted to better understand the transition from middle to high school, she requested that she be transferred to middle school to serve as an Assistant Principal there. She stated:

I wanted to clearly understand that transition year. It seemed like we lost a lot of kids from eighth to ninth grade. I really learned from that experience that the entire district has to be thinking about getting students to graduate. It couldn't just be the high school, it can't be just the middle school, it had to be the entire district. That's what made me think, I need to be working at the district level to help others understand the big picture. As I moved through the ranks from principal to district level leadership, I think those professional experiences of really understanding the big picture, of kids
from pre-K to college [is significant]. We all need to understand how to set those pebbles in place to help students reach their goals.

Dr. Charles describes her job as superintendent as her most “favorite job so far, other than high school principal, which [she] loved.” She disclosed that what she feared most was the politics but she learned that “if you are focused on the right thing, the politics never really interfere with the job.”

Dr. Charles shared that her mother and her two daughters are her “biggest fans.” She maintained:

I really do everything, and try to work through everything, because I have two girls.

One of them wants to be a doctor, and the other wants to be an accountant. Two fields that little black females don't typically go in and I think it's because they've never seen me allow someone to tell me no.

Both of Dr. Charles’ parents have high school educations. Her mother was a licensed, practical nurse. She received her schooling through the hospital; her father was in the military.

Dr. Charles describes herself as being “extremely, genuinely, passionate about children.” She believes that the superintendency is “probably one of the most rewarding jobs that there is.” She also stated:

If you look at this state as a whole, we have a lot of minority students and adults those who are looking for leadership of people that look like them. To me, it doesn't matter what you look like as long as you are in it for the right reason and are confident in
your job. But it does matter to a 12-year-old, African American female who's trying to decide what she's going to be—to see that there are options outside of what some would call a stereotypical position. I think that is important for our children to see successful African American women in positions that are not the norm.

Case Study #4: Dr. Daniels

After a unanimous decision by the Marlon Board of Education, Dr. Daniels was chosen to serve as the county’s superintendent. A graduate of Marlon County Schools, she also taught Math for five years before accepting an administrative position in the neighboring school district, Avery. Marlon County Schools is a rural school district comprised of approximately 2,000 students. The student racial demographics in her school district include: 77.12% African Americans, 15.76% Whites, 3.26% Hispanics, 2.51% Multi-race students, 0.65% Asians and American Indians, and 0.05% Pacific Islanders. She has completed her first year as superintendent of Marlon. Her age range is 45-49. She is married and has a son and a daughter. Dr. Daniels has had a myriad of experiences within education. In Marlon County, she has served as a substitute teacher, Math teacher, coach, and bus driver. She has also worked as an Assistant Principal, Principal, Director of Student Services/Testing and Accountability in Avery School District. In Orem City Schools, she has served as Principal, Director of Accountability and Secondary Education and Chief Academic Officer.

Concerning her administrative experience, Dr. Daniels stated, “I've had multiple hats and have pretty much juggled every aspect of central office support and building level administrative positions. [The superintendency] was just an opportunity that I said, ‘I've got
the experience. Why not?’” When Dr. Daniels became an educator, she wasn’t interested in becoming superintendent. It wasn’t until about four years ago, that she sought to do so. She was also encouraged to apply by her colleagues and mentors “because of their of [her] and the quality of [her] work and expertise that they see in [her].” Dr. Daniels describes her experience as nontraditional and sees herself as a “life-long learner.”

Although neither her mother nor father went to college, Dr. Daniels’ father was a Retired Air Force Master Sergeant and mail handler for the U.S. Postal Service and her mother was a household engineer and family consultant. She has four sisters and one brother; together, they are all first generation college students. As a result of growing up in a military family and knowing what it is like to be one of two Black families on the entire base, she stated:

I make it a point to communicate with all groups and cultures and genders just because I knew how it was when I grew up… While there are times that you do communicate with who you identify yourself with, at the same time though, you have to be inclusive and not exclude yourself, because we [African Americans] can be self-exclusive.

Diversity has great value for Dr. Daniels and her sibling. This is a result of their upbringing.

As a community leader, Dr. Daniels is a member of a local Baptist church in Marlon County, an active member and officer of several civic organizations, and has received several awards. In 2012, she received the Principals Excellence and Achievement Award from Marlon Community College. In 2014, she also received the Distinguished Alumni Award “for
outstanding service and accomplishments, embodying the college’s values and integrity, commitment to service, exemplifying dedication, [and] leadership and loyalty to the college and community” from the Marlon Community College. She has also received *Principal of the Year* awards from Orem City Schools and Avery School District as well as other accolades as an educator. She feels “thankful” and “blessed” to be able to do a job that she loves.

**Cross-Case Analysis: Characteristics of Resilient Leaders**

Overall, all of the participants agreed that resiliency has to do with persevering through adversity. Two participants indicated that resiliency meant being able to “bounce back” from negative situations. Three participants felt that resiliency was innate and one felt it couldn’t be taught. Another participant suggested that resiliency is not allowing someone to define who you are and maintaining a positive outlook. Two participants believe that it has to do with being flexible and being able to adapt to whatever comes.

More specifically, the participants stated:

**Dr. Anderson**

It’s hard to describe because I think it’s something that is just in you. It’s just like you’ve heard people say. “You either have it or you don’t.” Nobody can teach you, you can go to class and you can get your degree, but it’s just something within you that allows those right characteristics to come out to be able to do a great job.

She believes that resilient leaders have “confidence, perseverance, intelligence, and you could describe it as ‘stick-to-it-ness.’” She views herself as resilient. “I never gave up on
getting in this chair even when I didn’t get the position twice…I always knew that my day would come.

**Dr. Burton**

I think it means staying the course. I tell people you have to have a very strong constitution. What I mean by that is that there are things that people will say to you that you know that they would never say to you if you were not an African American woman. You have to be able to hear it, take it in, but not necessarily act on it as you might want to. I think it takes a stronger person to contain [his or her reaction to the situation] than it does to [lose control and get angry], so I think you have to stay the course. You have to be able to bounce back up when you are kicked down because in this business you have highs and lows. In a day, you might start high and end low, so you have to be able to bounce back between the two. I think we’re all figuring that out everyday—how to be resilient because it is a process.

She feels that resilient leaders have “internal strength” and “clarity.”

I think people who are really resilient can sift through the muck of it and get to what really matters in this work. You have a lot of stuff coming at you and it might all appear to be important but it’s really not all that important. So as the superintendent you have to be able to sift through and figure out what do I need to have my eye on this very moment; I think this helps with your resiliency because if you pile it all on, you’re going to fall on the floor, so you gotta sift through that. It’s about being able to withstand through adversity. To me that’s the hardest part of being resilient.
Sometimes things are easier to bounce back from than others but at the end of the day, you want people to work through things to get to the other side and that helps you be resilient. [To] try to learn from those adversities, which is hard to do sometimes.

She sees herself as resilient because she didn’t give up on her pursuit of the superintendency. She posited:

I definitely would [describe myself as resilient] for a couple of reasons. I think that when I was applying for superintendencies in my home state and I was not getting them, I could have gotten really down on myself but I never did. One of my friends, I think she applied twice and did not get it. She said, “That’s it! I’m never applying again!” And again, I never had that attitude. It was almost like I knew it was going to happen. It was just a matter of time and finding the right district at the right time. I just kept going and I never really got down about it. Not that I wasn’t disappointed but I wouldn’t get totally down.

She was determined to keep a positive attitude.

**Dr. Charles**

That just means to me that you define yourself, you don't allow others to define you. I think the reason that we don't have as many applicants as we do of color, is because we have allowed someone else to define where we should be or shouldn't be. I'm just not that type of girl. I never have been, so resiliency to me is that you define it. When someone says to you, you're not going to be a superintendent, that's probably not your
path, and I define that as my path, then you figure out how to make that happen. It's about not allowing others to set barriers, and look at those barriers as opportunities when they are put in front of you. If you are smart enough to know that they're barriers and that you have to have a game plan, then when you [face] a barrier in your life, you get through it. Resilient leaders have perseverance, grit, and the ability to adapt. [They are able] to be flexible [and have] the ability to set a vision and stick to it.

Dr. Charles feels she is “somewhat” resilient. She responded:

That's a hard question. I guess I would [define myself as such], but I would not really. I really wouldn't say that I'm resilient; I just think that I do the job. I do the job and I've never been one that has set a goal and let someone else determine if I'm not going to reach it. To me, that's not really resiliency, it's just my personality. It's just who I am. I think, where people go wrong is when they're not themselves. [With me] you get what you get.

Dr. Daniels

Concerning resiliency, she offered:

When you are faced with obstacles or you follow a plan of action, and things may not have worked out the way you intended, you come again and you start over. You've got to be resilient in education as a whole. Sometimes our job is trial and error, and sometimes our job [requires that] we have a definite direction that we're going, but it may not work out. The outcome may not be the result that you intended, and you have
to regroup, and you have to be willing to be flexible. You can't dwell on the negative, because you've got to constantly move forward. Each and every day, we're here to prepare our students for their future, and yet, we don't know what their future's going to look like many times. You've got to have the perseverance, and you have to be able to recover from those bumps that you may have in the road. You're going to have some challenging times, so get over it, figure out how to problem solve for that specific moment or circumstance and let's move forward. You just have to be flexible.

According to Dr. Daniels, resilient leaders are:

Flexible, for one. You adapt to change very easily. It's not a hindrance nor is it a stall. When you're faced with challenges, you have to adjust your lens and refocus. You have to be a thinker and a problem solver. Even when you have those tough circumstances and situations, you take the time to reflect. I think you also, well for me, I also have to be an abstract, logical thinker because I think through every scenario to try to make, even with factors and information that may be provided, the best informed decision. In making that informed decision, I'm also thinking about well, what do I think the results will be if I do this [and] what do I think the results will be [if I do that?] The logical aspect of thinking for me is what I believe I have to have, and I feel I do have, to deal with the change, the educational change, and the paradigm shift that must happen [in order to adjust].

Dr. Daniels sees herself as resilient. She assured:
Oh, I am. I'm very resilient. Many times, people get knocked down, but you get right back up. You get right back up and start over if you need to start over, or you adjust accordingly [in order] to move forward. No, it comes naturally to me.

**Barriers En Route To Superintendency**

Table 4.6 presents barriers African American women face in accessing the superintendency. All of the participants feel that negative perceptions of women in general and negative perceptions of African Americans are another barrier. Three out of the four participants felt the intersection of race and gender is a barrier while one participant saw gender as more of a barrier than race. One participant indicated that there is a lack of opportunity presented to African American women. Another superintendent spoke of culture as being a hindrance. One superintendent shared that discouragement from others serves as a deterrent to the pursuit of the superintendency.

Table 4.6

*Barriers African American Women Face Accessing the Superintendency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superintendent</th>
<th>Intersection of Race and Gender</th>
<th>Negative Perceptions of Women</th>
<th>Lack of Opportunity</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Negative Perceptions of African Americans</th>
<th>Discouragement From Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anderson</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burton</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniels</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


Dr. Anderson

Dr. Anderson felt that negative perceptions of African Americans and women are barriers to the superintendency. She maintains:

The first thing that they [African American women] face is that for some reason because they are women first, they are looked upon as not being as competent or ready for the job as a man. And then the second thing, is that there is a stigma, I feel, that African American people, period, can’t do as well. So when you put being a woman and an African American [together], it’s tough.

When Dr. Anderson was rejected twice for the superintendency in her home county, she shared her feelings of disappointment:

Some of the responses that I got back were that I wasn’t ready and that I needed to wait. The first time I accepted it and said ok, maybe I’m not [ready]. Then the next time that it came around, I had my doctorate degree and all those years of experience, I had been here forever, did well in the interview but still did not get the job...now that [the second] time, I think it was because I was an African American and a woman. It’s just my personal opinion because I could not find another reason. I know the district like the back of my hand. I’ve been here; I’ve grown up here; I have a doctorate degree now, if you wanted a person with a doctorate degree. There was to me, no other reason [besides my skin color and gender].

Dr. Burton

Dr. Burton had a different perspective on barriers en route to the superintendency.
She doesn’t see race as a [significant] barrier as it once was. She feels she faced minimal barriers due to the preparation she received from the Patton Superintendent's Academy. She expressed:

I think that since I went through the Patton Superintendent’s Academy, I was pretty prepared to pull the trigger. That was a pretty extensive training program. If I had not gone through that I think I would have hit all sorts of barriers because they [interviewers] sometimes would ask questions to intentionally throw you off or to see how you would react. I had been trained on all those tactics. So I don’t know if I had a lot of barriers along the way. I will tell you that every interview that I have gone into for the most part, I have felt welcomed. You can always tell if you’re it or not, for the most part. I have made the finals several times when I knew it was between myself and another person. Usually, when you get to that second level interview, you can kind of tell if they like you or not. And again, I don’t know if I would call that a barrier, it’s just that you have to be very observant about what’s going on around you.

However, she feels the challenge has to do with gender and the culture of the school district. She stated:

I think that where the issue comes in is when you are a woman. I have talked to my female colleagues who are superintendents who are Caucasian and they feel the same things that I have felt. But I shared with folks that some of the questions you get asked in an interview, you know your male counterpart isn’t being asked that question. “What does your husband think about you being here today?” Would you
ask him how his wife feels about him being here today? So I do think that there is a perception that women may not have the strength. I don’t believe it is so much a race thing as it is more of a gender issue.

She stated further:

Cultures of school districts you are applying for jobs in—I think that’s another barrier. You have to be cognizant of what culture school districts/areas of the state are open to women leadership. You know, I knew that the community college president was a woman before I got to this county. That was a sign to me—“Oh! They probably like ladies in leadership over there!” So you just do your research.

**Dr. Charles**

She believes that the lack of opportunity afforded to African American women is a deterrent to accessing the superintendency.

The first barrier is getting in the door. I was told very early on, that it would not be likely that I'd be a superintendent in the Southern State. Oh yeah, based strictly on that I was a black female. You've seen the numbers; it's pretty accurate.

Negative perceptions of African American women are another barrier according to Dr. Charles. She stated:

[There is] the perception that we [African American women] are angry or controlling or difficult to get along with. This is the second barrier. We are just perceived differently if we are strong-willed or vocal. This is a stereotype I don't think we are ever going to beat, so we need to be smart enough to work around it.
She also felt that race and gender was a hindrance at times.

And you have a double-edged sword when you're a female, because if you're a black female, not only are you a female, but you're also a minority—that whole perception of women being bossy, rather than leaders. When men are that way, they are determined to be leaders, but when we are, we're determined to be bossy. There's a fear behind women leaders, and I think that's a barrier that you have to overcome, then on top of that you have the whole “angry black woman” syndrome that you also have to overcome. I think those are barriers.

She was even told by a couple of White male superintendents that she wouldn’t even be considered for the superintendency because of her skin color.

Two [White] male superintendents said that to my face. One even had the nerve to give me a list of districts that I could be superintendent in. Of course, he listed all the districts that would be considered failing or majority minority. It was really insane. I just looked at him and said, I appreciate you wanting to help me, but I don't need your help. He thought, in his world, he was really helping. Seriously, he was trying to be supportive. It was comical.

Dr. Charles also feels that discouragement is a barrier. She maintained, “I think the discouragement from others is one barrier. Like I said, just really trying to select the district that was even open to diversity [is a challenge].”
Dr. Daniels feels that the negative perception of women, in general, is a barrier. She said:

One of the things that I have found is [that] most of the superintendents, especially female, and this is certainly not limited to African-American females, we have had to [make sure that] our resumes really look good to get ourselves through the door. Many times, for boards to recognize that a female superintendent can be just as effective as a male superintendent, we have to have that experience and be more of a proven leader, so to speak, on paper and when reference checks are done, to have the opportunity. That they don't believe you can handle this level of responsibility—this perception is a barrier. Unfortunately, there are many who still think this is a man's job. I am a very independent-minded person. I certainly am not one to accept that this is not the job for a female, or black female for that matter or maybe you should consider something else because it's out of your league. That just fuels me more—to show how I can get the job done.

Dr. Daniels also shared that “With some of the Board members in my second interview, I could tell that some of them were of the mindset that they weren’t certain a female could come in and get the job done.” In her opinion, this is not her belief.

Personally, Dr. Daniels has not faced any barriers en route to the superintendency. She posited, “Once I decided I was going to do it, fortunately, for me, my first pursuit of the superintendency, I received it.”
Challenges Within the Superintendency

Table 4.7 portrays the challenges African American women have faced within the superintendency. One superintendent found the following to be challenges within the position: the balancing act between work and family, stress, and the negative perceptions of African American women. All of the participants were faced with unforeseen challenges—weather-related challenges, an outbreak of violence in the community, not having a Board chair, which hindered the hiring process for the school district, and the ramifications of closing a single-gender classroom.

Table 4.7

*Challenges African American Women Face Within the Superintendency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superintendent</th>
<th>Balancing Work and Family</th>
<th>Negative Perceptions of African American Women</th>
<th>Stress</th>
<th>Unforeseen Challenges</th>
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<td>Anderson</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Burton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daniels</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Balancing Work and Family**

Dr. Anderson disclosed her struggle between wanting to spend time with her family, being a good wife and mother, and performing all the tasks and responsibilities of a superintendent. She shared:

The biggest barrier that I have faced in this superintendency thing is personal—
having enough time for my family, particularly my husband. Sometimes it’s difficult because you got night things [you have to do]; you’ve got workshops that you require your attendance for two and three days; then you are trying to come home and trying to cook and you’re tired. So to me, as far as the job and doing it—this is a piece of cake but trying to balance it with my personal [life]—having enough time for me, having enough time for my family, especially my husband [is a great challenge]. And then, when my mother was living in a nursing home [I had to spend time with her], and putting all of that in there, and then trying to do this job, [trying to] stay ahead of stuff, and [trying to] be on top of it [all has been very tiring]. As far as the job goes—I don’t have no problems; [the challenge] is the balancing act.

**Unforeseen Challenges**

Dr. Anderson described the impact that a hurricane had on the community during first month as superintendent. Students were displaced from their homes and schools as a result of flooding; this all took place at the beginning of school year. She reminisced, “I started this job one day in August and four days later, a hurricane hit down here and my middle school was flooded. [Students] stayed out of that school for eight months.”

For Dr. Burton, the outbreak of violence in Poole City Schools has not only impacted the community but quite possibly, the academic performance of students in that district. Dr. Burton solemnly shared:

You never know what's going to come your way. This has been a hard year for us for a couple of reasons. Our academics have not moved this year as quickly as I wanted it
to. I think a lot of it is because we've had community strife most of this year. If you do any research over the last four or five months, you will see that the youth in this town have decided to go on these fighting rampages in our parks. We had a big blow up in April. We're praying that it doesn't blow up over the summer, but our young people have just taken to violence in the community. The kids have just taken to such extreme violence, and I say it's extreme because they're beating each other to a pulp out there. Luckily, no one has been shot or stabbed or anything and that's what I'm hoping we don't have going on. When you talk to the kids, nobody can tell you the absolute root of it, but all you can figure out is that we have this one side that did something to this side, and there's just constant retaliation business that seems to keep going back and forth. We can't really figure out what it was [that instigated this outbreak]. We don't know if it started over a girl or a bad drug deal. We have no clue.

Dr. Daniels faced a challenging situation after her first month as superintendent. The Board of Education could not break their tie when it came to selecting a new chair. As a result, she could not officially hire anyone. She did not expect the Board to not be able to settle on a new chair. She described:

When I first started [serving] as a superintendent, I started in July and by the August Board meeting, [the Board was supposed to] elect a new chair. They have to have a chair elected within 60 days of the July Board meeting. However, this past summer, the Board was at a [standstill]. They couldn't break the tie for who was going to be the [next] Board chair, so they actually could not conduct the business of the school
district until a chair was elected because we couldn't officially have a meeting without a chair. We had a whole 30 days of not being able to have an official Board meeting; I needed to hire people. Superintendents recommend for hire, [however], they don't make the final hire of new employees. In addition, [the school district] had quite a bit going on that month of August.

Dr. Charles shared an unexpected challenge that she encountered after her decision to close down a single-gender classroom. She faced a situation where the White community felt she was looking out for the interest of the African American community and the African American community felt she wasn’t doing enough.

Like I said, the district has, for a decade, done the same thing. This district is also viewed as one of the top ten districts in the state, academically, so for an outsider to come in and say, we can be better, [this] has been challenging. I think it's even more significant when you look like me, because you get these looks, like what would you know, or how would you know? I think part of that is just being an outsider.

[However], I can't help but think that sometimes, part of that is something else.

Dr. Charles described the challenge further:

I think it's a mixture [of things]. I think in every stakeholder group, there’s a pocket of people that, for a variety of reasons, have an issue. I mean, sometimes, it's because you're a black female; sometimes, it's because you look too young; sometimes, it’s just because you're an outsider. To be able to maneuver around [this, is a challenge] because I think you deal with each one of those [cases] differently, so to try to have
the background knowledge about what you're going to do, depending on, I will say, individuals, has been challenging. One example is when we had the change in the single-gender classroom. All of the parents that were upset were, very high-income, White parents. It almost immediately became about race and it wasn't. It just wasn't. The parents wanted to make it about race. It was just absolutely so far from [being] about race. So as a Black female, you get it from both sides, frankly. That whole image of, she's going to come in here and do everything for the black kids, and then you have our black community saying, you're not doing enough for the black kids. It's [an] interesting [dichotomy], because you have to figure out how to work around, and again, know what you're dealing with, so that you can maneuver around that and have the right answer.

She was not prepared for the negative reactions of the community because the closing of the single-gender classroom only affected a few people. She explained:

Last semester, we announced that we were closing a single-gender classroom—an all female classroom. We were closing it for a lot of reasons. The data indicated that it was not effective. When we did that, literally, many parents that wanted that option went berserk. I did not even anticipate that they'd be so angry, so I didn't have a plan. When they started calling and emailing, I was like, oh my gosh! These people are going to kill me.
Negative Perceptions of Women and African Americans

Dr. Anderson feels negative perceptions of women and African Americans is her greatest challenge within the role of superintendent. She said:

The biggest challenge that I’ve encountered locally is the fact that I’m African American more so than being a woman. Racism is just [such a barrier]. I call it “Obama-ism.” Ever since he’s been in [office], I feel like it’s just harder. Sometimes, you don’t get in the door because of [racism]; you don’t get all the way in; you don’t feel [that your entry in the door] is genuine. I know these people [in this community very well] because I grew up here. I don’t know if you can call it an intuition but I just know! I know fake [people] and I know genuine [people].

Regarding racism, in particular, Dr. Daniels declared:

Most of the time, [racism is] hidden but sometimes, it’s just out there. And a lot of the [racist comments], come from parents [of students in the district] because they don’t care. When you go to civic organizations, [with] those kinds of folks, it’s kind of hidden. Sometimes when you deal with parents, they don’t care; it just comes out. So you just have to deal with it. Because what I tell them [is that] “I’m the buck and it stops with me. Now, I can help you deal with this problem that you are in but guess what? There’s nobody else to go to.” It is what it is. We just get [the work] done!

Dr. Daniels shared her views on the perception that she isn’t competent because she is an African American woman.
I've had many people tell me over the past several months, "I'm glad you're here. Please don't go anywhere. You're doing a great job." But sometimes I think, "Oh, it's as if I wouldn't?" In the back of my mind, I know that there are many that feel like African American women can't handle [the] superintendency. I don't know. I don't think it's necessarily that they [African American women] don’t have the right skill set, that's not the issue. I think it's the perception that people think the public may not view them as a strong enough leader because they are African-American females. It's a role that, as you [can] see, it's only about six of us, so not many are used to us holding these positions. They don't necessarily think or have faith that you [as an African American] can [lead a school district] without being surprised that you do in the end.

**Stress**

Dr. Anderson feels that the “worst part of the job” is the stress.

You carry the load of a school system, which includes the students and the staff, on your shoulder everyday. You have to think about the buses getting here safely; you have to think about the high school students who drive [to school]; if something happens to the teachers on their way to school; once they get into the building, does anyone have a weapon? All those kinds of things, you think about those things all the time. When the test scores come out, you know the report cards [have been were re-normed] and we were anticipating that. Luckily, we got Cs, which was where most of the school systems were. But if you had gotten a D, an E, or an F, then [the
superintendent] has to shoulder that; then you have to worry about where you [are
going to] get your money from and [whether] you have enough money. The buck
stops right here! I mean you have staff members to do this, this, and this, but the buck
stops here! It’s like, “You’re superintendent, you’re supposed to make it happen!” If
your folks aren’t getting this and that and you’re not getting As, Bs, or Cs, what are
you going to do? So there’s just a lot of stress and I’m tired.

**Strategies to Overcome Barriers**

The participants in this study have utilized multiple strategies to overcome the
barriers they have faced en route to and within the superintendency. Three of the participants
*promoted shared responsibility* and all of the participants *employed their interpersonal skills.*
Two participants said that they are *direct* in dealing with conflict; two participants work to
*nurture their relationships with their Boards of Education.* Two participants try to *find viable
solutions* for problems as they arise. Three superintendents have had to learn how to *navigate
through politics* and three superintendents seek the input of mentors as a strategy for dealing
with conflict and challenging situations. Other strategies that have emerged from the data
include: *Being fair, knowing who the gatekeepers are* in the community and hiring entities,
*site-based management* and *making sound decisions.* Table 4.8 depicts which strategies the
participants have utilized to overcome the barriers they have faced en route to and within the
superintendency.
Table 4.8

*Strategies Used to Overcome Barriers En Route To/Within the Superintendency*

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<th>Navigate Policies</th>
<th>Nurture Relationships</th>
<th>Know the Culture</th>
<th>Be Direct</th>
<th>Fairness</th>
<th>Find Viable Solutions</th>
<th>Interpersonal Skills</th>
<th>Seek Input from Mentors</th>
<th>Promote Shared Responsibility</th>
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**Promoting Shared Responsibility**

After the hurricane hit the area, Dr. Anderson met with various people on her leadership staff to create a plan of action.

The flooding started on a Saturday and by Sunday morning, we were sitting around that table trying to figure out what we were going to do with those students; we had to come up with a plan. We sat around that table and met everyday for a whole week.

[As a result], the kids started back in school a week later.

In dealing with the challenging situation of the outbreak of violence, Dr. Burton has solicited help from community members. She offered:

It has really been a huge concern to the point that I meet with a group of ministers once a month, and that's the only thing we talk about—is the community strife amongst our youths. The police chief and I have started this pretty open and transparent partnership. I talk to my police chief probably every other day so I can hear what's going on; what has happened the night before; or [whether] we need to
add extra security at the high school. We've really been having those discussions for probably the last four to six months.

She also said, “If I have to bring in teams of people to help me deal with [the challenge], we come together and we just get it done.”

Whenever possible, Dr. Daniels believes in “promoting shared responsibility, but also at the same time, leading by example. It's always good to deal [with others], to even have the opportunity or afford the opportunity, to get the input and strategize a lot of times.” She has been “building a collaborative Board environment where everyone [has input]—leveraging everyone's expertise, as well as distributing leadership and helping all recognize that [our jobs require] shared responsibility because anything we do, it's for our students.” Concerning her Cabinet, she said:

The five of us come together and we discuss some of the scenarios and provide each other with information that sheds better light on the circumstance before I finalize my decision. If I have situations where it's a little bit more sensitive in nature [where I am only] privy to the information, or the Board chair, or the Board, or the attorney, which I've had all [these] cases, then it's just not waiting and stalling. Once I gather as much information as I can, then to address that information head on to figure out what we're going to do, then I share what I can share with the parties involved.

Employing Interpersonal Skills

Dr. Anderson feels her interpersonal skills have been a valuable asset in the superintendency. “That’s what has helped me more than anything, that skill—[along with
finding viable solutions] has been a great asset. My people skills [help me to enjoy] my relationships [with others]. I don’t meet strangers.” She confidently stated, “I have a way of dealing with people and that makes a difference.” She also said, “I’m very personable; I can relate to all people.”

When Dr. Burton became tired of working and living in a different state from her husband, it was her knack of forming relationships with various individuals that helped her to secure a position in the Southern State. She shared:

I had been in contact with a woman there for several years—you know how you just pick up people along the way and make friends and relationships. She told me, “There is an opening in the Department of Education that I think you’d be perfect for.”

Regarding her interpersonal skills, Dr. Charles stated:

I'm a people person, and I'm happy when I wake up, and I'm happy when I go to bed. I think that it's hard to be mad at someone that's smiling. I'm just that person. I think that has been helpful, in that, I hope people see that as a willingness to be open and transparent and a willingness to want to involve others.

Dr. Daniels also believes that having “strong interpersonal skills” is a helpful strategy in resolving conflict.

**Being Direct**

Dr. Anderson stresses the importance of being direct. She stated, “[To deal with conflict], I just take care of [the issue]. I deal with things head on. That’s just my philosophy. You have to deal with the situation. You don’t hem; you don’t haw. You just deal with it
when it comes to you.”

Dr. Daniels also agreed with this. She responded, “Facing [conflict] head on and dealing with them and not trying to put them off [is necessary]; not trying to overlook them; not trying to sweep them under the table—just dealing with what the issues are at hand.”

**Finding Viable Solutions**

Dr. Anderson feels that her skill in weighing the pros and cons of a situation in order to make an informed decision is very helpful.

One skill that I think has helped me the most is that I think through issues and decisions I have to make. You have got to think things through and you have got to say, “Here it is; give the me good and possible bad things that can happen as a result of that decision or what I’m going to say or do and then, you weigh it out.” But in doing that—[you must be cognizant of] the things that could possibly go wrong.

When conflict surfaces, Dr. Daniels suggests, “trying to determine a viable solution.” She also talks to “as many people that may have been involved in the circumstance before making [her] decisions.” Whenever possible, she does her research so that she can make the best choice.

**Navigating Through Politics**

Dr. Anderson figured out how to navigate through the politics in the county. She said: I learned how to speak the language. You have to be very knowledgeable of the group that you are with. You just have to be ready. You have to do your research and be familiar with that group because “when in Rome, do as the Romans do.” You do what
you need to do. There’s a lot of politics in [education].

She maintained further:

Because I know the history of this county, I know when to send somebody else to get the money. Sometimes, I have to [either] send my executive director, my curriculum specialist, or finance officer. [Because I] know these things, I send them. [They need to] just get the money or [whatever] we need. That’s all!

According to Dr. Burton, politics plays a “huge” role in the superintendency. She feels that Patton has helped her to better navigate through the politics.

It's not my nature [to deal with politics]. I have to work at it. I would love to just go in the schools and watch people teach and give them feedback on how to improve instruction, but if I have three or four phone messages that are on my desk [from the] County Commissioner, a City Council member, I better not leave this room until I get that taken care of—that's in any school system. You have got to keep that at the forefront [of your “to-do” list]. And even [with] staying on top of it, you may not have a handle on it. It is very, very important and it's very critical. Again, I guess the Patton Academy helped tremendously because I [communicate with] my school Board members.

Dr. Daniels had this to say about politics:

I have to work at that, because my least favorite part of any administrative position I've held is the politics. I knew that superintendent positions are political. I've learned that they truly are, and while I may not like the politics of it all, I have to be able to
navigate within the politics. I have to stay abreast of the politics. It is an aspect of the job that comes with the job, and I have had to learn to deal with it.

Dr. Charles feels that Purdue isn’t a very political place although it is “different”. She claimed, “This is not a real political place. When they are [political], it's still all about public education. [This occurs] in small chunks, but nothing like what I hear my colleagues talk about.” This is a departure from what the other participants have experienced.

**Nurturing Relationships with the Board**

Dr. Burton works to maintain a positive relationship with her Board.

I have a great relationship [with my Board]. They're incredibly supportive of me. [Even with their support, I nurture [our relationships] and I work at it. My Board chair and I talk at least once a week. I will call every Board member individually and give him or her an update on whatever has happened that's of a critical nature. I send out a “Friday Update” every week of all the highlights of things that have happened in the school system. [I make sure that] they're not out of the loop. I am very transparent with them. You've got to nurture your Board relationships. I just can't say that enough. Like I said, you can think you're doing enough and it's still not enough. It's a work in progress, and I can remember that session, Board-superintendent relationships, but trust me, that class was not even close to everything you really need to know [about this].

She is also in constant communication with them and tries to keep them well informed.

Dr. Daniels also makes a conscious effort to keep her Board abreast of what is
happening in the district. In dealing with her challenging situation of not having a Board chair in the beginning of the school year, Dr. Daniels did the following:

I used the weekly updates that I send to my Board as the vehicle with which I provided them with information and kept them abreast of what was going on in the district. I had to come up with another method of communication so that we could still get some work done and work through a little bit of a consensus as opposed to having to get official votes on certain things [as we would have done if we actually had a Board chair].

**Knowing Who the Gatekeepers Are**

Dr. Burton believes it is important to know who the gatekeepers are in the district or entity. She advised:

You have got to figure out, in every state, who the gatekeepers are for these jobs. For example, I had met the woman who is the attorney for the school Board’s association who does superintendent searches. I probably met with her two years before I ever applied for a job because I wanted her to look at my resume and give me feedback. [I wanted to] make sure that I was in line to do what I needed to do. So you’ve got to go out of your way to find those kinds of people.

**Being Fair**

Dr. Anderson endeavors to be fair and consistent when dealing with conflict. She shared:

I live by this; I’m fair and consistent. It doesn’t matter who you are; where you
belong; who your mamma is or who you’re daddy is. I’m going to deal with the situation [head on] and I’m going to treat everybody fairly and consistently. The consequences, whatever the consequences may be for that particular infraction, you receive them.

Seeking Input from Mentors

Dr. Anderson differed from the other superintendents in that she didn’t have a mentor. She didn’t find it necessary to have one because of her vast experiences and her wealth of knowledge. She dissented, “I don’t think it would’ve made much of a difference anyway if I had [a mentor]. I think this is because I gained so much experience along the way.”

The other participants, however, had mentors that included men, women, and White and African American people. Dr. Burton sought out her mentors because they had qualities that she admired. She shared, “I was mentored by really strong, actually, male superintendents who really encouraged at all phases of my leadership; they encouraged me to do more in my career.”

Dr. Charles revealed this about her mentors:

I have two mentors. One mentor, Dr. Thomas, was an interim superintendent, when I was assistant superintendent at Mosaic County. He is retired. I just love that man. He retired from this Southern State, is currently in another Southern State. Literally, I only worked with him for about half a year, and he really, really, is just an amazing person. He is kind of like a father figure, in that he was very encouraging, very smart
in guiding me through the interview process, which he did. He helped me maneuver around some questions that might have needed to be answered; he allowed me to bounce some ideas off of him. He would be the number one mentor. Another mentor that really got me into administration was my assistant principal when I was a teacher, actually. She, a white female, was the one who encouraged me to get my master’s [degree].

Dr. Daniels also has mentors. Not only have they encouraged her to pursue the superintendency, they have also provided her with their input and wisdom.

There are two superintendents—one who is a sitting superintendent and one who was a former superintendent. When I have a circumstance where I really need a superintendent's point of view [and] I really need one of them to weigh in, I call them first. One of them was my former superintendent and he's actually been a mentor with me for about 20 years.

**Utilizing Site-Based Management**

Dr. Daniels uses site-based management when she can. She is an advocate of “implementing site-based management.” She feels “that's just a natural part of [her] leadership style. When it is possible to do so, I [use site-based management].”

**Making Own Decisions**

Dr. Anderson maintained that as a superintendent “you also have to go ahead and figure out a solution if it comes out [from looking at possible outcomes]. That’s what I do.” While acknowledging that it is a good thing to get input from others, Dr. Daniels shared, “In
[the] superintendency, though, there are many times when you've got to make the decision yourself.”

**Emergent Themes**

Emergent themes derived from the analyzed data include: *Having faith, having confidence, having a strong support system, and being prepared*. These themes are exemplified in the lives of all these participants. In addition, all of the participants have obtained their doctorate degrees and recommend that aspirants do the same.

**Having Faith**

When Dr. Anderson is dealing with difficult situations or conflict, she prays a lot. After being rejected twice for the superintendency, she made the following statement, “I always knew that my day would come and I kept asking God when and how long do I have to go through this in order to get this [superintendency] and when I least expected it, it happened.” She is also an active member of her church. She sings in the gospel choir; she is a member of the Women’s Fellowship Committee; and she is the chairperson of the Scholarship Ministry at her church.

Dr. Burton is also a woman of faith. She believes that “God puts you where you need to be.” She attributes her positive outlook to her faith versus her personality. She maintained, “I attribute a lot of [my positive disposition] to my faith than my personality; I also pray through things and I usually can come out on the other side. I would attribute [my positivity] more to my faith than probably my personality.” When times get hard, she said:

I will say that my faith sustains me. I don’t know how people do these kinds of jobs
without it, personally, because you have a lot of days when you don’t always see positive things and you can get very negative and very tainted. I think my faith keeps me upbeat, nourished, and always optimistic about the future and what we can do for young people. So, I think my faith is critically important to that support and sustainability.

Likewise, Dr. Charles defines herself as a “faithful” and “prayerful” woman. When she started to worry that she might not have the opportunity to be a superintendent, she said, “I just thought, the right door will open and I'm not going to get discouraged.” She said further, “I'm just a very faithful person who trusts that God has put me in the right places and I'm going to follow the path that he leads me to.” Besides being “blessed” and “thankful,” Dr. Daniels attributes her success to God. “What has been fortunate is that God has put me in the right job at the right time.”

Having Confidence

Three out of the four superintendents feel that their confidence was the result of growing up in their family, their schooling, and work-related experiences. One superintendent feels she has grown to be confident. Dr. Anderson affirms, “I'm very confident. When I came to the central office, I was in my early thirties. I worked around superintendents and directors so I gained a lot of experience and knowledge from doing that. I was very confident.” She credits her mother and her education at Ascend University, saying:
My mother [has also played a role in my confidence]; she always told me that I could be and do whatever I wanted. Then when I went to Ascend University, that just put the nail in the coffin. When I left there, I could be the president. It instilled in me [so much]. [My experience there] made me feel so good [about myself]. I was a “country bumpkin” when I left here and I went up to Ascend. When I came back, I was a polished African American woman who was ready for the world.

Dr. Burton attributes her confidence to her parents and her work-related experiences. She maintained:

I was raised with two very strong personalities and when I was in elementary school, my dad would tell me, “You’re a leader! You’re a leader!” So I grew up with that. I have learned through the years that even though I’m a confident person, it’s not just about me. In my early twenty's, I thought everything was—oh, I’m wonderful; and I know everything—but as you get older, you figure out that you are confident because you have good people around you who have helped you to get to where you are and who are helping you in this work.

Similarly, Dr. Charles’ family influenced her confidence. Her various experiences also play a role in developing this quality.

I grew up with two older brothers and a military dad. If you weren't confident in my house, you were in trouble. Honestly, again, I have been really, really blessed. I was the first African American scholarship cheerleader in undergrad; I was the first African American principal in [my county]; I have just been blessed to be set up in
opportunities that make me feel that I'm supposed to be there. When you feel like you're supposed to be there, confidence just comes with the job. I really just think that it's my parents, it's family, and my experiences have been just really positive.

Dr. Daniels’ confidence development has been a process. However, she feels her work-related experiences have enabled her to be knowledgeable about many different areas. She stated:

I have grown into my confidence. I sure have grown. It's because of the experiences that I've had, which have been great administrative experiences. It has afforded me to know a lot about a lot, and that has helped because the majority of the time, if I'm faced with a question or if I am in need of doing some research, it's easy for me to find out what I need to know. While there's still much to learn in any superintendency, it's good to [refer back to past experiences and say, "Well, yeah, when I did this in such and such…it helps when you know your such and such... or think about the aspect from a different angle because if you will recall…”

**Having a Strong Support System**

Participants in this study have strong support systems filled with people who love and encourage them. This included support from their family, colleagues, mentors, and allies. Allies are supportive colleagues, co-workers, and mentors who help to connect people to resources and information; they also help individuals advance towards career goals. In the case of the participants, their allies have helped them secure jobs, made them aware of openings and positions, and have also babysat so that the superintendents could go back to
school and further their education.

Dr. Anderson disclosed that her friends and family members were her support. She shared, “I have two very close friends that encourage me to keep striving and then at the time, my mother was still living, [both she] and my husband supported me. So it was those people that encouraged me.” When dealing with conflict, she said:

What helps me more than anything is that I have a friend who retired as an Associate Superintendent; she has always been there for me to bounce stuff off of. She gives me feedback. She is my number one supporter; I’m talking about dealing with work issues. Then other superintendents in the region are my support. I talk with them too.

Dr. Anderson was fortunate to have an ally in her former superintendent. She posited:

Luckily, the person that [the Board] hired was a decent person; he was not prejudiced and understood the plight of African American administrators aspiring to go into the superintendency. He had actually done some research with a lady at a college up North on women ascending to the superintendency and the barriers [they have faced]. So we talked and had a great relationship. I was highly respected by him, and that’s the only way I made it [to the superintendency] because he treated me with utmost respect and recognized my talents. This is the one that decided to resign and said to the Board of Education, “There’s no need of you looking [anywhere else] because you have the right person here.”
Dr. Burton stated:

I have a phenomenal husband. I’m just so fortunate everyday. I tell him that almost everyday because it’s not easy for some men to sit back and just let you go. Most men who are married to women, who are in leadership roles, they have to be very self-assured individuals because we’re not the type of women who are on you all the time because we have stuff to do—so you really have to be a really self-assured individual to be able to do that. You also want someone who is encouraging of you and your work and not negative about the work. Even when I come home and I am negative, he’s the one who will say, “You know you are going to figure it out. Remember when you figured that out? So, you will figure this out.” And this is what you need around you [a supportive husband].

And then I have had close relationships with my parents. My mother passed away last year but I will tell you that my father is one of my biggest cheerleaders—huge cheerleader. He is such an encourager. I talk to him everyday on my way home. I’ll tell him something that happened and he’ll say, “What?!!” And I’ll say, “Yeah daddy, that’s what happened.” But again, he’s encouraging. When I became a principal, it was one of the proudest days for him and when I became a superintendent that was one of the proudest days for him. You just need those kinds of people in your inner circle to support you.

When she has dealt with conflict or a challenging situation, she has also relied on her colleagues. She stated:
I think I have started to develop a really nice group of female superintendents that I talk to periodically. We talk to each other actually about our issues. To be honest, I'm the only African-American in the group but we're all women, and I think that has been really helpful because we can bounce ideas off of each other. You can lay your cards on the table and say, "Can you believe this just happened?" We're supportive of each other. I think that's another piece. I think you have to connect yourselves with folks similar to you who you can just bounce things off of, and become a part of that network.

In addition, having allies has enabled Dr. Burton to secure jobs.

While I was in the Patton program, one of the superintendents in residence for that program, who was the superintendent in a city up North, came out of retirement to take on this city. The city had a lot of financial issues and still does today. She looked at me one day and said, “I’ve been listening and watching you talk about instruction and I need a Chief Academic Officer.” And I thought, “Well, I’ve never left the South, but I’ll try it.” So I went up North. She actually recruited three of us from that class to go with her.

Regarding having a support system, Dr. Charles claimed, “My other support system [besides my mentors] is my mother. My mother and my children are my biggest fans.” She also stated:

Although I had a lot of people that were naysayers, I had a whole lot of support too. I really felt like I was prepared. I waited for my girls to graduate from high school to
apply for my first superintendency job. I just think that I had a support system and a plan in place; and I was ready to go.

Dr. Charles has found an ally in one of her mentors. She maintained:

Another mentor that really got me into administration was my assistant principal when I was a teacher, actually. She, a white female, was the one who encouraged me to get my master’s degree. I was a single parent, so that was a little bit scary. She said, “I'll help you; we'll help you; you need to go do it. You're going to be an administrator, and you're going to be a superintendent, one day.” She said that back in the late 1990s.

She further added, “The mentor that I spoke about, the teacher, who is a white female—she went after me, for lack of a better term. We worked together as peers; we were teachers [together]; and then she just kept coming to me and saying, ‘You got to go get your masters; you got to get your masters.’ So she sought me out. From then on, we just became friends through that process.”

While Dr. Daniels has had mentors in her life, she did not share anything about her allies. However, she relies on her cabinet especially when it comes to serious issues or conflict; she seeks out their input before making final decisions. Her cabinet consists of her Director of Human Resources, her Director of Auxiliary services, her Finance Officer, and her Chief Technology officer. She also depends on her husband for support.

My husband is also [part of my support system]. He's a high school/middle school math/science teacher, and he is in the military. He's an active Air Force reservist.
With husband and I, there have been many times when he's been deployed or activated; with myself being a military brat, because my father was in the military, and he retired in the air force, I'm used to parents not being around all the time, or at least my dad not being around and my mom having to raise the six kids because he's off somewhere, so that was just second nature for me. With my husband and I, there have been times when he's been the primary one taking care of the kids and doing everything, and now, there are times when I am. Especially [the times] when he was deployed, there was nobody but my children and I, getting through things.

If it were not for her husband, she may not have considered the pursuit of the superintendency.

It does help when you've got a strong family support, and I did as well. I actually would not have [become a] superintendent if my husband hadn't encouraged me to [apply]. [I pursued the superintendency because] he had been saying for the last ten years, "Dr. Daniels, you need to be a superintendent." Now, I've finally done it.

She has also found support in her school community.

What has been fortunate is that God has put me in the right job at the right time. If I was coaching a game, [my kids] were with me. If [my husband] was coaching a game, they were with him. If I had a late meeting or I had a PTA meeting, then if my kids had to come with me, they just had to come with me, and my kids at school took care of them for me. So it was great. They grew up knowing everybody—parents and students alike. Many times, I would just have to say, "Okay, you make sure you're
back at this time." I didn't have to worry about them. If I had to work a basketball game, [my kids] were at the games and with somebody. People took care of them, and when it was time to go home, they knew what time they had to be back where I was so that we could leave.

**Being Prepared**

Being prepared has to do with the ability to do the job, knowledge of the job’s duties and responsibilities, varied experiences in educational leadership, having the necessary credentials/educational background, how documents are organized and presented, and an individual’s grooming/appearance for interviews and meetings. Dr. Anderson feels well prepared to do her job. She affirmed, “I’m very knowledgeable about my areas and what I’m doing.” She is also not a stranger to responsibility because, as a child, she was in charge of taking care of her brothers when her mother was at work.

See, my mother worked at a place that was almost forty-five minutes to an hour so she would leave home early. I had to be responsible for making sure [that my three younger brothers] got up and went to school. I had a lot of responsibilities and then when they came home I had to cook and fed them and that kind of thing. So I had a lot of responsibilities at a young age. Like my grandma used to say, “You were grown before your time, girl!"

Regarding her being prepared as a result of the stigmas associated to African Americans, she said:
You have to dress and present yourself very well and you have to know how to respond to the questions and the conversation; [you have to] know how to engage in conversations [with White people]… so that’s why I’m always—now today, I’m dressed down because it’s Friday—but everyday, I’m sharp, from head to toe, everyday because that in, itself, commands respect. When they see you looking like that and being presentable, that in, itself, cuts away some things.

Dr. Burton stressed the importance of being prepared whether it is for a meeting, how a person presents himself or herself for an interview, or in one’s document preparation. She said:

I don’t think people take [how they prepare their documents] seriously. What you prepare—what [interviewers] look at before they ever set eyes on you— is critically important. And again, I have gone through the Patton’s Superintendent Academy where people had gone through all of that and perfected what that looks like; I had a huge advantage there. But all of that plays into you even getting in the door to talk to somebody so I just think these are things people ought to be highly in tuned to.

Regarding appearances, she said, “You just have to be very intentional in how you prepare yourself and how you look. Prepare yourself well.”

Dr. Charles feels she has also been well prepared to do her job and she also feels like she has had positive experiences in her educational career. She stated, “I'll be honest. I have been blessed in my career, that I was trained really well, from year one of teaching. I had a
really great experience, as a teacher, and as an administrator.” She also said, “I really felt like I was prepared [when I decided to pursue the superintendency].”

Dr. Daniels has also had a wealth of experiences that aided in her preparation. Her researching skills have been an asset. She said:

It helps to have the experiences that I've had. If I had not had those, I wouldn't be at a level of knowledge that I can make the connections necessary; that got me my position of superintendent. If there is something that I don't know, at least I have a strong network and my background in research. I know who to call or how to find out that answer.

**Internal Protective Factors**

Internal protective factors are characteristics that individuals embody that help them to build resiliency. The participants have used many strategies that align with internal protective factors in resiliency. All of the superintendents gave of themselves “in service of others and/or a cause;” this service and/cause is education. They all showed evidence of using “life skills.” In particular, Dr. Daniels used making [her] own decisions as a strategy for overcoming her challenges. All of the participants described ways in which they solved problems as they arose. They spoke of meeting with various members of their cabinets and central office representatives to strategize and choose the best solution for the problem at hand. Dr. Daniels, Dr. Anderson, and Dr. Burton promote shared responsibility, which is another resounding theme of this study.

All of the participants were sociable. They were very easy to talk to and as Dr.
Anderson said about herself, “I never meet a stranger!” They not only enjoy relationships with their support networks and allies i.e. family members, friends, and colleagues, but three out of four of them had mentors that have made imprints on their lives and propelled them forward in their educational leadership pursuits. All of the participants had a sense of humor. In particular, Dr. Burton maintained, “I use humor a lot. I also try to put things in plain language, which I think really helps especially when things are getting really tense. [For example when I am] in a meeting with parents or with staff members or teachers and it's getting really heated; I try to throw in some humor [to lighten the mood].” The participants seemed easy-going and laughed as they shared different experiences with the researcher. In describing her personality, Dr. Charles said, “My public information officer laughs at me all the time and says, ‘you get what you get when you get Dr. Charles.’ I am crazy and smart [but] I can be serious.”

There was evidence of “internal locus of control” which has to do with the belief that an individual is accountable for his or her own success. While all of the participants did make mention of their faith and its impact on their lives, they all seemed to embody an internal locus of control. The participants were not afraid to make hard calls and decisions. They showed “self-confidence.” They seemed confident about who they are and about their experiences. Dr. Burton was especially proud of being a graduate of the Patton’s Superintendent Academy and how it prepared her to face the difficult aspects of her career. Dr. Anderson stated, “When I came to the central office, I was in my early thirties. I worked around superintendents and directors so I gained a lot of experience and knowledge from
doing that. I was very confident.” Similarly, Dr. Charles shared, “I have just been blessed to be set up in opportunities that make me feel that I’m supposed to be there. When you feel like you're supposed to be there, confidence just comes with the job.” Dr. Daniels explained, “I have grown into my confidence. I sure have grown. It's because of the experiences that I've had, which have been great administrative experiences. It's afforded me to know a lot about a lot. [This] has helped because the majority of the time if I'm faced with a question or if I am in need of doing some research, it's easy for me to find out what I need to know.”

The participants had no trouble telling the researcher what they are “good” at. Dr. Anderson described her knack for handling her role and responsibility. She said this regarding resiliency:

It’s hard to describe because I think it’s something that is just in you. It’s just like you’ve heard people say—you either have it or you don’t. And that’s what I say about school administrators—you either are a good administrator or you just don’t know how to do it; nobody can teach you; you can go to class and you can get your degree, but it’s just something within you that allows those right characteristics to come out to be able to do a great job. I’m blessed that I had them all. I’m very confident; I’m very knowledgeable about my areas and what I’m doing. I’m very personable; I can relate to all people.

Regarding “personal competence,” Dr. Burton shared:

Sometimes, I think I am too observant because I pick up on everything. I pick up on if they leaned in; their hand gestures; did they walk me to the door or not? I have a
Master’s degree in Organizational Communication so I have studied a lot of communication techniques. My husband says it’s probably to a fault, because I do. I watch how people talk to each other, how they lean in, and [their] facial expressions.

All of the participants maintain a “positive outlook” in life and a “positive view of [their] personal future.” Dr. Anderson, when speaking about her pursuit of the superintendency, she said, “I always knew that my day would come.” She didn’t give up on her aspiration. Dr. Burton attributes her positive disposition to her faith. She explained, “I attribute a lot of that to my faith than my personality and also, I pray through things and I usually can come out on the other side.” Further, when had been rejected in her pursuit to the superintendency, she stated, “It was almost like I knew it was going to happen; it was just a matter of time and finding the right district at the right time. I just kept going and I never really got down about it.”

Dr. Charles’ positive outlook is a result of her family interactions, her work-related experiences, and her faith. She stated, “I really just think that it's my parents, it's family, and my experiences have been just really positive. Again, I'm just a very faithful person and trust that God has put me in the right places and I'm going to follow the path that he leads me to.”

Dr. Daniels is optimistic about the increase of future African American women superintendents. She said, “It's just a matter of time; just like there's more female teachers and now, [there are] more female building-level administrators. It's just the way the pendulum is.”

Three out of the four participants showed “flexibility.” When dealing with the impact
of the hurricane on her district, Dr. Anderson not only made adjustments to reallocate textbooks and the locations where students would be taught, she also had to restructure personnel in an effort to deal with that transitional period.

According to Dr. Charles, resilient leaders are flexible and she does see herself as “somewhat” resilient. Dr. Daniels stressed the importance of being flexible. She maintained, “Sometimes our job is trial and error, and sometimes our job [requires that] we have a definite direction that we're going [in], but it may not work out. The outcome may not be the result that you intended, and you have to regroup, and you have to be willing to be flexible.” She also recommended that leaders “adapt to change easily.”

All of the participants demonstrated “a capacity for and connection to learning.” They all have earned their doctorates and strongly recommend the attainment of a doctorate degree prior to applying for the superintendency. Dr. Daniels shared that she finds value in lifelong learning. Similarly, Dr. Burton feels she is a lifelong learner and stays abreast of various trends in education. She calls herself a “student of leadership.” Dr. Anderson is proud that she has helped others to pursue their education. She exclaimed:

You can make such an impact on people! I think about all the people I’ve encouraged to go back to school and get a Master’s degree or for teaching assistants to go back and get their four-year degree; even custodians going to get their two-year degrees; [I have encouraged teachers to pursue their] National Board Certification; and I have also encouraged my administrators to become directors.

Additionally, she has “pushed students to be the best that they can be.”
Table 4.9 portrays the factors utilized by the participants to overcome challenges and difficult situations. Responses in column “A” provide the superintendents’ own appraisal of factors they have employed to overcome barriers en route to and within the superintendency. Column “B” denotes the researchers’ evaluation of which characteristics the participants have demonstrated as it relates to internal protective factors in resiliency based on the findings of the data.

Table 4.9

**Internal Protective Factors: Individual characteristics that Facilitate Resiliency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Anderson</th>
<th>Burton</th>
<th>Charles</th>
<th>Daniels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gives of self in service to others and/or a cause</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Uses life skills, including good decision making, assertiveness, impulse control, and problem solving</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sociability; ability to be a friend; ability to form positive relationships</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sense of humor</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Internal locus of control</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Autonomy; independence</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Positive view of personal future</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Flexibility</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Capacity for and connection to learning</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Self-motivation</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Is “good at something”; personal competence</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Feelings of self-worth and self-confidence</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Internal and Environmental Protective Factors. Reprinted from *Resiliency in Schools:*
Environmental Protective Factors

Schools, families, and communities can offer both environmental protective factors and conditions that build individual protective factors (Henderson & Milstein, pp. 11-14). All of the participants have been reared in environments that “promote close bonds” and “encourages supportive relationships with many caring others.” They all spoke of their relationships with their siblings and the role that their families have played in their educational leadership and development in general. Each superintendent spoke of the impact that various people had on their careers and talked about their support systems and in three out of the four cases, they talked about the relationships they have with their mentors.

All of the superintendents shared how their environment “values and encourages education.” Dr. Anderson’s support came from both her friends and her family. She stated, “I have two very close friends that encourage me to keep striving. At the time, when my mother, [who] was still living, both she and my husband supported me. So it was those people that encouraged me.” She also felt that “[her] mother had always told [her] that [she] could be and do whatever [she] wanted.” In addition, she stated, “I credit my mom [for my resiliency] because my mama raised eight children and she was a single mom. She was very determined that we all would do well. So she pushed us.” In addition, Dr. Anderson shared how Ascend University also played a significant role in her educational preparation.
When I went to Ascend University that just put the nail in the coffin. When I left there, I could be the president. It instilled in me [the confidence I needed]—it made me feel so good! I was a “country bumpkin” [when] I left here. [However, when] I went up to Ascend, when I came back, I was a polished, African American woman who was ready for the world.

Dr. Burton disclosed the impact that her family has had on her educational attainment. The fact that her grandmother could not read and needed her help to vote at the age of ten made an impression on Dr. Burton. She reminisced, “It was probably at that moment I realized I wanted to be an educator because at ten I knew I had a power that she didn’t have.” She also spoke of her relationship with her father and how he was an “encourager” and one of her “biggest cheerleaders.” She asserted, “When I became a principal, it was one of the proudest days for him and when I became a superintendent that was [also] one of the proudest days for him.”

Dr. Charles also feels that her environments, both familial and work, values and encourages education. She posited:

I have been really, really blessed. I was the first African American scholarship cheerleader in undergrad; I was the first African American principal in [the county]; I have just been blessed to be set up in opportunities that make me feel that I'm supposed to be there.

Dr. Daniels also felt that the environments that she has worked in has valued and encouraged education. She maintained:
I've just had a plethora of experience. I've been fortunate in my professional opportunities that while I may have held leadership positions, I've viewed them as being a service to others and building a collaborative Board environment where everyone [is involved]. [I lead by] leveraging everyone's expertise, as well as distributing leadership and helping all recognize that it's a shared responsibility because anything we do, it's for our students.

The environments of the participants “promotes sharing of responsibilities, service to others, [and] “required helpfulness;” “encourages prosocial development of values (such as altruism) and life skills (such as cooperation);” and “provides leadership, decision making, and other opportunities for meaningful participation.” Dr. Anderson discussed how her family environment provided her with opportunities for responsibility, service, decision-making, and leadership. She asserted:

I had four older brothers and then there was seven years between the fourth child and me, the fifth child. Because all of [my older brothers] were gone, I was like the oldest and then I had three younger brothers. See, my mother worked at a place that was almost forty-five minutes to an hour so she would leave home early so I had to be responsible for making sure they got up and went to school. I had a lot of responsibilities. When they came home, I had to cook and feed them and that kind of thing. So I had a lot of responsibilities at a young age. Like my grandma used to say, “You were grown before your time, girl!”
Dr. Burton has been collaborating with key stakeholders/community leaders in her area to mitigate the challenging situations she has faced this year especially the outbreak of violence of students in the community. She explained:

It has really been a huge concern to the point that I meet with a group of ministers once a month, and that's the only thing we talk about is the community strife amongst our youths. The police chief and I have started this pretty open and transparent partnership. I talk to my police chief probably every other day so I can hear what's going on, what has happened the night before, [and to see if] we need to add extra security at the high school. We've really been having those discussions for probably the last four to six months.

Dr. Charles also collaborates with her Public Information Officer. She runs her decisions by him to get his feedback and input. She said this in discussing how she has changed significantly:

As a principal, you really have no blame or authority, because you're in your own little world, nobody's going to bother you, and you make decisions on the fly. As a superintendent, every decision you make is going to end up on the front page of the paper. I didn't learn that until about three months in. Now that I realize that, any decision, any change that I make, I need to go through my communications officer, to make sure that I worded things right; to make sure that I planned things right; and to make sure that I have answers to every question that might come up. It's the biggest
change and the biggest learning curve for me. Fortunately, I have a great communications officer. Anything I write and anything I do, I send it to him first.

Dr. Daniels not only collaborates with members of her cabinet, she also shares decision-making with them before she makes her final decision. She explained:

I have my cabinet [as a support] and if we have some serious conflicts or challenges than I certainly need to hear other voices before I finalize some decisions. For those things that are confidential, then my first step is to involve my cabinet, which is inclusive of my Director of Human Resources, my Director of Auxiliary services, my Finance Officer, and my Chief Technology Officer. The five of us come together and we discuss some of the scenarios and provide each other with information that sheds better light on the circumstance, before I finalize my decision. If I have situations where it's a little bit more sensitive in nature that only myself is privy to the information, or the Board chair, or the Board, or the attorney, which I've had circumstances in all cases, then it's just not waiting and stalling. Once I gather as much information as I can, then [I proceed] to address that information head on and to figure out what we're going to do and share what I can share with the parties involved.

Table 4.10 shows which characteristics of environmental protective factors have helped the superintendents to overcome barriers and challenges they have faced. Responses in column “A” provide the superintendents’ own appraisal of factors present in their environments that have helped to foster resiliency in their pursuit and attainment of the
superintendency. Column “B” denotes the researcher’s evaluation of which features of environmental protective factors in resiliency have been evident in the participant’s environment based on the findings of the data.

Table 4.10

*Environmental Protective Factors: Characteristics of Families, Schools, Communities, and Peer Groups that Foster Resiliency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Anderson</th>
<th>Burton</th>
<th>Charles</th>
<th>Daniels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Promotes close bonds</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Values and encourages education</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Uses high-warmth, low criticism style of interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Sets and enforces clear boundaries (rules, norms, and laws)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Encourages supportive relationships with many caring others</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Promotes sharing of responsibilities, service to others, “required helpfulness”</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Provides access to resources for meeting basic needs of housing, employment, health care, and recreation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Expresses high and realistic expectations for success</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Encourages goal setting and mastery</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Encourages prosocial development of values (such as altruism) and life skills (such as cooperation)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Provides leadership, decision making, and other opportunities for meaningful participation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Appreciates the unique talents of each individual</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Permission.

Advice to Aspirants

These superintendents are hopeful about the increase in African American women in superintendencies. This is why they eagerly and readily offered their time to inform this study. The following quotes provide advice for aspirants to the superintendency:

Dr. Anderson’s Advice

- *Obtain your doctorate.* Get your doctorate degree because [African Americans] have to work twice as hard and be twice as smart. That, in and of itself, gains you a lot of respect.
- *Be confident.* You have to be extremely confident.
- *Be knowledgeable about the job.* You have to be extremely knowledgeable of what it is that you are doing.
- *Hire competent people.* Surround yourself with competent people in the areas that you need. And [the people] need to be trustworthy—competent and trustworthy people.

Dr. Burton’s Advice

- *Do your research.* If you do your research, you sometimes can figure out [whether or not they were going to hire a woman at all]. You can save yourself some time and a whole lot of energy.
- *Be clear about what you believe.* You can't come to this job trying to figure out what you believe in because people are going to chip it back. You have to be very clear at
the front [end], "This is who I am. This is what I believe in, and there you go." I think a lot of times, school Boards and superintendents get on the outs because they're not on the same page there, and it could change on a dime any given day and you know that in this work. I think you can overcome it by being very clear about what you believe in and what your expectations are. Then everybody in the community gets that, and then you can move on.

- **Work hard, be knowledgeable, and be prepared.** You have to work really, really hard, and you have to know some stuff. I guess what I mean by that is people are not as forgiving when—as females or as African-American females—I would say either case, as a woman or as African-American woman. People are not as forgiving when you walk into a meeting unprepared or you walk into a meeting and you haven't done your homework. People are not forgiving, and so you have got to have your stuff together. Everybody has off days and so I'm not saying you have to be perfect, but you have got to have your stuff together. That's just really, really important.

- **Be hopeful.** I just want African American women not to see it as a challenge. I think more African-American women have been named superintendents just in the two years I've been a superintendent.

- **Obtain your doctorate.** I think for women, and I think for minorities, you need to have that doctorate degree. I think it adds a different level of credibility for you as an educator and it helps you so that there isn't an additional reason to say no to you. You want to set yourself up [for success].
Dr. Charles’ Advice

- Be smart. Be smart and include all types of people in your circle. Like I said, Dr. Thomas is really my go to, but if you look at my entire circle, you'll [also] see older White guys and younger White guys; Dr. Thomas is an older Black man. You [should also include:] males, females, people who have been superintendent, and teachers. I mean, when you put yourself in a box and they see you the way they would expect to see you, people make judgments, and their judgments don't change. I have been lucky enough, to surround myself with all types of people—like me and not like me.

- Surround yourself with diverse people. I think the best advice for an African American female, especially in this state, is to surround yourself with everybody even if they are different from you.

- Obtain your doctorate. I think [getting a doctorate] is essential. Unfortunately, there are many superintendents without their doctorate degrees, however, you will not find a Black female that I'm aware of [without their doctorate].

Dr. Daniels’ Advice

- Pursue your goals and aspirations. To go forward and don't accept that you aren't capable of doing so.

- Get your doctorate. Make sure that you have the appropriate credentials and the expertise, meaning the background experience, which shows without a doubt you're capable of handling [the job]. That is necessary for African-American females. They have to have it together. You don't want to be in a position that gives anyone the easy
way out that [enables him or her to say, “Oh, we're looking for someone who has a doctorate,” even though you already have the licensure to be a superintendent. There are many men who don't have their doctorate [degrees]. [However], in this day and time, females who are pursuing CEO positions like this need to have the highest level of certification that they can hold because, believe me, there will be someone who says, "This is not a better candidate, because we're looking for someone who has…” Make sure you have your credentials in order.

- *Get varied experiences in education.* And having a variety of experience is crucial as well, because it affords you the opportunity to adjust the lens when you need to adjust it, and to be able to provide educated, intelligent responses to situations or things that are asked of you that you wouldn't normally be able to [know] if you have a limited background. If all you've done is personnel, then that limits a lot of the kinds of conversations you can have.

**Summary of the Findings**

This chapter presented the qualitative data, which richly depicts the barriers and strategies of resiliency that four African American women superintendents have encountered en route to and within the superintendency. Their lives and experiences have been chronicled according to emergent themes that surfaced from the interview protocol and has supported the four overall research questions of this study:

1. What are the barriers that African American women face in accessing the position of superintendency?
2. How do African American women superintendents define resiliency?

3. What methods, procedures, and/or processes have African American women superintendents employed to overcome barriers to the superintendency?

4. What are the challenges African American women have experienced within their position as superintendent? How have they overcome these challenges?

Using Henderson and Milstein’s Protective Factors in Resiliency Theory (2003), the interview questions focused on barriers and challenges these superintendents have faced, strategies of how they overcame these barriers and challenges, and advice for aspiring African American women superintendents that would help to mitigate and minimalize future barriers and challenges designed to limit their access to the superintendency. In doing so, aspirants to the superintendency would [hopefully] be resilient in their quest and “bounce back” from barriers and difficult situations they face in their ascension to the superintendency and within the position itself.

Various themes were evident for barriers en route to the superintendency, such as the intersection of race and gender, negative perceptions of women and African Americans, the lack of opportunity afforded to African American women, culture, and discouragement from others. Emergent themes centered on challenges within the superintendency were: Balancing between work and her family, stress, negative perceptions of African American women, and unforeseen challenges.

Participants used both internal and environmental protective factors to overcome their barriers. In the strategies utilized to overcome hardship, the following themes were
displayed: Promoting shared responsibility, employing interpersonal skills, being direct, nurturing relationships with the Board, finding viable solutions, navigating through politics, being fair, knowing who the gatekeepers, utilizing site-based management, seeking input from mentors, and making own decisions. The emergent themes from the overall data are: Having faith, having confidence, having a strong support system, and being prepared.

Chapter 5 will present a discussion and interpretation of the findings of this study based on the literature; significant implications for practice, policy, and future research as well as the researcher’s conclusions from the study.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Review of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this case study was to understand and describe the ways in which African American women superintendents have been resilient in attaining and maintaining the superintendency despite their underrepresentation in the position and in the literature. Protective factors in resiliency theory (Henderson & Milstein, 2003) has been used as a framework to analyze ways in which African American women superintendents have dealt with challenges in their position and overcome them. The research questions for this study were:

1. What are the barriers that African American women face in accessing the position of superintendency?
2. How do African American women superintendents define resiliency?
3. What methods, procedures, and/or processes have African American women superintendents employed to overcome barriers to the superintendency?
4. What are the challenges African American women have experienced within their position as superintendent? How have they overcome these challenges?

This chapter provides a summary of the findings from Chapter 4. It also provides a discussion of the themes and how they relate to the literature and to the internal and environmental protective factors in resiliency. After this, the researcher’s conclusions are
shared along with implications for research, policy, and practice. Recommendations for future aspirants to the superintendency are also made in this chapter.

Summary of Findings

Four current African American women superintendents from urban and rural school districts in a Southern state participated in this study. Their tenure as superintendents ranged from one to four years. The participants identified barriers they faced en route to superintendency, challenges within their superintendency, and strategies they employed to overcome these barriers. They also provided their own definitions of resiliency. In addition, each participant shared advice for African American women superintendent aspirants to overcome barriers and hopefully, improve their chances of attaining the position. Further, the participants’ disclosures of strategies highlight ways that using protective factors is helpful in overcoming hardship and building resiliency. Various themes were evident in this study related to barriers in obtaining the superintendency. They included the intersection of race and gender, negative perceptions of women and African Americans, the lack of opportunity afforded to African American women, culture, and discouragement from others. Themes centered on challenges within the superintendency were balancing between work and her family, stress, negative perceptions of African American women, and unforeseen challenges.

Participants used both Internal and Environmental Protective Factors to overcome their barriers. Within the strategies utilized to overcome hardship, the following themes were displayed: Promoting shared responsibility, employing interpersonal skills, being direct, nurturing relationships with the Board, finding viable solutions, navigating through politics,
being fair, knowing who the gatekeepers are, utilizing site-based management, seeking input from mentors, and making own decisions. The emergent themes derived from the overall data were: Having faith, having confidence, having a strong support system, and being prepared.

Discussion

As reflected in the research, not only are there a limited number of African American women superintendents, but there also exists a paucity of research illuminating who these women are, their leadership styles, and their experiences (Alston, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2005; Bell & Chase, 1994; Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999, 2000; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Gewertz, 2006; Glass, 2000; Grogan, 1996; Jackson, 1999; Peyton-Caire, Simms & Brunner, 2000; Pigford & Tomsen, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1989; Sharp et al., 2004; Tallerico, 1999, 2000; Tillman, 2004a, 2004b; Tillman & Cochran, 2000). Oftentimes, African American women are grouped in research on women and African American men. While some similarities may exist, the pathway of African American women to the superintendency is a unique one and needs to be heard (Alston, 1999; Alston & Jones, 2002; Collins, 1990; Collins-Thomas, 1982; Peyton-Caire et al., 2000). Further, according to Tillman and Cochran (2000), there is a gap in the literature on the challenges of African American women superintendents.

Some of the barriers African American women face en route to the superintendency based on the literature are: race (Alston, 1999; Goffney & Edmundson, 2012; Kalbus, 2000; Peyton-Caire et al., 2000; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Simmons, 2005); gender (Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999, 2003; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Goffney & Edmundson, 2012; Grogan, 1996, 2005, 2008; Loder, 2005; Peyton-Caire et al., 2000; Robinson, 2004; Shakeshaft, 1989;
Tallerico, 2000); gatekeeping practices (Tallerico, 2000); glass ceiling (Alston, 1999); and cultural norms that are prejudicial and biased in nature (Grogan & Brunner, 1995; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Tallerico, 2000). Given these barriers, “The tenacity and resilience of those Black women who meet the challenges of the superintendency and are successful has not been studied extensively” (Alston, 2005, p. 676).

**Barriers En Route to Superintendency**

**Intersection of race and gender.** Regarding sexism and racism, Alston (1999) and Collins (1990) posit that the way African American women, as a whole, experience the world is distinctive from others who are either Black or women. According to Jackson (1999), “Black women superintendents grew up doubly marginal in society, as females and African Americans” (p. 141). As a result, they face what scholars refer to as the “double whammy” (Andrews & Simpson-Taylor, 1995) and the “double bind” (Doughty, 1980); this is the intersection of race and gender. The double whammy deals with negative stereotypes based on race and gender that produce problems in the workplace for women of color; these stereotypes negatively impact their job mobility and advancement (Andrews & Simpson-Taylor, 1995). Similarly, Dr. Charles described the predicament faced by African American women as it relates to being both Black and a woman. She stated:

You have a double-edged sword when you're a female, because if you're a black female, not only are you a female, but you're also a minority. [You have to deal with] that whole perception of women being bossy rather than leaders. When men are that
way, they are determined to be leaders, but when we are, we're determined to be bossy. There's a fear behind women leaders.

Interestingly, Tallerico (2000) points out that the practices of Boards and headhunters/consultants hired to represent Board interest often don’t favor women and people of color. She states:

In sum, the experiential backgrounds routinely described as “best” or “strongest” by this study’s informants reflect career pathways more likely followed by nonminority males than by any other administrators. The favoring of positions infrequently occupied by females and administrators of color lessens these groups’ chances of being viewed as most qualified to advance through the final selection gates in the search process. (p. 31)

While one participant did feel one barrier faced by African American women of color was a lack of opportunities for selection, they all remained positive in their outlook for future African American women superintendents and readily discussed their own strengths. The participants in this study felt very confident about their work experiences, capabilities, and qualifications to be successful superintendents. One participant described her work of supervising people and areas of responsibility as being “top-notch.” Two of the four participants saw their pathways as traditional; this contradicts the research that says the path of African American women superintendents as a-linear (Alston, 1996).

Further, in Alston’s (1996) dissertation, she concluded that in order to attain top-level administrative positions in a school district, African American women have to pursue a more
circular pathway to superintendency. Although the other two participants would call their journeys to the superintendency “a-traditional,” none of them viewed their experiences as circuitous or as a departure from their goal of attaining superintendency.

**Negative perceptions of women and African Americans.** All of the participants believe negative perceptions of women and African Americans is a barrier en route to superintendency, while two participants felt that this a challenge that African American women face within the position. One participant said that African American women were viewed as “angry,” “controlling,” or “difficult to get along with.” It is, however, important to note that the participants of this study were quite different than these negative perceptions. In reality, the researcher found all of the participants to be warm, friendly, and inviting.

   Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) assert,

   Black women have so much to offer our country, so many gifts to share with all of us. And yes, as a society and as a nation, we have never quite stopped to appreciate the truth of their experience, the verity of what it feels like to be Black and female, the reality that no matter how intelligent, competent, and dazzling she may be, a Black woman in our country today still cannot count on being understood and embraced by mainstream White America. (p. 2)

   Gewertz (2006) affirms that African American women superintendents must overcome negative stereotypes and that they have had to repeatedly prove their capability, making their already challenging jobs even more challenging. She also shared insight from an ally to African American women in leadership. She wrote:
Robert S. Peterkin, the director of the urban superintendents' training program at Harvard University, which seeks to increase the presence of women and minorities in leadership positions, said he believes that "people have a hard time with strong African-American women." "It starts in the stereotypes we have about women in leadership, and it gets complicated by the race issue," he said. "Then it can become an excuse for folks to think they can substitute their wisdom for the leader's wisdom."

Sometimes, people base their negative perceptions of African American women on their appearance. Gewertz reported that some African American women superintendents “told stories of drawing negative reactions based on their clothing, a burden they don't believe men carry.” Two participants in the study spoke specifically about the importance of one’s appearance. They maintain that a person’s appearance can cause people to negatively judge him or her.

Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) assert:

Black women have so much to offer our country, so many gifts to share with all of us. And yes, as a society and as a nation, we have never quite stopped to appreciate the truth of their experience, the verity of what it feels like to be Black and female, the reality that no matter how intelligent, competent, and dazzling she may be, a Black woman in our country today still cannot count on being understood and embraced by mainstream White America. (p. 2)

**Culture.** Cultural norms help to restrict the movement of minorities and women in educational leadership such as social prejudices, both racial and gender stereotypes, and
androcentric notions of leadership (Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Tallerico, 2000). Similarly, one participant cited “culture” as a barrier faced by African American women superintendents. She discussed the adverse impact cultural norms of school districts may have on the selection process of African American candidates and advised, “You have to be cognizant of what culture school districts and areas of the state are open to women leadership.” She also asserted that “You have to fit what that community sees as a superintendent.” One can do this by paying attention to the type of clothes one wears; for instance, in a conservative district, one would not wear stilettos and a low cut blouse. She further stated on the topic:

I'm not saying you need to go in there and change your entire wardrobe to get a job, but you have to be cognizant of what that community looks for in a leader. Be intentional. You wouldn't go in there and spandex and stiletto.

According to Riehl and Byrd (1997) and Tallerico (2000), cultural norms may serve as an impediment to movement of people of color and women in educational leadership; these norms may include but are not limited to social prejudices, both racial and gender stereotypes, and androcentric notions of leadership. Grogan and Henry (1995) maintain, “the superintendency continues to be constructed as a male arena” (p. 172).

In her research, Tallerico (2000) found plentiful examples of prejudicial, gender stereotypes held by some Board members such as assumptions that men candidates were stronger disciplinarians and capable of executing non-instructional technical duties than women. Participants in Tallerico’s study experienced overt biases in their experiences with both school Board members and search consultants. Consultants, often iterated this
viewpoint, “I won’t just put minorities into the finalist pool. I’m always going to go with the best qualified” or “I’m going to bring the best candidates forward for this job…I will not bring somebody up because they are female or because they are Black or because they’re Hispanic.” These quotes express how “best qualified” serves to limit women and people of color in education administration (Tallerico, 2000, pp. 32-33).

The lack of opportunity afforded to African American women. One participant in the study cited a lack of opportunity afforded to African American women as a barrier en route to superintendency. This theme is supported by the literature. According to Tallerico (2000), the way in which quality is defined restricts access for women and people of color. White men dominate the superintendency (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Kowalski et al., 2011), the assistant superintendency, and the high school principal (Glass, 1992; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). In addition, “Minority group respondents were more than twice as likely as their peers in the nonminority group to report that they had encountered discrimination in their pursuit of the superintendency (Kowalski et al., 2011, p. xvii).

Further, Tallerico (2000) states, “The gates are more likely to be closed, or opened only partially, to applicants whose experience consists primarily of elementary principalships and other educational administrative roles” (p. 29). In general, women and minority principals tend to be found at the elementary versus secondary level (Montenegro, 1993). Tallerico (2000) also states,
Most consultants and board members were found to value line over staff administrative roles and secondary over elementary principalships. Their rationale for these preferences is based on the belief that high school and direct line experiences are tougher, more demanding, and therefore, better preparation for the pressure-packed role of the superintendency. (p. 30)

Contrary to the extant research, three of the four participants have had secondary level experience and in one case, the participant had no principalship experience at all. She did, however, like the other participants, hold numerous central office positions. So based on the literature, they were prepared to handle the pressures of superintendency.

**Discouragement from others.** Dr. Charles identified discouragement from others as a barrier for African American women. She was told by two of her White male colleagues that she wouldn’t be considered if she applied for superintendency. One of the two men even went as far as to offer her “help.” She recalled:

> One even had the nerve to give me a list of the districts that I could be superintendent in. Of course, he listed all the districts that would be considered failing or majority minority. It was really insane. I just looked at him and said, “I appreciate you wanting to help me, but I don't need your help.”

Although this experience with the two colleagues caused her to be concerned, she chose not to listen to their opinions and advice and to pursue the superintendency anyway. While the literature does not speak directly on discouragement, it does highlight that African American
women along with women of color do struggle with a fear of failure (Escocebo, 2011; Vaughn, 2008).

**Challenges Within the Position**

**Balancing work and family.** In her dissertation, Odum (2010) found that “conflicting career and familial demands” was a frequently stated barrier. The participants in her study describe the sense of responsibility that mothers feel towards their children; the importance of having spousal support to handle household chores and to effectively serve as superintendent; the need for mobility in securing a superintendency; and the time constraints they face. Similarly, in this study, Dr. Anderson disclosed her own personal challenge of trying to find the balance between work and family. She found it challenging to make time for her family, which included her husband, daughter, and mother when she was living, and time for herself. Interestingly, Dr. Burton disclosed that she didn’t believe she could be a superintendent if she had had children. She has been very focused on her career. Dr. Charles, who is a single parent of two girls, decided to wait until her children graduated from high school to pursue the superintendency.

**Stress.** Schmidt (2010) maintains, “A number of scholars have stressed that leaders are increasingly working within roles that are conflicted, complex and politically sensitive, resulting in role anxiety, emotional stress, and professional burnout” (p. 626). In their article entitled, “Dilemmas of the Modern Superintendency,” Fusarelli, Cooper, and Carella (2002), the authors describe the plight of superintendents. They ask:
How can any one professional handle all the competing expectations: the need to be an ace administrator, competent manager, and somehow an instructional leader; to carry the torch for children and their teachers, while playing politics before the school Board community; to reassure staff inside the system while being spokesperson for public education outside in the community and state; and to respond to the demand for change while championing traditional educational values? It’s no wonder then that candidates are less likely to apply for superintendency, a shortage that threatens the school reform agenda and deprives districts of strong leadership. (pp. 5-6)

Dr. Anderson revealed that the “worst part of the job” was the stress. Her response to the challenges she has faced within the position also reflects the dilemma described by Fusarelli, Cooper, and Carella (2002).

**Unforeseen challenges.** All of the participants faced unforeseen challenges that affected their communities; one dealt with the effects of a hurricane in her first month as superintendent; one dealt with the outbreak of violence on the community; one participant could not hire new personnel due to not having a Board chair, and another participant had to deal with the ramifications of closing a single-gender classroom. Dr. Anderson had to meet with central office personnel to devise a strategy for handling such a multi-faceted problem; as a result, many people and entities were involved.

Similarly, Dr. Daniels also faced a challenging situation in the first month of her superintendency when the Board of Education could not break their tie when it came to selecting a new chair; this was an impediment to hiring new personnel in the district. AS a
result, she also met with members of her cabinet in order to find a solution. In dealing with the violent outbreak of children in the community, Dr. Burton has had to meet with various members of the community to strategize a plan and analyze the reason this situation arose in the first place. In addition, Dr. Burton felt that it is very possible that the district’s academics were negatively impacted by the discord in the community. Lastly, Dr. Charles faced a situation with an unexpected challenge when she decided to close a single-gender classroom. She didn’t expect the community to react the way they did nor did she expect the African American and White constituents of the community to be polarized on the issue. All of these situations may have caused stress and were definitely unforeseen by the superintendents.

Resiliency and Protective Factors

According to Higgins (1994), resilient adults enjoy positive relationships, are skilled at problem solving, and seek self-improvement, similarly to resilient children. These adults attain high levels of education because they are highly motivated. They are actively involved in social change and activism and usually consider themselves to be religious or spiritual. This seems very true for the participants in this study.

As noted in the literature on educational resiliency, individuals who are successful often employ internal and environmental factors to overcome obstacles they face. This research echoes Morales and Trotman (2004) because it shows that resiliency is a “very personal journey and process” and that the resilience experience of one individual may not reflect that of another (p. 153). However, these researchers recognize that there is similitude in the experiences of individuals who are successful; these similarities are revealed in this
study both in the barriers and challenges they have faced and also in the strategies the participants have utilized in overcoming these barriers.

Henderson and Milstein (2003) maintain further, that an individual’s environment is vital to his or her resiliency in two ways: 1) Internal protective factors promote resiliency when individuals face stressors or barriers, and 2) The conditions of the environment affects the capability of individuals to move from dysfunction to resiliency. In addition, research recognizes resilience as the “universal, developmental capacity of every human being; good developmental outcomes necessitates an environment that is nurturing” (Benard, 2004, p. 43). So an individual’s environment is very important to his/her resiliency development.

This study, in particular, underscores features of resiliency, which include internal and external factors such as the importance of family and community as support systems and allies and personal strength, which involves social competence, problem solving, autonomy, and sense of purpose (Benard, 2004). The overall emergent themes of the study which are: \textit{having faith, having confidence, having a strong support system, and being prepared} also align with internal and environmental protective factors.

\textbf{Having faith.} According to Benard (2004), “Researchers have found that some resilient individuals draw strength from religion, others benefit from more general faith or spirituality, and others achieve a sense of stability or coherence by finding personal answers to questions about their sense of purpose and self-worth” (p. 32). Resilient people often view themselves as either “religious” or “spiritual” (Higgins, 1994, p. 8). In her dissertation, Vaughn (2008) found that the participants employed “having a spiritual background” as a
strategy of resilience. Similarly, the findings in this study also support King and Ferguson’s (2011), Morrison’s (1997) and Weatherspoon-Robinson’s (2013) view that the faith and spirituality of African American women is at the crux of finding balance, achieving their goals, maintaining a positive outlook, and finding the motivation for productivity.

The participants in this study all have faith whether it is attending a local church as well as the belief in God, his timing, and his providence in their lives. For example, Dr. Burton attributes her positive outlook to her faith stating that it “sustains” her. Dr. Anderson sought answers about her initial rejections to the superintendency in prayer and continued to remain optimistic because she “knew [her] day would come. She also searched for answers from God about why she had not achieved superintendency. Dr. Charles describes her self as a “faithful” and “prayerful” person. Similarly to Dr. Anderson and Dr. Burton, she attributes her positive disposition to her faith. She also believes that God has put her in “the right place” just like Dr. Daniels. Lastly, Dr. Daniels credits her success to God recognizing that he has placed her where she needs to be at the right time.

**Having confidence.** Having confidence is a recurrent theme throughout this study. This theme is related to what social cognitive researchers call “self-efficacy.” Self-efficacy is an individual’s personal view of task capability (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Maddux (2002) maintains, “The timeless message of research on self-efficacy is the simple, powerful truth that confidence, effort, and persistence are more potent than innate ability” (p. 285). According to Wood and Bandura (1989), it is necessary that leadership preparation programs assist individuals in cultivating their competencies in the areas of knowledge, social
interaction, and behavioral impacts. Programs should also help future leaders to develop their own personal beliefs in the context of their settings. Levels of motivation, confidence, and self-efficacy will increase for individuals when there is an increase in knowledge and an understanding of an individual’s personal beliefs.

A direct relationship exists between high levels of self-efficacy and leadership success (McCormick, 2001). Leadership preparation programs must help future leaders develop their self-efficacy in order to help individuals attain leadership success. When an individual is confident about his/her ability to handle a school administration position, the individual is more likely to do well as a school leader. To improve self-efficacy, future leaders ought to be given the opportunity to apply the theories and content knowledge in challenging, real world settings that assess their ability to analyze, make decisions, and execute goals and actions. These experiences, coupled with guidance and encouragement, will enable individuals to increase and maintain a positive appraisal of their leadership abilities (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Having a positive perspective assists individuals in increasing their self-efficacy and can leave the organization under the individual’s leadership, in a better place.

The participants in this study were much like the early/mid 20th century “Jeanes Supervisors” who were “self-effacing, stimulating others to put forth their best effort” (Alston & Jones, 2002, p. 69). All of the participants in the study were confident and as mentioned before, they all have a positive outlook; this means they have high-levels of self-efficacy. Three out of the four superintendents feel that their confidence was the result of
growing up in their families and work-related experiences. One superintendent feels she has grown in her confidence due to her wealth of knowledge and vast experiences. Dr. Anderson also recommends that superintendent aspirants be confident.

**Having a strong support system.** Jackson (1999) found that the support African American women superintendents received while growing up, along with their experiences, prepared them for leadership; this was vital to transcending barriers for the African American woman. Herring (2007) found that there is a need for personal support from family and friends for African American women seeking superintendency. Daye (2007) and Kowalski and Brunner (2005) call for mentorship, role models, and support systems of African American women superintendents and aspirants. Similarly, Brown (2011) and Vaughn (2008) support the importance of mentorship and networking for recruitment and retention in the superintendency and Odum (2010) found that networking was the most commonly stated strategy for success.

The findings of this study also reveal that the participants have very strong support systems, which aligns with the Internal Protective Factor, “promotes close bonds.” The participants enjoy close relationships with their families, colleagues, and mentors. Henderson and Milstein (2003) also designate this as an external protective factor, which encourages supportive relationships with many caring others. Likewise, Benard (2004) maintains that this characteristic “conveys loving support” (p. 44).

For the participants in this study, support came from their family (i.e. spouses, children, siblings, and parents), their colleagues (i.e. teachers, current and formers
superintendents, and mentors), and their community (i.e. board members, parents of their students, and their friends). They were able to find encouragement, perspective, advice and refuge from their support systems, mentors, and allies.

**Being prepared.** This was a resounding theme throughout the study and also aligns with the Internal Protective Factor, “capacity for and connection to learning.” Daye’s (2007) study focused on the perceptions of five African American women superintendents of their experiences through the lens of resiliency. One of the emergent themes was “competence” which is similar to being prepared. Daye defines competence as having knowledge of the job to show capability of the job tasks, skills needed to do the job, having ample preparation preceding the position, and a variety of preparative experiences on the way to superintendency. Similarly, Alston (1996) also affirms the need for African American women to couple their experience with education in order to become superintendents. Likewise, one of Herring’s (2007) key findings is the importance of obtaining the appropriate education and certification.

The participants in this study also stressed the importance of being prepared. In particular, they all believe that earning a doctorate, having knowledge of the job duties and responsibilities, as well as varied experiences prior to applying for the superintendency is paramount to even be considered for the position. This way, no objections can be made purporting that an applicant is under-qualified.

This theme also aligns with the Environmental Protective Factor, “values and encourages education.” Three of the four participants felt their environments, which included
their family, educational institutions, and their work environments supported their education. One of the participants shared that she has been accustomed to having responsibility since she was a young child because her mom left her in charge of her younger siblings. This is similar to Alston’s (1999) claim, “Due to having more family and leadership responsibilities sooner than their White colleagues as a result of taking care of younger siblings, some African American women tend to be assertive, more capable, and skilled in the managerial facets of their jobs (Alston, 1999).

**Implications of the Research**

Based on the findings of this study, several implications emerged for practice and future research. The implications are centered on the conclusions weaned from the experiences and wisdom of the participants.

**Implications for Practice**

**School boards.** It is of the utmost importance that school Boards make a conscious and concerted effort to hire candidates who are different than themselves—women and people of color. Herring (2007) and Grogan & Brunner (2005) assert that people of color are more likely to be hired by diverse school Boards. School Boards also need to provide potential candidates with equitable access to the superintendency. This calls for professional development on diversity and cultural sensitivity training so that Board members are aware of their biases and prejudices, the negative impact of gatekeeping practices, and value the need for diversity. It is essential that Board members form and maintain positive relationships with African American women administrators because this will facilitate an
increase in the number of African American women superintendents in the position and reduce the likelihood for high turnover.

**Educational leadership programs.** According to Kowalski et al., (2011), former professors have great influence in the hiring of superintendents after other superintendents and Board members. This requires that relationships are formed and maintained even after students have completed their programs. Professors should collaborate with school administrators to serve as mentors and provide support for African American women administrators especially since research shows that successful superintendents are mentored (Alston, 1996; Brown, 2011; Daye, 2007; Herring, 2007; Jackson, 1999; Vaughn, 2008). They should also encourage African American women to show interest and to actually apply for superintendencies (Alston, 1996; Jackson, 1999) especially since some women of color have a fear of failure (Escocebo, 2011; Vaughn, 2008).

The curriculum should reflect diversity in the course objectives, readings, and other learning experiences. Professors should include culturally relevant as well as multi-cultural literature in their curriculum so that students may learn in the context of their own cultures. In addition, professors should incorporate readings that center on diverse leadership styles and strategies for success in the preparation of future superintendents. They should make sure that the aspirants to the superintendency have authentic experiences that prepare them for potentially challenging school districts and problems. Field experiences should take place in varied settings such as urban and rural areas. Further, faculty members in educational leadership programs should facilitate critical conversations and educational experiences that
prepare all of their students for the challenges they will face as they seek to change and serve K-12 schools.

The recruitment and retention of diverse faculty is necessary in educational leadership programs. In particular, administrators in Higher Education should also and recruit faculty of color to serve as role models and encouragers for African American women. Existing faculty should partake in diversity training in order to better understand issues faced by people of color and women so that faculty can provide these students with support.

**Current African American women superintendents.** These women should form their own network among fellow African American women superintendents. This way, a support group is formed where its constituents have some of the same commonalities and/or face similar challenges and barriers. There is value in sharing experiences, both positive and negative ones. In addition to networking with fellow African American women superintendents, these women should also form diverse networks not limited to being the same race, gender, etc. According to Kowalski et al., (2011), “Superintendents reported that the most important source for informing elements of their practice were peer superintendents, especially those in comparable school districts” (p. xvi). Further, superintendents are “the most influential in helping the respondents [in the 2010 AASA Decennial Study to] become superintendents were other superintendents” (Kowalski et al., 2011, p. xviii). They should serve as mentors to aspirants to the superintendency.

**African American women aspirants.** Aspirants should seek to be mentored. According to Kowalski et al. (2011), “Superintendents often mentored colleagues aspiring to
be administrators and especially those aspiring to be superintendents” (p. xvii). They should utilize elements of protective factors to overcome potential barriers as they journey to superintendency. Additionally, they need to show their interest in becoming superintendents and not allow fear to hinder them from applying for the position. Aspirants can also benefit from having a strong support system and from networking.

**Implications for Policy**

**School districts.** Educational leadership faculty members should form partnerships with school districts to create a pipeline to superintendency program for African American women aspirants. The hiring practices of school districts and school Boards should also be reviewed to ensure that discrimination is not present. Policies should be revised to promote diversity and accessibility to underrepresented groups. It is imperative that school districts seek to hire diverse administrators and provide professional development to their staffs on diversity and cultural sensitivity. Therefore they should put a policy in place to identify qualified African American women applicants to the superintendency.

**State and federal departments of education.** Financial assistance should be developed and allocated to aspirants to the superintendency from underrepresented groups. Funding should be allotted for the creation of a mentorship program between professors, superintendents, and African American women aspirants. In addition, funding is needed for diversity and cultural sensitivity training for faculty members in educational leadership departments, Board members, and school administrators.
Implications for Future Research

**Increased literature.** A scarcity in research exists for African American women superintendents despite the increase in the number of these women in the superintendency. While the available research on this particular group is often intermingled with research on African American men, other women of color, and White women, the experiences of African American women are unique and need to be heard. There is a need for a comprehensive database for superintendents by race and gender across the United States because this does not exist. This would be useful in setting up networks and mentorship relationships among other things. Further, an increase in literature on this subgroup is warranted because aspirants to the superintendency and current superintendents can learn from the experiences of actual/other African American women superintendents. Alston (1999) posits, “Black women superintendents in the literature, then, become invisible, leaving no trail for other African American women to follow” (p. 87). Therefore, the voices of these women have been silenced for too long and need to be heard.

**Replicated studies.** This study may be replicated to focus on other superintendents of color in order to ascertain what their barriers are to superintendency, strategies they employed to overcome hardships, and ultimately, increase the dearth of research while encouraging other aspirants of color to apply. It would also be interesting to replicate this study to include African American women from other states/regions to see if African American women superintendents across the United States have the same challenges. Since the findings from this study aren’t generalizable, future researchers should consider
expanding the target population to multiple states in the southern region. In addition, this study should be replicated to investigate other women of color to gain their perspectives on barriers en route to the superintendency and challenges within the position, their strategies, and their advice.

**Former and retired superintendents.** The study of former and retired superintendents can provide insight to aspirants and current African American women superintendents on their challenges and barriers. Others can learn strategies of success from these women if this study was replicated and also included this group as its participants. It is also recommended that former and retired superintendents be studied to gain knowledge about their career trajectories.

**Professors in educational leadership programs.** Studies should be conducted to determine how African American women in educational leadership programs are being prepared for the superintendency. What strategies are being taught to prepare these women for potential barriers en route to the superintendency and challenges within the position? How are professors preparing African American women aspirants to work in low-wealth/high poverty, and predominantly minority school districts?
Conclusions

The following section provides the conclusions that the researcher derived from the collected data in this study and the review of literature on African American women superintendents and resiliency.

Fifteen years ago, Alston (2000) raised an important question, “Where are the Black female school superintendents?” Today, the researcher has the same question. After meeting these dynamic African American women superintendents, she wonders why there still remains a paucity in the literature on the experiences of African American women superintendents and administrators in general as well as why there is a shortage in the number of African American women in the superintendency. Here are the researcher’s conclusions:

1. Despite the underrepresentation of African-American women in the superintendency and in the literature, the researcher feels hopeful that the numbers will increase. It is her belief that more African American women will continue to overcome barriers to attain the superintendency and that these women are needed in the field of Educational Leadership. Race and gender, negative perceptions of women and African Americans, the lack of opportunity afforded to African American women, culture, and discouragement from others cannot continue to restrict African American women’s access to superintendency. Instead, the work and contributions of these women are noteworthy, significant, and needed in our public schools.
2. While these women have some commonalities, they are different and have unique stories and experiences surrounding how they have overcome their obstacles and barriers to attain and maintain the superintendency. Their experiences need to be heard. These women are not at all like the negative perceptions and stigmas surrounding African American women. In fact, they are caring; they are warm and inviting; they are dynamic; and they are inspiring. More studies need to be done to enhance the dearth in research.

3. African American women are resilient. The women in this study have utilized internal and environmental protective factors in order to attain their goals and ultimately, become resilient. These strategies help them to build resiliency.

4. These women are very capable of effectively leading any school district regardless of its size, its student demographics, and its location. They don't have to be limited to leading only schools where there are majority students of color, districts that are in financial crisis, nor schools where students are not succeeding academically.

5. Obtaining an Ed.D or Ph.D is crucial for African American women because it reduces the possibility for rejection based on a lack of educational attainment and preparation. Further, African American women are prepared, skilled, and experienced when it comes to handling the daunting and complicated task of leading school districts. Sometimes, unforeseen challenges may arise but with collaboration, proper planning, and responsiveness to the needs of the schools
and community, even these problems can be mitigated.

6. It is necessary that African American women who are seeking the superintendency, along with those who are currently superintendents, have strong support networks. This includes family members, colleagues, mentors, allies, and Board members who are willing to encourage and support them in their quest to the position as well as within the position. Building relationships are essential to resiliency.

7. African American women must be themselves. They cannot allow anyone to define who they are and what they can and cannot do. Having faith is important for maintaining an optimistic outlook and interpreting life’s hardships. This includes having faith in God as well as the belief that an individual can realize their goals and dreams. These women are hopeful and optimistic about their futures. African American women have an abundance of experiences, insight, and wealth of knowledge to share with the world.

8. African American women can be direct and vocal, however, this isn’t necessarily a negative thing. It helps them to be fair when conflict arises and is a benefit when collaboration with various stakeholders is needed. African American women superintendents “do the job!” They are resourceful, confident, and resilient. These women are visionaries and trailblazers for women to come.
Lastly, there is a need for more African American women superintendents because of the increased number of students of color in our schools. To this end, Dr. Charles eloquently stated:

If you look at this [Southern State] as a whole, we have a lot of minority students and adults—those who are looking for leadership of people that look like them. To me, it doesn't matter what you look like as long as you are in it for the right reason and you are confident in your job. However, it does matter to a 12-year old African American female who's trying to decide what she's going to be; to see that there are options outside of what some would call a stereotypical position. I think that it is important for our children to see successful African American women in positions that are not the norm.
Figure 5.1 *Process of Resiliency for African American Women Who Attained the Superintendency*

Note: Not all resiliency-building strategies employed by the participants are portrayed in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 depicts the researcher’s interpretation of how these superintendents surmounted their barriers to attain their goal, which was the superintendency. According to Henderson and Milstein (2003), having a “resiliency-building attitude,” brings about “hope and optimism” regardless of past situations or challenges (pp. 17-18). The participants utilized resiliency-building strategies in order to overcome the various barriers they faced en route to superintendency.
Chapter Summary

This study provided insight into the ways in which African American women superintendents have been resilient in attaining and maintaining the superintendency despite their underrepresentation in the position and in the literature. Protective factors in resiliency theory (Henderson & Milstein, 2003) was used as a framework to analyze ways in which African American women superintendents have dealt with challenges in their position and overcome them. The research questions for this study were:

1. What are the barriers that African American women face in accessing the position of superintendency?
2. How do African American women superintendents define resiliency?
3. What methods, procedures, and/or processes have African American women superintendents employed to overcome barriers to the superintendency?
4. What are the challenges African American women have experienced within their position as superintendent? How have they overcome these challenges?

Four current African American women superintendents from urban and rural school districts in a Southern state participated in this study. Their tenure as superintendents ranged from one to four years. The participants identified barriers they faced en route to superintendency, challenges within their superintendency, and strategies they employed to overcome these barriers. They also provided their own definitions of resiliency. In addition, each participant shared advice for African American women superintendent aspirants to overcome barriers and hopefully, improve their chances of attaining the position. Further, the
participants’ disclosures of strategies highlight ways that using protective factors is helpful in overcoming hardship and building resiliency. Various themes were evident in this study related to barriers in obtaining the superintendency. They included the intersection of race and gender, negative perceptions of women and African Americans, the lack of opportunity afforded to African American women, culture, and discouragement from others. Themes centered on challenges within the superintendency were balancing between work and her family, stress, negative perceptions of African American women, and unforeseen challenges.

Participants used both Internal and Environmental Protective Factors to overcome their barriers. Within the strategies utilized to overcome hardship, the following themes were displayed: Promoting shared responsibility, employing interpersonal skills, being direct, nurturing relationships with the Board, finding viable solutions, navigating through politics, being fair, knowing who the gatekeepers are, utilizing site-based management, seeking input from mentors, and making own decisions. The emergent themes derived from the overall data were: Having faith, having confidence, having a strong support system, and being prepared.
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APPENDICES
What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to understand and describe the ways in which African American women superintendents have been resilient in attaining and maintaining the superintendency.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a brief biographical questionnaire prior to the interview. This will be sent via email to you. Each participant will take part in an in-depth interview, which will last approximately two (2) hours. The interview will be audio-recorded. The interview will be held at a location of your choice. During this interview, you will be asked questions about your past experiences as an educator, barriers and challenges you have faced en route to superintendency, as well as the ways you have overcome them. The researcher requests that the location be a quiet one to ensure the quality of the recording as well as to maintain the trustworthiness of the collected data. In addition, the researcher would like to reserve the right for a follow-up interview, if necessary. The recording will be transcribed by the researcher and sent to you via email for your approval and/or any revisions you would like to make.
In addition, you will be asked to provide a current résumé and any press (articles, websites, or announcements) highlighting your experience/achievements as an African American superintendent. You may provide paper copies or email these documents; links may also be shared with the researcher.

**Risks**
Because of the small pool of African American women superintendents in the state, adequate measures will be taken to protect the identity of each participant. Pseudonyms will be utilized for you, your school district, and graduate institution. Audio-recordings will be conducted only with your permission. As previously stated, the transcription of the recording will be provided to you for your approval and/or revisions.

**Benefits**
The information gained from this study will be used to illuminate the barriers and challenges faced by African American women as they pursue and maintain the position of superintendency. Strategies that portray how these women overcome these barriers and challenges will also be added to the existing body of research. The researcher seeks to inform educational leadership programs on the type of support needed for African American women doctoral students in their programs. The information gained will also assist search consultants and school boards on their selection and screening practices. Further, the findings will provide strategies to future African American women aspirants on how to attain and maintain the superintendency.

**Confidentiality**
The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely in locked and password-protected storage and will also be encrypted so that only the researcher, who has the password, can get in and see it on the drive. Paper documents that have been given in support of the research will also be locked away in a safe using a lock and key.

Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity, your district, graduate institution, or any other type of identifying information. The pseudonyms will be given in alphabetical order based on the order that the interviews have been conducted. The collected data will also be encrypted to protect its sensitive nature. In addition, The researcher will create a crosswalk table which will be stored separately in a password-protected file so that a coordinated analysis of the various forms of data (resumes, newspaper clippings, interviews, etc.) can be conducted and the identities of the participants are protected; thus, the researcher will be able to match the identifiable data with the de-identified interview data in a secure manner.
Compensation
You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study. Participation is strictly voluntary.

What if you have questions about this study?
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Francemise S. Kingsberry. She may be reached via phone at (919) 671-1954 or by email at (fskingsb@ncsu.edu).

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you have not been treated according to the safeguards in this form or that your rights as a participant in this research study have been violated, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator at dapaxton@ncsu.edu or by phone at 1 (919) 515-4514.

Consent To Participate
“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject's signature_________________________ Date _____________

Investigator's signature____________________ Date ______________
APPENDIX B

Biographical Questionnaire

Principal Investigator: Francemise St. Pierre Kingsberry
fskingsb@ncsu.edu
(919) 671-1954

Research Title: *Protective Factors and Resiliency: A case study of how African American women overcome barriers en route to the superintendency*

I. Demographic Information

Please provide the following personal and district-level information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Degree(s) Earned</th>
<th>District Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Under 35</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td># of enrolled students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
<td>2014-2015 district budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>M.S.</td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>Ed.S.</td>
<td>□ Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
<td>□ Suburban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>□ Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over 60</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. Open-ended Questions

1. What is your current job title? What year did you start in this position? What are your primary responsibilities?

2. What positions have you held in this district?

3. What positions have you held in other districts?

4. What was your first administrative position?

5. List your professional and educational background (i.e. professional, community, and civic associations/affiliations) if this is not provided in your attached résumé.

*Return no later than (INSERT DATE) along with your résumé via email: fskingsb@ncsu.edu
or mail to:
P.O. Box 1285
Youngsville, NC 27596
APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol Guide by Research Question

Research Title: Protective Factors and Resiliency: A case study of how African American women overcome barriers en route to the superintendency

Background Questions

A. What made you want to become a school superintendent?
B. Tell me about your professional experiences before becoming a superintendent.
C. What was the selection process utilized by the Board of Education when you were hired?
D. Describe your position and responsibilities as a superintendent.

Research Question 1: What are the barriers that African American women face in accessing the position of superintendency?

1.1 What barriers do you believe African American women face, in general, in pursuing the position of superintendent?
1.2 What barriers have you faced in pursuing the position of superintendent?

Research Question 2: How do African American women superintendents define resiliency?

2.1 What does resiliency mean to you?
2.2 What qualities does a resilient leader embody?
2.3 Would you describe yourself as resilient? Why or why not?

Research Question 3: What methods, procedures, and/or processes have African American women superintendents employed to overcome barriers to the superintendency?
3.1 What strategies have you used to deal with conflict, difficult situations, and/or barriers?

3.2 What kind of support system, if any, do you have in place for dealing with the barriers?

3.3 How have you changed in dealing with barriers from when you were a novice superintendent and now?

3.4 How have you grown in your position as superintendent?

**Research Question 4:** What are the challenges African American women have experienced within their position as superintendent? How have they overcome these challenges?

4.1 What are some challenges you encountered as a current superintendent?

4.2 Do you feel the challenges you have faced are unique or common to other African American women superintendents?

4.3 How have you overcome your challenges?

**Closing Questions:**

A. What are some skills or strategies that have helped you in your role as superintendent?

B. What advice would you give African American women aspiring to be superintendents?

C. Is there anything else you want me to know or expand upon?
APPENDIX D

Phone/Email Script for Recruitment of Superintendents

Introduction:

Hi [Name of Black Woman Superintendent]. My name is Francemise Kingsberry and I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Supervision and Administration program at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, NC. Under the guidance of Dr. Paul Bitting, my dissertation chairperson and faculty advisor, I am conducting a study on the ways in which African American women have been resilient in attaining and maintaining their superintendency. This work seeks to highlight the perspectives of current African American women superintendents on the barriers they have faced en route to superintendency and describe the strategies they have employed to overcome these challenges. As you may be aware, there is not only an underrepresentation of African American women in the position of superintendent but also in academic literature. Oftentimes, their experiences are often lumped together with women of other ethnicities and cultures or with that of the African American male experience. The purpose of this call is to invite you to participate in this study because I believe that your unique perspective as an African American woman will greatly enhance this work. Your participation is completely voluntary.

Is this study something that you would be interested in participating in?

(If not, I will thank the superintendent for her time.)

If so, in order to fully prepare you to consider participating in this study, I would like to provide you with some important information. (By the way, you will receive the information that I have shared with you on this phone call in an email.) Your participation will entail completing an informed consent form, a brief, biographical questionnaire, one (1) digitally recorded, face-to-face interview which will last 1-2 hours in length at a location of your convenience, and I would like to reserve the right for a follow-up interview, if necessary. Once I have transcribed the interview, you will have the opportunity to review it and provide feedback via email. Please keep in mind that pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity, your district, and any other type of identifying information.

Further, the information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely in locked and password-protected storage and will also be encrypted so that only the researcher, who has the password, can get in and see it on the drive. Paper documents that have been given in support of the research will also be locked away in a safe using a lock and key. In addition, I will create a crosswalk table which will be stored separately in a password-protected file so that a coordinated analysis of the various forms of data (resumes, newspaper clippings, interviews, etc.) can be conducted and
the identities of the participants are protected; this way, I will be able to match any identifiable data with the de-identified interview data in a secure manner and your identity will also be protected.

In addition, you will be asked to provide a current résumé and any press (articles, websites, or announcements) highlighting your experience/achievements as an African American superintendent. You may provide paper copies or email these documents to me; links may also be shared with me.

**In the follow up email:**
Attached, you will find an informed consent form and a brief, biographical questionnaire, which consists of demographic information and five open-ended questions that will provide me with the necessary background to begin our conversation about your life and professional experiences. Please complete the questionnaire and consent form, attach your résumé and return these items either by email or in the self-addressed, stamped envelope I will send to you no later than [Insert Date].

As previously stated, your information and identity will be kept confidential throughout this process. No names will be shared or disclosed in this study. If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact me via phone at (919) 671-1954 or by email at (fskingsb@ncsu.edu) or my dissertation chair, Dr. Paul Bitting at (919) 515-1768 or at paul_biting@ncsu.edu.

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. I am excited about your participation in this study on African American women superintendents and that you are letting your voice expand our knowledge in the field of educational research. I know you are very busy so I am grateful that you for your time and attention.

With Gratitude,

Francemise Kingsberry

**Phone:**
Thank you so much for your time. Look to hear from me via email. I look forward to hearing from you soon.