

## **ABSTRACT**

WRIGHT, JR., WILLIAM THOMAS. A Case Study of the African American Male Superintendency in North Carolina: Barriers Within the Position. (Under the direction of Dr. Kenneth H. Brinson, Jr.).

This qualitative research study is a case study of practicing African American male superintendents in the state of North Carolina. There is an examination of barriers in the obtaining and retaining of the position. The research examines critical race theory, as well as a historical reference to African-American leaders in general as well as in the field of education. Of the nine practicing African-American male superintendents in the state at the time of the study, seven were interviewed. Using in-depth interviews, narratives were transcribed to capture their viewpoints and experiences. The themes that emerged relative to specific characteristics needed for African American male superintendents included: the need to be more prepared than your counterparts, and that continued focus should be placed on obtaining and retaining the superintendency by aspiring and practicing African American male superintendents.

Study of the African American Male Superintendency in North Carolina:  
Barriers Within the Profession

by  
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## DEDICATION

First and foremost, I thank God for giving me far more than I deserve, which of course includes, but is not limited to, working through this dissertation.

Immediately beyond the acknowledgment of God, I must say thank you to my favorite gift from God: my wife, Mary Barnes Wright. Without you I would be so much less.... I am so thankful that November 11, 1989 began our pursuit of “trying to measure our love with a multiple of infinity”.

I also am so appreciative for my boys, Tre’ and Deonte’. You guys inspire me as much or more than I inspire you. Thank you for sharing me with my schools and with my pursuit of this degree. I hope that I’ve set an example for you and I want to continue to do so.

To all of my family, friends, and colleagues who have supported me through this process. Thank you.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

William T. Wright, Jr. was born in Flint, Michigan in 1966 to William and Maxine Wright, who grew up less than a quarter mile from each other. Upon returning to their home of North Carolina, William was reared in a rural community named Swift Creek located in the northwestern corner of Nash County. William skipped the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and went on to become the youngest graduate of Northern Nash High School (at that time) at 16 years old.

Upon matriculation to college, William became distracted and therefore didn't complete his undergraduate degree right away and subsequently finished his bachelor's degree after getting married.

Eventually, after working in radio broadcasting for seven years, and manufacturing for eight, William found a true love in the field of education. With a desire to lead, after 3-1/2 years of teaching, he moved into school administration.

William assumed his first principalship at the age of 37 becoming the first African-American principal of South Edgecombe Middle School in 2004. In 2007, while in the midst of the pursuit of the Ed.D. in Educational Administration, William and his family moved to Wake County. In 2008, William was awarded the principalship of Western Harnett High School. In 2011, William was promoted to an Assistant Superintendency in Harnett County Schools during the completion of this body of work.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

In a country where we are only about 140 years removed from institutionalized slavery, the African American male still experiences many barriers to success in the United States. One of the areas where this is evident is in public school education. African American males perform at the lowest levels on academic achievement tests of any group. In fact, the United States Department of Education published a report (2009) based on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data that shows the achievement gap between Black and White students to be more than twenty percentage points. This trend has held true since the inception of NAEP testing, which began in the 1970s. Although most African Americans are aware of the importance of education for gaining a higher standard of living and better quality of life, many still continue to suffer from poor school achievement. School failure, high rates of educational dropout, low college enrollment, overrepresentation in special education classes, and low standardized test scores reflect a pervasive problem of educational underachievement among African Americans. These issues are listed as the causes of social and economic failure among African Americans, particularly males (Irving & Hundley, 2009).

### **Background of the Study**

While the total number of African American superintendents rose from 2001 to 2004 nationwide (Gregory, 2006), the proportion is still relatively small, considering the number of African American males being educated in the United States every year. In a United States Census Bureau Report (2008), 12.8% of the population of the United States was African American, compared with 21.6% in North Carolina. The representation of African



Americans in the education profession as a whole is minimal. In 2004, 2% of superintendents were African American. In North Carolina, 12 of 115 school districts had African American Superintendents in 2004. The most recent research shows that there are only 14, with 12 of those being male (NABSE, 2004; Simmons, 2005). Two of 12 have taken positions outside of North Carolina since the beginning of this study. The NC Department of Public Instruction reports that there are 171 African American males with the superintendent licensure. Only 10 of these 171 are currently serving as superintendents. These 10 African American males hold 8.7% of the 115 superintendencies in North Carolina. That compares with 76.5% (or 88 out of 115) of NC's superintendencies being held by white males. The only group that is more poorly represented than African American males is African American females. Two superintendents statewide are Black females, which equals 1.7%, although 346 African American females carry the superintendent's license. The remaining 17 superintendencies are occupied by White females which equals 14.7%. 968 White females in NC possess an active superintendent's license (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2010).

A few researchers have addressed the reasons for the lack of African American leadership in public education (Alston, 1996; Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Gregory, 2006; Jackson, 2002; Johnson, 2000; Kowalski, 1995; Lavender, 1983; Moody, 1971; Scott, 1980; Sizemore, 1986). While these researchers have diligently sought answers, much research still needs to be conducted on the subject.

The African American male's pursuit of the K-12 Superintendency is an example of the struggles of African Americans in general. The United States of America has elected an

African American male as President. This election occurred when the country was experiencing unprecedented national problems, especially in the financial sector. The underrepresentation of African Americans in leadership positions holds true not only in education, but in other disciplines as well. In his dissertation entitled, *Where do We Go From Here?: Understanding the Impact of Racism and Its Influence on African American Male Superintendents*, Dr. Donnell Gregory (2006) wrote that, “Despite changes in policies and procedures, the law, and affirmative action initiatives, African Americans have continued to be underrepresented in the position of superintendent and other administrative leadership positions” (p. 6). African Americans who choose to seek superintendent positions in majority-White school districts face an array of challenges as well (Dawkins, 2004; Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003). This study will focus on the underrepresentation of African American males in the superintendency.

While there are many preparation programs for superintendents across the country, most are available within university graduate school programs. Most of these are general in nature, and very few have programs that cater to minority leaders (American Association of School Administrators [AASA], 1999). *The Superintendents Prepared* report released by the AASA in 1999 revealed that the typical school superintendent is a Caucasian male with an average age of 50, “despite the diversity of candidates available for employment” (Gregory, 2006, p. 7). Lars Bjork (2000), in a book on the American superintendency released by the AASA, finds that superintendents “[are] mostly married, White, male, of middle age, come from small towns, have advanced degrees in educational administration, and for the most part

share common values and opinions” (p. 15). The study further reveals that in 2000, 94.9% of American superintendents were White and 86.6% were male (p. 15).

The National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE) reported in its *Directory of African American Superintendents* (2005) that there were 313 African American school superintendents in 2004. This number represents a 2.0% increase from 1.8% in 2001 (14,559 school districts). (Gregory, 2006). This same 2% of African American superintendents were responsible for 8.9% of the public school students in 2004, indicating that African American superintendents are predominately based in urban school districts. According to NABSE, in 2006 there were 16 states that had no African American superintendents at all, even though, in 2005, “the National Education Association estimated that 34% of the 52 million public school students in the United States were African American and Hispanic” (Gregory, 2006, p. 9). This study will seek to discover the challenges that African American male superintendents currently face and what steps can be taken to improve opportunities for those who will follow them.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine current African American male superintendents in the state of North Carolina. This research uses a case study approach to discover information about their career paths and the impact that racism may have had in their pursuit and retention of superintendency. This study includes research on why there are still so few African American male superintendents, and it will determine what factors led those who have pursued the superintendency to do so. Donnell Gregory’s 2006 study at the University of Cincinnati concentrated on the urban superintendency. However, since there

are so few Black males serving as urban superintendents in North Carolina, this study will consider superintendencies in general. This study also focuses on current African American male superintendents with only historical references to past ones. Dr. Gregory's study also was based on grounded theory with phenomenology whereas this study is a case study. North Carolina also has less urban districts and more districts that are majority-minority than the state of Ohio.

This study is a review of the current literature on African American male superintendents (Alston, 1996; Dawkins, 2004; Jackson, 2002; Johnson, 2000; Moody, 1995; Gregory, 2006). It also adds to the literature through the surveying of and interviewing current African American male superintendents. The experiences of the sitting superintendents should provide insight into the challenges the leaders faced in their ascension to the superintendency. This study has sought to discover whether African American males face more limitations and challenges than their White counterparts do when pursuing the superintendency. To this end, the study examined the path to the position, the barriers commonly associated with the position, the process of superintendent selection and the challenges of progressing in and retaining the position once a superintendent has attained it. The study also examines Critical Race Theory to see whether any useful parallels exist between the theory and the experiences of African American male superintendents. This study has also discovered a path of best practices for aspiring African American males to follow in their pursuit and retention of the K-12 public school superintendency.

### **Significance of Study**

This study illuminates and explains why there are so few African American male superintendents in North Carolina and why the African American males who are superintendents are serving primarily in urban or minority districts (Tallerico, 2000). The increasingly diverse population of the United States might require a more diverse leadership within the educational system. An infusion of more African American superintendents would contribute significantly to such diversity needs. With the African American male public school student failing at alarming rates, school districts must actively seek leaders who understand how to work towards improvement for all students, including minorities.

My desire to study this issue arose out of my own experiences. I have now experienced two principalships in racially charged communities. My own struggles in these environments taught me that the challenges for African American males who strive to attain leadership positions in education are especially great. I also learned that many of these challenges were heightened because of the color of my skin and had very little to do with my ability. The impetus for this study first arose, then, with my need to better understand the challenges I faced and to see whether they were part of a larger pattern. Discovering whether the experiences of other Black male educational leaders paralleled my own would constitute the first step toward remedying the problem. In addition, I wanted to understand why so many African American males who attain superintendencies find themselves serving in predominately rural, economically disadvantaged school districts. This study contributes to the existing body of research related to the many challenges faced by African American males who aspire to superintendency. Although this study makes new contributions to the field, the general purpose is similar to that of an earlier, related study (Gregory, 2006), which

hoped that the research ultimately would be “used to help influence school systems, universities and other urban training centers to expand African American representation in school districts” (p. 15).

### **Research Questions**

The two main research questions that this study addresses were suggested by two dissertations (Gregory, 2006; Jackson, 2002) that together capture this study’s two-phased approach. This study explores thoroughly the experiences of modern African American male superintendents in North Carolina; the experiences to be considered include career path, systemic or institutional barriers, and daily local challenges. The study also emphasizes race: it will examine how the factor and context of race impacts the progress and effectiveness of modern-day Black superintendents.

The two main research questions are:

1. What are the experiences of African American male superintendents who choose to pursue the superintendency?
2. Within the context of Critical Race Theory, how does the perception of racism influence African American males’ decisions to pursue the superintendency and, later, their experiences as superintendents?

### **Definition of Key Terms**

This study contains key terms that are important to identify for consistency:

*African American or Black:* “People of an African descent who live in the United States” (Parker, 2001, p.12).

*African American school superintendent*: “Individual who is Black and is identified as chief executive officer and advisory officer, charged with the direction of schools in local school districts” (Moody, 1983, p.29).

*Critical Race Theory*: a theory subscribed to by “a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 2).

*Racism*: “the unexamined and unchallenged system of racial biases and residual White advantage that persist in our institutions of learning” (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 33).

## **Summary**

This study sought to investigate the African American male superintendent and the challenges he faces in the pursuit and retention of the K-12 public school superintendency. Chapter 1 defined the need for the study and its potential contribution. A review of available, relevant literature will be presented in Chapter 2.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

In 2008, an African American male was elected to the highest office in the United States government for the first time. While this possibly denotes a historic change in America's acceptance of African Americans as leaders, American society still very often views African American leaders as inferior.

I decided to study the experiences of African American males with regard to the K-12 public school superintendency because there is little definitive research on this topic. In order to examine the African American superintendency, the educational plight of African Americans generally must be researched. Moreover, this study could not have proceeded without a firm understanding of the many challenges historically faced by Blacks in the United States.

The literature review has focused on two major points: a) how Critical Race Theory can illuminate the challenges faced by African Americans seeking attainments and professional advancement within the American education system; and b) why African Americans are underrepresented in the superintendency and why their representation needs to increase.

Black leaders are often excluded from literature on American leadership. Dr. Jacob Gordon, in his book *Black Leadership for Social Change* (2000), attempts to theorize and define Black leadership. Examining the origins of human leadership, he finds that it dates back to primate life (Gordon, 2000). African Americans who became leaders saw and seized leadership opportunities as a means of fighting oppression and gaining freedom. Many of the



initial efforts by African American leaders were attempts to demonstrate racial solidarity. As African Americans became more prevalent in the United States, it became clear that a theoretical approach to leadership was missing. This lack led to the development of Critical Race Theory (Gordon, 2000).

### **Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory is a theoretical approach to race that was and continues to be developed by “a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 2). Critical Race Theory originated within the discipline of law but quickly evolved so as to be adapted across disciplines. Emphasis on Critical Race Theory began in the 1970s and coincided with the beginning of school integration. Critical Race Theory activists and scholars believed that the gains that were made during the civil rights era were beginning to be reversed during desegregation and the blending of America (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Critical Race Theory, which was championed initially by Derrick Bell, a professor at New York University, is a blend of two prior theoretical frameworks (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical Race Theory adopts certain tenets from critical legal studies and radical feminism. Other founders of Critical Race Theory include Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, Patricia Williams, and Kimberle Crenshaw (Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999). Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, formerly a professor of law at UCLA and now a professor at Columbia University’s School of Law, is considered to be a prominent figure in Critical Race Theory. Crenshaw was featured in a January 10, 2010 interview on National Public Radio entitled “*The Promise of diversity has yet to be fulfilled*” (National Public Radio, 2010). Mari

Matsuda, an Asian American who also worked at UCLA and is currently a professor at Georgetown University's School of Law, was also instrumental in developing Critical Race Theory (Georgetown University Law Center, 2003). Patricia J. Williams, a professor at Columbia's Law School who at one time worked as a consumer advocate in the office of the City Attorney in Los Angeles, helped develop the theory, as well (Columbia Law School, 2010).

Critical Race Theory has three major tenets. First, the concept of ordinariness states that racism is ordinary and therefore difficult to change. According to this concept, it is normal to expect not only the existence of racism but also its prevalence in American culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Crenshaw, 1998). Ordinary racism and the expectation of racism are made real through inequities in hiring practices and in the systemic prevention of African American home-buying in White neighborhoods.

Second, the concept of "interest convergence" states that promotions are given to Blacks only when the promotions advance the interests of Whites (Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999; Bell, 1980). Delgado and Stephancic (2001) describe *Brown v. Board of Education* (United States National Park Service, 2003) as a result of elite White desires rather than an attempt to improve civil rights for African Americans (p. 7). Additionally, while *Brown v. Board of Education* is credited with striking down racial segregation, the "separate but equal" segregationist ideal persists in housing segregation and public education funding inequities across the United States (Hunter, 2009). In 2009, in an article for *Education and Public Society* entitled "Public School Administration and Brown v. Board of Education," Richard C. Hunter wrote:

Recent decisions of the United States Supreme Court have rejected the use of race-conscious policies to remedy past discrimination against Black public school students, such as *Bradley v. School Board of Richmond* (1965), *Milliken v. Bradley* (1977), *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978), and *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* (2007). In the later decisions, public school districts were restricted from assigning pupils to schools based on race, even if it reduced racial isolation and increased student diversity. Within the backdrop of other Supreme Court cases, this decision has dealt a fatal blow to public school desegregation and is now leading the country away from racial and ethnic diversity. (p. 577)

The third tenet of Critical Race Theory is the concept of social construction, which states that race is an invention of society. The notion here is that races, and ultimately racism, were invented to point out and accentuate differences in the human race to determine classification (Valdez, Culp, & Harris, 2002). Critical Race Theory “is grounded in the lived experience of racism, which has singled out, with wide consensus among Whites, African Americans and others as worthy of suppression” (Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999, p. 183). In 2006, Stovall analyzes the work of Gloria Ladson- Billings and her very descriptive account of Critical Race Theory’s ability to illustrate accurately the concept of white supremacy. Stovall writes:

In its most explicit definition of its operation in education, Gloria Ladson-Billings uses CRT to name and highlight the function of White supremacy through five tenets. Essentially, the CRT project in education becomes the attempt to:

1. Name and discuss the pervasive, daily reality of racism in US society which serves to disadvantage people of color.
2. Expose and deconstruct seemingly ‘colorblind’ or ‘race neutral’ policies and practices which entrench the disparate treatment of people of non-White persons.
3. Legitimize and promote the voices and narrative of people of color as sources of critique of the dominant social order which purposely devalues them.
4. Revisit civil rights law and liberalism to address their inability to dismantle and expunge discriminatory socio-political relationships.
5. Change and improve challenges to race neutral and multicultural movements in education which have made White student behavior the norm. (p. 2)

This position helps illustrate the view that racism still exists in the United States and that African Americans still face many challenges and obstacles to success.

### **Racism**

Dr. Jerry L. Jackson in his dissertation (Hofstra University, 2002), wrote:

Society’s opinion of African-Americans has been tainted by stereotypes since an assortment of Africans aboard a Dutch frigate, a ship reputed to have a mysterious past, sailed into Jamestown harbor in 1619. African-Americans still bear the stigma of Slavery. The negative stereotypes associated with Africa (the Dark Continent, ravaged by wars, diseases and poverty) and slavery itself, an institution continues to haunt African-Americans today—especially males. (Jackson, 2002, p. 13)

As we delve into the 21st century, theorists such as Delgado and Stephancic (2000, 2001) and Stovall (2006) continue to examine Critical Race Theory, and some scholars contend that a new Critical Race Theory has emerged (Valdez, Culp, & Harris, 2002). This new Critical Race Theory more stridently argues that being blind to race will not eliminate racism, and that racism continues to fuel policymaking and institutional practices that have further oppressed minorities in the United States. New Critical Race Theory theorists also believe that the most potent form of racism comes not from individuals but from systemic discrimination (Stovall, 2006). This systemic discrimination, scholars argue, is tied to the Civil Rights movement, and some assert that it may even be a result of it (Cho & Wesley, 2002, p. 32; Stovall, 2006).

In order to examine the life of the African American male superintendent, we must first explore the concept of racism in America and how it ultimately impacts the Black leader. Racism in America has been described as “the unexamined and unchallenged system of racial biases and residual White advantage that persist in our institutions of learning” (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 33). The concept of race is a social construction. Human ideologies created the idea of race, and various social forces contributed to the creation of racism: “In this formulation, race is not a determinant or a residue of some other social phenomenon, but rather stands on its own as an amalgamation of competing societal forces” (Lopez, 2000, p. 168). Gloria Ladson-Billings even states that our notions of race are so complex that even when race doesn’t make sense in our minds, we still continue to use it. According to Ladson-Billings, American racism is a realization of the American unconscious (1999).

Race and racism are also relatively recent phenomena. In the 1920s, W.E.B. DuBois referred to the “discovery of whiteness” as a modern thing (Hayman & Levit, 2002, p. 162). Hayman and Levit (2002) further argue that the “birth of racism” can be divided into periods: The Color-Consciousness period from 1619-1662 is the time when Europeans became “aware” of the color of the African’s skin. The Formalization of Race period from 1662-1776 then institutionalized servitude and slavery and rationalized them based on the concept of race. Once slavery became a fact, the focus shifted, and the Explication of Race period began, when a “racial carving out of a racial exception to the rules of liberty and equality” occurred (Hayman & Levit, 2000, p. 162). This period lasted from 1776 to 1835 and was then replaced by the current Scientization of Race period, which has found its most receptive audience in the southern United States. Even in areas where African Americans manage to break through, there are still periods of adjustment. Dr. Robert Bridges, an educator who became superintendent of one of the largest school districts in North Carolina, describes his early days as a school administrator in this way:

The central administrative office was the ultimate manifestation of the mainstream for me. Coming from my experience in the Black culture, socially and professionally, this new environment and operating style required being alert and sensitive during each minute of engagement with my new peers. In the simplest ways, being with white people all day was clearly different from being with Black people all day and night. (2009, p. 25-26)

Dr. Bridges goes on to describe how, in his ascension to the superintendency, he became comfortable—out of necessity— adjusting to the mainstream..

## **Help Wanted: Not Everywhere**

In the 21st century, the public education system of the United States suffered a staffing crisis with regard to the availability of qualified superintendent candidates (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2002, p. 7). Very often, qualified African American candidates are not even considered for administrative positions. Research into those districts in North Carolina that employ Black male superintendents reveals that all of those districts are either urban and low-performing or rural, small, and chiefly serving minority students. As people of color and women seek employment as superintendents, they often face the challenge of overcoming racial stereotypes, the most significant one being that, because of their race, they will be ineffective in majority White school districts (Banks, 1995; Lewin, 1947; Shoemaker, 1991; Tallerico, 2000). Tallerico (2000) points out that African American administrators who organize and participate in groups to discuss best practices feel uncomfortable about advertising such activities for fear of receiving undue, and perhaps unfriendly, scrutiny. An anonymous African American administrator whom Tallerico interviewed for *Accessing the Superintendency: The Unwritten Rules* (2000) stated:

For years, I got together with a group of African American administrators in the district. We always tried to help and support each other. There weren't that many of us. But we kept it quiet. It's like when some people see a group of Black teenagers in the mall they immediately get worried about what might occur. We knew better than to advertise what we were doing because that might make some people nervous. (p. 101)

In other words, had the group been White, no one would have noticed their organization or gotten nervous about it. Consciousness of the administrators' race needlessly and negatively affected their own and others' behavior. Another glaring fact is that school boards and key support resources for superintendencies are predominately controlled by White men (Tallerico, 2000).

### **History of the Superintendency**

The superintendency originated in the mid-1800s, when larger school districts located mostly in big cities recognized the need for a centralized leader. In 1837, Buffalo, New York hired the first superintendent (Jackson, 1995). By 1860, more than 20 school districts had established a superintendent's position (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000, p. 1). Glass, Bjork and Brunner (2000) explain that the first superintendents were considered to be educational reformers, a role that included but was not limited to defending the concept of school itself. Marketing was essential for early pioneers of public education, who had to sell the concept of school to neighborhoods and surrounding towns. The late 1800s and early 1900s saw the superintendent's role transition from that of a clerical keeper the school's business to that of an overseeing manager. This change coincided with a similar change in the idea of leadership that took place during the industrial revolution (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000, p. 2).

In his 2002 dissertation, Dr. Jerry Jackson noted that early superintendents tried to change how the public viewed superintendents: the superintendent would be not merely a decorated master teacher but an executive manager. Early superintendents such as George Strayer and Frank Spaulding worked to establish a civic and political dimension to the position. In the 1920s, the position followed a more corporate model. Educational scholar



Raymond Callahan even felt that schools should be run like factories. He called this concept the “cult of efficiency” (Jackson, 2002, p.11). During this period, the differences between the superintendent and the board also got more defined: the board would govern and create policy, while the superintendent would lead the daily activities of his or her respective school district.

In their account of the superintendency (2000), Glass, Bjork, and Brunner emphasize different developments in public and institutional perceptions of the superintendency. In the 1950s, educational leaders focused on defining the best practices of an effective superintendent. These definitions were often offered by retired superintendents who became professors of educational leadership programs. The 1960s and 1970s saw more emphasis put on superintendent selection, a development that followed the movement toward integration. In the 1980s and 1990s, questions emerged from the non-educational community about the validity and effectiveness of public schools (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000).

The literature offers factual data about the superintendency. First, the public school superintendency continues to be dominated by White male leaders. Lars Bjork (2000) writes that 94.9% of superintendents in America are White and 86.6% are male. This research also indicates, however, that the number of female and minority superintendents is increasing: “The number of female superintendents increased from 6.6 percent in 1992, to 13.2 percent in 2000. Superintendencies held by minorities moved from 3.9 percent to 5.1 percent during the same period”(Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000, p. 103). Prior to integration, minority leaders were mostly limited to segregated minority school districts. The pattern holds even today, as minority superintendents are generally found in areas where their race is

predominant or in large, mostly urban school districts (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). In fact, in 1993, 46% of minority superintendents were leading school districts with 50,000 or more students (Glass, 2002). There is also data on the typical age of public school superintendents. The median age for superintendents has increased over time, from 43 in 1923 to 48-50 in the period from 1950-1992. Since 1992, the median age has risen to 52.5, the highest age thus far (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000).

The process by which most superintendents reach the position usually takes one of two paths. The most common path is for a teacher to become an assistant principal, then principal, then central office administrator, and then finally superintendent. The second most common path is identical to this except that it skips the central office administrator step. The leap from the principalship into the superintendency seems to be more common in smaller school districts as well (Glass, 2000). Most superintendents teach first for five to seven years, then ascend to building-level administrative positions in their early 30s. They work towards central office positions in their late 30s and aspire to secure superintendencies in their mid 40s. The trend has remained fairly consistent since 1992 (Glass, 2000). In addition, most of today's superintendents come from secondary schools and primarily high schools.

The modern superintendent faces many daunting responsibilities, and those are ever increasing. In fact, Drs. Fusarelli and Cooper (2002) outlined five major dilemmas facing educational leadership in the 21st century. They are as follows:

1. Superintendents perceive a field in crisis, but when asked, appear quite happy and satisfied with their own careers in educational administration.

2. The high demand for superintendents requires candidates with great mobility, a willingness of superintendents to take on new positions; yet incumbents appear less attracted to even “good” jobs in other districts.
3. While large, urban districts are critical jobs in education, fewer superintendents seem attracted to these positions.
4. Despite the need for modern superintendents to be instructional leaders, those most experienced with instruction, women, remain a small but growing faction of superintendents nationwide.
5. With the growing technology, diversity and multicultural makeup in school districts, superintendents are called on to make decisions in these areas; yet incumbents tend to favor more traditional roles in human and community relations, thus presenting a divergence between skills required and skills possessed. (p. 6)

Gene Carter and William Cunningham (1997) also spoke of the skills required to be a superintendent. They wrote:

It requires exceptional leadership skills to preside over the education of thousands of young people in an age of full media attention, where everyone claims to be an expert; where elections on every level bring new, often ill-advised solutions and where there seems to be a general deterioration in the family and community. (p. 4)

This expansion of leadership skills includes but is not limited to the mandate to educate all children, regardless of their background. This is mandated while funding is decreased, despite the addition of children, the increasing diversity of society, and the increasing number and intensity of outside influences that combat education at its core (Fusarelli &

Fusarelli, 2000). These increasing demands are characterized by Drs. Bonnie Fusarelli and Lance Fusarelli as causing the superintendent to become an “applied social scientist” (p. 188).

### **Minority Superintendents: The Harsh Reality**

In his 1973 doctoral dissertation, T. J. Robinson wrote a statement that still rings true today:

There are many reasons why a school system must have minority administrators. Minority students need individuals of their own ethnic groups with whom they can identify and in whom they can confide. White youth, too, must have opportunities to work with and observe members of other races in positions of leadership if they are to develop nonprejudicial attitudes. But minority administrators are not needed for the young alone. Administrative positions carry prestige, power, and high salaries. These practical benefits must be shared among all ethnic groups if their members are to participate fully in the life of the nation. (p. 8)

In a case study conducted by Franklin Campbell-Jones and Robin Avelar-Lasalle (2000), success in the superintendency for requires African Americans to cross-network and bridge racial gaps when they encounter them. The superintendent is also expected to walk a tight-rope of maintaining his or her cultural identity while at the same time suppressing or changing it enough to not challenge the status quo. This was noted to be especially necessary in districts where an African American superintendent was following a White superintendent (Campbell-Jones & Avelar-Lasalle, 2000, p. 21). In 1992, only 3.9% of superintendents in the nation were minorities, and 46% of those were employed in urban districts with more

than 50,000 students (Glass, 1992). The advent, then, of demographic changes for several racial and ethnic groups in the nation's larger cities resulted in minority groups becoming majority populations.

However, comparatively few minority, medium-sized districts had minority superintendents (Rist, 1991). According to Glass (2000), 5.1% of the nation's superintendents in 2000 were minorities, and 50% of these minority superintendents led districts with at least 3,000 students. In addition, Glass found that 95% of minority superintendents headed districts with enrollments of more than 25,000 students, and only 23% of those districts were minority districts.

In 1999, C. Cryss Brunner addressed the issue of minority women and the superintendency:

Black women (who are mostly in primarily Black urban centers) and Hispanic women (who are primarily in the Southwest) each constitute about 1.5 percent of superintendents, with other minorities accounting for another 0.5 percent. This pattern of superintendency appointments may be based on societal and cultural perspectives and influences regarding race and gender. (p. ix)

Dr. Willie Yvonne Johnson, in her 2006 dissertation at the University of Texas, went further and described the superintendency as a White-male dominated profession:

This system of traditional gate-keeping bars women and people of color and preserves the position of the superintendency for the domain of European American, middle-class, male-dominated control. This social construction, which creates obstacles for aspiring female superintendents, is indicative of the traditional social identities of

superintendents, who by nature of this socially constructed design, represent White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant males. (p. 24)

Johnson also describes the challenges that aspiring African American female superintendents face as a “double-whammy”. This phenomenon is perplexing, especially given the fact that teaching is a female-dominated profession. In the state of North Carolina, while there are 12 male African American superintendents statewide out of 115, there are only two female African American Superintendents as of this writing.

The modern superintendent is also expected to be mobile, which adversely affects African American and female candidates because of their desire to be more stable. Superintendents as a whole also favor stability because of their familiarity with the districts they lead. Of course, there is a tendency to stay in districts that are suburban and wealthy. However, some superintendents end up serving in multiple districts (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). AASA’s 2000 Study of the American School Superintendency points out that 24.5% of superintendents have served in two school districts and 11.8% have served in three (Glass, Bjork & Brunner, 2000). While large, urban districts are increasingly important in terms of their need for success, they do “contain a majority of impoverished minority children,” and thus are less attractive to the typical superintendent (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2002, p. 11).

Furthermore, the African American superintendent often faces seemingly insurmountable odds arising from the problems endemic to low-income schools. For example, in an abstract of an August 2005 article written for *Education and Society*, Richard C. Hunter and Saran Donahoo posited:

When confronted with the problems of urban school districts, such as an ever-increasing achievement gap, the underfunding of school districts, increased shortages of qualified teachers, greater emphasis on accountability, and the loss of public confidence, African American superintendents have considerable difficulty leading their school districts. (p. 419)

### **African American Leadership**

In his 2006 dissertation, Dr. Donnell Gregory noted that as of 1991, 3.8% of all doctoral degrees awarded went to African American men and women. The majority of those degrees are in the field of education and more specifically educational administration. This fact is significant because by 1991, America had been under the influence of affirmative action for approximately 20 years (Gregory, 2006).

The most significant Black leaders of the 20th and 21st century were also significant American leaders. Mainstream society more easily accepted those leaders who stressed non-violence. In September of 2009, President Barack Obama addressed the school children of the United States on the topic of the national dropout rate. The speech encouraged children to get education as a means to success. Before the speech aired, many schools, including my own, were scrutinized by the public and even received racially charged comments regarding the decision to allow students to hear the speech. Our school district chose to make the speech optional, and we further gave students the option to go to an alternative location during the speech if they desired. The opposition to this education-driven speech must have been about the man and not the message. This episode suggests that America still has not fully embraced the African American leader.

Many Americans are unfamiliar with all but the most famous Black leaders. Jacob Gordon's book *Black Leadership for Social Change* (2000) names some leaders who "sought in diverse ways to advance the race and overcome the racial barriers and oppression that have pervaded American society." (p.27) The leaders Gordon names are:

Booker T. Washington, T. Thomas Fortune, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, W.E.B. DuBois, James Weldon Johnson, Marcus Garvey, A. Phillip Randolph, Charles Clinton Spaulding, Mary McLeod Bethune, Charles Hamilton Houston, Mabel K. Stampers, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X and Whitney M. Young, Jr. (p. 27)

Some of these names are at the forefront of our discussions about Black American history, and some are not. Militant leaders are much less likely to be accepted than moderate ones (Gordon, 2000).

Gordon (2000) goes on to state that Black leaders in education face some of the same challenges that all educational leaders face. Educators are often accused of not being able to change with the times. However, Black leaders' ineffectiveness often results directly from the cutting of programs that targeted Black students. In fact, we tend to view the accomplishments of leaders such as Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, and Mary McLeod Bethune very differently from those of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. However, the works of these education leaders helped to pave the way for history-making legislation such as *Brown v. Board of Education*. Benjamin Mays, a great educator and author, contributed greatly to the mystique and grandeur associated with Morehouse College, one of the premier historically Black institutions in the United States. Yet, with all of these proven



examples of Black leadership, the dropout rate of Black students in public schools in the U.S. almost doubles that of White students (Gordon 2000).

### **The African American Superintendent**

In his collaborative work with Bjork and Brunner, Thomas Glass (2000) wrote that “a difference exists between minority and non-minority superintendents in that they are selected much more often to be change agents” (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000, p. viii). However, once these leaders are selected, the political pressure to maintain the status quo often prevails. Barbara L. Jackson (2000) contests that African American women have it worse because they have “grown up doubly marginal” in society (Jackson, 1999, p. 141).

Historically, there has been an astounding scarcity of female African Americans having the school district leadership post. In fact, in the 1995-1996 school year, there were only 45 female African American superintendents in the entire United States. Dr. Judy Alston (1999) draws a parallel between the ascension of Black females to the superintendency and the struggles of Black Americans climbing the “crystal stair” in the famous poem by Langston Hughes (p. 81). According to Alston, the plight of women is similar to that of minorities; indeed, there are five special problems that apply equally to both women and minorities:

1. Women usually must be better than their male competitors to be considered for administrative appointments.
2. Successful women usually are viewed as the exception.
3. Aggressiveness usually is viewed as a negative trait in women.
4. Women frequently do not receive salary, title and status to match their responsibilities.

5. Women usually are not willing to compete for top level jobs (Alston, 1999, p. 83). These issues are certainly interchangeable with regard to minorities. The domination of the superintendency by middle-aged White males affects the outlook and assumptions held by women and minorities aspiring to be superintendents.

There are small pockets of school districts, however, in which strides have been made. For example, the state of Kentucky has hired its first Black school superintendent. An article called “Fired KSU coach becomes 1st male black superintendent” (Wasson, 2009), reports that former Kentucky State University football coach Donald Smith has been named superintendent of Marion County Public Schools. The article also reports that Smith was fired from KSU in 2004 amid allegations that he misappropriated funding—an allegation that was later found to be false. The majority of the article about Smith focused on the past (and false) allegations; very little focused on the current history-making event of his appointment to the superintendency. It is also interesting to note that the first African American male superintendent in the state of Kentucky was not appointed until 2009 (Wasson, 2009, p. 1). Mr. Smith was afforded the opportunity to lead the Marion School District after completing the Minority Superintendent Internship Program started by the Kentucky Department of Education. This program is described as a one-year (July 1st-June 30th) leadership development program for minorities who wish to pursue a position as a Kentucky school superintendent. This nontraditional leadership development program responds to the appreciation that a minority school superintendent may be faced with unique and complex problems as an educational leader. Further, this program recognizes the necessity for a pool

of diverse individuals prepared to successfully meet the academic and fiscal challenges of accountability in our schools (Kentucky Department of Education, p. 1).

### **The need for African American superintendents**

One of the reasons why African American superintendents are a valuable asset to the public education community is that they have the ability to understand the needs of an underserved population (Foster & Tillman, 2009). Vernon C. Polite, Kristy Lisle, and Cheryl Price (2009) made this point while discussing the importance of caring:

In an educational context, caring can help to ensure the social, and academic success of marginalized students. However the educator must be able to understand students and the contexts of their worlds, to “see” empathetically through the students’ eyes what their worlds are like, and to understand how they see themselves, instead of seeing students in a disconnected manner from the educator’s own perspective. (p. 145)

In the June 26th, 2009 edition of the *Philadelphia Tribune* newspaper, Arlene Ackerman, superintendent of schools in Philadelphia, unveiled a plan to actively seek and recruit teachers, especially African American teachers. “I think we need more people of color,” Ackerman said. “The need to get African American, especially African American males, into our school system is long overdue” (Mayes, 2009, p.1). The superintendent further stated that 82% of the district’s students are minorities. That breaks down to 65% African American, 12% Latino, and about 5% other (non-White) ethnicities. Yet, only 28% of the teachers were minority teachers, with 23% being African American and 5% being Latino or Asian. The superintendent also pointed out that “very few” of the Black teachers were male. These

discrepancies create a culture gap between teachers and staff. “It’s important that you populate the staff with people who look like them. We understand the culture,” said Ackerman, who is African American. “We act as role models and as a bridge not only for students, but for teachers” (Mayes, 2009, p. 1). Ackerman asked for an incentive that would help entice more minority teachers to accept positions in underperforming, largely minority schools. The incentive would be to attach bonuses to such positions, particularly in areas where the achievement gap is large (Mayes, 2009).

### **Summary**

In summary, a review of relevant literature shows that African Americans routinely face biases that hinder equal consideration for the public school superintendency. While historically significant changes are being made with regard to African American leadership, African Americans still are not getting enough opportunities to lead. This problem coincides with increasing problems affecting minority student performance in school districts nationwide. The literature review also considers Critical Race Theory and its usefulness for understanding the mindset of assumed racial inferiority, a mindset that African Americans and their White colleagues must work to overcome. The history of the superintendency was also examined, with specific emphasis on how the position has evolved to include—and yet exclude—African American. Chapter three will explain the methodology that this study will use in order to discover the reasons for the under representation of African American males in the superintendency.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This chapter describes the research procedures used for this study. Descriptions of the research design, setting, participants, and survey instruments are included.

As in Dr. Gregory's (2006) research, the goals of this study are "to identify limitations encountered by African-American males who pursue positions as superintendents" and "to ascertain if racism influences African-American males' decision to pursue the superintendency" (p. 56). This research will focus on finding the answers to two major questions:

1. What are the experiences of African American male superintendents who choose to pursue the superintendency?
2. Does racism as defined by Critical Race Theory influence African American males' decisions to pursue the superintendency and their experiences as superintendents?

### Setting for Study

In keeping with Dr. Gregory's (2006) work, I chose to use an open-ended interview process. The open-ended interview process allows dialogue rather than rote- memorized answers to questions. The dialogue in turn allows for a more in-depth understanding of the specifics of the superintendent's job. Through this interview process, I will collect the personal stories of African American male superintendents. I visited three of these men in their respective districts. I interviewed four by phone. I created a consent form asking participants for permission to (1) engage in a 50-60 minute interview by telephone or in

person and (2) tape-record the interviews in addition to taking notes by hand, in order to ensure accuracy. Participant anonymity was protected: I did not name schools, districts, or individuals, and I transcribed the recordings after the interviews and kept the digital voice recorder locked in a safe at my home during the research period.

### **Participants**

While Dr. Gregory's (2006) research at the University of Cincinnati studied both current and former superintendents, this study focused on current superintendents in order to examine issues specific to the present time. The state of North Carolina currently has nine African American male superintendents. Since June of 2009, two African American male superintendents have left for out-of-state positions. One was replaced by an African American, and one was not. Also, in November 2010, another African American male superintendent resigned in order to assume a superintendency in another state.

### **Research Methods**

This study was designed to uncover racism's impact on African American male superintendents in the state of North Carolina. This data was obtained from interviews with current African American superintendents, who answered questions about their current experiences as superintendents and their past experiences as candidates seeking the position.

Given the need for detailed accounts of the participants' experiences, this study employed a qualitative research design. A qualitative design is appropriate for the kind of data to be collected, which will be comprehensive and detail rich (Creswell, 2002; Jackson, 2002).

More specifically, this research uses a case study design. There are three distinct types of case study. Robert Stake describes these three types as intrinsic (has personal interest), instrumental (is designed to accomplish something other than understanding the individual being studied), and collective (coordinates individual case studies) (1995, p. 3). The intrinsic case study arises generally out of an interest the researcher has in a particular case. The instrumental case study arises from a search for insights about a system or the answers to a research question. If the researcher is interested in a broader, multiple-case approach, then the research would involve a collective case study (Stake, p. 3). The multiple case researcher needs to seek a “replication logic” as outlined by Robert K. Yin in 1993 (p. 33). Replication logic requires that two or more cases be included in the same study because similar findings will generate more confidence in the results (Yin, p. 34). According to Yin, case studies are an “appropriate research method when you are trying to attribute causal relationships and not just wanting to explore or describe a situation” (Yin, 1993, p. 31). For this study, I will employ a multiple subject case study in order to examine the perspectives and beliefs of African American male superintendents in North Carolina with respect to the process of obtaining and maintaining the superintendency. Patton describes the multiple data source approach as an opportunity for the researcher “to validate and cross-check evaluation findings” (1986, p. 157). It is important to note that this study seeks to “contain important explanatory variables about the phenomenon” which is pointed out by Yin as being an important variable of case study research (Yin, 1993, p. 31). In a discussion of the applications of case study research, Sharan B. Merriam, offers a different anatomy of the different types of case studies. According to Merriam, the three types are particularistic,

descriptive, and heuristic. The particularistic study focuses on a particular situation, event, or phenomenon. The descriptive case study produces a “thick” description of the phenomenon being studied. Finally, a heuristic case study illustrates the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon that is being studied (1998, p. 29-30).

## **Interviewing**

This study used interviews to obtain the data needed for the case study. These interviews were conducted through a face-to-face arrangement or by telephone when necessary. According to Sharan B. Merriam, the main purpose of an interview is “to obtain a special kind of information. The researcher wants to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind” (1998, p. 71). Merriam also identifies three types of interviews. The highly structured, standardized type is an oral survey, with a predetermined order and wording of the questions. The semi-structured interview type is a mix of more- and less-structured questions. The unstructured interview type has open-ended questions that are flexible and exploratory in nature; this type proceeds more like a conversation than a formal interview (Merriam, p. 72-73). A major drawback with the formal interview for the purposes of qualitative research is that it generally does not lend itself to interviewee flexibility. This approach is good for foundational data such as age, gender, and career path, but the heart of the research must be gathered from less structured, more open-ended interview questions (Merriam, p. 74). Qualitative research most often employs the semi-structured interview approach. Merriam goes on to state:

In this type of interview, either all of the questions are more flexibly worded, or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions. Usually, specific



information is desired from all the respondents, in which case there is a highly structured section to the interview. But the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. (p. 74)

The most common approach to preserving interviews is to tape record them. However, there are two disadvantages to this approach. First, there is a chance that the recording equipment could malfunction. Second, tape recording sometimes makes an interviewee uneasy.

Researchers commonly report, however, that “after some initial wariness respondents tend to forget they are being taped” (Merriam, p. 87).

This research employed the one-on-one interview process in most cases, with some telephone interviews at the convenience of the participant. John W. Creswell states that “the telephone interview provides the best source of information when the researcher does not have direct access to individuals” (2007, p. 133). The disadvantage of this form of interviewing is the inability of the researcher to see informal communication triggers. Creswell also encourages the creation of an interview protocol, which serves as a note-taking guide during the data collection. The instruction outlined in this protocol is as follows:

1. Use a header to record essential information about the project and as a reminder to go over the purpose of the study with the interviewee. This heading might also include information about confidentiality and address aspects included in the consent form.
2. Place space between the questions in the protocol form. Recognize that an individual might not always respond directly to the questions being asked.

For example, a researcher may ask Question 2, but the interviewee's response may be to question 4. Be prepared to write notes on all of the questions as the interviewee speaks.

3. Memorize the questions and their order to minimize losing eye contact with the participant. Provide appropriate verbal transitions from one question to the next.
4. Write out the closing comments that thank the individual for the interview and request follow-up information, if needed from them. (Creswell, 2007, p. 135)

### **Instruments**

This study used open-ended questions that I will ask the participants during a face-to-face or telephone interview session. These proposed questions were taken from Gregory's 2006 study called "Where do we go from here? Understanding the impact of racism and its influence on African American male superintendents." The topics of Dr. Gregory's research which will also be covered in this study include:

1. motivation for pursuing the superintendency
2. major challenges in the application and interview process
3. typical career path to the superintendency
4. barriers for African American males to the superintendency versus barriers for African American females, White females, and White males in the superintendency
5. use of a mentor or sponsor
6. motivation for seeking the superintendency in a suburban White school district
7. the role of race in seeking a superintendency in a predominately White school district

8. opinion on whether the opportunities are the same for African Americans and Whites seeking the superintendency
9. the role of race in each superintendent's school district and community and in interactions with staff and students
10. how to become a great African American superintendent
11. how schools can better prepare candidates for today's position of superintendent and for the job of urban school superintendent
12. how schools can better prepare minority candidates for today's position of superintendent
13. how school districts can aid leaders in moving into the "pipeline" for superintendency positions if the process is different for urban districts and for minority school leaders (Gregory, 2006, p. 122).

In addition to these questions, the book edited by Drs Bruce S. Cooper and Lance Fusarelli (2002) outlines some key questions about the superintendency that will also figure into the interview questions for this study:

1. Why did you seek this position?
2. What are the main accomplishments and problems of being a superintendent?
3. To what degree is there a shortage of superintendent candidates for new positions and why?
4. Under what conditions would this superintendent advise others to prepare themselves for the job?

5. What are some of the main concerns of “executive succession” as this superintendent inherits the accomplishments and failures of prior job incumbents? (p. 2).

### **Limitations of the Study**

The population that was studied consisted of African American male superintendents in North Carolina. This study was limited by the limited number of participants. There are nine African American male superintendents currently in North Carolina out of 115 school districts. This number decreased from 12 at the inception of this research. While these findings might be applicable to superintendents across the nation, this study is limited to the state of North Carolina. One of the superintendents was my former supervisor, who accepted a superintendency in another state. Another of the superintendents was appointed to a position with the United States government.

### **Research Validity and Reliability**

Joseph Maxwell describes validity in research as being a “relationship between an account and something outside of that account, whether this something is construed as objective reality, as constructors of actors, or a variety of other possible interpretations” (Maxwell, 1992, p. 281). Maxwell (1992) goes on to state that validity is not an isolated property of a particular research method but applies to the data and conclusions reached from that data. The applicability of the concept of validity presented does not depend on the existence of some absolute truth or reality to which an account can be compared, but only on the fact that there are ways of assessing accounts that do not depend entirely on features of the account itself (Maxwell, 1992, p. 283).

Understanding the reality or *truth* according to the African American male superintendent's individual experiences is critical to this study. Therefore, interpretive validity is of particular importance to the execution of this qualitative study. Maxwell (1992) describes interpretive validity as seeking "to comprehend phenomena not on the basis of the researcher's perspective and categories, but from those of the participants in the situated study" (p. 290). This allows meaning to be derived from the participants "in their own language" (p. 283). To facilitate this process, the use of thick description is necessary. Clifford Geertz (1973) defines thick description as meaningful images that not only speak to the richness of explanatory detail, but also situate personal perceptions and experiences within the framework of the life of each participant.

John W. Creswell further speaks of thick description as being necessary to protect validity: "Rather than reliability, one seeks dependability that the results will be subject to change and instability. The naturalistic researcher looks for confirmability rather than objectivity in establishing the value of the data" (2007, p. 204). Creswell further explains that reliability can be enhanced through detailed field notes that are recorded and transcribed to include pauses and overlaps (p. 209).

### **Subjectivity Statement**

As an African American male who has worked in North Carolina's public schools as a teacher and school administrator for 12 years, I feel that I should disclose information about myself to provide a clearer picture of the research. While I was born in Flint, Michigan, I was raised in the northern part of Nash County, North Carolina in a community called Swift Creek. I attended public schools in what is now the Nash-Rocky Mount School District.

Swift Creek is a predominately African American neighborhood but is surrounded by other neighborhoods that are predominately White. I attended Swift Creek Baptist Church and Swift Creek Elementary School, which are located on the same parcel of land. My mother was a teacher who later became a guidance counselor, and my father drove Trailways buses for 27 years. Both of my parents are also from Swift Creek. I was raised in a middle-class home where the need for achievement was stressed along with an understanding of the barriers to success often faced by African Americans. I also spent time as a middle and high school student in Gifted and Talented classes, where I often was the only minority student, or one of a very few. At 16, I left to attend college but did not graduate initially. Upon getting married, I saw the need to complete my undergraduate degree, and so I returned and did so in 1998. I also accepted my first teaching position in 1998 and chose to pursue a Master of School Administration in 2002. I received an MSA in 2004, and after some coercion from one of my professors at graduation, I chose to pursue the Doctor of Education degree.

In 2004, I received my first principalship in a rural, racially charged community. At the first football game under my tenure there, I discovered that the attendees sat in “White” and “Black” sections. I worked quickly to change that. I was called *nigger* by parents whose children I had suspended. As time went on, I believe that I was able to dispel the false ideas that people in the area held about the intelligence and fairness of African Americans. Because of these experiences, I became even more determined to do all that I could to improve how Americans view African American males. I realize that because I am an African American male, and given the nature of qualitative research, this study has the

potential for bias; however, I believe that this bias can be minimized by my research methodology.

### **Summary**

An interview process was used to examine the characteristics of African American superintendents. Through this process, the researcher was successful in gaining a better understanding of the challenges involved when an African American male aspires to the superintendency and the barriers that he faces once he obtains the superintendency. The participants were asked the open-ended questions presented in Appendix A. The researcher chose African American male superintendents in North Carolina to participate in this study. This group was chosen because it contains a large enough sample of superintendents to be studied, and because there is relatively little data on this particular group.

This study used a qualitative approach. Data was collected from the participants through a personal (face-to-face) or telephone interview. E-mail correspondence was used for follow-up questions when necessary.

Chapter Four addresses the findings resulting from the research conducted. It has examined the findings to answer the research questions posed about the characteristics of African American male superintendents in North Carolina and the challenges and barriers they faced and will continue to face in their careers.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### Superintendent Adams

Superintendent Adams leads a district that has twelve schools. There are seven elementary schools, two middle, two high schools and one school providing alternative education. The demographic makeup of the district is 48% White, 48% Black and 2% Other.

This superintendent was appointed by the BOE to the role of interim superintendent after serving as an assistant superintendent in the same district due to the sudden death of his predecessor. After finishing the year as an interim superintendent, the board selected him by a 5-2 vote to continue as the permanent superintendent. Superintendent Adams wanted to only accept the permanent superintendency if the vote ended up being more than a 4-3 majority. “I felt like that without that, my entire superintendency would have been a tug-of-war” (Personal communication, 2011). While the dissenting two board members caused some initial problems because of their desire to conduct a national search, Superintendent Adams was selected for this position because he had knowledge of the district’s initiatives and most of the board members felt that he could do the job. “We had already begun to do some things differently like the Leadership Academy and we didn’t want to turn that over to a new superintendent who’d come in and just change everything” (Personal communication, 2011). Though this superintendent ended up being moved from the interim role to that of permanent superintendent, an interview process was conducted. During this process, Superintendent Adams got to share his vision with the Board of Education with specific emphasis on reading. This superintendent worked diligently to improve reading through



hiring a director of reading and expanding tutorial programs in the schools and throughout the community.

Superintendent Adams followed the traditional path of progression from teacher, to assistant principal, to principal, to assistant superintendent and then ultimately the superintendency. Most of this gentleman's career was in this school district.

When questioned about the barriers to the superintendency, the leader perceived his example as being more difficult than it would have been for a white male who had served the district in all of the capacities that he has. He felt that the vote would probably not have been 5-2 but rather 7-0. Superintendent Adams is the first African American superintendent in this school district. He described this accomplishment as "a challenge for them [board] to embrace the idea" (Personal communication, 2011).

In lieu of an official mentor Superintendent Adams learned from the observation of leaders at all levels and spoke of learning from their mistakes and or successes. He stated that he pays attention to people who are around him, whether they know that he's paying attention to them or not. "I learn from other peoples' mistakes, or when they're being successful" (Personal communication, 2011).

Superintendent Adams is not interested in pursuing a superintendency in a predominately White school district because he is at the end of his career and states that this superintendency will be his last job. However for the person that would be interested in doing so, Superintendent A feels the person would need to be "well read and on top of his game especially when applying in a surburban white district" (Personal communication, 2011). This superintendent likened the kind of person that would be successful in this kind

of role to President Obama and stated that this person would need special skills to be able to relate to all kinds of people.

While Superintendent Adams felt that the playing field is changing some for African Americans with regards to the pursuit of the superintendency, he also felt that the field is still nowhere close to being level. The leader described the person of color's challenges to be greater. "There is a constant need to prove themselves with decision making and people constantly second guess you" (Personal communication, 2011).

When offering tips to include in a book about the African American male superintendent, this gentleman offered these points:

- 1) A common-sense approach to decision making
- 2) Allow experiences and some of trials and errors to help with some of decision making
- 3) Surround yourself with solid people, not just like you, but people who have a passion for children, that understand the vision of the district.

When faced with the conversation of how schools of higher learning can better prepare African American candidates for the superintendency, this superintendent said, "universities along with school districts need to work to grow the capacity within the district" (Personal communication, 2011). He felt that this needed to be done through leadership academies. He has begun to implement such in his school district. This superintendent felt that if districts grow the capacity properly, districts would not suffer as much when people retire or leave. Superintendent Adams also spoke of his districts design of school and district design teams. These teams are designed to grow leaders. This leader felt that schools are

doing a better job of preparing school administrators than they used to. He also commended the former retired superintendents who are creating academies to better prepare future school leaders.

In response to being asked why most African American superintendents are in majority-minority districts this superintendent felt that people as a whole still believe that people should serve their own people. “There is still that belief that people of color should be with people of color”, stated Superintendent Adams (Personal communication, 2011). He felt however, that this trend is changing and that he personally doesn’t subscribe to this theory. “I’m a little different on that one, I don’t believe that color will fix the place” stated the seasoned leader (Personal communication, 2011). He said that he selects leaders based on their passion for the job irregardless of their color.

In surpassing barriers and dealing with racism, Superintendent Adams responded immediately “I know who I am” (Personal communication, 2011). He also stated that it’s imperative that one knows the people that they’re working for. Superintendent Adams further posited that he doesn’t take people’s idiosyncrasies too seriously because “everybody brings something from the neighborhood” (Personal communication, 2011). Important characteristics for success also included the ability to possess thick skin, and not allow things to stain what you believe in.

### **Superintendent Baker**

The district that Superintendent Baker leads has 17 schools. Eleven of these schools are elementary/K-8 schools, with three middle schools and two high schools. This superintendent has been a superintendent for 15 out of his 34 years in the public school

system and is in his 3<sup>rd</sup> school district as superintendent. As is the case with Superintendent Adams, Superintendent Baker does not have a doctorate degree.

Superintendent Baker quickly stated that the pursuit of the superintendency was a response to “area of influence” (Personal communication, 2011). This superintendent was an engineering major originally because of a strong math background, but after realizing a love for working with youth switched to education. This administrator taught special education classes that ran the gamut of exceptionalities from EMD to AG. This former college athlete also coached basketball while teaching. He has also had five principalships all grade levels. He has also served with the NC Department of Public Instruction.

When asked about the application and interview process, Superintendent Baker referred to the profession as one in which “you can get the hell beat out of you for doing the right thing” (Personal communication, 2011). This leader referred to boards of education as being political and noted that the first job of an interviewee is to gain the respect and attention of the board and said that this must be done quickly. One must ascertain quickly according to Superintendent Baker where the focus of each board member is, including but not limited to curriculum, community, climate, etc. This leader also stated that it’s important to study the district to find out what their current issues are. The prepared interviewee, according to Superintendent Baker, must also be ready to answer any question that comes up with regards to education, ranging from curriculum, personnel, programs, bullying, alternative schools, etc. He said that “all boards want to know two things: 1) How can you improve our school district? and 2) Why are you the right man for this job” (Personal communication, 2011)? He also said that unfortunately though, in some cases, even the

most well prepared interviewee may still get overlooked. “There are some school districts where you could be the greatest administrator ever, and they still wouldn’t want you” (Personal communication, 2011). The successful candidate according to Superintendent Baker, must have research based data that shows how to decrease the dropout rate, and to increase test scores because all boards want to hear that strategy for their school districts.

This superintendent followed the traditional route to the superintendency by being a teacher, assistant principal, principal, was an executive director, an associate superintendent, and then superintendent. He said that he learned a tremendous amount at each level. He also feels that “in order to be a quality superintendent you must spend some time as a principal” (Personal communication, 2011).

This seasoned leader named mentors such as Dr. Dudley Flood (former Deputy State Superintendent) and Dr. Bob Bridges (former superintendent of Wake County Schools, NC) as instrumental to his success. Although he considers Dr. Bill McNeal (also former superintendent of Wake County Schools) somewhat of a contemporary, as they were in graduate school together, Superintendent Baker still conversed and got advice from him from time to time. Now he is extremely proud also of the fact that he gets and takes the opportunity to mentor new superintendents in North Carolina and Virginia. He also in this section of the interview used Bill Clinton’s presidency to point out a similarity between it and today’s field of education. He said, “the process is more important than the outcome” which was a point that he says Clinton pointed out very early in his first term as president (Personal communication, 2011).

Superintendent Baker felt that barriers for African American males were greater than those of White males who aspire to be superintendents. He used as an example the scrutiny that President Obama faces as a leader for everything that he does, and compared that to President Bush who “got away with everything” (Personal communication, 2011). He further explained that no matter what one says or thinks, our country is still driven by race. This leader even feels that with the rise of the Tea Party and other factions that we are actually going backwards into some things that he thought we’d gotten away from with regards to race. While he felt that the barriers were greatest for African American leaders, he also felt that the same kind of scrutiny was in place for female leaders, thus explaining the harshness that is sometimes portrayed by them. While he sees barriers for African American males, Superintendent Baker was very quick to point out that he doesn’t feel that race played a factor in his own selection as superintendent, as he was the first Black superintendent in all three of the superintendencies that he’s held. He believes that African Americans have to be better prepared. “I still think that we have to be a little bit better, a little bit sharper, a little bit better prepared,” stated Superintendent Baker (Personal communication, 2011). While this superintendent has not completed his doctorate, he believes that has not hurt him in his educational career, however he does feel that some boards of education would screen a person out prior to meeting them without the doctorate in hand. He also pointed out the trend for some districts to hire non-educators is growing and felt that trend had to do with the transition of the position to more of a leadership position with less emphasis on mandatory knowledge of curriculum.

Superintendent Baker has always served as superintendent in predominately White school districts. He said he would not allow the location or the demographic makeup to determine whether or not he applied for a superintendency. He described this as a matter of confidence. “ I feel strongly enough about my abilities to know that I could be effective”, said Superintendent Baker (Personal communication, 2011).

This district leader felt that the playing field was not level for African American candidates for the superintendency and felt that this had a lot to do with the demographic makeup of most school boards. In his own superintendent selections, he was selected by boards with 0, 1, and 2 minority school board members. He went on further to say that even though African Americans come to the interview with a good track record, properly credentialed and very prepared, sometimes boards of education still reject them because of matters that sometimes remain unknown. Superintendent Baker referred to the successful superintendent candidate needing to establish a connection between himself and the board. He posited that this must be done quickly in the interview process to grab and maintain the board of education’s attention. “Homework about the board and their interests and personal goals is key,” according to Superintendent Baker (Personal communication, 2011). This leader also felt that it is important to ensure that one feels comfortable with the district after interviewing for the position. Candidates need to maintain their integrity in the opinion of this superintendent. Superintendent Baker also felt that interested superintendent candidates need to seek boards of education that possess integrity and want to work together for the betterment of children and not for their own political agenda.

In terms of pointers for aspiring African-American Superintendents, Superintendent Baker noted the following points:

- 1) Know what you know and know it
- 2) Be a good communicator, and use the method of communication most that you do best. If you're a strong writer, write. If you're a good oral communicator, speak your vision.
- 3) Let the people know truly who you are. Get to know your community and let them know who you are. Be yourself, don't try to be what you think they want.
- 4) Be a person of integrity.
- 5) Be prepared. (Personal communication, 2011)

Superintendent Baker noted that schools of education need to be more realistic with aspiring administrators. He also feels that programs need to have more of a practical application infused into their course of study to better prepare superintendent candidates. "Our universities seem to be a bit too theoretical", stated Superintendent Baker (Personal communication, 2011). He felt that universities need to provide more opportunity through apprenticeships and internships and give them feedback which would come from evaluators and self-reflection. In addition to the research and evaluation that programs require, this superintendent felt that schools of education need to discern whether students can problem solve.

In his own educational pursuits, Superintendent Baker felt that his programs would have served him better if there had been more attention to things like the micro-political, building construction, and boards of education that are all a part of the superintendency.



There instead was focus on finance, law, personnel and evaluation, which are important parts of the job, but are certainly not all inclusive. He referred to the several micro-political committees that he currently serves on, which are an expected part of the job.

Superintendent Baker believes that school districts don't do a good job of implementing succession plans. He believes that districts must grow their own leaders. He believes that districts should have plans that allow for good people to move from the classroom to the superintendency. He noted that Wake County used to do a great job of growing people within the system and named three people who started as teachers in that district who ended up being superintendent. He feels however that this process is more difficult for African American leaders to navigate through though, because of the lack of good examples that are predecessors. This superintendent felt that there are not enough black leaders in the pipeline. He even felt an extra need to help me in the conducting of this study because of a personal need to help grow leaders.

In response to the question of why most African American superintendents are serving in majority-minority districts, Superintendent Baker felt this was because most boards of education are still predominately white. Because of this, he felt that boards sometimes do not give Black candidates a chance because of their skin color, no matter how prepared they are. He said it's not necessarily racism, but that "we need to stand out" (Personal communication, 2011). This superintendent feels that there are still places where people just don't accept all people. This is sometimes based on religion, socioeconomic status, intellectual ability in addition to race according to Superintendent Baker. He also felt that superintendencies are easier to get once the first one is obtained.

In overcoming and dealing with racism, Superintendent Baker felt that he did that through his intellect and his ability to communicate. He also can articulate himself and presents himself well. He also believes that people respect his integrity and moral character. He also said that he tries to show his love for children daily. He values the profession so, that he says: “doctors may save lives, preachers may save souls, but as educators, we shape the future” (Personal Communication, 2011).

### **Superintendent Combs**

Superintendent Combs leads a district that has just shy of 8,000 students. This district is one of the few headed by an African American male superintendent at this time that is slated to grow over the next few years. This district has one high school, one alternative school, an early college, two middle schools and eight elementary schools. The district is also a majority-minority district. This superintendent is serving in his first superintendency after his third application for the same district. He had also worked in two other school districts in progressively responsible roles prior to assuming the superintendent’s position in this county.

Superintendent Combs pursued the superintendency out of a need to be challenged in a top level leadership role. He also wanted to answer the question ‘Can I do that job?’ and he also had a desire to have an impact on the betterment of children.

This district leader described the navigation of the interview and application process as one in which a candidate has to go into understanding that it is an elimination process. He feels that it is essential that a successful applicant has all of the documentation and credentials that his competitor has. As Superintendent Baker stated, Superintendent Combs

said that the key component in the interview process is the ability to connect with the board of education. Even with a strong ‘skill set’ and being the best prepared with a strong record, this leader says the key remains in the ability to convince the board of education that you’re the best candidate. This superintendent posited that when board members grant candidates an interview, it means that you’ve met the requirements and are credentialed. So, the successful interviewee is one that convinces the board that he will establish a good working relationship with them according to Superintendent Combs (Personal communication, 2011).

This leader followed the typical career path to the superintendency in that he worked through the ladder of teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. He felt that this traditional path is important and emphasized the need for superintendents to have been principals. He believes that “there are variables that you need to know that exist at every level; people need to believe that you know what they’re talking about” (Personal communication, 2011). The length of the principalship is not necessarily important according to this leader, but one must have experienced the position to be able to communicate effectively with principals. He cautioned against school districts hiring leaders who are non-educators because of the belief that they will have to spend additional funding to staff central offices with people who do have an instructional background. He further stated that larger, urban districts though are okay with hiring non-traditional superintendents because they’re being asked to be managers rather than instructional leaders. However, he felt that medium-sized districts like his had to have instructional leaders.

When questioned about barriers and the additional impact that they have on African American males, Superintendent Combs felt that the largest one is to change the mindset of

boards of education about black people. “We have to convince them that we can lead” stated Superintendent Combs (Personal communication, 2011). He also felt that it was important for the African American superintendent to work diligently to prove that he is working for the benefit of all children and dispel the myth that African American children would receive preferential treatment.

Superintendent Combs did not have a specific mentor to guide him in the inception of his superintendency, but paid attention to strong African American leaders no matter where they were. He named Mr. Leonard Arnold, who was a former Assistant Superintendent in Harnett County Schools as a person whom he studied as an example. He felt that it is important to study a network of people including but not limited to current practicing superintendents.

This superintendent said that he would not shy away from applying to a predominately White district because he feels that he’s qualified. He also said that he doesn’t think the work would be any easier, but the challenges would just be different in a more affluent district. He felt that he could lead in these type of districts too because “it’s a people business and you simply have to be in touch with the needs of that district” (Personal communication, 2011). He believes that America has finally begun to reach a time where “we’re not so concerned about the color of leadership”, but rather focuses on the ability to lead (Personal communication, 2011).

This superintendent took a great measure to point out that African American superintendents should not be offended by the need to prove oneself constantly. He prefers

to embrace that fact and know that it just “comes with the territory” (Personal communication, 2011).

Superintendent Combs declared that the playing field is not level for African American male candidates because of the mindset of boards of education assuming that White males are best suited to do the job. He also said that “some boards of education don’t want real leadership, they don’t want you to rock the boat. You want to stay away from those situations” stated Superintendent Combs. This leader also warned African American superintendents to be cautious of dealings that happen without their knowledge. “I often tell people that the night work will kill you”, said Superintendent Combs, meaning that boards often do work behind the scenes that may be detrimental to school district leaders. But despite these efforts he warned that the successful superintendent be ‘emotionally mature’ meaning that he must be able to allow personal attacks to not affect efficiency. He also noted that African American leaders have a moral obligation to conduct themselves professionally and as an upstanding moral citizen. He also said that African American superintendents need to have the ability to “hear that stuff and let it roll on” (Personal communication, 2011).

In terms of the creation of the tips for successful African American superintendents, Superintendent Combs emphasized the following points:

- 1) From the position of superintendent, I am here to serve all kids.
- 2) You have to be emotionally mature and not get pulled into that personal stuff.

He went on to emphasize that our positions whether principalships or superintendencies are servant positions and that we needed to keep that at the forefront of our focus.

Superintendent Combs felt that schools of education could better prepare their students by getting them more involved in simulations of real problem solving matters. He feels that many education leaders graduate from schools of education without the ability to problem solve or even start the process of such. Schools need to be more practical in their processes than they've ever been according to this seasoned leader. Superintendent Combs further elaborated that his own educational experience could have been enhanced through a greater influence of practical applications to his learning. He also felt that the instructors in educational leadership programs should be current, or recent so that they will have a working knowledge of the trends in education. Too many professors in this leader's opinion, don't have a real understanding of today's challenges because they're too far removed from today's school operations. He feels that administrators who are not in synch with today's school climate need to compensate by inviting current school leaders to involve themselves in their classrooms to better prepare leaders.

In answering the question of best practices to move through the pipeline to the superintendency, this leader quickly referred to the process as being one of opportunity. He felt that school districts, with particular emphasis on those that are led by African American superintendents have a great responsibility to grow leaders. He posited that these leaders do this not by micromanaging, but by giving these leaders the latitude to make decisions and 'test the waters' (Personal communication, 2011). He also pointed out that in his own selection of principals, he is careful to watch the reaction of the rejected candidates 'the next day' to see how they will continue to conduct themselves. He believes that the mark of a great administrator lies in his ability to accept adversity when he doesn't get the promotion.

He also emphasized the point that it is “up to us to make ourselves available” (Personal communication 2011). He felt that oftentimes administrative candidates limit themselves by not pursuing superintendencies. Superintendent Combs felt that candidates need to apply for positions and ‘make them tell you no’ rather than not applying because one feels that he is second class. He also noted that superintendents need to be willing to be mobile because most superintendencies are awarded in districts that are not in your home area.

Superintendent Combs believes that most African American male superintendents are serving in minority districts because they have mostly majority-minority boards of education. He further believes that these boards are more likely to select a black candidate than boards who are majority White. He believes that this is especially true for African American candidates seeking their first superintendency. He also believes that superintendents have to get a break for the first superintendency. Superintendent Combs also told of offers that he’s received since being granted the superintendency at his current district that he believes had nothing to do with his race, but more with leadership capabilities.

When posed with the question of how he surpassed the racial barriers that presented themselves, Superintendent Combs referred back to the implementation of the ‘emotional stability’ approach. He reiterated that African American leaders cannot be offended by the issues that will come up. He also pointed out that leaders must know and stay true to themselves. He also said that there are still a high number of people who don’t want every child educated, and that African Americans need to understand that fact and navigate through it. He feels that Senate Bill 8, which is a North Carolina mandate to eliminate the limit on the amount of charter schools is an example of the efforts of people who don’t want every

child educated. While Superintendent Combs didn't feel that African American leaders needed to necessarily become politicians, he felt that it was crucial that successful leaders understood the political climate. He also feels that African American leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century need to understand that "time is going to handle racism for us, because America is browning" (Personal communication, 2011).

### **Superintendent Drake**

This leader is in his fourth year as superintendent in his district and is also the first African American superintendent to ever serve in his county. He is also the first college graduate in his family, although since then his siblings have also done so. This district has 9400 students with 17 schools and is predominately African American with 55 percent of the students being African American, 40 percent White, and 5 percent Latino. This leader is also a licensed minister. He has worked in school districts in North Carolina and Virginia. He chose to pursue school administration out of encouragement from a principal while he was teaching. Then, while a principal, his superintendent asked him, "how would you like to impact thousands" (Personal communication, 2011). That's what spearheaded his pursuit of the superintendency. Superintendent Drake credits having the right people in his life that pushed him for his success.

In the application and interview process, this leader felt that he had credentials that were equal to any of the other candidates. He said however that he questioned himself as to whether he really had a chance to receive the position because of his race. In his case, when his predecessor left, because he was doing a good job as an associate superintendent, he was promoted to the superintendency without an interview. Superintendent Drake has been



through several superintendent applications and interviews though prior to receiving this position. The observant candidate according to this leader can look at the makeup of the boards of education in most instances, according to Superintendent Drake, and determine whether he has a real chance of receiving the position. He alluded to the fact that sometimes people get selected with substandard credentials. “That’s always going to be there” stated Superintendent Drake (Personal communication, 2011).

Superintendent Drake followed the traditional path to the superintendency. When asked about barriers to the superintendency, he quickly said that he believes that females suffer the greatest scrutiny. This, in his opinion is because of the assumption by most people that a superintendency is a male dominated position. The barriers that this leader talked about also included the stigma that was placed on school leaders in the early 80’s that the best administrators were coaches. Then, the trend shifted to superintendents and principals being instructional leaders. This superintendent felt that people as a whole just trust the male superintendent, particularly the White male, more than any other.

Superintendent Drake had a mentor as a teacher and principal but not as a superintendent. However, he believes that mentorships would be valuable for new superintendents, and has taken on the responsibility informally to mentor new superintendents in his region of the state. He mentioned a new superintendent in particular whom he interacts with and keeps in contact with “because there are many roadblocks out there especially for us” (Personal communication, 2011). This leader pointed out that race always comes into play at some point and therefore mentorships would be helpful for the navigation of these times and issues. Specifically, he felt mentors could aid new leaders with

regards to salary negotiations, redistricting, and trying to implement new policy amongst other things.

Superintendent Drake would seek a superintendency in a predominately White district because “I think I’m qualified” (Personal communication, 2011). He believes that people are more accepting of him because although his first two degrees are from HBCU’s, his doctoral degree is from a large, prestigious predominately White university. He believes that this fact helps to garner acceptance from some boards of education. Superintendent Drake believes, however that the most valuable portions of his education came from his time on HBCU campuses.

This superintendent is currently under attack by people of the Republican party in the county in which his district resides. They are scrutinizing the car he drives, and other personal things despite the fact that proficiency has risen each year of his superintendency. He believes that this is solely because of race. The school board has also changed this year and is now all Republican and ran on the “anti Superintendent Drake campaign” (Personal communication, 2011). Despite the fact that other superintendents in the area are paid at a higher salary than he is, Superintendent Drake feels that he is looked at so closely, because “I’m a black man making that money” (Personal communication, 2011).

He believes that if he sought a superintendency in a predominately White school district that there is a 50 percent chance that he will not get an interview. In the other 50 percent he feels that he might get an interview because of the well prepared package that he will send in. Superintendent Drake says he would have been more optimistic about his chances prior to the assumption of his current post.

This district leader is certain that the playing field is not level for African American candidates for the superintendency and points to what he feels is the obvious answer. “People believe that African Americans are not qualified” (Personal communication, 2011). He equates this to President Obama’s attacks by those who say that he’s not qualified to be President of the United States. “The man’s got a Harvard Law degree”, stated Superintendent Drake. This gentlemen met the same kind of skepticism from community people and even some members of his staff, and confronted it with the declaration that it was about the color of his skin, and not about qualifications. He also spoke of the inner push that he created for himself to become an instructional leader while he was teaching. He did this to defeat the stigma that male teachers are PE teachers. He therefore, studied the craft of teaching math and English and believes that this push has propelled him to be as strong of an instructional leader as he is. He even spoke of a trip to his first conference as a superintendent where he was met with a greeting of “sir, the principals’ table is across the room. He responded: Why are you telling me that? She said aren’t you an assistant principal, he said no my name is Superintendent Drake. She said, oh Dr. Superintendent Drake, I’m so sorry, I didn’t know (Personal communication, 2011). So, he feels the playing field will never be level because people don’t think African Americans can do the job.

In terms of points for being a good African American male superintendent, Superintendent Drake offered one main point which he repeated three times: “Hire good people” (Personal communication, 2011). This superintendent feels that hiring good people keeps a leader from making bad decisions if he chooses to trust them and not micromanage them. It is also important to this superintendent that he builds strong relationships with the

people that he works with. It is also important to be able to embrace the community and market yourself in the opinion of Superintendent Drake. He also alluded that the fact that he is a pastor has helped in this arena because of opportunities to speak at various church and civic functions. He also used a point taught to him by a former boss: “It’s never ready, aim, fire, but rather aim, ready, fire” (Personal communication, 2011). Being visible is also an important characteristic to have according to Superintendent Drake. It is imperative also according to this leader that African American are on time to events including but not limited to arriving to work. He also posited that superintendents must maintain good financial people, because of the knowledge that mismanagement of finances can get a superintendent fired quickly.

Schools of education can better prepare African American candidates through recruiting more people of color into their programs. He has sought to do that in his county through the creation of assistant principal pools which then yield principals, central office people and more. He has promoted six African Americans in his four year stint in his district into principalships and central office positions in this school district. He feels that his own experiences with college prepared him well because at the HBCU’s they worked on practical applications that addressed demeanor and best practices not found in textbooks.

Superintendent Drake believes that moving through the pipeline is so difficult now because of the political nature of the process. He also believes that sometimes moving away from home gives a leader an opportunity to prove himself because people don’t know about baggage that might be present at home. Maintaining dignity and great character is also important in the opinion of Superintendent Drake.

Most African American superintendents are serving in majority-minority districts because of the trust factor, in the opinion of Superintendent Drake. He believes that most African American male superintendents experience success though wherever they are when given the opportunity. “We’ve got to be better and more educated” stated this leader (Personal communication, 2011).

When faced with the task of overcoming and dealing with racism, Superintendent Drake responded, “I always knew that I had to be better” (Personal communication, 2011). It is imperative in this leader’s thought process that one thinks before he acts. He also sends newsletters out to staff members which always include a personal story about a relevant issue which he believes has helped the community he serves to better understand him. He works hard to learn his people by name, which he believes helps to break down the barriers that exist. He also said that he embraces his faith, which he believes helps him, because people have accepted it. He also believes that some of the hostilities that African American leaders are experiencing now, are a result of the fact that we have an African American President of the United States. Superintendent Drake also stated that African American leaders have to be smart enough to know what the barriers are and recognize that they are there, even if they don’t like them. “We must not allow them to stop us from reaching our goal,” stated Superintendent Drake (Personal communication, 2011).

### **Superintendent Evans**

This African American male school superintendent is the longest tenured of the group in one system. He has been the superintendent of his current district for 8 years. The district that Superintendent Evans leads has approximately 2500 students and is 77 percent African-

American, 18 percent White and 5 percent Native American. This district is considered to be a low-wealth district and is one of the poorest counties in the state.

Superintendent Evans chose to pursue the superintendency due to a desire to continue to have an impact on whatever he's doing. Initially, his goals were limited to the pursuit of the principalship, and then grew into wanting to be a superintendent. This leader also cited himself as always "having a desire to make a difference" (Personal communication, 2011).

In the discussion of the application and interview process for the superintendency, Superintendent Evans stated that the process of interviewing was particularly challenging for him. He noted that he interviewed several times before 'figuring out' what school districts wanted and understanding the process. Making the shift to one of a broader visionary stature took this leader some time to adapt to. He elaborated that it took him about three interviews to get the idea of what school boards were looking for. He also points the fact that after learning that he wasn't articulating the vision like he needed to, he began to do a self-study to become more prepared.

Superintendent Evans did not follow the traditional path to the superintendency. He started out as a teacher assistant and a substitute teacher. He also has worked with day care centers and did some grant writing, which he feels was helpful because of the non public-school experiences that he encountered. He has also been the principal of an alternative school, an in school suspension counselor, and assistant principal and a high school principal. He then served as an assistant superintendent, before becoming a superintendent. He has served in six different school districts and believes that in order for a school leader to succeed, he may have to move around (Personal communication, 2011).

This superintendent firmly believes that barriers to the superintendency are different for African American males than they are for White males. While not as much as it used to be, Superintendent Evans believes that race is still a barrier. He also believes that African Americans stand a better chance of being promoted to the superintendency if they have proven themselves within the district rather than coming from another district. He believes that it is more difficult to become a superintendent in a district where “you are not known” (Personal communication, 2011). Superintendent Evans named some situations where African American superintendents served in White majority districts and noted that they all had served in some capacity within the district before being promoted. “It’s much easier when the people already know and trust the administration, if you’re in that kind of situation, it’s easier” stated Superintendent Evans. He noted that the barriers are tougher for African American male candidates who are applying from the outside. This leader was careful to point out that most of the African American male superintendents in the state are serving in majority-minority districts.

The question of mentoring for Superintendent Evans sparked several references all throughout his career. Former educators like Dr. Bob Bridges (former Wake County Schools Superintendent), Dr. Dudley Flood (former Deputy State Superintendent), Willis McLeod (former superintendent) as well as many of his former superintendents were noted as having a major impact on his development. He named one superintendent who had a wealth of experience as being instrumental in his growth during his tenure. While most of these mentors were informal, he sought these people out because of his goal-driven nature (Personal communication, 2011).

Superintendent Evans expressed no desire to apply or seek a superintendency in a predominately White school district. He looks at his work with majority-minority districts as a calling and sees his mission as one to help the underprivileged. He did however say that an urban district might interest him. He also noted that it is important to him to work with a school district that has challenges and one that wants improvement. “Unless there are challenges, I wouldn’t want to be there”, stated the school district leader (Personal communication, 2011). He has enjoyed the work of helping disadvantaged, at-risk children. Superintendent Evans posited that he would be qualified to apply for these positions, but not interested.

When asked what challenges an African American male candidate would have with applying to a White majority district, Superintendent Evans noted race as being a key barrier. He further noted that it is certainly the most visible barrier. He also believes and has always subscribed to the theory that the African American male has to be better than his White counterpart. This leader stated that he feels that additional obstacles are placed in front of Black candidates to try to limit qualifications. Questions were posed to this leader during his pursuit of his first principalship like: “Has he been trained in the new evaluation process” and so forth (Personal communication, 2011). Superintendent Evans also believes that preparing for superintendencies by working in prerequisite positions is key to validate oneself.

Superintendent Evans clearly indicated that he felt that the playing field is not level for African American candidates when compared to their White counterparts. African Americans have to present themselves as better on paper as well as through the articulation of a vision for the district. Black superintendent candidates also have to convince boards of



education that they can deal with White constituents according to Superintendent E.

Whereas the White candidates pursuit does not emphasize the opposite.

In the tips for aspiring African American superintendents portion of the interview, Superintendent Evans makes the following points:

- 1) You have to over prepare.
- 2) Be prepared to deal with race. While it's not as prevalent as in the past, it's still there.
- 3) Develop a plan for how you'll get to the superintendency. This includes preparation for interviews, and gaining prerequisite experiences (Personal communication, 2011).

When asked about the university role in better preparing minority candidates for the superintendency. Superintendent Evans alluded to the fact that he felt that schools needed to do a better job of preparing everyone for the superintendency. Superintendent Evans also mentioned a group that was helpful to him, named MAEP from the late 1980's which was designed by practicing African American administrators that helped prepare young African American educators for school leadership positions. This leader said that he benefited greatly from having the opportunity to participate in this program. This district leader feels that universities are not doing much more than giving the basics of knowledge in their programs and are not preparing candidates much for the superintendency.

In his own preparation, he felt that his doctoral school did a better job of preparing him for the superintendency because at that time, there was a push to get more candidates in the pipeline. He feels that universities need to develop more programs that give exposure to things like dealing with boards of education, working with county commissioners, and other

components that are vital to the success of a school superintendent. He also said that it would be helpful to get insight on how to “manage the organization” (personal communication, 2011). In other words, Superintendent Evans felt that these experiences would have to come through some form of field based internship in which there was an opportunity to shadow a superintendent. This, in Superintendent Evans’ opinion would take a shifting of the curriculum in EdD programs, and he said he wasn’t sure if universities could afford to change their academic focus. The very best preparation in this leader’s viewpoint would be if a candidate could spend about one year working directly with a superintendent who served as a mentor. This would give a realistic look, in the opinion of Superintendent Evans into the daily operations of a superintendent, thus increasing the candidate’s knowledge base (Personal communication, 2011).

When asked how school districts could aid school leaders in moving through the pipeline towards the superintendency, Superintendent Evans went back to reflect to his youth and dealing with segregation. He used this to parallel the need for today’s aspiring leaders to be careful to ensure that they understood the need to address concerns that people might have for a minority candidate. This is necessary because Superintendent Evans believes that there are still people who assume that African Americans are somehow not as intelligent as Whites. So, this requires the Black leader to have to be prepared to address that. “You’ve got to be damn good at what you do”, stated Superintendent Evans (Personal communication, 2011). He also believes that school districts have to prepare aspiring leaderships by providing opportunities internally and partnering with universities where possible. He named two universities that his school district is currently working with to grow leaders for positions

in the central office which include, but are not limited to the superintendency. He also felt that it is his duty to help prepare candidates for the superintendency in his district as they become interested.

Superintendent Evans believes that most African American male superintendents are serving in majority-minority districts because 1) the environment and selection process may be more level or fair, because they are not dealing with people who have preconceived notions about the African American candidate. Also, this leader pointed out that majority-minority districts also usually have boards of education that are predominately African American which lends itself to a situation where the black candidate is probably trusted more. 2) Superintendent Evans also believes that districts that are minority-minority are also more likely to select a black superintendent because they believe that these leaders might be able to better understand the challenges of the African American student. He further illustrated that boards of education also want the district to improve during their term of service, which factors into the selection of the superintendent.

When posed the question about surpassing the barriers that were faced, Superintendent Evans pointed to the fact that he sees an advantage for himself in the fact that he has worked many different jobs which prepared him in a multiplicity of ways for the job. He mentioned school jobs, ranging from teacher assistant, to testing coordinator, to assistant principal, working in the central office in several capacities, working with food services, worked with building construction supervision for the district, amongst other things. He also believes that much of his success lies within his planning a course of action towards the superintendency. In his own path to the superintendency, this leader sought opportunities to

work in larger districts to gain those experiences as well as working under an experienced superintendent to gain exposure to the position. Superintendent Evans also credits his own seeking of mentors to help guide him through his career as instrumental to his success. This leader has also taken a great deal of time and effort to prepare for the application and interview process which he feels helped propel him to the superintendency after several tries.

### **Superintendent Frink**

This district wide leader is responsible for 2300 plus students in a district that has four elementary schools, one middle school, an alternative school and two high schools. There is constant conversation going on in this district about the need to close one of the high schools because of dwindling enrollment in the district. The district is amongst the poorest in the state and is heavily African-American and rural. Superintendent Frink is in his third year leading this district which is 85 percent African American.

This superintendent saw the opportunity to lead this school district as one in which he could “give back and make a difference” (Personal communication, 2011). Superintendent Frink grew up in the school district that neighbors the district in which he is currently serving as superintendent. He says he also felt that the region of the state in which he currently serves as superintendent “never got it’s fair shake”. Therefore, he chose to apply for the superintendency there, because he felt that he could make a difference. This leader chose to leave a larger more prominent district where he had achieved success to return to an area near his home to try to make a difference. In a visionary state of mind, Superintendent Frink saw this opportunity to bring fresh eyes to a situation, “not knowing anybody, not owing

anybody” (Personal Communication, 2011). He also said he wanted to hire quality personnel in an attempt to raise the standards for the benefit of the children of his school district.

Superintendent Frink did not experience any major challenges in the application and interview process for his superintendency. He did however, mention the natural anxiety that goes along with wondering what questions would be asked even with knowing that he interviews well.

This leader varied from the traditional path to the superintendency somewhat. He was a teacher, assistant principal, and principal. He then went into the role of Executive Director, before assuming the superintendency.

When posed the question regarding whether barriers are different for African-American males than they are for white males and females, Superintendent Frink responded, “I don’t know” (Personal Communication, 2011). He elaborated that there must be something there because there are 100-plus white superintendents as opposed to a small amount of African-American superintendents in the state. He felt that in order to truly assess whether or not there were barriers, one would have to ascertain the figures as to how many African-Americans were qualified and applying for superintendencies. He posited that “if Barack Obama can become president, I can become a superintendent anywhere” (Personal Communication, 2011).

While Superintendent Frink did not have a formal mentor in his path to the superintendency, he comes from a family of successful educators. His father was a veteran, long serving principal. His older brother was a principal who became a superintendent and

has served as an informal mentor as well. Both, according to Superintendent Frink, still continue to serve in those roles for him.

When faced with the question as to whether or not he would pursue a superintendency in a predominately white school district, Superintendent Frink quickly stated that he would. He went on further to state that he would seek a superintendency anywhere, and would not allow his race to deter him from doing so. He stated that he would look at the challenges and make his decision to pursue the superintendency based on that rather than racial makeup. He also does not feel that his race limits him at all in the pursuit of a superintendency.

When asked about whether or not the playing field is level for African American male superintendents, Superintendent Frink felt that question was better suited for board members, but went on to say that the imbalance of people in the positions might indicate that the playing field is not level. “More African Americans are qualified to be superintendent than the 12 or 13 of us that are holding positions now, that’s for sure”, said Superintendent Frink (Personal communication, 2011). He spoke of a desire for school districts to be beyond the process of not selecting candidates based on the color of their skin. He went on to relate this to sports and talked about parallels between superintendencies and head coaching positions in the NFL. He spoke of the success rates of people like Mike Tomlin and Tony Dungy who both are super bowl champions as head coaches, because they were given a chance.

In terms of the best tips book, Superintendent Frink posited the following points: 1) Have thick skin. 2) Separate family from business. 3) Doing what’s right by kids. He warned that people are constantly looking at today’s superintendent wondering who you’re

looking out for, therefore increasing the need to “work right down the middle” (Personal communication, 2011).

Superintendent Frink feels that schools of higher learning can better prepare students by providing more hands on learning. He felt that he learned more about his job working on his masters during the conversations that practicing school administrators in his class had. These sessions, in his opinion were helpful because they dealt with real life situations. He also felt that having professors who were either practicing or former superintendents was helpful. Additionally, Superintendent Frink said that although school districts of today couldn't afford to do so, a dream would be a situation where universities could set up six month opportunities for aspiring superintendents to shadow practicing superintendents. He felt that this would have been really helpful in minimizing some of the transitional shocks of the first time on the job as a superintendent (Personal communication, 2011). He went on to say that the pressure of a superintendency equals the pressure of a principal times 100.

School districts need to do a better job with creating and maintaining succession plans according to Superintendent Frink. “We think we're going to be in these roles forever, and don't really expose people to the jobs, to get where they need to be”, stated the district leader (Personal communication, 2011). When Superintendent Frink was an assistant principal he states that he was exposed to the totality of the job by his principal in addition to the inherent tasks of the position.

When posed the question of why African Americans are serving in predominately Black districts primarily as superintendents, Superintendent Frink responded by recanting that not only was that true, but that in North Carolina most of them were in the same region

of the state. This region is highly African-American, rural and poor. Moreover, he said that maybe boards of education assume that African Americans can relate better to African American students than European American leaders can. He also said that boards of education may feel more comfortable in general if they're predominately African American, with an African American leader.

When assessing how he surpassed the barriers that he faced, he cites his preparedness as the major factor contributing to his success. "There's no excuse to learn as much as you can about a district today, because there's so much on line" (Personal communication, 2011). He stated that in his own pursuit of this superintendency, he learned as much as he could about the county, formally and informally. He also believes that being from the area may have helped him obtain the position, but it has also hurt along the way, because of people expecting special treatment at times.

### **Superintendent Gaddy**

This African American male leads a small predominately black school district that has around 1000 students housed in three schools. There is one school at each major level. The district also has an early college high school which is a joint partnership between the school district and a community college. This district is 98 % African American. The district also has 92% of its' students who are currently receiving free or reduced lunch. The county is also one of the poorest in the state, much like that of Superintendent Frink. This leader comes from a family of educators as well and his father was a high school principal, much like Superintendent Frink's. Superintendent Gaddy's father encouraged him to go further in his pursuit of the educational arena than he did.



When posed the question of the challenges of the interview and application process for the superintendency, this district leader pointed to the task of having to convince the board that someone was young (36 years old) could do the job. He saw that as an internal challenge.

Superintendent Gaddy's career path was a bit different than the traditional superintendent's path in that he was never a teacher. He was a guidance counselor who became an assistant principal, then principal, then a director, then assistant superintendent and then into the superintendency.

In addressing the question of the barriers as they relate to African American candidates, Superintendent Gaddy first of all acknowledged that barriers must be there as evidenced in the numbers of there being "nine or ten out of 115" (Personal communication, 2011). He was not comfortable in stating what those barriers were because he has not applied for any superintendencies that were not in predominately black school districts.

Superintendent Gaddy did have mentors to help him through each of the different steps of school leadership. He felt that this is a necessary step for school leadership. He mentioned the need to have a network of people that one can turn to.

Superintendent Gaddy would be willing to pursue a superintendency in a predominately white school district and cited the desire to not stigmatize himself as one of the reasons. He went on to state that if the right position presented itself, he would apply for the superintendency regardless of the demographic makeup. More important than demographics, Superintendent Gaddy felt that applying for school districts had to be based on whether or not it was a good career move and after an assessment of the people that the

successful candidate would be working with. This leader felt that if he was limited in the pursuit of a superintendency it would only be because of race and not ability.

When faced with the question of the level playing field for African American candidates, this school district leader pointed to the disparity in the numbers of African American superintendents as being an obvious ‘no’ to the question of equitability. He was careful to note though, that there may not be as many qualified African Americans for the superintendency as there are white candidates but felt that there were more than the handful that are currently serving.

When we discussed the best tips question, Superintendent Gaddy stated that being prepared was an essential element. His definition of being prepared includes having the terminal degree. He felt that candidates need to think of “doctorate preferred” as “doctorate required” to be given the best chance of obtaining the position. “The notion of doctorate preferred really doesn’t apply to us,” stated Superintendent Gaddy (Personal communication, 2011). Administrative experiences of varying degrees are also important in the eyes of this superintendent. He also felt that it is important to keep up with the current trends in education, which includes being abreast of the latest technology according to this leader (Personal communication, 2011).

Superintendent Gaddy feels that university programs need to do a better job of recruiting minority candidates into their programs. He feels that this can be done through formulating stronger relationships between universities and school districts, in efforts to recruit more candidates. In terms of his own preparation, Superintendent Gaddy would like to have seen more relative work with the budget in his studies. In finance classes, he talked

about the content being there, but feels that programs would serve students better by allowing them opportunities to actually prepare a budget.

People getting opportunities to advance through the pipeline, according to this leader, has a lot to do with the superintendent in the district in which they serve. These leaders have to be willing to give up and coming school district aspirants an opportunity to learn which often doesn't happen. He felt that aspirants are helped by leaders of both races, and hindered by leaders of both races.

Superintendent Gaddy believes that most African American superintendents are serving in majority-minority districts because the boards in those districts are predominately black and have more comfort with African Americans as their school district leaders. He also felt that these boards usually feel like that black superintendents can relate to their constituents better.

In overcoming racial barriers, Superintendent Gaddy said that you have to go into the position "with blinders on" (Personal communication, 2011). He posited that the African American superintendent must prove his ability to lead by showing what he can do, through dialogue and intellect.

The researcher was unable to secure interviews from two of the current African American male superintendents. One superintendent required the researcher to clear a number of hurdles through an application process only to not be available in the end. The other superintendent was never reached despite several e-mails and phone calls to the office, in addition to postal mail requests.

## **Summary**

Chapter Four of this case study addressed the findings which resulted from the research conducted. The analysis and findings were focused on examining the barriers within the pursuit and maintaining of the superintendent's position as it specifically relates to the African American male.. The superintendent's background characteristics, professional expertise and training, LEA demographic information, and superintendent's personal interviews were examined and analyzed. Chapter Five will provide a summary of the study; conclusions gathered from the interviews and recommendations for future research and superintendent preparation.

## **CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Summary and Conclusions**

In seeking to find an answer as to whether barriers exist for African American males who seek to obtain and maintain a public school superintendency, the answer is a resounding, ‘yes’. However, most of the participants indicated that they felt that the climate was indeed becoming more accepting of African American males in district wide leadership positions. The participants who were nearing the end of their careers also took care to emphasize that the climate has changed significantly over the last few years.

The majority of the participants in the study pursued the superintendency because they thought they could make a difference in a larger manner in that role. Two of the seven superintendents who were interviewed were promoted from an Assistant Superintendent’s position by working hard and being in the right place at the right time.

While most of the participants indicated that the application process was not difficult to navigate, all of them indicated that the level of preparedness needed to be successful must exceed other candidates. One superintendent even stated that he had to interview several times to become ‘comfortable’ with the process. Superintendent Baker; however, who is in his third superintendency, indicated that “once you’re successful with one, the others are easier to obtain” (Personal communication, 2011). One of the younger participants who leads a small majority-minority district emphasized the fact that today’s superintendent candidates don’t have an excuse because information is so readily available on the internet.

Three of the seven superintendents followed the traditional path to the superintendency. The other four varied in some fashion from the norm, but all were

educators of some type prior to pursuing the superintendency. Five of the seven have doctorate degrees.

Without exception, all of the school district leaders interviewed noted that the barriers to the superintendency were not only present but significantly more challenging for African Americans to obtain and retain the position. One in particular indicated that his district was ‘giving him a hard time’ despite academic growth in the district that is unprecedented. This leader was certain that this was because of race. Others talked about the additional pressures of having innovative ideas accepted because of racial ramifications.

While none of our superintendents is currently involved in a formal mentoring program, all of them indicated at some level that they were mentored informally. Several of the forefathers of educational leadership were mentioned as informal mentors. These leaders such as Dr. Bob Bridges (former Wake County Superintendent), Dr. Dudley Flood (former Deputy State Superintendent), and Dr. Bill McNeal (former Wake County Superintendent) are all noted as being instrumental in many of these practicing superintendents’ success. Many of the veteran superintendents also spoke of mentoring other African Americans who are aspiring to be superintendents, and many of them offered help to me.

Most of the superintendents interviewed would be willing to interview for school systems that were predominately White if a position became available. Most talked more about the ‘fit’ of the superintendency as being more important than the demographic makeup. However, only three of the seven are currently serving in majority White school districts and all of them are first time African American superintendents in their respective districts.

While all of the superintendents indicated that they thought race could limit their ability to receive a superintendency in a majority White district, most felt that they could overcome this issue by being more prepared than their White counterparts. Only one superintendent indicated that he had no desire to pursue a superintendency in a majority White district because he preferred the majority-minority district and its challenges.

None of the districts felt that the playing field is level for African American candidates pursuing the superintendency, and all offered that being better prepared is the only remedy to this problem. Others stated that the selection of African Americans to superintendencies is often based on a level of comfort within the members of the boards of education.

Several points were emphasized in the tips portion of the interview. Here are the ones that were emphasized most often:

1. Being prepared always for whatever presents itself in the interview and once you've assumed the superintendency.
2. Having thick skin. Superintendents of color must have the ability to realize that often the criticism of the programs that are being implemented are often not about the program but the person themselves.
3. Superintendents must be willing to move in order to obtain the job. Most superintendencies will not become available where one lives.

Many of these leaders who were interviewed talked about the need for colleges and universities to provide more hands-on experiences for aspiring administrators. Most stated that while theory is important, schools of education must continue to provide opportunities

for real life experiences wherever possible. While most of them felt that their programs did a decent job of preparing them in terms of pedagogy, most felt that programs could have been enhanced through the furtherance of simulated examples of leadership positions.

The majority of the participants in this study indicated that part of increasing the pipeline of African American leaders rested on their shoulders. These leaders felt that it was their responsibility to create programs within their district to promote from within. Many of these leaders have existing programs which prepare leaders to move up through the ranks of educational administration.

The question of why African American male superintendents are serving mostly in majority-minority school districts raised interesting similarities. Most of the leaders pointed out that this fact has mostly to do with the comfort of the board of education. Most believe that majority-minority boards have a greater comfort level with the selection of a black superintendent than majority White boards would.

The most consistent way that our leaders in this study have addressed the barriers they've faced has been through preparation. The variation that exists is in what the preparation is. Most however, are convinced about the fact that preparation equals the possession of the terminal degree. The need to be able to answer any question presented to you was also an often emphasized part of preparation. Most of the leaders also seemed to have overcome barriers through the persistent pursuit of the superintendency.

## **Discussion**

In an effort to examine this issue of perceived racism with relationship to Critical Race to respond to the second research question, I think it's important first of all that the



question be restated: Within the context of Critical Race Theory, how does perceived racism influence African American males' decisions to pursue the superintendency and, later, their experiences as superintendents?

Page 10 of the study points to Delgado and Stefancic's assertion that Critical Race Theory activists and scholars believed that the gains obtained during the civil rights era were actually being reversed during the 'blending of America'. (p.2) This could very easily be ascertained as being consistent with the fact that the numbers of African American male superintendents during this study in the state of North Carolina has decreased from 11 to 8. Moreover of the two African American female superintendents that were serving in the state at the beginning of the study, only one will remain by the completion of this body of work as one has submitted her request for retirement.

As I look at the three major tenets of Critical Race Theory, all of them were reiterated throughout the findings in the interviews conducted. When looking at the concept of ordinariness which states that racism is expected and prevalent in American culture, statements presented by Superintendent Adams such as "the vote probably would have been 7-0, instead of 5-2 had I been white" (Personal communication, 2011), are examples of that. This superintendent also took care to talk about the belief that many people have about people of color being with people of color. Superintendent Baker even talked about the backward plight of the African American race and it's consistence with the rise of the Tea Party. This leader also emphasized the fact that some candidates never get a chance because of skin color, no matter how prepared they are.

Superintendent Combs spoke of the need to change the mindset of boards of education about black people as stated on page 52 of the research. There is a notion that American society has to be continuously convinced that African Americans can be effective leaders. This leader optimistically hopes that time will begin to fix this issue because of the “browning of America” (Personal communication, 2011). Superintendent Drake, who was in the midst of a very racially charged battle at the time of the interview, talked very candidly about the successes that he was having while in the superintendency and the fact that some of them were overlooked because of his skin color. Moreover, it is ‘ordinary’ by definition of Critical Race Theory to expect that people according to the perceptions of Superintendent Drake, would have a problem with paying him a competitive salary because, “I’m a black man making that money” (Personal communication, 2011).

Superintendent Gaddy looked at the application process as being more challenging for African Americans because of educational requirements. His perceived view of a racial inequity was expressed in the notion that “doctorate preferred really means doctorate required” (Personal communication, 2011). Although Superintendents Adams and Baker do not possess doctorate degrees, they are both seasoned veterans and in the case of Superintendent Baker, he had proven himself in his district and was in the right place at the right time. But in most instances, the sentiment of the group is that African American males in particular, must possess a doctorate degree in order to be considered for a superintendency. I was even told by superintendents Combs and Evans that if I was doing the right thing if I ever wanted to be taken seriously. If Gloria Ladson-Billings’ assertion is correct as stated on page 14 of this research and American racism is a realization of the American unconscious,

then these leaders are accurate in their perception that African American candidates have to be better prepared educationally, as well as with research and vision in order to be successful in the obtaining and retention of the superintendency.

Several of the participants in the study pointed to President Obama and the additional attacks that he's received as president. Many would assert, perceived that if all else were the same; Harvard Law graduate, eloquent speaker, family man, state and US senator, overwhelming favorite amongst party to win the election in 2008, etc., and he were White, that the US would be more accepting of the things that he's tried to accomplish. Many of the participants in the study likened the experiences of the president to their own. However superintendents like Superintendent Evans, who is the youngest of the group pointed to the fact that because Barack Obama has been elected president, he sees hope for the future.

Critical Race Theory's concept of ordinariness does state that racism is ordinary and therefore difficult to change. Thus, while one can argue as to whether strides have been made, and as to whether racism is perceived or real, the fact remains that until the lens is unchanged because of one's skin color, racism will continue to exist in the minds of some Americans.

Looking at the second tenet of Critical Race Theory and the concept of interest convergence which refers to the fact that promotions are given to Blacks only when the promotions advance the interests of Whites is one that is a bit more evasive to discover in the findings. Very little proof can be presented as to why promotions would be given to African Americans especially as it relates to advancing the interests of Whites. This concept would surely be one of pure perception rather than factually based.

The tenet of social construction which ties the concept of racism to an invention of society to classify people might be evident if one looks at the numbers of superintendents in the state of North Carolina. There are 115 school districts which currently are led by superintendents. At the completion of this study only 9 will have African American leadership. Critical Race Theory constantly points out throughout readings in the literature that it is based on the lived experience of racism. Therefore one might ascertain that the dwindling numbers of practicing superintendents is a direct reflection on the continuance of the perception of the existence of racism.

In keeping with the thought process that racism can be described as a perceived racism by those who are on the receiving end without proof, Critical Race Theory while maybe just a theory has many points about it which can be explained in the findings. Time and time again, we see evidences that the perception of our participants is that they were treated differently either in the process of application and/or during the superintendency itself because of the color of their skin. There is also hesitance amongst some of the members of the group to dismiss the fact that racism still exists in the application process, the pipeline of applicants and the recruiting of Black educators throughout the entire education system. Most of the participants have also expressed a renewed commitment to contribute to continuing to work to change the current plight of African Americans in the field of education. It is this researchers hope that many of them will serve as mentors, and leaders of programs that will continue to develop African American educators. I hope also that universities will seek these superintendents to teach courses on their campuses, and help them recruit leaders into their programs to become more competitive in the process.

As for the whole notion as to whether racism truly exists, or whether it is simply a perception, this study will depend upon current writers and their attempt to examine such. Mark Peffley and Jon Hurwitz write in their book, *Justice in America: The Separate Realities of Blacks and Whites*

Racially polarized evaluations of the criminal justice system are based, at least in part, on the radically different experiences of Blacks and Whites with police and the courts-experiences that can either be personal or vicarious...that make personal experiences with discriminatory treatment more likely and that lead people, especially Blacks, to generalize such personal incidents to perceptions of discrimination in the broader environment” (Peffley & Hurwitz, 2010, p.29).

Linda Hite of Indiana University –Purdue describes in her (2005) article for *Women in Management Review* entitled *Perceptions of racism and illusions of equity* that today’s racism has somehow been diminished:

“While blatant racism has not been eradicated, it has diminished in many segments of society, often replaced by a more subtle form-aversive racism.....often found in White individuals who possess strong egalitarian values and who believe that they are nonprejudiced” (p.213).

Since perception is based on one’s belief system, it is reasonable to believe that the concept of racism and its’ reality or intensity varies from person to person, and situation to situation. Therefore, is also reasonable to believe that the more closely one’s life is linked with racially charged periods in time, such as the initial integration of public schools, the civil rights movement and so forth, the more likely one’s ‘perceptions’ of racism would appear more

realistic to them than those of us born after those times. As Americans hope should be maintained that Superintendent Combs is correct in his assessment that “time will take care of that” in his reference to racism (Personal communication, 2011)

I believe that this study relates to studies like Dr. Donnell Gregory’s and Dr. Jerry L. Jackson’s because of the comparative nature of the study of African American male superintendents. However, this study deals with superintendents in the state of North Carolina only, and these leaders all happen to lead rural districts. The 2006 University of Cincinnati study of Dr. Donnell Gregory provided a mixture of African American male superintendents in rural and urban districts. However, many of the findings in Dr. Gregory’s study are similar to those found in this one. Dr. Jerry L. Jackson’s 2002 Hofstra University study, which was done in the state of New York was similar in the type of districts studied, but varied somewhat because of the fact that New York is in the northeast where there were more superintendents available for the research (Gregory, 2006; Jackson, 2002). This researcher hopes that this body of work will also be used to formulate some of the studies that are outlined in the recommendations for practice.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Whether one is examining the public schools of North Carolina as a casual observer or as I do as a 14 year daily participant in the process, one thing is for certain: there is a lack of abundance of African American male educators in our schools. A closer examination would point out that in faculty and administrative positions, the numbers are even smaller. In Harnett County Schools, where I received my principalship in 2008, I was the only African American male principal in the entire 27 school district. Moreover, there were no African

American principals above elementary school prior to my arrival. Therefore, one of the first recommendations is that there must be:

***Active recruitment of African Americans into the profession and ultimately into school leadership roles.*** I believe that this responsibility falls on school leaders, colleges and universities and the community at large. As educators, we must encourage people that we see with potential to pursue higher heights in the field. I am working to complete this program as we speak because I was encouraged to pursue the doctorate by an African American male educator.

Once the recruiting has been done and established, there must be a mentoring program established for African American male school personnel. As indicated throughout the participants' interviews, many of them attribute their success to being mentored by others. Many of them also indicated that they had to seek out mentors on their own. The state of North Carolina has many people who would serve as great mentors. These people include the aforementioned trailblazers like Dr. Flood, Dr. McNeal, Dr. Bridges, etc., but there are also great leaders in this study. Great leaders who would make fabulous mentors are also in our schools and central offices. With an organized mentoring effort, the quality and quantity of African American superintendent candidates would surely increase. This program would have to be led and organized by a veteran African American male superintendent either practicing or retired. The current superintendents and their cabinets must continue to identify strong candidates that they will in turn encourage to enter the pipeline and support them through the process of doing so.

*The story must continue to be told.* As an aspiring African American male superintendent, I was inspired through the process of working on this body of work. But, in 14 years of being in the state, in four different school districts, had it not been for this dissertation, I would not have known about the success of these very capable leaders. These gentlemen and their stories of pursuit of the superintendency, the success of the superintendency, the challenges of the superintendency, and all else that encompasses it must continue to be shared. Through that, those of us who've not achieved the superintendency but have interest would continue to strive to do so. Most successful ethnic groups are productive through networking and sharing of prominence. The African American community needs to share successes more. In the book, *Human Diversity in Education: An Integrative Approach*, storytelling is described as: "a time-honored way of teaching because it creates scenes that we can imagine in our minds, that we can look at somewhat objectively, and that we can identify and learn from. ... And at still another level, they may create meaning in people's lives by identifying unnamed feelings and experiences for those who read or hear them" (Cushner, McClelland, Safford, 1992, p.3).

In terms of universities and their role in increasing the number of African American males in the pipeline, there should be emphasis on the recruitment of faculty members whether adjunct or full-time, who are African American. Universities can also help by recruiting in majority-minority districts more for educators who are 'of leadership quality'. I remember as a new principal sitting in a principals' meeting listening to a colleague state that "I'd hire them, but they're just not out there" (Personal communication, 2004). I responded by asking where he'd looked and the answer was in some of our majority White districts and



universities. There must be emphasis on universities partnering with majority-minority districts, and historically black colleges and universities to recruit candidates into educational leadership positions. This argument is not posited on the premise that people should be recruited simply because of the color of their skin, but with capabilities to do the job.

There must also be an increased sense of desire and responsibility amongst practicing African American leaders to level the playing field. African American leaders who have garnered success in negotiating the barriers should reach back to find more capable leaders to promote into positions of leadership. This can be done through the establishing of mentoring programs, speaking at engagements as well as good old fashioned recruiting. We as African American leaders must seek to afford others the same types of opportunities that we had.

Ultimately the perception of the competence of the African American male must be changed. Too many black students are dropping out of school, ending up in prison, or just underachieving. The responsibility to fix this rests with all of us. Through these efforts, the pipeline will increase in time, because the pool of applicants will increase. This will in turn, create an environment where the African American male can stand a better chance of being successful in today's world.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

As the life of African American male superintendents continues to be studied, a great way to explore more thoroughly the superintendency would be through a comparative study between the African American male superintendent and his white male counterparts. An example of this has been done in South Carolina on a smaller scale in April of 2011. Carlotta Redish and Edward P. Cox wrote an article for an academic leadership journal entitled:

*Leadership Differences Between African-American and White Superintendents in South Carolina.* This study asked questions about approaches such as:

1. How has the racial make-up of your district's schools and communities framed your leadership practices?
2. Are your self-reported LPI survey results consistent with your personal beliefs? Of the leadership practices you employ? Are you surprised by your results?
3. How do you define your leadership practices through the lens of race as a superintendent?
4. Which "personal best" leadership practice would you rank as most important? Why?
5. Which "personal best" leadership practice would you rank as least important?
6. Superintendents are viewed as being visionaries, yet Inspiring A Shared Vision was rated as the least important leadership practice by superintendents in South Carolina. Why do you think this is true?

(Redish, Cox, 2011)

Future research would benefit from the study of other minority groups. Statistics show many of the same challenges are faced by women as those of African American males. The African American female in particular has additional challenges because of sex and ethnicity. There would also be some benefit in a study which would study the cases of African American males across multiple states. This study could look for consistencies from state to state and possibly might yield some different challenges particularly if the study

looked at states from different regions in the United States. A study might also have some merit that compared African American males who graduated from Historically Black Colleges and Universities to those who graduated from traditionally White universities to see if the process of application and obtaining of the superintendency is easier or harder. There would also be room to study those who obtained their doctoral degree through on-line programs as opposed to traditional university programs.

A study of interest might also be one that examined the barriers and challenges faced by leaders in other professions as compared to school superintendents. Examples of these positions would be black CEO's, doctors, university presidents, ministers, and others. The effective study might look to see if the same racial prejudices were present.

### **Additional Research Notes**

During the final defense portion of the research, a suggestion was made to convert the names of the superintendents from lettered names such as 'Superintendent A' to pseudonyms such as Superintendent Adams, etc. Care was taken to ensure that these names in no way reflected the first or last names of the participants as well as links to the school districts in which they serve.

As of the completion of this study, the number of African American male superintendents declined from 11 when this study began to 9 during the research phase of the study, to the current total of eight. Two of the original eleven left for superintendencies in other states. One went to Virginia and the other (who was one of my former supervisors)

went to Alabama. They were both replaced by White superintendents. The third, who is one of the superintendents in the study, was “bought out” of his contract shortly after the completion of the interview.

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## **APPENDICIES**

## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

These questions were taken from the dissertation of Dr. Donnell Gregory and his 2006 study done at the University of Cincinnati. Questions that referenced urban school districts were removed from the list, since North Carolina has only two urban districts, both of which are currently led by White male superintendents. The questions are as follows:

1. What motivated you to pursue the superintendency?
2. What were your major challenges in the application and interview process for your superintendency?
3. The typical career path to the superintendency consists of being a teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. Was your path that way? How was it different?
4. Are the barriers to the superintendency different for African American males versus females? European males?
5. Did you have a mentor or sponsorship to help navigate you through the process at any point of being an administrator?
6. Would you seek superintendency in a suburban White school district if a position that interested you became available? What characteristics of that district would motivate you to seek the position?
7. To what degree do you think that your race limits your ability to seek a superintendency in a predominantly White school district?

8. Do you think that the playing field is level between African American candidates and European American Candidates who aspire to become superintendents? Why or Why not?
9. If you were writing a book entitled, *Best tips to be a great African American superintendent*, what points would you emphasize?
10. How can schools of educational leadership more specifically aid and prepare better minority candidates for the position of school superintendent?
11. What would you have liked to have been different? Could school have prepared you better?
12. How can school districts aid good leaders to move into the "pipeline" for a superintendency position, and to move through the "pipeline" more successfully? Is this process different for minority school leaders?
13. Why are most African American male superintendents serving in minority districts?
14. How did you surpass the barriers that you faced? What strategies did you employ to overcome/deal with racism? (Gregory, 2006, p. 121).



**APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM**

Dr. First, Last Name  
City School District  
Address  
City, State Zip

Date

Dear Superintendent:

My name is William T. Wright, Jr., and I am currently a doctoral candidate at North Carolina State University, in the College of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. My program of study is in Educational Administration and Supervision. My research topic is: **A Study of The African American Male Superintendency in North Carolina: Barriers Within the Position.** This area of research is limited yet important to the understanding of the difficult role of the African American Male Superintendent.

Are you willing to participate in this study? If so, I am asking that you engage in a 50-60 minute one-on-one interview with me. At your convenience, I would like to interview you by telephone or in-person. Reports of the results of these interviews will be included in the dissertation as well as other academic publications.

Please sign and return the consent form in the stamped, self-addressed envelope, which has been enclosed, at your earliest convenience.

Your expertise in this area will provide insight on the rise of African American Male Superintendents as school districts move in a participatory framework towards educational excellence.

**Your confidentiality will be protected to the fullest possible extent.** If there are questions, please contact me at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or by mobile phone at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

I will contact you in a couple of weeks if I have not received your response by mail. Thank you in advance for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

William T. Wright, Jr., MSA

Kenneth H. Brinson, Jnr., PhD Dissertation Chair

## APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

North Carolina State University

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH**

*This consent form is valid February 14, 2011 through February 14, 2012*

Title of Study A Case Study of the African American Male Superintendency in North Carolina: Barriers To and Within the Position

Principal Investigator William T. Wright, Jr. Faculty Sponsor (if applicable) Kenneth H. Brinson, Jnr. PhD

### **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 examine current African American male superintendents in the state of North Carolina. This research will use a case study approach to discover information about their career paths and the barriers they may have faced in their pursuit and retention of superintendency. Results of this study will be included in dissertations and other academic publications.

### **What will happen if you take part in the study?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to agree to allow me to set up an interview with you. This interview will be either in-person or by telephone. I will also ask to tape record the interview with careful attention to the protection of confidentiality. Upon completion of the interview I will use your answers to complete the case study with other African American Male superintendents in North Carolina. The recorded data will be transcribed and the tape recording will be destroyed at the end of the study. You may also be asked to participate in some follow up questions based on your interview questions.

### **Risks**

**I will make every effort to avoid all risks for the subjects being interviewed by using letters to replace names and school districts.**

### **Benefits**

While there is no financial benefit, this researcher hopes that the reader might benefit from the insight given by each of the participants.

**Confidentiality**

The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely in a safe at my home until such time as I am finished with it at which time tape recorded material will be magnetically erased and written material will be shredded and discarded. While your identity will be protected, due to the small number of participants in this research, there is a possibility that you will be identified from quotations used in reports about the research. We cannot guarantee full confidentiality.

**Compensation**

You will not receive anything for participating

**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, William T. Wright, Jr., at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX (XXX) XXX-XXXX (M), (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

**What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box XXXX, NCSU Campus (XXX-XXX-XXXX)

**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** \_\_\_\_\_



North Carolina State University  
Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research  
GUIDELINES FOR A PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

In your narrative, address each of the topics outlined below. Every application for IRB review must contain a proposal narrative, and failure to follow these directions will result in delays in reviewing/processing the protocol.

**A. INTRODUCTION**

1. Briefly describe in lay language the purpose of the proposed research and why it is important.

The purpose of the proposed research is to produce a case study of African American male school superintendents in K-12 Public School Districts in the state of North Carolina. I desire to interview these men to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges they have and still are facing with specific reference to their current position. Hopefully the research will outline a path for African American males to follow in the future for success as superintendents.

2. If student research, indicate whether for a course, thesis, dissertation, or independent research.

This research is being conducted for a doctoral dissertation.

**B. SUBJECT POPULATION**

1. How many subjects will be involved in the research?

There are currently 10 African American male superintendents in North Carolina.

2. Describe how subjects will be recruited. Please provide the IRB with any recruitment materials that will be used.

I propose to send each of the superintendents a letter asking for permission to interview them along with a consent form. I will follow up these letters with phone calls to set up times for the interviews.

3. List specific eligibility requirements for subjects (or describe screening procedures), including those criteria that would exclude otherwise acceptable subjects.

The superintendents must be current full time superintendents at the time of the interview.

4. Explain any sampling procedure that might exclude specific populations.

None noted

5. Disclose any relationship between researcher and subjects - such as, teacher/student; employer/employee.

None noted. I am a high school principal in Harnett County, but my superintendent is a white male.

6. Check any vulnerable populations included in study:

- minors (under age 18) - if so, have you included a line on the consent form for the parent/guardian signature
- fetuses
- pregnant women
- persons with mental, psychiatric or emotional disabilities
- persons with physical disabilities
- economically or educationally disadvantaged
- prisoners
- elderly
- students from a class taught by principal investigator
- other vulnerable population.

7. If any of the above are used, state the necessity for doing so. Please indicate the approximate age range of the minors to be involved.

**C. PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED**

1. In lay language, describe completely all procedures to be followed during the course of the experimentation. Provide sufficient detail so that the Committee is able to assess potential risks to human subjects. In order for the IRB to completely understand the experience of the subjects in your project, please provide a detailed outline of everything subjects will experience as a result of participating in your project. Please be specific and include information on all aspects of the research, through subject recruitment and ending when the subject's role in the project is complete. All descriptions should include the informed consent process, interactions between the subjects and the researcher, and any tasks, tests, etc. that involve subjects. If the project involves more than one group of subjects (e.g. teachers and students, employees and supervisors), please make sure to provide descriptions for each subject group.

First I will send a letter to each of the 10 African American superintendents by mail asking them for permission to interview them. Upon receipt of these letters, I will follow up with a telephone call to them asking for an interview time. I will give the superintendent the option of being interviewed face-to-face or by telephone. I will also ask for permission to record the interview. I will interview the superintendents and keep the tapes locked up in a safe until such time as I am finished with the transcribing of the material. At the end of the time prescribed by my department, I will shred the transcribed documents and magnetically erase the recorded material. I will also seek a background sketch from each candidate to include in the research. I will use numbers instead of names for personal names as well as letters for counties to protect anonymity.

2. How much time will be required of each subject?

The interviews should last 50-60 minutes.

**D. POTENTIAL RISKS**

1. State the potential risks (physical, psychological, financial, social, legal or other) connected with the proposed procedures and explain the steps taken to minimize these risks.

The only risk that I could imagine would be if one of the interviewee's thoughts were to be used against them. However, the use of numbers instead of revealing identities should protect against that.

2. Will there be a request for information that subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive (e.g. private behavior, economic status, sexual issues, religious beliefs, or other matters that if made public might impair their self-esteem or reputation or could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability)?

No these interviews ask questions about career path and challenges in the pursuit and obtaining of the profession.

- a. If yes, please describe and explain the steps taken to minimize these risks.

- b. Could any of the study procedures produce stress or anxiety, or be considered offensive, threatening, or degrading? If yes, please describe why they are important and what arrangements have been made for handling an emotional reaction from the subject.

No.

2. How will data be recorded and stored?

I will take notes as well as with permission record the interviews. Again, I will store the tapes in a safe located in my home and destroy them at the end of the process.

- a. How will identifiers be used in study notes and other materials?

By labeling them according to Numbers 1-10 for people and school districts.

a. How will reports will be written, in aggregate terms, or will individual responses be described?

Numbers will be used in place of names in all study materials as well as reports, and that the letters used to represent counties will not be associated with county names (i.e. I will not use "W" for Wake county), as that would identify participants.

1. If audio or videotaping is done how will the tapes be stored and how/when will the tapes be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

They will be destroyed at the conclusion by magnetically erasing the material and shredding the tapes as appropriate.

2. Is there any deception of the human subjects involved in this study? If yes, please describe why it is necessary and describe the debriefing procedures that have been arranged.

No.

**E. POTENTIAL BENEFITS**

*This does not include any form of compensation for participation.*

1. What, if any, direct benefit is to be gained by the subject? If no direct benefit is expected, but indirect benefit may be expected (knowledge may be gained that could help others), please explain.

None other than perhaps through reading the comments of others, there might be insight gained that might benefit the other participants.

**F. COMPENSATION**

*Please keep in mind that the logistics of providing compensation to your subjects (e.g., if your business office requires names of subjects who received compensation) may compromise anonymity or complicate confidentiality protections. If, while arranging for subject compensation, you must make changes to the anonymity or confidentiality provisions for your research, you must contact the IRB office prior to implementing those changes.*

1. Describe compensation

None.

2. Explain compensation provisions if the subject withdraws prior to completion of the study.

3. If class credit will be given, list the amount and alternative ways to earn the same amount of credit.

**G. COLLABORATORS**

1. If you anticipate that additional investigators (other than those named on Cover Page) may be involved in this research, list them here indicating their institution, department and phone number.

None.

2. Will anyone besides the PI or the research team have access to the data (including completed surveys) from the moment they are collected until they are destroyed.

No.

**H. CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

1. Do you have a significant financial interest or other conflict of interest in the sponsor of this project? No.

- a. How will reports will be written, in aggregate terms, or will individual responses be described?
2. Does your current conflicts of interest management plan include this relationship and is it being properly followed? \_\_\_\_\_

**I. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

1. If a questionnaire, survey or interview instrument is to be used, attach a copy to this proposal.
2. Attach a copy of the informed consent form to this proposal.
3. Please provide any additional materials that may aid the IRB in making its decision.

**J. HUMAN SUBJECT ETHICS TRAINING**

\*Please consider taking the [Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative \(CITI\)](#), a free, comprehensive ethics training program for researchers conducting research with human subjects. Just click on the underlined link.