

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF FEMALE SUPERINTENDENTS:  
LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS IN CONTEXT

by

Lynn Amedy

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Approved:

Dr. Joan L. Curcio, Chairperson

Dr. M. G. Cline

Dr. Jennifer Sughrue

Dr. Robert R. Richards

Dr. Mary Ann Hardebeck

Dr. Steve Parson

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M. Lynn Amedy

Committee Chair: Dr. Joan L. Curcio

Educational Administration

ABSTRACT

Remarkably few females hold the position of superintendent; although, there are capable women in the educational field who are qualified and interested. Researchers proposed many reasons for this disparity including the lack of studies regarding females in the superintendency. This void has made it difficult to determine a clear picture of what leadership behaviors female superintendents employ. Research questions included: (1) What leadership assumptions appear to form the basis for the leadership behaviors of these presently practicing female superintendents? (2) In what ways do those within each district leadership circle respond to these female superintendents when they function as leaders? (3) What political, educational, and demographic contexts frame the leadership behaviors of these female superintendents?

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe through case studies the leadership concepts drawn upon by specific females presently serving in the role of superintendent, the responses of those within the leadership circle regarding these leadership choices, and the situations that drove these superintendents' leadership decisions. Multiple case study design as well as multiple data gathering methods were employed in this study. The leadership choices of female superintendents were investigated in depth through interview, observation, and document analysis. Data was transcribed and coded using Ethnograph software. Common themes and patterns emerged through analysis of statements, situations observed, and interpretation of data collected.

These understandings have implications for the training and preparation of women for the superintendency. The study's findings indicated how these female superintendents applied their skills to leadership situations. These findings provided a baseline understanding of how these women proceeded in a top-level position such as the superintendency. In their own words, these women aided in creating a more comprehensive picture of a practicing female superintendent.

## Dedication

Thanks beyond description belong to my understanding family who have patiently provided me with support and love throughout this process. My husband, Mark, who had the courage to marry a woman swimming in the dissertation process and the strength of character to understand when I became lost in that sea, is truly the lighthouse to my sometimes lost soul that makes safe harbor so wonderful. To my children, Tyler, Megan, and John: “Mom’s back and thank-you for at times raising yourselves. You’ve done a great job.” My sister, Joyce, always had faith that her little sister could be the first. Thanks for the shove, Sis.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	
Dedication .....	ii
Acknowledgments .....	iii
Chapter I Introduction .....	1
Problem Statement .....	3
Purpose of the Study.....	4
Research Questions .....	4
Definition of Terms .....	4
Need for the Study.....	5
Delimitations and Limitations of the Study .....	6
Summary of the Chapters .....	7
Chapter II Literature Review .....	8
Representation of Women in Education.....	8
Leadership and Gender Considerations.....	9
Feminine Leadership Model.....	13
Reaction to Feminine Leadership Model .....	14
Women in the Superintendency .....	16
Chapter III Methodology .....	18
Introduction .....	18
Research Design.....	19
Sample.....	21
Data Collection.....	23
Interviews .....	23
Observations.....	25
Document Collection.....	25
Validity and Reliability .....	26
Data Analysis .....	27
Ethical Considerations.....	28
Summary .....	28
Chapter IV Research Findings.....	29
Introduction .....	29
Research Design.....	30
Case One: The Steel Magnolia.....	30
District Description .....	32
Superintendent's Relationship with the Community and Board .....	33

Key Issues in the Community.....	34
Communication .....	34
Quality Education .....	37
Small Town Atmosphere .....	38
Thumbnail Sketch of the Superintendent .....	39
Critical Leadership Behaviors .....	41
Demonstrates Zestful Energy .....	41
Utilize a Thorough Understanding of the Community.....	45
Multi-modal Communicator.....	48
Case Two: Queen Bee .....	52
District Description .....	52
Key Issues of the Community .....	53
Rapid Growth and Taxes.....	53
Preserving Historical Areas.....	54
Community Security.....	54
Relationship of the Superintendent, the Board, and Community.....	55
Thumbnail Sketch of the Superintendent .....	56
Critical Leadership Behaviors .....	59
Building Connections.....	59
Expectation of Accountability.....	63
Works in Isolation .....	65
Case Three: Battalion Commander .....	68
District Description .....	68
Issues in the Community .....	69
Relationship of the Superintendent, the Board, and Community.....	70
Thumbnail Sketch of the Superintendent .....	72
Critical Leadership Behaviors .....	77
Demonstrates Practical Organizational Skills .....	77
Managing Change.....	79
Lifetime Teaching .....	82
Summary .....	84
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations.....	85
Conclusions .....	85
Research Question 1 .....	85
Research Question 2.....	88
Research Question 3.....	89
Overarching Conclusions .....	90
Relationship of Findings to Literature.....	92
Recommendations for Future Study.....	95
Researcher's Comments .....	95

References .....	98
Appendix A: Letter of Introduction.....	103
Appendix B: Standard ethical Protocol.....	107
Appendix C: Superintendent's Interview Protocol .....	109
Appendix D: Matrix of the Interview Protocol .....	111
Appendix E: Members of Superintendent's Interview Protocol.....	112
Appendix F: Board Member Interview Protocol.....	113
Appendix G: Case Site Codes .....	114
Vitae .....	116

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

#### Introduction

Women are underrepresented in the superintendency of public schools (Shakeshaft, 1989). Although women in education, according to Grady and Wesson (1994), comprise the majority of professional employees and receive the majority of advanced degrees, the superintendency has been elusive for many of them. Shakeshaft (1989) noted that this has been the norm since the creation of the educational hierarchical structure. Because there have been few women in the role of superintendent, until recently studies on the characteristics of those who became superintendents focused necessarily on men. Researchers (Glass, 1992; Grogan, 1994) report that male superintendents have been studied as to demographic make-up, stresses, career paths, personal opinions, leadership traits, relations with the community and school boards, and indicators of success. Only recently has the study of female superintendents as a group become an area of interest to researchers.

The appearance of women in the research on the superintendency surely springs from many sources, among them possibly is the changing theory and practice in the field of educational administration. Grogan (1996) stated that recently questions regarding the efficacy of the hierarchical organizational model have surfaced; the consequences of restructuring, school reform, and the perceived need for a more collaborative and lateral organizational model have had an impact on school boards' decisions to broaden and diversify their pool of potential superintendent candidates (Grogan, 1996). Research (Shakeshaft, 1989) has shown a slight rise in the number of women attaining the superintendency from 1.6 percent in 1928 to 3.0 percent in 1985, and recently Montenegro (1993) stated that the percentage of female superintendents was 7.1.

Research findings from the past twenty years regarding general leadership traits that females exhibit have been divided. While some researchers reported that men and women hold

mostly common leadership traits (Denmark, 1977; Estler, 1987; Haslett, Geis, & Carter, 1992), other researchers (Loden, 1985, Powell, 1988; Shakeshaft, 1989) found that men and women employ different leadership styles based on their personal leadership concept and stereotypical perceptions. Shakeshaft indicated, “women and men approach the job of school administrator differently and, consequently, respond in ways that are often dissimilar ... as a group, women tend to have a different administrative style than do men and that effectiveness for a female may depend on this altered approach” ( p. 190). Some contemporary researchers working in the social sciences (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1993; Grogan, 1996; Helgesen, 1990; Noddings, 1992; Shakeshaft, 1989) report that women display specific gender-based leadership characteristics. In describing the different managerial behaviors of women and men, Helgesen (1990) noted the following differences:

The [managerial] characteristics of the women in the diary studies strongly interrelate and reinforce one another. Their willingness to share information derived from a complex sense of their own identity, which enabled them to keep their careers in perspective. This broad sense of identity in turn encouraged a big picture focus - on the world rather than just the organization- which was strengthened by the women’s participation in activities that had nothing to do with their jobs. (p. 28)

However, Chase (1995) described some females as being “co-opted” by the traditional systems in which they work (p. 183). These females may find traditional methods of leadership to be the most appropriate for the situation because they are expected of them. Other women are observed remaining above that fray, forging ahead inventing their own individual style of leadership. Chase (1995) further noted that leadership style appears to be an area of personal choice directed by values, beliefs, and the workplace environment. Grogan (1996) found that the women in her studies acted in a variety of ways and demonstrated differing responses to an environment of gendered identity. While Grogan indicated that a number of the women she studied utilized alternative approaches, including a collaborative connected approach to leadership within a pronounced ethic of care, she noted that conflicting and controlling discourses often left these women frustrated with their performance. The predominant discourse

in educational administration is very traditional. Grogan (1996) further noted, “A discourse that effectively curtails the full participation of many women and some men, and especially women and men of color, must be disrupted .... Leadership must be released from stereotypical constraints and alternative approaches valued” (p. 192). In addition, Grogan indicated that in order to disrupt this discourse, it will take significant change in the way policy makers at all levels view the role of superintendent with “it’s persistent white male image” (p. 195).

### Problem Statement

Research studies (Cunanan, 1994; Glass, 1992) show that few women compared to men attain the position of the superintendency of public schools, although there are women in the educational field who have been in preparation to advance into the position. The literature offers some insight into why women constitute only a small percentage of the superintendency population including the consequent lack of role models in the upper administrative slots of education. In addition, data concerning the characteristics of gender and its relationship to leadership are only recently available on female educational leaders and these research findings differ regarding the behaviors displayed by women in a leadership role in education. Researchers (Frasher, Frasher, & Hardwick, 1982; Hutton & Gougeon, 1993; Loden, 1985; Mertz & McNeely, 1990) find that women display two identifiable sets of leadership skills in leadership roles, those referred to as “traditional” and those called “feminine” skills. Feminine skills are not those indigenous to women, but stereotypically belong to women as the result of the socialization of children in American society. However, studies have provided no clear findings on which set of behaviors, feminine or traditional, “sitting” female superintendents display. The concepts of leadership that guide the choices of these females presently filling the role of superintendent have not yet been identified in the growing body of recent research inquiring into practicing and aspiring female superintendents. The varying views regarding women’s leadership behaviors, the situations that affect these behaviors and the response of others to these behaviors would suggest that the time is ripe for an exploration of these issues; particularly appropriate at this time is a study conducted through qualitative inquiry from which theory may be proposed.

## The Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the leadership behaviors that selected female superintendents display under the conditions of the superintendency in order to identify and describe, through case study, the leadership assumptions drawn upon by these women, the responses of selected participants within each district's leadership circle to the superintendent's leadership behaviors, and the contexts that frame these superintendent's behaviors.

## Research Questions

Research questions include:

- 1) What leadership assumptions appear to form the basis for the leadership behaviors of these presently practicing female superintendents?
- 2) In what ways do those within each district leadership circle respond to these female superintendents when they function as leaders?
- 3) What political, educational, and demographic contexts frame the leadership behaviors of these female superintendents?

## Definition of Terms

Some of the following terms have been specifically defined by the researcher for the purposes of this study; others are defined as they appear in the literature, and those sources are cited.

Educational context refers to all the educational structures that support and enhance instruction, learning, and training.

Demographic context includes the vital and social statistics associated with a district or specific region.

Discourse defined by Grogan (1996) is the use of sets of commonly shared words, phrases, and symbols to communicate.

Feminine skills are those leadership skills associated with the feminine leadership model described in the literature. These skills are identified by a reliance on emotional as well as rational data, interaction, power-sharing, and enhancement of other people's self worth. These

skills may be demonstrated by either the masculine or feminine gender, but are stereotypically associated with women as the result of the socialization of children in American society (Loden, 1985).

Leadership behaviors include making administrative decisions, anticipating and surviving political conflicts, planning and presenting the budget, managing personnel decisions, and interacting with the school board, peers, teacher's unions, subordinates, key community figures, and the media (Blumberg, 1985).

Political context is the bureaucratic structure that guides governmental decision making in the local and state arena.

Traditional skills are those skills described in the literature as generally associated with male leaders and attributed to successful leadership. These skills are stereotypically associated with male leadership, but they may be displayed by either gender. For example, according to Haslett et al., (1992) being task-oriented is a traditional leadership skill.

Superintendent's leadership circle includes members of the administrative team or selected central office administrators, the immediate support staff, and the members of the Board of Education (Garfinkel, 1987).

### Need for the Study

Women in educational administration, especially the superintendency, are understudied. The majority of research in the past has been based on male perspectives, theories and interpretations (Shakeshaft, 1989). This study of individual female superintendents can provide needed information on what leadership choices are being made by these female superintendents. The in-depth study of the leadership framework employed by specific female superintendents would add to the knowledge base and provide encouragement and possibly a direction to other females aspiring to this position. A rich description of leadership behaviors, the contexts that provided impetus for these behaviors, the rationale for these choices, and the reaction to these choices will provide insight into how these women experience the superintendency. There exists a need to increase our understanding of these women and their experiences in order to better interpret the role of women in leadership positions. According to Grogan (1996), more studies

need to be conducted from a perspective that focuses on our understanding of the meaning of the leadership experiences to the women involved. Progress in representing woman's experiences has been noted by Scherr (Chapman, 1997), but more discussion of non-traditional leadership, especially in a minority voice, needs to occur. The scrutiny of leadership choices of female superintendents may help to create a more accurate image of the current female superintendent in her work role and fill a void in the available studies on the leadership behaviors employed by sitting female superintendents.

#### Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

Delimitations of this study concern the boundary of the problem, the individuals to be studied, and the setting of the study. This study concerns the demonstration of leadership behaviors by certain individual female superintendents in context. It provides detailed descriptions of the situations that trigger leadership responses. In addition, this study considers the perceptions of others within the leadership circle concerning the leadership behaviors of these individual female superintendents.

Limitations of this study include the bias of the researcher, the effect of the observer in the environment on the actions of the subjects, the role of perception and memory to recreate history, and the generalizability of the findings. The researcher is committed to the belief that females employ multiple leadership behaviors framed by a unique work environment. This study should result in rich descriptions of the leadership behaviors currently displayed and described by these individual female superintendents. It is assumed that the participants will offer honest answers and display genuine actions throughout this research study. The presence of the observer may alter normal behavior to a degree; however, triangulated data should minimize the impact of this occurrence. While the findings of this study cannot be generalized to a population, the rich description that results should enable women in similar positions in educational administration to recognize something of themselves in the accounts that follow.

### Summary of Chapters

Chapter two includes a review of the literature regarding traditional and non-traditional leadership behaviors and the role of the female superintendent. Chapter three details the method of research describing the interview format and the observation opportunities as well as the document search. Chapter four reports the study results and chapter five presents conclusions, findings, implications, and suggestions for further research.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

#### Representation of Women in Education

According to Ginn (1989), men dominated the teaching profession from colonial times until the twentieth century. Women gained access to the profession by teaching the younger students in the summer session because these jobs were easy to obtain. However, the salary for all teachers was extremely low and when the terms lengthened and the standards for certification rose, men began to look elsewhere for work. As the demand grew for literate, moral teachers at low wages, women began to monopolize the teaching profession. Women were accepted as teachers because they were thought to work well with children. Even though both genders left the profession at equal rates, women were seen as transient or waiting for marriage. Therefore, women remained segregated in the lower rungs of the teaching professions while men, perceived to be more reliable managers, moved into the supervisory positions. For male administrators, marriage did not conflict with their career.

Ginn (1989) also found sociological and political factors that contributed to the minority representation of women in educational administration. Men were assumed to be supporting a family, while women were assumed to be supporting only themselves. Additionally, economic hardships after World War Two forced great numbers of men to take advantage of the funds available to veterans to enter administrative degree programs. Ginn (1989) noted this phenomenon and its effect: "Male teachers increased markedly during the post-war years, but did not enter the public school classrooms planning to remain there throughout their careers....In the decades of the 50's and 60's career ladders were abundant for men." Conversely, however, during those decades "family demands caused few women to attack the powerful institutional sexism which still persisted" (p. 7).

Ginn (1989) did acknowledge situational and regional instances where women actually outnumbered men in the field of educational administration. For instance, fifty years ago females outnumbered males as principals of elementary schools, but when feminism began its decline in

the late 1920's, so did the number of female administrators. Between 1928 and 1984, the number of female principals steadily dropped from fifty-five to eighteen percent. Cunanan (1994) noted that since 1984 the break through the "glass ceiling" has been difficult for women (p. 1).

Cunanan (1994) offered several explanations for the current lack of female representation in school leadership, including that in the past females have been inadequately prepared for administrative positions. Within educational administration of the past, women were neither recruited nor offered the financial support necessary to allow them graduate experience even though graduate school education had been found to be essential to those women who aspired to the principalship. Finally, in his 1992 study, Glass showed that between 1985 and 1990, the proportion of female educational administration graduates pursuing administrative careers and enrolled in administrative preparatory programs had increased. Likewise, Cunanan (1994) cited statistics that indicated that up to the advanced degree level women finished in numbers higher than men. However, the ratio of females to males decreased at the doctoral level. The researcher concluded that degrees of advancement are more important to women than men wishing to achieve a line position. Yet despite the increase, the numbers of women in the line positions that traditionally lead to the superintendency have not increased proportionately (Glass, 1992).

#### Leadership and Gender Considerations

Leaders establish and transmit organizational standards, represent the organization to both subordinates and external publics, and make key policy and procedural decisions. According to Hardebeck (1997) most superintendents see their role as being an implementor of public policy. They differ in how they accomplish this task, some being facilitators and others developers. Facilitators are enablers and communicators. Developers are those who establish ways for others to accomplish their goals. Given the difficulty of these tasks, some believe (Haslett et al., 1992) leadership is problematic to women. Literature indicates that concerns regarding the leadership abilities of women relate to several major areas. Those areas indicated include: stereotypical beliefs (Haslett et al., 1992); sex role socialization (Gilligan, 1993; Powell, 1988); ownership of real power (Tavris & Wade, 1984); conflict responses (Haslett et al., 1992); values (Loden, 1985); and differences in preferred management styles (Helgesen, 1990; Shakeshaft, 1989).

While attitudes toward women are changing, stereotypes still exist where men and women behave in the same way, but their actions are perceived in different ways. Haslett et al., (1992) found that there are several stereotypes that interfere with women being accepted as leaders. These include the belief that women are less intellectually competent and rational, that women should not have more power or higher status than men, and that there is something inappropriate about women who display self interest instead of working solely for the group's success.

According to Shakeshaft (1989), there is no guarantee that any person's actions will be determined in all situations by their gender. However, she noted that it is a common perception that men and women are different in abilities, interests, and mentality. These gender stereotypes, presented as facts, can be damaging to both genders. Shakeshaft depicted these stereotypes as including negative images of men as being remote, authoritarian, sexist, aggressive, and too focused on procedure. Women's negative images included being too centered on people, emotionally demonstrative, and not assertive enough. Positive images of men included being egalitarian, efficient, and organized. For women, positive images included being relaxed, humorous, able to separate work from social roles, and utilizing an independent work style. Shakeshaft (1989) confirmed that the stereotypically informed message for female leaders is clear: To be female in work situations is to be associated with powerlessness and whether actual or perceived, powerlessness is a disadvantage to work mobility.

Researchers (Gilligan, 1993; Johnson, 1994; Powell, 1988; Tavis & Wade, 1984) have proposed reasons for differences observed in leadership styles of men and women other than those which were related to stereotypical bias. Powell (1988) reported for instance that leadership style differences may be due to sex-role socialization, power, opportunity, and organizational structure. Differences in early socialization experiences of females and males set up assumptions or expectations of behaviors in the workplace. Some researchers (Gilligan, 1993; Johnson, 1994) believe socialization enhances certain behaviors that impact a person's leadership potential or success. For example, while girls have been encouraged to take turns, boys have been socialized to compete and win. Shakeshaft (1989) also described considerable differences in the way men and women reach a decision. She found that female decision makers generally utilize an

inclusive participatory style which comes as a result of socialization.

Real power is the authority to make decisions, institute these decisions, and hand out rewards and punishments. According to researchers Tavis and Wade (1984), managers who have real power are more flexible about roles, share information, and mentor able employees. These authors indicated that females rarely hold real power and thus may have low self-confidence that would impact leadership responses. Kanter (1977) reported that women have been forced by the lack of real power to lead differently than men, using indirect methods of influence because they have limited access to legitimate power. Haslett et al.(1992) noted that understanding and using power is critical to a woman's success in leadership because organizations are dominated by traditional values and characteristics. Therefore, certain characteristics that women are perceived to possess of a communal and expressive nature fulfill the needs of the group but may not be valued in top management.

Haslett et al.(1992) observed that women and men demonstrate different ways of dealing with conflict. For example, while women tend to follow communal goals and strategies, men generally pursue instrumental goals, emphasizing individual interests. Women avoid conflict by minimizing differences and smoothing over problems. Men prefer more direct, competitive strategies while women tend to prefer a collaborative, supportive style.

Powell, from field research done in 1988, wrote that leadership differences exist between the sexes in behavior and responses to others, internal motivation, and subordinate response to managers. In response surveys, males were favored for their responses to poorly performing subordinates and females were favored for their ability to motivate. The most significant differences occurred in the area of personal motivation. Women were socially oriented toward the good of the group, but men were more directed towards personal advancement.

Gender differences in leadership behavior observed in the lab appeared much more obvious than those in field studies. In lab studies (Haslett et al., 1992), gender differences were exemplified by women speaking less and experiencing more frequent interruptions in mixed sex groups. Men were more task-oriented, while women were more socially and emotionally tuned. Women were maintenance oriented under situational pressure and they scored lower than men in

self-confidence; however, men over-estimated their abilities.

Loden (1985) indicated that she believed men and women differ in basic values. A values survey given to college age adults indicated men and women differed significantly in the priority they placed on several basic values. For example, men were motivated by a search for rational truth, practicality, utility of things and ideas, and the desire for power and influence. Women placed a high priority on harmony, form (aesthetic), concern for people (social), spirituality (religions), and interest in beauty and creative expression. They seemed to be motivated by the desire to help and care for others and to be guided by idealism. Gilligan (1993) reported that men viewed work through logic and law; women viewed it through relationships.

Preferred management or leadership behaviors observed in females by Loden (1995) include the need for consensus, consideration of feelings in their work, and the connection of interpersonal relationships and action. Noting the differences in management or leadership behavior between men and women, Shakeshaft (1989) and others (Gilligan, 1993; Helgesen, 1990; and Grogan, 1996) emphasized the unique “environment” of a female managed work place. The unique voice and care-based actions which Gilligan (1993) indicated as typical for females intensifies the different workplace environment.

In research studies (Gilligan, 1993; Haslett, 1992; Loden, 1985; Powell, 1988; Shakeshaft, 1989), differences in the leadership behaviors of men and women were found which may be based on stereotypes, socialization, expectations imposed by society, and organizational structures. Other research (Tavris & Wade, 1984; Kanter, 1977) indicated that women administrators often lack real power which affects their leadership behaviors. Loden (1985) found that a leader’s gender-based actions such as personal response and choice of priority directly impacted the workplace environment. Finally, Shakeshaft (1989) noted that until recently few studies have been done that examine a solely female view of the educational world or their place in this world.

### Feminine Leadership Model

Feminist writing about women in administration began in the 1980's as a response to the sparsity of female representation in top-level administrative positions (Acher, 1995). Feminist writers went on the offensive, and the existence of a female organizational culture was proposed by Shakeshaft (1989). Belenky et al.(1986) and Gilligan (1993) studied the voices of women and their approaches to leadership activities such as decision-making. This use of a feminine lens through which to study leadership behavior has continued to the present. According to Gosetti & Rusch (1995), females as leaders experience a different reality and interpret this reality differently than the traditionally dominant group. The study of these realities has resulted in an attempt at “recentering knowledge in a way that draws on the experiences and scholarship of men and women equally” (p. 16). This body of research has resulted in the concept of a feminine leadership model. While feminist researchers have not claimed that the traits they describe as a part of the feminine leadership model are those demonstrated by women only or by all women in leadership positions, they have observed these traits in women in their studies.

Researchers Loden (1985) and Aburdene & Naisbitt (1992) noted that leaders who employ a feminine leadership model utilize an emotional lens as well as a rational data lens to function in the role of problem solver, decision maker, and manager of relationships. Aburdene & Naisbitt (1992) labeled all leaders who encourage participation, share power and information, and enhance other's self-worth transformational or interactive leaders. These interactive leaders promote enthusiasm and confidence of others about their work by empowering them to act on their own in a risk free environment.

Women who draw on the feminine leadership model prefer being in the center organizationally as in a web and dislike being in a more isolated topdown leadership model. In addition, Helgesen (1990) reported that women have succeeded by utilizing feminine strengths such as supporting, encouraging, teaching, opening communication, soliciting input, and creating a positive, collegial work environment. Aburdene & Naisbitt (1992) indicated that women are interpersonal experts who network well when given the opportunity. Women's socialized roles make them balancing experts who juggle work, family, and recreation.

#### Reaction to the Feminine Leadership Model

In the work setting, the female in a leadership position may encounter gender role expectations and task-oriented behaviors that conflict with one another (Haslett et al., 1992). For instance, if a woman exhibits task-oriented behaviors she is seen as masculine and women who use power in a masculine way get negative reactions. On the other hand, nurturing behaviors are judged by many as unsuitable for management. Paradoxically in gaining power, these women lose feminine identity (McBroom, 1986).

Chase (1995) shed light on this paradoxical behavior, through her construction of the concept of the "co-optation" of women by the traditional systems in which they work. Chase defines co-optation as assuring upward mobility by denying connection to one's gender or social group and describing success and individualism in ways that curb integrated identification. According to Hart (1995) and Isaacson (1998) mentors often play an important part in the development of a leader. In the case of aspiring females, mentors are often males who model traditional behaviors. Chase (1995) indicated that a woman who uses individual solutions to deal with the collective problems of inequality does not pose an obvious challenge to the system. Concurrently, Bell (1995) studied how marginality shapes expressions of gender consciousness among women superintendents, by focusing on defeminization (which she found in all of her interviews with female superintendents). Some of the study women avoided any talk of gender because they wished to be evaluated without gender interference. Bell said that pressure to disaffiliate from other women arises from women's need to prove themselves different from a negative stereotype. She found that there is much resistance from these women to women's

networks which results in isolation and inability to build solidarity with other women ultimately inhibiting collective political action for social change.

Twenty-two years earlier than the studies of Chase (1995) and Bell (1995), Henning and Jardim (1977) provided a profile of top-level women administrators. At that time, they found that women leaders adopted a largely traditional leadership style that continued through at least their middle management or career stabilization period. By 1987, Gabler was still expressing the belief that female superintendents had to look and act tough, masculine and callous in order to gain the respect of students, staff, and community. However, Powell (1988) found that once a point of comfort was reached, female leaders may integrate feminine leadership behaviors into their active leadership concept.

A final perspective is presented in the co-authored studies of Bell and Chase (1995) in which they report that most effective leaders draw on both leadership and task orientations in an integrated fashion without regard to gender, but rather to their environmental context. Their research together did not disclose differently developed style in leadership between men and women. However, they found that gender is one of the contextual factors that shapes leadership practice. When focusing on superintendents they noted that women and men accomplish leadership tasks in much the same way, but women still have to deal with a unique set of difficulties because they are female in a traditionally male position. Having to confront these gender-based difficulties does have an impact on the leadership strategies women choose. Where these choices have to be made, women choose strategies based on the individual situation as it is presented to them at the time. Bell and Chase (1995) in that respect confirm Schmidt's (1992) findings that women may vastly differ from each other in leadership style due to the contexts in which they lead. Grogan's (1996) work supports the reports of Schmidt (1992) and Bell and Chase (1995).

To summarize this section, research exists on several fronts concerning gender and leadership concepts. On one level, a bank of research data of the observational and survey variety indicated that females view the world differently from males causing researchers to structure or define unique feminine leadership concepts. Several researchers (Gilligan, 1993; Helgesen 1990;

Shakeshaft, 1989) isolated and described female techniques of leadership. Reacting to past research that excluded women or to applied theory based on male responses to women, Hutton & Gougeon (1993) noted that women need their own knowledge databases to be considered alongside the more traditional knowledge base, if women are to be factored into the definition of a leader. Finally, the recent research of Bell and Chase (1995) indicated that leadership traits may be reliant on situation and differ little between males and females.

### Women in the Superintendency

Grogan (1996) stated:

It is my firm belief that school districts could benefit greatly from .... alternative approaches to leadership....if the diversity of values, attitudes, and perspectives currently being voiced in the public schools continues to challenge educators, only those leaders who are collaborative and who care deeply about children will be able to respond adequately. (p. 163)

According to Grogan (1994) and Isaacson (1998) women have leadership qualities that are valuable to the superintendency. Female candidates for the superintendency that Grogan studied and those females that Isaacson interviewed displayed strengths in the areas of people skills, reflective practices, and offering alternative perspectives to problem-solving and decision making. These strengths as well as socialized skills, such as care and nurturing, crossover into leadership behaviors which may meet present needs in educational administration. Grogan suggests an on-going enhanced discourse on the superintendency that questions assumptions regarding appropriate educational leadership held to this point.

Other researchers (Garfinkel, 1987; Genzen, 1993; Greenfield, 1994; Shakeshaft, 1988) also found female superintendents hold certain valuable leadership strengths and behaviors in common. In a study of women public school superintendents in Ohio, researchers focused on leadership style. Using the Leadership Practices Inventory-Self, Genzen (1993) determined that female superintendents held a high degree of self assurance and were generally transformational.

In studying leadership strands displayed by female superintendents in Massachusetts, Greenfield (1994) found strands of generative leadership among female superintendents

common. She described a generative leader as one who has evolved from a transformational leader by valuing care and nurturance and seeking to provide a community which fosters these values. Characteristics displayed by generative leaders include: empowerment of others through collaborative efforts, open communication and shared decision-making, and conflict prevention.

Shakeshaft (1989) noted that female superintendents are unique in the way they spend their time, in their daily interactions, in the priorities that guide their actions, in the perceptions of them by others, and in the satisfaction they derive from their work. According to Shakeshaft (1989), female superintendents often devoted a great deal of time to evening preparation, building tours to observe teachers and students, and dialogue with members of the school community on diverse levels. Female superintendents often devoted their unstructured time to curriculum and instruction matters rather than to discussion of politics.

While there have been several studies regarding the contributions females can bring to the superintendency, these contributions may go unnoticed unless there are more women chosen for the available positions. Grogan (1996) detailed several findings in her research on the voices of women aspiring to the superintendency that describes the discourse that affects those females. The current discourse indicates that there has to be a vast amount of traditional credibility in order for a female to be considered for a superintendency. Women in Grogan's study believed that they had to exhibit enough traditional behaviors to keep their gender from being counted against them because nontraditional leadership is viewed as inherently suspicious. However, Grogan suggests that female aspirants to the superintendency in her study are also resisting traditional perspectives about the superintendency and making individual contributions for repositioning the discourse to include alternative approaches to leadership, reformed practices, and emphasis on teaching and learning rather than organizational management.

In summary, social, political, and organizational reasons have kept women underrepresented in the superintendency (Ginn, 1989). In an attempt to explain this disparity some researchers have indicated that there are significant differences in the way males and females lead (Shakeshaft, 1989; Haslett et al., 1992; Loden, 1985). Others (Chase, 1995; Bell&Chase, 1995; Grogan, 1996) see little difference in leadership related to gender except

those differences in behaviors forced by situation. There is strong evidence to suggest that females demonstrate many strengths as superintendents (Grogan, 1996). Research focused on their behaviors, the unique situations that frame their actions and the responses of others to their actions may help bridge the gap between what is and what could be for females in and aspiring to this leadership position.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the leadership behaviors that selected female superintendents display under the conditions of the superintendency in order to identify and describe, through case study, the leadership assumptions drawn upon by these women, the responses of selected participants within each district's leadership circle to the superintendent's leadership behaviors, and the contexts that frame these superintendent's behaviors.

A qualitative, inductive approach with descriptive methods of data collection was utilized to give consideration to the following research questions:

- 1) What leadership assumptions appear to form the basis for the leadership behaviors of these presently practicing female superintendents?
- 2) In what ways do those within each district leadership circle respond to these female superintendents when they function as leaders?
- 3) What political, educational, and demographic contexts frame the leadership behaviors of these female superintendents?

This chapter outlines the overall research design and rationale employed in this study. It includes a discussion of the basic research design, sample selection, data collection and management methods, reliability and validity issues, data analysis strategy, and ethical considerations.

#### Research Design

Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined qualitative research as “ any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (p.17). In addition, the authors indicated that the analysis in this type of research is a qualitative one that involves a “nonmathematical analytic procedure that results in findings derived from data gathered by a variety of means” (p. 18).

Earlier Merriam (1988) had identified some assumptions that undergird qualitative

research. She described these assumptions as follows:

Qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities-that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring. Beliefs rather than facts form the basis of perception. Research is exploratory, inductive, and emphasizes processes rather than ends. In this paradigm, there are no predetermined hypotheses, no treatments, and no restrictions on the end product. One does not manipulate the variables or administer a treatment. What one does is observe, intuit, sense what is occurring in a natural setting-hence the term naturalistic inquiry. (p. 17)

The assumptions that Merriam (1988) indicated undergird qualitative research were considered in this exploratory study. The initial research questions framed the study, which focused on the process of leadership, as well as the impetus and the results of leadership behaviors of particular female superintendents. The context of these leadership actions, as well as the participants' frame of reference while displaying a leadership behavior, was integral to this study.

Qualitative methods of data collection and analysis allowed the researcher to reach an in-depth understanding of the complex factors that influence the leadership behaviors of female superintendents. This research design employed interviews of selected female superintendents and direct observation of leadership behaviors of these superintendents in natural settings. The inclusion of situations and settings in which leadership behaviors of the selected superintendents were displayed provided clues as to the rationale for these behaviors. In addition to interview and observation, this research design included a review of district and local documents as a method of gathering and triangulating data regarding the superintendent's leadership actions. In some cases these documents indicated the perception of these actions by others.

Also considered in this holistic view of these superintendents' leadership processes was a detailed description of the superintendents' districts, administrative tasks, and the composition of the superintendents' leadership circles. Consideration of the specific settings and situations of

these female superintendents aided the researcher in forming an interpretation of the leadership assumptions that frame the superintendents' displayed leadership behaviors.

### Sample

According to Merriam (1988) the needs of qualitative research are best met by nonprobability sampling. Merriam described purposive sampling as "based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most " (p. 48). Miles and Huberman (1994) indicated that a small group of subjects studied in their context make up a purposive sample. In addition, they indicated that initial choices of participants in the research study can lead to unlike or like subjects which helps the researcher further describe the entity.

Fifty-one female superintendents within a hundred and fifty mile radius of the researcher were initially contacted by letter in September, 1998, to introduce the researcher and briefly describe the research project. This letter (Appendix A) included a questionnaire that when returned by mail to the researcher indicated a superintendent's interest in being considered for the study.

This study employed purposive sampling. The overall criteria for sample consideration included: 1) those female superintendents who indicated a willingness to participate on the questionnaire; 2) those available female superintendents whose districts were within a one hundred and fifty mile radius to the researcher; and 3) those female superintendents who had held their present position for at least one year. In order to consider the effect of situation on the behaviors of the superintendents the women considered for the study represented divergent population settings, including rural, suburban and urban areas. The populations that indicated these data categories were those utilized by the American Association of School Administrators in a study of the American Superintendency by Glass (1992). Data categories from 1988 Common Core of Data Public Education Agency Universe maintained by the Department of Education enrollment categories include: Urban (Group A), equal to or greater than 25,000 pupils; Suburban (Group B), 3,000-25,000 pupils; and small city and rural (Group C) 300-3000 pupils. Areas of less than three hundred pupils were assumed by this study to have no one person

functioning entirely as a superintendent and were, therefore, not reported.

Within these categories, except for the category over 25,000 pupils, women were found in number. Glass (1992) noted:

Women superintendents for the most part serve in school districts with populations fewer than 10,000 .... 56.2 percent .... and 33.9 percent serve districts with populations of fewer than 2, 500, compared to 45.8 percent and 20.3 percent, respectively, for male superintendents....17 percent of women superintendents serve districts in which the population exceeds 50,000 . (p.61)

The percentage of females in each data category in the 1992 study indicated that adequate numbers of females would be available for participation within the radius of this study. However, no female superintendent in the districts of over 25,000 students was able to participate. Therefore the researcher utilized areas of over 3000, suburban/rural and suburban/urban as the final two categories.

The first superintendent to be interviewed matched the following criteria:

1) she was enthusiastic regarding the project; and 2) she was from a small town setting. After receiving the superintendent's returned questionnaire indicating her interest in the study, the researcher contacted the superintendent by phone to arrange an introductory meeting during which the initial interview, observations, and site visits were scheduled. The second superintendent chosen for the project fit the following criteria: 1) she was enthusiastic regarding the project; and 2) she was from a suburban area with rural characteristics. Concurrently, a third superintendent was chosen for the study who fit the following criteria: 1) she was enthusiastic about the project; and 2) she was from a suburban area that had characteristics of an urban nature. Again, as with the first superintendent, contact was made by the researcher to arrange an introductory meeting for organizational purposes with this superintendent.

In each of these categories, a reserve superintendent was chosen, contacted to seek agreement to participate in the study if an unforeseen circumstance would render a primary superintendent unable to continue the study. Other superintendents who indicated an interest, but had not met the criteria, were thanked for their interest in the study by letter.

Opportunity to observe and record rich, thick data is not guaranteed by schedule. Proximity to the superintendent, her team, and the school board was integral to this study because it would provide the best opportunity to view the action in the district in rich detail, in a variety of circumstances at various times of the day, night and work week. This ease of access allowed the researcher the advantage of face to face communication which enhances the opportunity to observe nuances in presentation. Further justification for geographic proximity was the provision of opportunity for the researcher to be involved in functions outside the superintendent's formal day which provided sense to some otherwise unexplained leadership behaviors. The researcher's presence in the field in a variety of circumstances enabled her to glean rich data through multiple opportunities that occur at short notice.

#### Data Collection

Data for this study were generated from a variety of sources: interview, observation, and document review. Given the complex environment of a superintendency, the sources for data collection were varied and multidimensional. The approach used here was to be fully descriptive of the behavior of each superintendent in the range of tasks, issues, problems, and decisions during the course of contact by the researcher.

#### Interviews

The interviews with each superintendent were semi-structured person to person conversations (Appendix C). As suggested by McCracken (1988) the interviews were based on the interviewee's responses to general leadership issues such as educational priorities, ethical leadership, personal perceptions, perceptions of others, and organizational goals; and in addition, they were guided by the researcher to the extent that each of the topics of interest were included. Interview questions were crafted to relate to the research questions. A matrix indicating the relationship of the interview topics and sample questions to the research questions is provided in Appendix D. The formal interviews of the superintendents were scheduled during an introductory meeting. At the conclusion of the scheduled interview with the superintendent, exit interviews, interviews with members of their district leadership circle, members of the school board and observations in the field were planned. At this time the researcher also requested at least five

documents of the superintendent's choosing that demonstrated their personal leadership concepts.

McCracken (1988) suggested that the interview format employ prompts or probes which give structure to the interview and allow the participant to use her own voice to relate experiences in an individual fashion. The interview structure applied in this research permitted spontaneous comments; however, where issues of interest were not spontaneously described by the superintendent, the researcher utilized prepared probes which directed the superintendent toward these issues. This structure allowed the interview participants freedom to connect, correct, rephrase for understanding, and digress to related topics.

The interview was piloted with the female chair of the Board of Education of a large district and with a principal who is in a minority of female high school principals in a large county. These women were chosen for the pilot to help identify gender appropriate probes for these interviews. The interviews took slightly over an hour and some minor changes in topic sequence were made in response to the suggestions of those interviewed.

In each interview the sequence of events was similar. Rapport building was followed by: a review of the ethics protocol (Appendix B), a reminder that the interview was taped, the interview, and agreement on future scheduled events, interviews, observations, and document needs.

After the initial interview with the superintendent, other interviews with a member of the superintendent's leadership circle, and a member of the school board were conducted by the researcher. The member of the administrative circle interviewed was of the superintendent's choosing to encourage comfortable, detailed communication. The member of the Board interviewed was on the Board when the superintendent was chosen so that initial impressions of the superintendent would be considered. If no Board member was available from the time of initial panel interview of the superintendent, the backup choice was a Board member who had served longest on the Board. A protocol for these interviews can be found in Appendix E and Appendix F, respectively.

All interviews were taped, allowing the researcher to take notes and guide the subject into areas in more depth or to related areas that appeared a priority to the subject. Immediately after each interview, the researcher reviewed the tape and notes taken during the interview to consider what main themes emerged and what needed to be altered in format or content for the next interview. The researcher kept a reflective journal to focus on learning and adjustments in data gathering. All interviews were transcribed and as themes and categories emerged, they were coded using Ethnograph. Clustering these themes and categories was an on-going process which was repeated by the researcher throughout the data gathering process.

### Observations

Observations of the superintendents began on a schedule determined at the conclusion of the initial interview. During the observations the researcher remained as unobtrusive as possible, taking detailed field notes which described the context of noted leadership behaviors.

Observation opportunities included: a typical day of the superintendent, an administrative team meeting, a school board meeting, and other job related activities as they arose. Leadership functions of interest to the researcher were those of a general nature such as: making administrative decisions, anticipating and surviving political conflicts, managing personnel decisions, formulating the budget, and interacting with the school board, peers, teacher's unions, representative groups, key community figures and the media.

After each observation, the researcher summarized and reflected upon the field notes to find areas of relationship of the interview responses and the research questions in addition to any categories that grouped together. This immediate personal response by the researcher allowed for on-going adjustment.

### Document Collection

During the time of interview and observation, the superintendent was asked to share with the researcher typical documents which demonstrated her personal concept of leadership. Letters and memorandums to the Board, parents, the media, and staff members, mission statements, and policy implementation memorandums, the contents of a speech, an interview with media, feature news articles, and minutes of formal and informal administrative meetings all reflect leadership

behaviors of the superintendent.

### Validity and Reliability

Yin (1989) described the necessity for the creation of case study designs which provide construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability.

Construct validity deals with the use of instruments and measures that accurately operationalize the constructs of interest in a study. Because most instruments and measures are not necessarily as accurate as desired, common strategy is to use multiple measures of the same construct as part of the same study. ( p. 40)

The insurance of dependable results or reliability was described by Merriam (1988) in her reference to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 288) who suggest thinking about dependability or consistency of results when considering reliability. In this case the desired outcome is that readers agree that given the same set of data and circumstances the outcomes described make sense. Techniques used to assure reliability include detailing the investigator's position in the research process, utilizing triangulation in data gathering, and creating an audit trail in detail as it emerged during the data collection period. Other reliability factors involve the description in the first chapter of the researcher's assumptions and the detailed choice of sampling method described in this chapter. A thorough research of relevant literature is also incorporated to ground this study.

Regarding internal validity, Merriam (1988) noted that there are six basic strategies that ensure internal validity. These include triangulation, member checks, long term observation at the research site or repeated observations of the same phenomenon, participatory modes of research, and consideration of researcher bias. This research study includes all of these validity checks. Triangulation results from the use of multiple data collection methods including interview, observation, and document collection, and analysis. Member checks occur through exit interviews. Repeated observations were included in the research design. Participant input and researcher bias were considered in the research design and analysis.

External validity produces results that may be generalized by the reader or user according to Merriam (1988). The reader generalizes as the findings apply to their needs or as they

recognize themselves. To enhance this external validity this study provides rich, thick description so that transferability is possible by the interested reader. It is conceivable that a single magnificently deep case could provide rich enough data for a study to be valid; however, failing this, additional cases could be included. The data indicated the point of saturation. It was the intent of the researcher to continue to observe and to collect data until saturation occurred indicated by a preponderance of non-exclusionary data.

### Data Analysis

The fieldwork stage of the research began September, 1998 and continued through January, 1999. Actual time spent by the researcher at each site varied from three to five days determined by the availability of the superintendent and others to be interviewed. Broken into segments of task, the initial meeting with the superintendent would take fifteen minutes; the interview with the superintendent would take 60 to 90 minutes; and the interviews with the administrative circle member and the board member would take approximately 30 minutes each. Observation of the superintendent in typical activities would be scheduled for a three hour period and the gathering of documents approximately three hours. Finally, the observation of the superintendent in non-office activities and an exit interview would take from two to three hours. The researcher's time at the site was from two to four days depending upon situations of availability and opportunity that the researcher could not control. This study included a collection of data through interview, observation, and analysis of documents. The use of triangulation allowed the researcher to overcome the weaknesses of each data gathering method by a strength of another. Ethnograph, a commercially available software package, was used to manage data collected from interviews, observations, and document analysis of each superintendent. Data was transcribed to Ethnograph, organized, and coded into interpretive categories as it was gathered. In addition, the researcher kept a detailed audit in Ethnograph of personal reactions, notes regarding new learning, connections, contradictions, and deviations from the original research plan. The case notes were numbered by line, coded for intriguing phrases and possible patterns, and marked for later retrieval.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) define open coding as “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (p. 61). Conceptual labels were placed upon happenings in the data gathered and these were then grouped together to form emergent categories.

Initially coding concepts were identified by key words in the margins which were clustered into major categories containing subcategories. The researcher used Ethnograph to designate coding categories and subcategories. The dialogue accompanying the events was also coded. Analytic procedures were uniform regardless of the type of data being reviewed.

Patterns and themes emerged which were related to the display of leadership behaviors, the responses of others to these leadership behaviors, and the context within which the behaviors were displayed. Data appeared in mutually exclusive patterns which were noted in their parameters and for their effect on the other patterns. Related patterns were revealed and reconfigured to form more major sets. Data analysis included a description of events, discussions, examples, relationships, exclusions, unanticipated classes of data, and alternative explanations. Emergent findings connect to past research and point to suggestions for further research.

### Ethical Considerations

General safeguards to the superintendent during the interview included the use of an informed consent form, a discussion of the interview agenda and time frame, and the use of a tape recorder to insure accuracy. A standard ethics protocol was read by the researcher to the superintendent prior to the interview (Appendix B). All agreements made with subjects in this study were kept by the researcher. In addition, the identity of the subjects, any other informants and the districts were held in confidence.

### Summary

This chapter included a description and rationale for the methodology and sample selection process employed in this study. The data gathering process, as well as the data analysis procedures of this study, was described. Also included were a basis for validity and reliability of this study as well as a description of ethical considerations applied in this research.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Research Findings**

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership behaviors that selected female superintendents display under the conditions of the superintendency in order to identify and describe, through case study, the leadership assumptions drawn upon by these women, the responses of selected participants within each district's leadership circle to the superintendent's leadership behavior, and the contexts that frame these superintendent's behaviors.

The women who participated in this study, as the women in Grogan's 1996 study, represented diverse situations and background. They reacted differently to their surroundings and shared openly with the researcher in varying degrees. Great care was taken by the researcher to utilize research understandings as they surfaced to improve the data gathering and interpretation process in an on-going fashion. Literature on the leadership behaviors of women, the socialization of women in society, and the changing status of the female superintendent was used as a framework for this study.

The following research questions guided data collection in the study:

- 1) What leadership assumptions appear to form the basis for the leadership behaviors of these presently practicing female superintendents?
- 2) In what ways do those within each district leadership circle respond to these female superintendents when they function as leaders?
- 3) What political, educational, and demographic contexts frame the leadership behaviors of these female superintendents?

## Research Design

In September, 1998, the researcher sent 51 letters of introduction with a questionnaire enclosed to selected female superintendents. Forty-two questionnaires were returned within three weeks and an additional six questionnaires were returned after follow-up phone calls to total 48 written responses ultimately returned. Three of the original letters generated no response even after repeated attempts by the researcher to contact the superintendents. Thirty-six of the respondents indicated that they were interested in the project and wished to receive an abstract; four of the respondents indicated that they could not determine interest without more information; three respondents indicated that they wished to meet with the researcher; three respondents indicated that they were not interested in participating in the project at that time; and two recipients indicated that they were not interested in the project at all. At this point it was necessary for the researcher to determine the degree of interest in the project of the superintendents who had responded positively while considering the population density and nature of the area they represented. To accomplish this the researcher arranged a dialogue with those who had in some way indicated a positive, open interest toward the study.

The 36 respondents who requested an abstract received a follow-up letter which included an agenda with a proposed research time line and an abstract. The three respondents who requested a conference were accommodated which resulted in all of them indicating that they were willing to participate. The four respondents who indicated that they needed more information decided that they were unable to participate. No superintendent of a district of over 25,000 students was willing to participate. The researcher considered the 39 willing superintendents to find six superintendents, two from each of the following categories modified from Glass' study on the superintendency (1992): Small town/rural (300-3000 students); Suburban/rural (3000-25,000 students); and Suburban/urban (3000-25,000 students) who were enthusiastic about participation in the study.

A large number of positive respondents were from districts of 300-3000 student population. The researcher first contacted the interested superintendent of the smallest, most contained area. At this time further contacts were made with other interested members of this

group of superintendents. Ultimately, two superintendents from this group who had distinguished themselves among their peers by their enthusiasm for the study and who had significant experience agreed to participate, one in a primary and one in alternate role. Alternates were chosen in all the categories to serve if an emergency caused the primary superintendent to withdraw. The site research involving the smallest area was started first because that superintendent was most eager to begin.

The next pair of superintendents came from suburban/rural districts of 3000 to 25,000 students. The researcher solicited two of the most positive of the superintendents in this group for the study. One superintendent agreed to be the primary source of case study and another agreed to be an alternate.

A final set of two superintendents was selected in the same manner as the previous sets from the 3000-25,000 student population suburban/urban districts. One of these superintendents agreed to be primary while the other superintendent agreed to function as substitute participant if necessary. The unique district situations and the varied student population figures provided a diversity of settings for cases in this study.

This chapter includes three case reports. Each case contains descriptions of the contexts that surround each superintendent. These descriptions include a district demography and significant history, key issues in each locality, and relationships of the superintendent, the board, and community members, and a thumbnail sketch of the superintendent. The final sections in the cases focus on identification and description of the critical leadership behaviors displayed by the superintendent and examination of the reaction of those in the administrative team to the leader as she leads. In addition to interviews with the superintendent, information presented in the cases will be drawn by the researcher from interviews with those who are familiar with the superintendent, analysis of documents that were made available to the researcher, and observations made by the researcher while in the field. Citations in the cases noted in parens in the text are coded by the researcher to support confidentiality of subject. An explanation of the citations from all cases may be found in Appendix G. The cases are presented in the order in which they were completed.

**Case One**  
**The Steel Magnolia**

*Steel Magnolia: A lovely southern belle of the traditional sense with a core of steel.*

District Description

The Town of WP is located on the tip of a peninsula, surrounded on three sides by industrial water and on the fourth by a sign that marks the town limit. To reach the town by auto one must leave a major interstate highway to travel fifty miles through Indian reservations and down narrow roads dominated by pick-up trucks and log haulers. The first indicators that one is entering a town of substance from the extremely rural countryside are a country club golf course and the emergence of small businesses of a trade or service nature. There is little evidence of the actual diversity of the town as roads to the more affluent subdivisions and marinas that border the water are not marked. Conversely, the quaint Victorian sections of the town are easily reached by the first time visitor. Initially WP appears to be a trendy little urban professional village, but a deeper examination reveals that the residents of the older section maintain their houses in the community tradition. There is no attempt to replicate the past; this is the past in the present.

This town of approximately three thousand residents at the junction of two rivers serves as a gateway to major industrial and commercial properties. The main industry, a vast industrial complex owned by a Canadian group, provides employment for most of the residents. This is a town of employed. During the day very few of working age are seen on the street and the local newspaper has few offers of employment. The mill is working three shifts.

The town's layout is almost a perfect rectangle. There is one central street, called Main Street, intersected by streets numbered in descending order. Beyond First Street there is water. The residential streets include a colorful collection of comfortable looking Victorian homes, some grand, some quaint, on plots that are each exactly one quarter acre. White picket fences, heavily shaded streets, and local landmarks such as the bank, general store, and post office lend a Rockwellesque quality to this place. Throughout the day people gather in small groups downtown to exchange information in half-sentences and informal gestures. The Chamber of Commerce signs boast that this is a great town to live in and work.

#### Superintendent's Relationship with the Community and Board

In a community the size of WP, most residents have more than a passing recognition of each other. Hence, most citizens know the superintendent by sight. As the superintendent and the researcher moved throughout the community, there were no community members who required introduction to JMW, the superintendent. Residents waved from the street and waitresses at local restaurants spoke to her by name. Her home is in a subdivision just outside of town and her white school division van is easily recognizable as she zips about town. In informal conversation with the residents the researcher found every resident polled knew the superintendent by sight. Some of these residents offered detailed statements. A florist knew which flowers JMW preferred and the librarian detailed her family history. In an interview with a Board member, reference was made to the superintendent's sister, a teacher, providing evidence that her family is well known. JMW's presence in the community is strongly felt.

The superintendent is aware of her high profile in this community. She noted that she found this situation both flattering and difficult. While she enjoyed the children stopping her at the grocery store to say hello, she at times finds restrictions imposed by the community to be annoying. For example, she related that her house guests have been scrutinized. She normally likes to dress to impress and would always appear proper in public; still she has sacrificed privacy to be superintendent here. As a result of this life in a glass house, she often escapes to a large metropolitan area nearby for an extended week-end.

The Board knows the superintendent well. The members know her family history both

private and public because she has roots here. According to one Board member, they chose her for strengths in instructional areas and recruiting personnel which she had demonstrated as an assistant superintendent and because of her passionate description of her philosophies regarding education that she shared during her interview. JMW's knowledge of community expectations helped her form responses to the Board's interview questions which enabled her to convince the Board that the hometown favorite was the best choice,. Since that time, eight years ago, she has kept their faith and grown in confidence in her leadership abilities. Although differences have existed between the superintendent and the Board, according to a School Board member and the superintendent, this Board follows her advise on matters of student achievement, staff development, and personnel issues.

#### Key Issues of the Community

The researcher used a variety of sources to determine key issues in this community. All conversation held with or in the presence of the researcher, informal and formal, reference works from the local library, and articles found in the local paper which is published weekly were considered sources. The researcher found that major issues of this community were continuation of clear constant communication within the community, provision of a quality school system, and maintenance of a small town atmosphere.

#### Communication

The importance of communication among the citizens was immediately evident to the researcher. In the first ten minutes at the post office, this researcher heard about school football teams, the decision to close an alley, an imminent bridge project, a local who is ill and in need, and the agenda of the next Rotary meeting mixed among small town gossip. Highlighting its importance, the newspaper office held a prominent place on the main street. In this cozy warm office an inquiry to the clerk by the researcher resulted in a pleasant conversation about subscribers and an invitation to take any of the displayed information packets regarding the area. The newcomer is immediately invited into the communication circle of this town.

The civic associations enhance the strong communication, social and economic networks in WP. As this observer moved from group to group, including the Kiwanis, Rotary, the school

and town planning councils, it was noted that many of the same key members attended all of the groups and all of these groups had a direct connection to the schools. These groups sponsor crab festivals, clean-ups, various junkets for fun, and events in the local schools.

The schools are well represented at these meetings. The Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs meetings involved meeting and eating in the same church hall in the company of lively town citizens. The Kiwanis, who followed the affairs of the school closely, was a social group with members who planned trips, talked in personal detail about certain student athletes and teachers, and was familiar with the financial needs of particular students. The superintendent attends these meetings weekly and is a member of this organization. The Kiwanis as well as the Rotary is tied to the schools.

The Rotary Club includes a younger crowd than the Kiwanis Club. Members of the administrative team serve on various committees. The superintendent, a founding member of this group, indicated in conversation that she initiated the WP Rotary to instill a wider view of the possibilities of school business partnerships in the area and to network with the community on behalf of the school system.

The Town Council meeting also highlighted the importance of communication to the citizens of this town. This well attended evening meeting held in the town hall included discussions of a school award, a massive bridge project that the state was proposing, utilization of alley space, the height of a flag pole, and finally whether a citizen could run hunting dogs in common areas surrounding the town. All of these cases, regardless of priority, were discussed by the council with an eye to budget, responsibility, and consideration of the public's expectations. Minutes of the meetings are published in the newspaper. The seven member council quickly passed minor budget requests of the superintendent regarding texts and then presented the superintendent and a student with a plaque awarded by the state. This council grants the schools 80 percent of its budget yearly. Thus, the council follows closely the issues of the school budget both large and small and communicates its stance on these issues frequently to the public.

The School Planning Council meeting was held at the administrative center in the early evening. Twelve adults, including parents, central office administrators, two principals, and the

superintendent discussed the status of the six- year plan of the school system, state assessments, and a proposed fine arts center. The superintendent explained current availability of funds for the center. The parents and staff all made positive comments about the prospect of the multiple uses of the new building and about the superintendent's budget savvy. Near the meeting's end, the superintendent opened the agenda with a time for citizens' comments.

The non-speakers at this meeting were the central office administrators and principals. Although testing was discussed, certainly a local school issue, they remained silent. The superintendent indicated that the expectations would remain high for the students in the community. When a parent asked what plans were being made for students who may not reach success, the superintendent did not open the floor to her leadership circle, but answered herself.

JMW recognized early that continual open and honest communication is important in this community. This subject was discussed in her interview and her past in the area provided an insight into this expectation. Upon becoming the superintendent she moved quickly to provide more detailed, relevant communication to the Board especially in the area of budget. To emphasize this point, she referred to her interview with the School Board:

But what they were looking for was someone who was open, honest, and forthright and who would share information with them. There had been some concern on the Board prior that they wanted more information especially in the area of finance. They wanted to know exactly what the money was spent for ... When I became superintendent I changed the method of reporting expenditures in that I took a column that we already had on the expenditure report that just gave some numbers that were not meaningful to them, and we actually list on the expenditure report the items so that they could see it's for furniture in the school or if it's for instructional supplies. They were very comfortable with that. I always talk to the Board about any major expenditures that are coming up .... We go through a process and they are clear that it is something that I have on the agenda and they will be seeing an expenditure that is a large lump sum, so I spend time communicating with the Board and preparing them for that thing. I think that they feel very comfortable about the funding and the money and the way it's handled. (JMW, 30-

42; 113-114)

In a statement concerning the extensive community interest in the schools and school personnel, a member of the central office team indicated that the community is focused on the answers to “Are we getting our buck?” (BS, 45). Regarding the focus of the community on things and people educational, this administrator indicated that although her original family is local, she enjoys the privacy of living distant from the community. She indicated that while she had no concerns with the community while living within, she has found it relaxing to live outside.

Communication is a major element in this small town. There are several avenues of information and dialogue open to interested citizens. Everyday conversations with neighbors, a well-written local paper, a number of community civic groups, and key community leaders support and encourage the expected high level of communication in this community.

#### Quality Education

At the time of interview to fill the superintendency, the School Board’s interview questions indicated they were clearly seeking to find a candidate who would promote student achievement to overcome a perceived second class status. JMW related the following:

Situationally, they were looking and we had been ranking well as far as student achievement regionally, but they wanted to do better. They wanted us to move forward as far as success of students and student achievement and they were really a progressive board. (JMW, 68-77)

In WP there was constant reference to the negative perception outsiders held about the socio-economic nature of the town. Some indicated that the stereotypes of others regarding the blue collar image of the town might be dispelled if the quality of education remained strong in the region, and if in the future, student achievement levels rose to become competitive at the state level. In all of the interviews conducted at the site, reference was made to the importance of academic excellence as an answer to the town’s image as second class. The Superintendent stated, “We are a mill town. We used to be corporate, but about eight to ten years ago they left and people said to us at that time our student achievement would drop” (JMW, 338-343).

However, the superintendent then added that lately the student achievement rankings on state level were significantly improved (JMW, 348-354).

The Board is also focused on test scores. An administrative team member offered a reason for their interest, "There is a heavy influx of tuition students that generates money for the school system and these students choose to come here. Therefore, the scores and offerings must stay high" (BS, 36-39). Reflecting a citizen's view, a Board member added:

Our situation at the time of the interview included a history of inflated grades, students avoiding higher mathematics, weak budget control, a fragmented administration and a town of blue-collar workers with high expectation...the environment has challenged the superintendent to remain enthusiastic and proficient and to rise above any question of her integrity. (LD, 46-60)

This community has acquired a blue collar image over the years. This one time resort for the wealthy, is now dominated by a large industry. Reference is repeatedly made to an era when the population included large numbers of well educated corporate leaders. Citizens and school officials expressed the opinion that student achievement that is regionally competitive would maximize the positive image of the town.

#### Small Town Atmosphere

The Chamber of Commerce publicizes a small town atmosphere in its slogan: WP is a good place to live and work. To encourage this atmosphere, the community organizations welcome the inclusion of interested citizens through open membership. The school system utilizes the funds of tuition students to provide a "private school atmosphere" (BS, 34-35) for all students. Finally, in this small school system, parents call the superintendent directly to express their concerns. The superintendent reported, "One thing that bogs me down is a lot of times people who have concerns will want to talk directly to me. They want to circumvent everyone and come straight to me" (JMW, 409-414).

The community is united in promoting its small town USA image. It is an active town with several political, social, and advisory avenues for citizens to become involved in the process of living together in harmony. In all of the meetings the observer attended individual agendas

were evident, but the public good was the overriding factor. Throughout the period of observation and in times since when reading the local newspaper, a definite local pride has been obvious in the uniqueness of the town and accomplishments of its citizens from student, to clergy, to superintendent, who is referred to as “Our own JMW”.

Issues that the residents note as important affect the economic, social, educational, and governmental systems of the town. Communication, student achievement, and the preservation of a small town atmosphere are important considerations of the residents of this community. These issues are a part of the context of JMW’s superintendency.

#### Thumbnail Sketch of the Superintendent

The administrative offices of WP schools are located in a brick building across the street from a huge industrial complex on the outskirts of town. The small, neat building resembles a credit institution. The offices are on the second floor with the rooms downstairs used for conferences, meetings, and storage. As one ascends the staircase a newly hired secretary is seated at a reception desk in the lobby area at the top of the stairs. In just moments the superintendent, referred to within as JMW, appeared. It was 8:30 AM and she had just arrived. This was our second meeting. Initially, the researcher met with JMW to discuss specific agendas, mutually agreeable dates for observation, and to discuss any concern that could negatively impact the data gathering process.

The superintendent’s greeting was gracious. As at the first meeting this woman exuded sparkling energy. As we moved down the hallway, just outside the superintendent’s office is an area carved out for her secretary. Noting the researcher’s interest in this the superintendent indicated that she preferred to answer her own mail and place most of her calls in order to personalize her communication and in this respect, her secretary was basically clerical. She presented the researcher with a two day and night agenda upon arrival, which included multitudes of planned meetings with the superintendent, her team members, a meeting with a teacher who was to compete in a state-wide competition, a visit to three schools to survey the condition of the facilities, Kiwanis, Rotary, Town Council and School Advisory Council meetings, three interviews, and two lunches. She indicated that the rest of her week would

include a trip to the state capitol to serve on various committees, visit the legislature, and attend an event at the governor's mansion.

The superintendent's office was a mixture of antiques and technology, local and global. Her desk is extremely neat holding only a laptop computer, a Wall Street Journal and a few mailings from the state. Later the superintendent indicated she had put some of the files she had been working on away anticipating my arrival. Antique furniture, which once belonged to her mother, including glass covered bookcases, a console buffet, and a small wooden table and chairs at the window filled the office. There were detailed window coverings, feminine and airy, and family photos on a shelf. The superintendent's desk was rather large, taking up a third of the office. The office had two windows letting in street sounds and light. The bookcases held texts from graduate classes, current bestsellers on management and leadership, and documentaries on education. Later in the interview JMW referred to several of these books as favorites.

JMW is a slight, fine-boned woman with expressive eyes that dominate her face. She is dressed as if from corporate Vogue in a blue suit, a white tailored shirt, and classic jewelry. Her blonde hair is cut and styled in a trendy bob almost to her shoulders. Her most noticeable feature is her mouth because of the bright red lipstick she wears. Although small in stature, this woman would never go unnoticed in a group.

Throughout the interviews and in observation of this superintendent, she displayed a dual inside/outside approach to many facets of the job. The gates to her time and energy were always open to key members of the public and the Board. She published, remained visible locally, at state, and national levels, and followed the trends and new approaches to education often initiating these learnings in the district; but in matters of home and inner circle, while supportive, she maintained distance.

After reviewing the field notes and transcribing the interviews from WP the researcher came away with a vast tapestry of this superintendent's leadership behaviors. Clustering and combining related behaviors resulted in the emergence of three major categories of leadership behaviors in which she demonstrated inside/outside levels of behavior. JMW is like a steel magnolia; classic and graceful on the outside, but strong enough on the inside to survive any

challenge. When strife and negativity affect her, she has the strength to answer the challenge and the character to smile through her tears. She draws support from her female friends and in her femininity. JMW presents one face to her closest group, her central office administrators and family, and another face to those outside this group. While protective of her inner circle, JMW's energies are directed outward. This superintendent expresses herself zestfully, confidently utilizes a deep knowledge of community, and exercises many methods of communication. While members of the community may know this superintendent for her vivid personality, those of her innermost circle: her sister, female friends in the community, her all female administrative circle know a woman of deep conviction and strength. She is not what she appears to be on the surface and presents two faces. To further draw for the reader an image, in her interview she used a phrase from the movie, Steel Magnolias: "What does not kill us makes us stronger" (JMW, 1256-1258).

#### Critical Leadership Behaviors

##### Demonstrates Zestful Energy

JMW is a fireball of enthusiasm. This spark was obvious at first meeting and remarkably continued throughout this researcher's time in the area. The superintendent's energy directed outward to key individuals and groups of influence differs in frequency and intensity from her energy directed inward to administrators, staff, and family. In describing the superintendent, a member of the school board listed her enthusiasm as her number one strength (LD, 2). He went on to say that "she had surprised the Board by her continued enthusiasm and energy level. She performed in an outstanding way during the interview and was passionate in her answers to the questions" (LD, 40-45). The energy of the superintendent was mentioned in every interview conducted at WP. The interviewed leadership team member indicated that JMW's leadership style was similar to hers in that it was hands-on, fast in pace, and somewhat "sparkling" in nature (BS, 6-10). The term "hands-on" in this reference is not that which would be considered meddling, but instead it is focused behavior. JMW indicated that she is indeed high energy and can hardly calm herself down. She is openly passionate about her work. The superintendent shared:

The Board wanted somebody with high energy and I can hardly calm myself down .... I am passionate about getting to where we have gotten. I will do whatever it takes to get there and make the changes that we need to make .... I will do whatever it takes to get there. I'm high energy and take care of myself. I walk four miles a day when I can. Other things motivate me .... the job is interesting and I love life and people. (JMW, 78-79, 184-192, 1127-1132)

In a few instances, the passion of the superintendent was based on pain or frustration. In a past personnel battle, the superintendent was hurt by Board and parent actions that led her to believe that she was unsupported. She expressed her feelings this way:

This woman kept the parents stirred up the whole year, so that we were not operating in the best interests of the students. It finally happened that a parent came to the Board meeting with a printed letter...which was probably the worse thing I've had to endure since I've been superintendent....I felt totally alone and I felt out there on a limb and that happens in this job. People commented to me later that they couldn't believe I was not emotional. (JMW, 1222-1271)

This superintendent is enthusiastic about providing an educational program that will allow children to compete in a larger arena. She devotes a great deal of energy to promoting a cutting edge system. She shared the following:

I was an assistant and we were going over the same thing with instruction. Teachers were giving inflated grades and the children were not mastering the work. The President of a local teachers' group followed me out of a meeting and she said the teachers are really upset with you because they think you want them to be accountable. And I said I do want them to be accountable. And I said if they think they're upset, they're not nearly as upset as I am when I look at what they're doing to children. (JMW, 589-601)

When the superintendent spoke about satisfaction in her job she indicated that passion in itself was satisfying to her. She noted that there were certain situations that evoked passion: "You work hard and reward is the result. This is true in education. We hear the compliments, but we don't hear the accolades often and when I do hear those it motivates me" (JMW, 959-968).

At the various functions the superintendent attended, she demonstrated enthusiasm and interest in promoting the schools and community in her conversation. However, when the conversation related to sports, specific students, and staff, only once when speaking of a teacher who was in competition for statewide recognition, did the superintendent become animated. Generally, she was polite, but non-interactive, unless she was promoting the quality and positive uniqueness of the school system, and indicating her willingness to consider the needs and issues of the Board and community as critical in school related issues.

The superintendent is concerned that others close to her may perceive her as driven. In this instance, she refers to her central office staff and her family. She is aware of the toll her drive is taking in her personal life, but this drive is mixed up with her enthusiasm for her personal mission so she continues at her frantic pace unable to separate her public from her private life. With concern she shared:

I am sure that I am perceived as being driven. I talked with my husband last night and he said I was relentless in doing the job, but I think that I am perceived as being goal-oriented and dedicated. Sometimes I worry about being too driven. I worry about what I do to the people in the office. I worry that I'm perceived that way and people don't know me and know that I love to have fun. That's a side of me that most don't see .... I try to be friendly and I love people. I get vibes that people are positive and generally have respect for me and believe that I want the right thing. The people I worry about the most are the ones I am the closest to. I tax the people in the office and they work very hard. I care about them and I'm not sure I always relay that to them. (JMW, 1308-1339)

Most of the energy of the superintendent is directed outward. Conversations of the researcher with a member of the leadership team, the interview of the superintendent, and our visit to the schools indicated that JMW does not spend a great deal of time and energy within her inner circle of staff, friends, and family. In an interview of a leadership team member, in response to a question regarding how she would lead as superintendent, she noted that she would spend "more time making the teachers feel important" (BS, 12-13). On a visit to the schools in the company of the superintendent, the researcher observed recognition of the superintendent by

the staff, but no personal pleasantries were exchanged, even though the newer staff had interviewed with the superintendent prior to being hired.

In her interview, JMW described her experiences with staff as mostly directive in nature, not as a team experience. Job descriptions of staff support the designation of managerial activities to administration in WP. The superintendent supported her administrative staff in situations when they faced adversity in implementing a Board mandated procedure. In describing an issue when a teacher failed to carry out a directive issued by an assistant superintendent and a new principal, JMW stepped in to carry the issue forward to resolution. In this manner she energetically supported her administrative staff, not as a team member, but as the ultimate leader of the system. Team efforts in this administrative team appear to center around weekly meetings with the two assistant superintendents to detail matters of the week followed by informal conversations if a problem appears. Observation indicated that this superintendent delegates managerial duties to her central office staff, and then goes on to more global leadership activities unless there is a problem encountered by her staff. The administrative staff was trusted to manage within the superintendent's closely defined parameters. If controversy surfaced, the superintendent would not only support her administrative team members, but carry on the fight from that point to resolution.

JMW indicated that her choices regarding the energy and time requirements of the superintendency have impacted her family. Raising children as a single parent, and at other times answering the needs of a new marriage have placed a high premium on the superintendent's time. She indicated she made choices to focus on her education and her personal career mission in the past. Currently, her successful children and a supportive spouse filter the memories she holds of times and decisions past; however, these choices still upset her as she describes instances of family difficulties. Her relationships with family members at this time appear to have mended as evidenced by her pride in reflection on her children's successes and their photos evident in her office and home. However, she attributes this positive outcome to their strength in character, not a change in any of her behaviors toward them.

At times the superintendent's energy spills over to areas of recreation. She indicates she

plays golf to network and dresses with the following consideration in mind. However, even in private moments JMW's energy spent is with the outside in mind.

I went to Bygones [ an clothing store]. Even when I go shopping for dresses I have to be worried that it's not too short or tight because you are the superintendent so it's always in the forefront. It is meshed, you can't separate personal identity. If you find out from someone else how to do that let me know. (JMW, 947-955)

#### Utilize a Thorough Understanding of the Community

The superintendent displayed a deep knowledge of the community in her choice of leadership behaviors. She was born in this area and employed her understanding of the local culture to choose her battles (JMW, 748-749). Regarding these choices she stated, "One thing I've found is that you pick your battles. That's what I do. I give in on a lot to things that don't hurt the system and that I can give in on to make them all happy" (JMW, 514-518). She has a keen understanding based on experience of what behaviors the community will accept and this knowledge gives her a strong self-confidence in her actions.

She moves with surety when she is introducing a Board initiative to the school population. She related, "I spoke to assemblies at the school at the beginning of the year .... The principals asked me to do it. I talked about the golden rule and treating each other with respect and we tied it to safety. I talked about the shootings in small rural areas. Often the children involved in these incidents are teased and ridiculed .... That's our biggest problem"(JMW, 983-1016).

JMW shared that her expectations of her current administrative staff are clearly defined at the central office level. The job descriptions of central office staff indicate that she has left managerial tasks to this staff and monitors them on an as needed basis. An assistant superintendent noted, "From this superintendent I have learned to have confidence in my administrative abilities. This superintendent has allowed me to make mistakes, allowed me to grow, and allowed me to design" (BS, 51-59). Clearly she has the confidence to allow others within her circle to grow and learn to follow their best instincts in the area of management.

JMW's self confidence is equally obvious as she moves outside her administrative circle. She knows the community and the Board and takes few risks. She spends considerable time in the community and among the power people in this small town. She attends so many community functions that even the smallest ripple of discontent would be immediately evident to her. One example of the certainness she applies is evident in the following situation. When implementing a character education program in the school system she moved quickly and with confidence. She noted that the community would not question the inclusion of this program in the curriculum because its sponsor was a respected local minister. JMW shared:

We're focusing on character education and implementing a character program. Our students wrote a sportsmanship policy last year and it was wonderful .... The mission of the school system lists the values of the community. We want character integrated into the regular system. Seize the moment . (JMW, 984-1000)

Some of JMW's confidence is related to her community experience and some is based on a sense of what perceptions key others hold and what these perceptions mean to her. She has a clear understanding of what behaviors of hers that others in positions of power would respond to in stereotypical ways and considers this understanding in her choice of leadership behaviors.

JMW offered the following advise:

One thing I learned early about women is you have to prove yourself. You have to prove that you can do this job. It's assumed a man can do this job, but you have to prove ... and that you are good. I knew that just from observation and stereotype and I focused on doing a good job and proving that I could do the job. And I think that a man can make firm decisions and be very focused and relentless in doing the right thing and that's considered a good, strong leader but if a woman has to be very careful not to cross that line because people can quickly term a woman as a bitch and you really have to be careful. I have found myself guarded in that area because I don't want to be called a bitch. (JMW, 624-644)

In addition she feels that one must be careful "how you present yourself as far as that is concerned (open feminism) because they like to categorize you. I don't appear masculine

because I've heard people criticized for that too. I could never be accused of that, I'm very feminine" (JMW, 708-715).

This superintendent understands the needs and expectations of this community. She was accurate regarding the desires of the Board upon hiring her. Her responses to topics related to Board expectations at the time of her interview match those of a Board member. The community desires were as evident to her then as they are now. This superintendent indicated:

They wanted someone who was good in personnel and they wanted to make sure we selected the right people and that we had good teachers.... I had virtually been selecting the people that were recommended to the School Board and they were happy with the people ... That was good for me because that was a very strong component that they were looking for at that time. (JMW, 51-56)

The superintendent is now confident in her budget skills. Prior to being hired as superintendent she knew that the Board wished to be more informed in this area. She was clear in what she could offer the Board in the area of budget in her interview. She shared, "I was really worried about the finance area when I became superintendent. That was an area I was worried that I might not be able to handle and I found that wasn't a problem at all" (JMW, 144-159).

The clear picture of this community held by this superintendent has allowed her to take some risks, but rarely with the community or the Board. She has skated very close to the edge with staff at times, appearing not to fear. A School Board member recounted:

The leadership behavior noted in the superintendent was in the area of instructional strength and putting the needs of children first. She stood up for what was right in forcing teachers to change their ways where they were not following the amended philosophy of the school system .... This teacher was not instructing her class .... In a very small town environment any personnel issue easily becomes a public battle. This one did. (LD, 22-39)

When asked to discuss risks she has taken, the superintendent retold the story recounted above by the Board member. In reference to this personnel battle the superintendent related the following:

I would say that last year I took a major risk .... I felt I could take it .... I wouldn't have survived it if I was new.... I really believe that if I hadn't been here so long and proven myself and was named [honor], I could have gone down on that one. But in the end if it doesn't kill you it makes you stronger. It helped me and it helped the school system.

(JMW, 1143-1150, 1252-1258)

She summed her risk taking behaviors up best when she said:

I took a big risk there; but if it's for the good of the children, I believe it's the right thing to do and I'm willing to be the lone ranger if I have to. And there have been times I have been virtually by myself and taking a risk. ( JMW, 314-231)

The job of a superintendent includes risk. It is critical to note that this superintendent is willing to risk if that risk is obviously in the best interests of the students and if she is within the agreed upon parameters set by the Board. She had been tasked by the Board to increase the academic rigor and maintain a quality staff. In this situation she had a clear understanding of the community and Board wishes and was able to align herself with those; therefore, there was little actual risk. The more genuine risks of this superintendent have related to her relationship with her family. She indicated several times the challenge of finding time for her family while in the superintendency. This struggle may continue as JMW made no reference to changing her time management to answer this need in the future.

This superintendent is optimistic about the future. There is no evidence that she is uneasy in her superintendency. The Board appears pleased with a superintendent who represents them well at home and in the state capitol. Her administrative circle remains silent. Her long-term plans include: construction of a Theater Arts Center, maintenance of local color, and a need to see academic acclaim which will be attributed to her leadership in this "cutting edge" school system (LD, 12-13).

Regarding the future this confident superintendent states:

People are responsible for their own success or failure and I think that one can go as far as they want to in life depending on what you want to give to it. Time, effort, perseverance and flexibility. If you have your goals, are you willing to take that action? (JMW, 1054-

1061)

### Multi-modal Communicator

Another key leadership behavior of this superintendent is her constant educational dialogue. At her interview, she recognized the Board's desire to hire a forthright superintendent (JMW, 31-32). The superintendent added that this personality trait had at times been burdensome. She noted, "If you give too much information you can confuse people and get bogged down in minute details, so I have to watch myself on that. But I am a very open personality and share easily" (JMW, 92-97).

JMW continually offered communication on all fronts. The intensity, type and frequency of this dialogue differ depending on the situation. To communicate to those outside her administrative circle she networks, attends conferences, practices her teaching skills on advisory groups and the Board, and remains active in her community while taking in feedback from all of these sources.

The superintendent practices various modes of communication, including networking through golf, on the phone, by computer with her peers, and at meetings and conferences. She noted, "I make it a point to go to conferences .... It helps you to keep your sanity. A safe way to exchange ideas .... I even initiated a Rotary Club here" (JMW, 1281-1291).

In the community, JMW is a teacher to many. A member of the Board indicated that JMW "has been proactive in bringing the council along and educating them in the process of being a council and board" (LD, 60-64). Her activity in the Rotary and Kiwanis and attendance at council meetings has a two-fold communication benefit. She receives input and she is able to answer any questions that surface regarding the schools. She indicated that she expects to give the community a lot of input and bring them along with her (JMW, 754-754).

In the advisory group observed by the researcher a parent brought up communication as an issue of concern. This parent was positive about the district newsletter which had been mailed to all citizens' homes and she indicated that she hoped that this paper would continue because she did not have cable television to watch the educational channel. The superintendent said that the

administration intended to continue to include all citizens in communication. She then asked if any person present had other ideas on how to maximize communication within the school district. Members offered suggestions without hesitation.

Mentoring from a former superintendent was helpful to JMW. This gentleman allowed JMW to go to the regional superintendent meetings because he knew this experience to be helpful. Other helpful feedback came from a professor. She noted, "He told me I was capable and I could do the job. He actually told me the budget was a piece of cake and it is. So that's how I aspired to be a superintendent" (JMW, 881-885). The superintendent acknowledged the power of feedback indicating that "getting information from all groups and from other resources before making decisions is important" (JMW, 1051-1053). Communication to the outside of her personal circle takes the majority of the superintendent's time.

When describing her communication style, the superintendent shared that she is always open. JMW made clear reference to time she spent with parents and staff answering their concerns. JMW noted that she "listens to them and takes their concerns very seriously" (JMW, 486-488). She went on to state, "We have channels and they feel confident that the channels work .... There is a sense of family" (JMW, 493-503). The superintendent described her response to a concern with a staff member or community member as follows: "If there is a concern, I sit down and talk about it, address it, and ask questions" (JMW, 686-689).

She added that some unique problems bring her to meetings.

On rare occasions I may go to a bus driver meeting. It would have to be a major political issue. We had one last year when the buses were turning around in the cul-de-sacs and we stopped that. You know when you take something away all the parents go to war. (JMW, 448-455)

Communication with staff outside central office is a more regimented affair than with the members of the community. This communication included memos, speaking to groups prior to school, and meeting advisory groups. Teachers meet with her a couple of times a year and she indicates that she takes their concerns seriously (JMW, 484-488). In describing how to manage change in the schools, her advice to administrators is as follows:

revisit, come back. We've got a new principal at the elementary school right now and that's one thing I am really working on with her. You don't go into a faculty meeting and go over something once like the part of challenging the ability and then think it's going to happen. It's not going to happen. It will revert back. (JMW, 557-565)

Seeking on-going feedback from the staff and her central office administrators is limited. Reference was not made to meetings to gather information or data from staff; however, the communication that was offered by staff was appreciated. The superintendent indicated, "If a teacher will write me a note, and they make a statement .. I find that rewarding and it makes it worthwhile" (JMW, 969-972). Other worthwhile feedback to the superintendent came from a family member. JMW related, "I was married to a lawyer at the time and he kept telling me that I could do anything that I wanted to and I should try things, administration, and an opening came up" (917-824).

Communication is what enables this superintendent to be effective. Within her inner circle communication is rather one way. She directs her message outward and notes what may come back. Her inner circle functions without steady direction. In her outer circle, communication is two way. The superintendent frequently articulates the mission and seeks feedback to guide her actions. Her open interest in what the community and Board require ensures their support and her continuance.

JMW, the Steel Magnolia, exists for and of the community. She speaks for them on the outside in larger circles and represents them well. They trust her to study the instructional options, seek out the best, and implement the best program for the district. Town members include her in their lives; she is trusted as one of them. They are proud and accepting of this superintendent which allows her to do her best for the children of the area and be her unique self in most instances at home. It has not all been easy for her. She has distanced herself from family and friends at times to pursue her goals, but regardless, she has the faith of long time friends and her female administrative circle to fall back on in times of strife.

In summary, the researcher spent a number of days and nights in the company of this superintendent, visited her in her home, and talked both casually and formally with her. During

this time the superintendent enabled the researcher to observe and question without reserve her actions and behaviors related to leadership. This superintendent was helpful and supportive in this research effort and remained so throughout the length of this study.

## Case Two

### Queen Bee

*Queen Bee Syndrome- Females in traditionally male leadership positions whose counter militancy has its roots in their personal success, professional and social, within the system. The queen bee has made it in a man's world of work while running a family with her left hand.*

"To be successful a woman has to be a much better at her job than a man .... certainly I've been lucky. Certainly not all women have had the same experience; however, my personal experience doesn't prove those crazy women are right" (Golda Meir).

#### District Description

The district of SC is located adjacent to a major transportation corridor between large metropolitan areas. This district, four hundred and seven square miles of mostly rolling terrain rising from the coastal plain, sprawls over an area prized by businesses and families because of location, prosperity, and historical importance. Nearby is a small city which has been listed among the top ten most desirable places to live in the country.

The economy and population growth of this area are rapid. In 1980, there were 34,435 people in the district; in 1990, 57,403; in 1995, 75,000. The projected growth for the year 2000 is 90,000. Unemployment is currently at four percent in this area of diverse opportunity. The local economy is based primarily on government, retail trade, services, manufacturing, and warehousing and distribution centers which include goods like wood, stone, circuit boards and silicon wafers. Foreign firms find the area desirable because of its right to work laws and its proximity to major airports and lifestyle amenities.

There are seven district board members who have control over budget, borrowing, and general county policies. This board manages issues such as population growth, zoning, supplying necessary services, taxes, and public safety decisions.

In the last decade, eleven schools were built: six elementary, two middle and three high schools. Residents remain concerned with parity in facility development, so considerable modernization has gone on in the older buildings to maintain equity. This construction creates a drain on an already burdened tax system.

The school community generally reflects the desires of the upper middle class and the expectation of continuing education after high school. To meet this need there are a nearby college, a community college, and three other universities within a short driving distance. A survey conducted by the central office of graduates from 1994-1996 indicates the probable diversity and achievement of the student population today. During that time period the student population included: 14.1% African-American, 3% Asian, 2% Indian, 1.5% Hispanic, and 82.9% were White. Sixty-two percent of these graduates were involved in higher education full time and another 11 percent were in school part-time. Five percent were in the military. Of those students who were trained vocationally, 59 percent were working in their area of training. Currently public school enrollment in this district is slightly over 17,000 and the per pupil expenditure is \$5,771.

#### Key Issues of the Community

A variety of issues surfaced as the researcher spent time with the members of this community. In addition to conversations and interviews which included discussions of the issues of the community, the local paper provided a wealth of citizen input. The concerns mentioned most often were rapid growth, inadequate tax base, protection of historical lands, and maintenance of community security.

#### Rapid Growth and Taxes

The chief concern expressed by citizens is the rapid growth of the area. Paradoxically, the taxpayers struggle with desires to keep taxes at the present level, while requesting expanded services. The tax base was referred to as inadequate by a member of the School Board who indicated that it resulted in a compensation package that could not compare to surrounding districts, and thus, resulted in staff loss (MW, 51-60). At a School Board meeting in November many school staff who attended rose to request consideration of higher compensation for their group. Parents proposed new sports offerings and students asked for gifted funding. All in the room seemed to be in agreement that these were all reasonable requests, but none discussed sources of funding.

### Preserving Historical Areas

Another major issue in the community is that of preserving the historical, somewhat rural, atmosphere. There is a constant debate regarding the use of land that has historical significance for new subdivisions. The tourist industry is strong in this area. Many families lost members nearby generations ago in a horrible war and the land is considered hallowed. The Chamber of Commerce offers advertisements of the many opportunities to work, raise a family, and relax in this historical area. The tourist is reminded that after visiting historical areas they can golf or fish in numerous places. With the population growing so rapidly, the Board of Supervisors constantly wrestles with the question of appropriate development.

### Community Security

One of the more disturbing concerns of the citizens is that of maintaining a safe secure environment. Serial murders of female adolescents in their homes has caused the public to fear that this tragedy may repeat. These horrible events have resulted in policy changes in the schools. The superintendent (SB) referred to the issue of safety in her interview when she detailed the schools' revamped security plans and policies.

We have had three students murdered by a serial killer in my first year as superintendent. We have forensic evidence that shows it's the same person and none of the students were murdered on school property. They were kidnaped in broad daylight from the safety of their homes, but none the less, they were students and our community remains very concerned about the safety of students in this county. We have done everything from going to ID badges to making sure that all of our maintenance workers wear badges so that they [staff] can tell it's really one of our employees. We have done emergency drills for hostage and tornado situations and for the first time it is in the policy manual to do a drill first semester and one second semester. (SB, 151-172)

The key issues of the community include rapid growth, the preservation of the historical atmosphere, and public safety which directly impact decisions made regarding the school system.

### Relationship of the Superintendent, the Board, and the Community

SB clearly acknowledges the political flavor of the superintendency. As early as graduate school she indicated that a professor shared the following advise:

I remember a professor .... someone in the class was saying it's not fair, politics. He said if that's the way you feel then don't become a school administrator because if you don't learn to work within the system then you won't get what you want done for kids. Stay in the classroom where there's less politics. The further you go up, the more politics there is. You have to work within the system. (SB, 722-744)

During her interview, the superintendent alluded to many instances of working within the system particularly with the administrators and staff to complete tasks. However, she discussed her role as a key person in the community only in passing. She indicated that she has to force herself to visit schools and get out of her office, preferring to remain on a task until it is completed (SB, 467-470).

A School Board member indicated that the superintendent answered all the expectations of the board regarding communications and establishing a relationship with the Board that were evident during her interview. He further stated that the superintendent has created a solid working relationship with all factions through her humor, low key attitude, and ability to get along with key groups (MW, 26-31). In describing a specific initiative in which there was community input he detailed the district's six year plan which was "classic SB" where she "set priorities in motion and involved a diverse group of people" (MW, 37-41).

The superintendent indicated that the Board was looking for someone to articulate and teach the mission. To accomplish this, she is a teacher to the staff and community on instructional issues (SB, 8-14). The superintendent noted that she clearly understands her parameters, "I've never been one to get upset when the Board recommends other than what I say because I'm supposed to implement what they want regardless"(SB, 707-710). She is very tuned into administration and staff communication channels, while preferring to let the Board design policy and answer directly to the community. SB shared her feelings on politics:

Some of our Board members are very aligned with the Republican party or Democratic activities. Our Board members are not necessarily split along party lines but we do have a split Board. So all of that politics is definitely there. It's difficult, but it's part of the job. (SB, 714-722)

The superintendent's closer relationships seem to be with her staff, in and out of the central office, rather than the community. Although there were no indications that there was any rift between the community and the superintendent, she appeared to spend most of her time helping her staff implement the policies of the Board and carry out the mission of the district.

#### Thumbnail Sketch of the Superintendent

The administrative offices of SC were in a modern well kept brick building centrally located in this sprawling district. The offices were adjacent to a complex of schools and a vocational center. The small lobby, School Board meeting room, and parking lot were uncrowded and calm during the normal working day, providing no indication of the on-going building frenzy of this district. The receptionist was a chatty woman who handled many tasks simultaneously, offering coffee while overseeing a lobby area which contained typical waiting room furniture, a table with a book of current job openings, a receptionist counter, and racks of public relations information.

The researcher arrived on a sunny cold afternoon for the first visit. The superintendent had a very demanding schedule, but agreed to meet briefly to set up a schedule for interview. During the first meeting as in all other meetings, the superintendent was cordial and friendly, anticipating most questions in a manner that indicated she had been interviewed heavily in her past. She was cooperative and helpful in setting up meetings with her administrative circle and providing several shadow opportunities. Although she was offered a copy of the interview protocol, she preferred to be spontaneous. She had just returned from inspecting a floor in a school auditorium that is still in the construction phases. She had assessed a construction fault that some in her advisory group considered minor. She was adamant that the floor would be done properly even though there were others who felt this was unnecessary. She shared that she felt

that some may have considered her an easy mark in the field of construction because she was a woman, but she nevertheless sets high standards in all situations. The researcher's impression was that the floor would be fixed; the case was closed.

The superintendent presented a neat appearance. Dressed in a conservative jacket and skirt with no accessories, her only concession to flair was the bright color of her jacket. What one notices after studying her for a short while is the constant subtle smile she presents; it seems her eyes twinkle. Her stride is purposeful and her handshake firm. A lilting, smooth southern accent in rather low voice makes her speech take on a story telling quality. She led me back to her sizable windowed office. The furniture was low key, the walls practically plain. On a wooden console there were stacks of paper indicating at least three separate projects underway. Her desk was relatively uncluttered and allowed for active work space with her computer nearby.

Raised near the mountains, this superintendent knew early that she would be involved with education. She grew up close to her mother's first cousin who was a female elementary school principal, and went into music in college with the intent of being a band director, a generally male occupied position. Viewing females in leadership roles in education was natural for her. She had experienced a female principal and superintendent in her school system. SB shared this story:

When I was a child I wanted to be a teacher. It was just a matter of what did I want to teach. My favorite subjects were always language and social studies until I got to high school and then I realized that I wanted to be a band director. (SB, 496-504)

After college, SB began teaching in a rural state where it was obvious to her that "women were not considered principals" (SB, 547). There she observed:

Even elementary principals were men. And assistant principals weren't women either. Women were supervisors at the central office and at school, but not administrators. It was during graduate studies .... I caught on that women were being discriminated against .... it's just blatant. When I began my graduate study .... I wanted to be a principal. At some time in my study, I determined that I wanted to be a superintendent. I took the extra courses that I needed to qualify for a licence .... I was at least thirty when I made the

conscious decision to spend the extra money to qualify. (SB, 545-569)

In spite of the areas' prevalent gender discrimination in educational administration, SB prepared herself for the superintendency by taking those jobs that offered experiences that directly related to that aspiration. She shared the following example:

I sought out a superintendent who let me present the budget to the Board of Supervisors so that I had that experience. He also let me build and administer that budget so that I really knew it. (SB, 595-600)

When asked about the non-work pleasures of her life she indicated that her supportive spouse made her choices regarding her job options easier than most women. She noted, "My husband and I maintained separate homes for three years. He always said I'll go with you or find a way to get there. A woman superintendent is likely to have two homes" (SB, 922-929). She finds relaxation around water and enjoys short trips to a second residence or longer trips to conventions.

SB appears to be a made-to-work model of superintendent. She has been raised around a family of female educators, has remained in the general region of her birth, and thus knows the culture well. She purposely prepared for and sought a superintendency, uses every minute of time on task, seeks not to draw extended public attention to herself, and is comfortable in her role as superintendent.

Like a queen bee, the superintendent anchors this district. The emergence of this district as a rapidly growing economic pocket in the region parallels new frontiers and constantly changing challenges. The superintendent continually maintains and improves the educational system trusting an inner circle to protect the unit from a sometimes hostile environment while answering to a sometimes conflicted directing group. The superintendent knew the value and importance of establishing connections throughout the various parts of her empire. Any fracture of these connections could result in a stagnant or inefficient system. In addition, she accepts no excuses for inadequate work. Accountability from all is required to insure a successful quality system that functions effectively. Finally, she distances herself from others in order to assess the situation and focus on her mission. It is imperative that there remain a healthy balance within the

hive and a healthy relationship with the surrounding environment in order to promote maximal product.

### Critical Leadership Behaviors

SB demonstrated several very distinct leadership behaviors to the observer. Others in the superintendent's team and on the School Board noted many of these same behaviors when asked by the researcher to comment. A list of the superintendent's leadership behaviors taken from interview notes, observation notes, and available public relations material was condensed by the researcher into three major leadership areas. This superintendent's leadership behaviors center around building connections, promoting accountability, and preserving her distance from others.

#### Building Connections

When SB took over as superintendent in this district she was aware that the School Board had concerns regarding relationships with the past superintendent. However, she has never had difficulty defining her relationship with the Board:

I've never been one to get upset when the Board recommends other than what I say because I'm supposed to implement what they want regardless .... but we do have a split Board .... It's difficult, but it's part of the job. (SB, 707-722)

It was also inferred during her initial interview that the relationship between the former superintendent and the building staff had been fractured and that clear communications with the Board, especially in the areas of budget, had not been a priority. SB believed that the Board was interested in promoting peace in the system and in following closely the expenditure of funds in a rapidly growing district. Recounting her interview, SB noted:

They were not happy with the budget or with the relationship with the Board and the superintendent .... The questions revealed dissatisfaction with business and management .... The previous superintendent had a good relationship with the central office staff, but not with the school level people. The central office staff people working in isolation can not fulfill a mission. There was some question that the vision statement was prepared solely by the superintendent and he didn't have buy-in other than the central office staff and that is only a feeling and a perception I have. I have no authentication of that theory

at all. (SB, 40-47, 57-70)

The superintendent went on to say that the Board wanted someone who could “bring reorganization to the budget process” (88-89). She also shared:

they were not happy with the relationship with the Board of Supervisors and the responsiveness to parents .... Their questions revealed dissatisfaction with business relations, and community relationships and relationships with other governmental agencies. (91-99)

A member of the School Board revealed that he had noted this superintendent’s budget strength and ability to build connections in her interview. The prior superintendent had built a large number of schools; therefore, the Board’s expectations for the next superintendent included management of student growth and of facilities. Since her hire, SB, according to a Board member interviewed, had answered the Board’s expectations in the areas of budget and management by creating a solid working relationship with all factions through the use of humor, a low-key attitude, and the ability to get along with key groups and people to reach a goal (MW, 13-31).

Regarding her working relationships with the central office team, she believes it is a much more personal one than with the building administrators. She noted:

I meet regularly at least once a week with the three assistant superintendents and the director of finance. So much of what we do relates to money. In those meetings I would be more candid and I would express more personal sentiments because I feel more comfortable in front of these four men, the supervisors and directors .... I like to think of the whole administrative staff as a team but the team I work most closely with right now would be the three assistant superintendents, the three directors of schools and the Director of Special Education . (SB, 848-855)

She has put in place a strong central office team that has grown used to her approach, which is very different from her predecessor. The central office administrative team members were in the system previously in different positions and in redesigning the administrative team she has built a cohesive team that is focused on the agenda she identifies. One item of this agenda is to connect with building staff to carry her message. This superintendent made a clear statement

of her belief regarding the mission of the central office personnel. She indicated that “the central office is there for service to the schools. Because I do believe that the schools are where it happens” (SB, 970-974).

The superintendent has been able to use her peacemaking skills to bring the factions together to create a Six Year Plan and participate in the budget process. A Board member referred to the design of the Six Year Plan as “Classic SB” (MW, 39-40) in which she set priorities in motion and involved a diverse group of people. A member of her administrative team indicated that where budget is concerned although the members of the team have different personalities, they handle this task as a team, utilizing a decision making process which incorporates needs assessment with studying available data, brainstorming, and creating hypotheses. According to the same member of the management team, this superintendent has incorporated collaboration in the design process for School Biennial Plans, the School Renewal Plans, and the School Improvement Plans as well as in the budget planning process (JW, 40-66).

Connection building between the superintendent, the Board, the central office administrative team, and the building staff is critical to this superintendent. She has mended many bridges that had previously been burnt. To accomplish this she is forging a working relationship with the building administrators. She makes visits to the school administrators in their smaller meetings, runs some larger administrative staff meetings, and remains in touch with them through a responsive team of school level directors. She has utilized these directors to facilitate her wishes and carry her message out from the central office. These directors are her communication lifeline to the building administrators. It is their job to assure that all of these administrators are informed regarding expectations, facilitated in their tasks, appreciated in their successes, and anxious to share these successes with others.

SB has made strides in constructing links with the building administrators. In describing why she had made a special effort to reach out to principals and include them in her loop, she noted that she often chooses former principals for central office positions. SB gave her reasons as follow:

Principals know what goes on in the trenches and they have credibility with the principals. If they (principals) disagree with them they may say it's been a long time since you've been a principal but they still know that they've been there at one time. (SB, 984-991)

Making statements that further defines the superintendent's regard for principals and the expected relationship of the central office and these principals, SB indicated:

Of everything that prepared me to be a superintendent, that was the key role that was the most important. I do think that principals have a hard job and I don't want to make their job harder. Our staff should make the job easier. If Step A is easier for the building people then that's the way I want to go .... If there's something that our staff is doing that is making it difficult in the building then we can do away with that and find another way to get the information. (SB, 976-1007)

In an effort to stay in touch with the principals, SB occasionally attends meetings to keep communications lines open. She noted:

Sometimes I visit the high school principals meetings and they are more casual and informal there. They are much more able to engage in lighter conversation and typically in those smaller meetings we do more laughing and problem solving. So, I prefer those smaller meetings. (SB, 890-898)

SB considers herself a teacher advocate. In describing her advocacy she indicated:

If it's neutral towards children then I want to do the humane thing toward employees. If there's a required two week separation notice, I always try to give them four. I try always to respect the dignity of any employee even one who has to be disciplined. (SB, 434-440)

More specifically SB offered:

if it was not in conflict with the needs of children it really is a no-brainer ....most of the time they wouldn't even know what I do for them [staff]. A lot of that is on an individual basis .... saved their retirement. Things like that they don't know about. (SB, 663-678)

Although one of the stressors in this district is low pay for educators, the teaching staff appeared not to fault the superintendent. At two meetings, one public and one private, the superintendent was not perceived to be at fault for low teacher salaries by staff. In a public

meeting held by the Board the people who spoke for higher wages expressed the opinion that budget in this district has been balanced on the back of the staff for years, but in no way did any presenters find the present superintendent at fault. Similarly, in a principals' meeting when one principal spoke of low morale because of low pay, he did not fault the superintendent for that situation. The superintendent shared that she engaged in risk taking behavior last year when she repeatedly asked for a higher compensation for staff. Even if the School Board did not heed her pleas for a different compensation package, the staff heard these pleas and apparently remembers.

Perhaps the superintendent's family roots in education or her desire to be a band director and make beautiful music allow her to build bridges between the various factions in this district. The connections required to unify this school district are what this superintendent hopes to create.

#### Expectation of Accountability

*"This will be a very uncomfortable time to be a teacher or principal. It will be on them. It will be just as uncomfortable for a principal as a superintendent "*(SB, 450-454).

SB holds high expectations for herself and others regarding carrying out the mission. She spends considerable time in her dealings with staff and the Board indicating her philosophy of maintaining high standards. Regarding these efforts SB indicated that she is particularly interested in continuous improvement for her district (SB, 442-446). In her drive to see continuous improvement she admits to being:

A very demanding person to work for because I have high expectations for performance. Although I am more willing to forgive mistakes in others than I am myself. I'm pretty hard on myself. I'm willing to defend others for mistakes but I beat myself up for the very same mistakes I would defend others for making. (SB, 954-963)

High expectations regarding performance for herself applies also to the performance of her central administrative staff and site administrative staff. These expectations extend through teaching staff to children (SB, 619-620).

Administrative staff, including those at the site, are expected to have a working

knowledge of the Six Year Plan and the major goals of the district. This expectation has resulted in a slight difference in the requests for budgeted funds. For example, there have been more requests for program funds that are academic in nature than in the past (SB, 387-398).

Administrative staff is expected to prepare in detail for any presentation. Quality management presentations in this district require rehearsal prior to presentation, so there are no surprises (JW, 49-53).

High expectations alone will not bring progress. SB set up a process by which the expectations could be articulated, integrated into the schools, and monitored. The Board initially expected someone who “was able to keep the staff focused on keeping the mission and improving student outcomes” (SB, 24-29). SB has answered that need and is able to present data to illustrate this. She has set up an informal process for continuous improvement and the related required accountability of staff.

The informal process for continuous improvement begins with the central office staff. They are expected to provide appropriate staff development and support to the directors and building administration to encourage positive growth. This staff gets the mission and goals out to the schools. The superintendent has an expectation that the staff know these goals. She maintained:

I've told them that I am going to come into their schools this year and ask random teachers what the three goals of their biennial plan are and if they don't know that's not good. They should know. And if they don't know that means the principal's not talking about it at a meeting. (SB, 253-261)

SB has a definite view of the principal as an instructional leader who models accountability and dedication to high standards. She indicated that working through the principals was a slow process because the principals had not in the past been seen in that light, but even in hiring she follows this philosophy. SB shared:

I have a very firm belief that in effective schools a principal must be an instructional leader in that school. That is one of the things I try to work toward including modeling that for principals in how you have to talk about instructional issues at meetings. The role

of a principal in my view is so different than the view that my predecessors had that complicates this [change] along with the size of the school system. (SB, 224-231, 313-316)

This superintendent is focused on instructional improvement. During her interview she made several references to instructional mission, quality management, and continual improvement. She focuses on her mission in these areas and expects others to follow her lead. She illustrated her focus recounting:

Board members told me later that was one of the key factors that they were looking for someone who was able to keep the staff focused on keeping the mission .... We can't use socio-economics as an excuse. We have to have high expectations for all learners. We have to improve things anyway .... We're here to make a difference. (SB, 24-28, 415-423)

Thus, this superintendent has adopted a no excuses philosophy. The Board at the time of hire was seeking a superintendent who would promote accountability, provide assessment, set up goals, and a system to attain these goals. According to a member of the Board, SB has made significant progress in these areas (MW, 35-37). In a statement regarding accountability the superintendent said, "As superintendent you are in demand constantly no matter what happens, especially if it is bad. It happened on your watch and you are accountable" (1023-1027).

#### Works in Isolation

*"Over time and not necessarily just here, one thing I tend to do, when I'm at work, I'm basically all work. I'm a very task oriented person" (SB, 464-467).*

The superintendent recognizes her propensity to remain on task in her office until completion, and therefore has devised a system to get out and about the district so that this habit does not create a negative perception. She shared:

One thing I have to do is chart for myself. I have to look back and see my visits to schools to make sure that I'm not perpetuating the impression of an isolated person who never gets out and about. If you wait till you have time to do it, that time will never come. (SB, 468-475)

Other actions of this superintendent may add to the concept of her being isolated. She focuses intently on task and has been this way since youth. After deciding that the superintendency was a reachable goal in her early thirties, she quickly finished the academic requirement and continued her progression toward her goal. She described her efforts:

I sought out a superintendent who let me present the budget to the Board of Supervisors so that I had that experience. He also let me build and administer that budget so that I really knew it. I probably know budget better than I knew anything else but I knew that it would be “well she’s a woman and she’s going to know instruction but not budget”. (SB, 595-605)

Some of this focus could be perceived as isolation. In addition to a separation in order to produce, she is somewhat isolated by the administrative team she has built since her arrival. She indicated that at first she intended to have the principals report directly to her, a model she was familiar with from the past; however, she retained the Directors as liaison to the building principals because it was a working system. Paradoxically, the directors isolate and communicate for the superintendent.

Finally, the superintendent chooses to seek relaxation by a river in an nearby county. She spends evenings there when she feels it is necessary and finds the location energizing. In addition, she keeps no work related materials in this house. She attributed some of her ability to cope with the demands of this job to a supportive spouse who was willing to move where her job took her and accepted living apart at times. When asked to comment on what might increase the number of female superintendents she noted:

I think there’s less of a societal expectation that women do all of the work. Just seeing more women in the superintendency makes a difference. In my case I had a role model and women serving in that capacity are role models for young adults and middle age are likely to see that as what they can do. (SB, 905-912)

In a number of ways SB reminded the researcher of the Queen Bee female leader first described in literature of the late seventies. Queen Bees, according to Tavis, (1984) practice co-optation for benefits and entry into the inner circle. These females subtly agree to be cooperative

and unthreatening. In addition, they tend to exclude the competition because they have worked very hard to achieve status. Finally, they feel little animosity to the system and little animosity towards the men who praise them for being so unique. They identify with specific males who are their reference group rather than the diffuse concept of woman as a class.

SB has an inner circle of male administrators who she trusts to do what she asks. She expressed a preference for hiring high school principals as central office staff. A majority of high school principals are male (Shakeshaft, 1989). These administrative choices work for this superintendent in this district and are part of what has made her efficient.

In addition to these personnel choices, this superintendent has been tasked with building connections. She clearly trusts her central office team to carry her message out to the schools. Throughout her tenure here she has also opened the lines of communication from the superintendent to the Board. Communication up from the bottom still has several layers to traverse, but this is a more open system than was in place when she arrived. A priority task on her agenda has been to communicate expectations to her community.

The superintendent has created an informal process for continuous improvement that is based on accountability for all in the system. There are no excuses or exceptions. The expectations have been carried out to the staff and all are expected to work for the good of the system. Her message very clearly states that she expects all to be accountable. Finally, she is a communications advocate who works in isolation, a paradoxical female leader who as the queen bee spends a great deal of the time in the darkness of her "hive", yet has a great impact on the whole system.

### **Case Three**

#### **Battalion Commander**

*Reminiscent of George Patton, the military genius who trained and motivated his men to achieve outstanding results, this superintendent stormed into her current school district tasked with a mission. She does not make policy, but once the goal has been set by those who are in charge, she has the authority to decide how to accomplish the mission.*

*I'm doing this to perhaps help somebody in the future and I've seen that a lot of women get there, but they fail. I don't know if they call it a failure, but longevity in the superintendency is key and when you get your contract and you're ousted before that is even up then to me there's something wrong. (BH, 4-13)*

#### District Description

The district of CD is a diverse undefined urban/suburban area that borders a large city. This industrial city is a modern transportation and manufacturing center that is served by a large river, five national highways, two railroads, a turnpike, and an international airport. Nearby manufacturers produce steel, clothing, shoes, electronic equipment, and precision and road machinery. In addition there are large military depots, a sizable military reservation, and a military college in the area. The first product to be heavily manufactured in this area was steel. The population of the city is currently 52,376.

The industrial flavor of the bordering city extends throughout the district of CD. The streets stretch over bridges, past row houses and through small ethnic neighborhoods. Eventually the row houses give way to houses on half acres, and finally to small garden farms and distribution warehouses on vast acreage. The schools are grouped in the more populated areas with only a few scattered in the outlying areas.

Neighborhoods are extremely distinct. In an interview a member of the Board reviewed the many different socio-economic groups that live within the area. He was quick to share that there were mobile home parks as well as enclosed restricted communities. The population is ethnically diverse with a large contingent of Southeastern European second generation citizens.

Overall, the minority population averages about 22 percent with most of this minority represented by African Americans.

The district of CD is situated northeast of the city and is the largest in area of the districts surrounding the city. According to literature produced by this system, this district encompasses an area of 125 square miles and is comprised of three boroughs and four townships. There are almost 11,000 students served by this district which includes 450 students in the technical school, and 145 students in special programs offered in the city. This district employs 800 certificated and 625 classified workers. The transportation system has 105 school busses and vans to deliver this large student body.

CD has two high schools, three intermediate schools, and fourteen elementary schools for a total of nineteen schools. The elementary and middle schools were built as need and population movement required. The high schools were built within a few miles of each other in 1955 and 1961. The schools hold 1,666 and 1,275 students respectively. The SAT mean of the high schools were slightly divergent in the verbal score (ten points) and in math (eight points). The older of the two schools is the larger and profiles indicate that there are far more graduates who pursue higher education graduating from this high school than the other. Reviewing the statistics, one would have to consider the possibility that this higher education choice is due to socio-economic circumstances because standardized achievement tests indicate no large gap between schools.

### Issues in the Community

Primary issues of these residents revolve around taxes, replacement of old technology, and provision of quality experiences and services to its citizens. In studying local papers, and in interviews the researcher noted that the residents place great importance on providing a quality education to their children.

Quality of the educational experience is important to this community. A member of the school board shared that in seeking a superintendent for this area, the Board actively sought a superintendent who could make a difference. He noted that certain academic areas required attention in order to allow this district to be competitive with adjoining areas (PV, article, 1998)

and that student achievement would become the primary mission of the superintendent. At the first meeting of the School Board a laundry list of concerns was delivered to the superintendent along with a charge to react and prepare strategic plans for a meeting in the near future (PV, 1-6). This list included concerns related to math and reading programs, number of classes a day, homogeneous grouping, inclusion, block schedule, and gifted programs. All of these curricular issues were linked to an effort to improve student achievement without raising taxes. A school Board member noted that the district “isn’t necessarily happy with the product the schools are producing” (PV, 32-34). Additionally, the Board had other issues of concern, including compensation for administrators and other financial problems of a bookkeeping nature. At the time she was hired, the superintendent was given the task of improving achievement levels in the district (PV, 8-30).

The concerns of this community are common. The struggle to keep taxes at a reasonable level while remaining competitive is fairly typical in most areas of growth. Although the growth in this district is not rapid, as new technology arrives areas are steadily being converted from agrarian to subdivision. This invasion of residents causes an upsurge in the need for expanded technology and increased services. People moving into the district often expect a different degree or kind of service from the schools than what is in place and thus, taxes tend to rise. Expectations of the citizenry related to the issues of concern impact the school community.

#### Relationship of the Superintendent, the Board, and Community

The superintendent of CD has been in place for three years. Her relationship with the board began with an interview at which she was not the first choice for the job (BH, 210). She was told by a member of the Board at the time of interview, that the Board feared hiring another woman because of the negative relationship of the Board and the previous female superintendent. For a reason unexplained by any Board member, the Board made a connection between the former superintendent’s leadership behaviors, such as her significant involvement with staff, and her gender. The superintendent noted:

there was the feeling that the whole faculty and administration was together against the Board. So, they were hesitant on hiring another woman. When it came down to the final

interview, [A School Board member] said, “You are head and shoulders above every other candidate. I’m just not sure we can hire another woman.” Those were his words and I have never forgotten them. (BH, 236-241)

Once the board had decided on this superintendent, they immediately made curriculum and personnel demands. Since her contract began, she has worked with a divided board that she perceived were concerned that they would be targeted in the next election for firing the former superintendent. She noted that when they got a new superintendent, the Board felt that they had to do something (BH, 645-652). In this instance she was referring to a building project to unify the high schools. BH described her actions in this effort:

My role has been more of a facilitator and a person to gather the facts and to explain these to the Board and the public and try to get through the emotion of it all. It was not my creation but now that it’s here I’ve moved it forward and I’ve gathered a good team .... the hope is that it will be going before the next election. (BH, 762-779)

BH described her relationship with the Board, her feelings about politics, and what she is willing to do to carry out her responsibilities:

I don’t do politics. Never have, never will and I don’t think like that. It’s been my friend, my enemy. I call myself an educator and you people go around and play politics. The other superintendent played politics and there’s too much to do academically and I’ve never been trained that way. (BH, 1150-1159)

According to the superintendent, while she has no plans to be a Board member, the members of the Board could not do the job she does. In her statement she referred to women on the Board as being easier to work with because they are willing to “put the other side of the issue on the table where the other people just try to steamroll” (BH, 1187-1196). The superintendent expressed a desire that the members of the Board would be more aware of her as an individual with feelings, but she was quick to indicate that she would pick her battles and that this was not one of them (BH, 1220-1268). Overall, the superintendent is sure that she can stand on her record if that is the deciding factor. In a conversation involving her achievements she noted:

I believe that I’ve done a great job. The next budget will prove it. When one budget is

made I am thinking about the next one. I'll do that for them. I've had six schools recognized by the state government. Six out of nineteen is a heavy number. (BH, 1273-1279)

It appears that this superintendent is all business when dealing with the Board. BH believes that the Board should decide policy and procedure and allow the superintendent to implement their policy. They have expressed faith that she will carry out their requests and move the district forward. A Board member says of the superintendent, "What this superintendent is really good at is making schools better" (Local Paper, 6/21/96). A School Board member interviewed indicated that he was surprised that she spent the number of hours she did on the job and remained productive (PV, 1998). BH appears a hard working superintendent who knows how to accomplish those goals set for her.

In the community the researcher heard few comments regarding the superintendent except that she had come from a neighboring district where she pushed a mediocre system to the top of the list and had spearheaded an elaborate building project of a Blue Ribbon School (Local Paper, 1996). Beyond those comments, when the observer was with the superintendent and moved throughout the community, the residents were more likely to refer to the Board as driving the district and the superintendent doing the expected, which according to them was facilitating the district educators efforts to provide the best education for children.

The superintendent does not live in CD. She lives within fifteen miles, but does not involve herself socially in CD. She indicated to the interviewer that she was comfortable with this choice, preferring to spend time with her family and friends in the area from which she had come. Her ties to this community are entirely of a work related nature.

#### Thumbnail Description of the Superintendent

BH is a tall woman of impressive presence. She engages in conversation easily employing constant eye contact. She is quick to smile, open and welcoming. Well cut honey colored hair, very little make-up on brilliant blue eyes, conservative designer suits, and a confident poise mark her as a corporate executive. Once dialogue starts with this woman, she sees it through to the end, taking time to explain fully each point and answer each question asked. It is not necessary to

probe for perceptions, opinions, and connections. She is proud of her accomplishments and honest about her situation. Somewhat idealistic in response, she offered no excuses or complaints. At the end of a very long day at work, she went on to entertain at her home. She is remarkable in her resolve and strength.

BH described her background in a German family as one reason for her ability to teach (or sell) others. She shared:

It was a sign of the times. I never wanted to be a teacher, but a vet. It was a financial issue coming from a German family with one son. He got all the money. He was going to be a dentist and he is a very prosperous one. The rest of us had to be a nurse, secretary or teacher .... It wasn't until I was disruptive in secretarial classes and they thought I was bored .... they allowed me to take the academic classes .... I had to pay for it myself so I went into education. (BH, 903-918)

The superintendent identified critical incidents in her professional past that she felt related to her desire to be a superintendent. Early on in her career as a guidance director she chaffed at the restrictions of politics on school policy and procedure. After serving for seven years as a guidance counselor in middle and high school she was appointed Director of Guidance K-12.

I was fairly young for that. The superintendent went to (a convention) and heard about this values clarification and told me to get it done. That was a lot of work and training and I did the whole thing. The night before the big training he called it off because of the controversy that had started to surface. I said to myself, "He's an idiot." He asked for something that he did not fully understand when he went into it. He used me to do all the work and yet I'm the one who took the punishment. He should have never let that happen ....I went into his office and his office had one of those desks with the shiny glass tops, nothing on it. And I left there and I said someday I'm going to be a superintendent. (BH, 786-816)

After pursuing her degree in guidance for a short time, BH was told of a study cohort that was in need of a woman. She resigned, took a sabbatical and entered a program at a university in

administration in order to continue her education in a funded capacity. She pursued her degree in administration without hesitation and completed fifty-seven credits and her dissertation in one year. Her dissertation concerned teacher selection. She intended to leave the program at one point, but a conversation with her advisor refocused her energies toward the superintendency.

I thought I could change guidance systems and I had been very successful .... I liked the kids and thought getting away from the kids would be hard. When he said go for it, I thought I had no choice. That's how I did it ... I felt that I had to finish what I had started. (BH, 847-856)

Once in administration, she quickly sought and gained valuable experience. She shared this experience:

There were seven assistant superintendents in [city named] .... I have never had an easy district. I got my own and then they merged it. .... five districts into one. I did that for two and a half years and then I got to [city named]. It was sweet, but it was worse than desegregating. The Board was hard to get together. A group of mini-superintendents and they were hard to keep out. (BH, 903-954)

This superintendent holds strong opinions of the struggle of women to obtain and maintain leadership positions. She indicated that in the superintendency, longevity is the major indicator of success. She related:

that has to do with leadership style .... well you work so hard and you go through all the hoops .... you have to get the doctorate ... you have to get the job .... perception that it's predominately male and you know how is a woman going to handle all those brutes, all those football players .... and somehow something clicks when they give you an opportunity and you have to really work at surviving and keeping your sanity, yet be an example and a model. (BH, 14-40)

Throughout this study, BH remained helpful to the researcher. On a site visit almost two months later, the superintendent appeared happy to pick up the conversation where it had stopped. This was the night of a tense community meeting attended by a vocal, unfriendly crowd that was opposed to the proposed building program. The superintendent appeared calm and prepared. She took her place at the podium, explained the growing enrollment, the options

considered by the Board, the financial feasibility of each option. The crowd was disdainful, but quiet during her segment, as she made no statements not supported by data. After her contribution, she sat still and silent as the pleas and questions of community members were hurled at the Board and the architect. Once her contribution was complete, the superintendent appeared content to listen. Earlier, she had shared how she moved this project from dream to reality:

My role has been more of a facilitator and a person to gather facts and to explain those to the Board and the Public and to try to get through the emotion of it all. It was not my creation, but now that it's here I've moved it forward and I've gathered a good team of people. (BH, 762-769)

The pursuit of the superintendency cost a great deal of personal pain for BH. She related the progression of events that resulted in her current single status. She indicated that her advancement in administration was initially supported by her spouse, but in the end it drove a wedge between them. She shared:

It was my marriage. He didn't want to have children and I felt that I couldn't sit home and watch television. We had a brand new set, but the university was so exciting and I felt that I had to finish what I had started. The day I finish is the day he divorced me. So that set the circumstances very different. Now you're into survival. Now you're into yourself which I wasn't into. I didn't know where that would have led me if I had children. I had finished my degree on Monday and I got a dozen red roses on Tuesday. My birthday was Wednesday and I got a dozen yellow roses on Thursday and by Friday I was divorced. It was an amazing cycle and it caused a different prospective. Now all I had was my work and I'll be the best whatever I am: principal, assistant superintendent and that's what I did. (BH, 862-884)

Legacy is important to this superintendent. She has been willing to risk her career in order build an impressive track record. She proudly describes her efforts to bring in a quality team to move the district forward as she did in the prior district. It is her purposeful effort to leave each place she leads with an academically stronger system and technology and facilities to support the

system. She explains, "I value a qualified staff. I'll train them and give them security, benefits, and kids" (BH, 754-755). Regarding the current building effort she says, "The architects have been working hard with people and it's really going to serve the needs of everyone. It's going to be gorgeous and it has so much potential. That's been the driving change that's happened here" (BH, 756-759).

BH is a battalion commander. She has been imported to lead the struggle and carry out a mission to reach a set goal, has been given little local support for this venture, and has had to rely on troops she does not feel are fully trained. There is little time for training while the constant battle that began before her arrival rages on outside her command post. Although she is not popular with the troops, the locals, or even some of her inner circle, she has been brought in by the Board to do a job that she has the credentials and the track record to accomplish.

She is spinning her wheels in a transition situation. She follows the battle plan which has been given her, but her idealistic comments and actions make her uniquely vulnerable on all fronts. She has made every attempt to ready those who are in her inner circle but senses their weaknesses. Like the great military leaders, she prepares carefully for battle, fights the good fight, and attempts to leave a positive legacy. One of Patton's maxims listed in a current book on leadership comes to mind here: Good tactics can save even the worst strategy. Bad tactics will destroy even the best strategy (Axelrod, 1999).

BH has played this role in other places, but she sees little reward in playing the commander (superintendent) for much longer. Again, a Patton principle fits: Any man who thinks he is indispensable, ain't. People must have the authority to match responsibility. Commanders must command (Axelrod, 1999). She began and ended the interview on the same theme indicating her concern over the changing role of the superintendent. The reader is directed to review quotes at the beginning and end of this case report which illustrate the superintendent's thoughts on the future of the superintendency.

## Critical Leadership Behaviors

### Demonstrates Practical Organizational Skills (Preparation)

Practical organizational skills were obvious in the formation, education and everyday professional and personal life of this woman. Her major organizational skills include extensive and well planned preparation, financial expertise, focus to task, and setting and maintaining measurable goals. Raised in a German family where tradition was respected and preserved, she knew order in her early life, even if it was one imposed by her family and it's expectations.

I had the greatest set of parents. There was limited money but they gave us freedom of thought. It was very intense. We [the siblings] were all very different. The profession of your father predicts your success and salesmen are rated the highest. That's what my father was and that's what I think I am. I know what kids would like to know and I try to do it against all odds. (BH, 1373-1383)

She prepared for her job in education, carefully looking for those experiences that she would need for later. She knew that financial knowledge would open doors so she became an expert on educational budgeting and was positive about her competence in this area. At the time of her interview she made a clear point of bringing up examples of her money sense.

I guess the reason they went for me is I'm very practical .... So I was able to tell them in their language what I could do to save tax dollars, what my background brings in terms of the financial picture, how long I've been dealing with finances because they represent the taxpayer and while they want to change curriculum and other things, the bottom line is that it's all financial and thank goodness I had some decent training coming up from my assistant superintendency on how to computerize the budget and how to get it out to the people and how to come up with compromise. (BH, 74-90)

Experience was a good teacher for this superintendent. She has a professional past rife with struggles and strife from which she generally emerged successful. The superintendent used all of her past training and experience to carry out the charges of the Board. These tasks included curricular improvement in math and reading, administrative personnel replacement, and planning for a large building project in several sites which would alleviate over-crowdedness. In a public

meeting required by state law the superintendent demonstrated her in depth preparedness for the building effort. She related the following data regarding the proposal:

At that high school there is about 11% minority population and at this high school there is 22%. And when you put them together it will be about 16%. It really solves all of the issues .... it stops the slide. (BH, 691-699)

Once hired, the superintendent began preparing the team to help her guide this district to quality education. But this organizational effort was initially frustrating and eventually, she had to cancel team meetings, and take time to meet with each administrator individually. An administrative staff member, who had been a part of a former administrative team of the superintendent, indicated she missed the meetings, but the superintendent felt they were not fruitful.

What I did the first year was what I did in every other superintendency. Every other week was my staff meeting. We would go in there and I would create an agenda and they would create an agenda. I would send out for items and we would go around the table and discuss hires .... The first year I was here it was just a disaster. There was just so much incompetence. (BH, 317-341)

In addition to preparing well, another strong organizational skill of BH is her ability to focus on task. A Board member highlighted her resolve, focus, and attention to task for long hours while still remaining productive was surprising (PV, 41-46). He shared that the numerous tasks given to this superintendent upon her entry were based on the Board's knowledge of her ability to bring out the best in a system. He alluded to a coming "battle" (the building project) and her continuing progress toward it (PV, 45-46).

This superintendent's practical organizational skills are evident in the area of personnel. Her ability to choose and promote administrative leaders has been evident in her reorganization of staff. She has had to replace six major administrators at the central level. Since then BH has hired and moved staff to create a team that she has learned only in part to trust. She noted, "it feels pretty good now to have people that want to work with you and want to be in that same fight. Not fighting each other all the time" (BH, 406-490).

BH is able to focus on her task and not be dissuaded from her given objectives.

Benchmarks and internal goal setting are all a part of her preparation for success. She described her efforts:

I've moved it forward and I've gathered a good team of people, the architect, the manager inside here are working on this only. The hope is that it will be going before the next election, and if the Board that comes in wants to change it they are going to have to change construction and all .... They [ Board] hope it will be a done deal by the time they are ousted. (BH, 768-779)

In her preparation, this superintendent made every effort to know the territory well and to work with her staff to make and follow a workable plan to achieve their given goals. However, this scrutiny of the situation apparently does not include the political front. She emphasized:

Frankly, I don't even think that way. [A Board member] says I just can't understand you. You don't even think of the political ramifications of anything you do and I say, That's right, that's your job. I don't do politics, never have, never will , and I don't think like that. It's been my friend, my enemy. I call myself an educator and you people go around and play politics. The other superintendent played politics and there's too much to do academically and I've never been trained that way. (BH, 1145-1158)

### Managing Change (The Good Fight)

"Change in Boards and governors make having a mission difficult. We went through outcome based education and now we're in standards. Churches and schools are slow to change," noted BH in her interview (1385-1389). Still, she is confident that change that is for the best for children, will prevail. BH is an willing change agent. She has been associated with change for the majority of her professional career. She shared a situation of this nature:

I had built the area I was superintendent in before from mediocre to Blue Ribbon ...I built a brand new high school and .... it has so much potential .... They wanted more and more. We were number one in the state assessment tests. (BH, 188-199)

Once she arrived in this district, the superintendent began a series of personnel, curricular

and procedural changes. Meanwhile, the Board began an initiative to merge two high schools into a super school. BH indicated that her role in the building initiative was that of a “facilitator and a person to gather the facts and to explain those to the Board and the public and try to get through the emotion of it all” (BH, 762-766). She further noted, “It was not my creation, but now that it’s here I’ve moved it forward and I’ve gathered a good team” (BH, 766-769).

This superintendent has already made strides in curriculum revision, and answering administrative personnel issues. In her past superintendencies she worked with desegregation, mergers, and making a mediocre system win Blue Ribbon honors. Part of her ability to be a change agent is based on her knowledge of systems as well as personnel. Regarding her knowledge of systems she related:

I’m a systems person and I like to see how systems work; where the pecking order is, the real power, and the informal power. For some reason I have never had an easy district .... I was always the troubleshooter. Pick it up and put it back together. I like systems to be symmetrical. I like symmetry and order and I like to be able to pull that together and maybe that’s something I just never thought about .... The progress I’ve made because I know how it works. (BH, 930-964)

I compete with myself. I set some internal goals for myself. If I achieve those and I know I’m doing okay, I’m energized. I can see it. I’m a global person. I see the big picture and all the little pieces. I know where I’m going. I can’t explain it to anybody. People say vision but I see how things fit together and how to move it. And when I see it come together, I’m energized. But a lot of people don’t think like I do, so I don’t talk to them. What needs to happen is to get everybody in the boat with an oar rowing in the same direction .... I’m a systems person. I have studied that inside and out. I know how bus drivers act, I know how that playground aide, the lowest in the pecking order feels. (BH, 1158-1216)

Her knowledge of systems design and how these relate to success is supported by statements of members of her administrative team, as well as a member of the Board in interviews and conversations observed. This superintendent was expected to know how the

pieces work together and to lead by example .In addition the administrative team members indicated that the superintendent's life is prioritized by the goals and vision she shares (SA, 21-24).

A member of the central office administrative team noted in an interview that she had learned to do her homework, to prioritize, and to focus as a result of working for this superintendent. She added that she has been confident to rely on and believe in herself since this superintendent has given her the impetus to hold others accountable. When asked how this change came about, she explained that the superintendent led by example and modeling. High expectations, hard work, and encouragement to meet goals are the actions of this superintendent and those that she expects and teaches others on her team. This loyal administrative team member noted that she felt the superintendent was "just awesome" and that if she left tomorrow this administrative team member would soon follow (SA, 25-37, 84-91).

BH's ability to turn systems around was well known at the time of her interview. She asked the Board at interview if they had the "guts" to change things which indicated to the Board that she was willing to take on this role again if that was necessary (PV, 36-38). Although she came in with six key people gone from the administration, she was encouraged to bring in five others by the board. She has gathered those she trusts, two from her old district, one from building administration, and another from industry. With these new people in her administrative team, she will prepare to do battle (PV, 37-39). However, she is still not comfortable with those in her inner circle.

It was a very difficult first year. I did a lot of listening. I didn't do a lot of reacting. The second year I reorganized (BH, 352-356). I told Pam I can never change this place until I can turn people over (BH, 977-979). I am willing to let them go through the sandpaper part of rubbing up against each other and I'm not reacting to their complaints about each other. You're just going to have to be patient. I hired that person because I believe in them. I believe they have the capabilities to do this. (BH, 1125-1132)

Mixed within the positive comments are those of doubt and frustration with leadership differences within her inner circle. Time is limited in this struggle. A local paper wrote that " BH

is the one who will unify the district “ (Paper, 1996), but the superintendent senses that time may be running out.

### Lifetime Teaching (Legacy)

BH is a consummate teacher. She has found a way to continue instruction throughout her career, and even now she considers it an important part of her leadership. She feels a responsibility to help other leaders become stronger leaders. Examples of this can be found in all of the interviews conducted by this researcher and again through observation. BH describes her current team:

I am still trying to meet with them and get them to see the big picture .... You'll talk to people here who say I'm hands-on and when they say that I say well I only have two hands and this is a large district. I am not sure what hands-on means, but I perceive it to mean I am controlling and I want it my way and I don't want to hear about the creativity of their way .... And in that sense they're probably true because they're new and I want to experience their thought process .... It's kind of like teaching every year when you start up you have to set up the rules and be tough and then you can ease up. My behavior is I want to know what you're thinking, how you're going to handle something and tell me what you're going to do. And if I agree with that, fine, then you go do that .... That's why I feel the leadership here when I came was the inexperienced versus the antagonists. I was just trying to feel out their leadership skills and what they did to move the district. Then I would help direct that. (BH, 497-584)

At points during this interview BH shared her feeling that her time here was limited. Even after a few years she does not feel appreciated. Regarding this she noted:

I have not brought them back together as a group. I feel that they were able to manipulate me and it was not that productive. I was sincere and they were the insiders. They knew what it was like and they also felt that I couldn't handle this job. (BH, 392-399)

The superintendent's comments regarding her tenure in this area included reference to other opportunities. BH has stayed to see projects finished before, but this time the situation

might not allow this. She may be a transitional superintendent. She shared some of her frustration:

You have to pick your battles and know your territory. I'm on the way out of here ....I'd risk my job. And at a point when I'm thinking why am I doing this when I'm still single, still supporting myself, still on my own and I know that I have some difficult battles. I have tempered my aggression. I could retire. I feel a freedom. I can take more risks now. (BH, 1265-1340)

Timing. It was a timing issue. They (Board) perceived their time on the Board as limited and they were talking about not running again. They were into their second year of four years. They had things to prove that had nothing at all to do with the superintendent. They had cleared out a superintendent and six people. They didn't raise taxes. (BH, 599-608)

BH's ultimate goal is to teach teachers or administrators in a university setting. She has participated in several of these programs in her development and would like to continue her leadership teaching indefinitely.

I want to teach. I want to pick up where Hunter left off ....I would love to go to a university and teach teachers or principals .... Administrators today have to be motivated and the training isn't there. They get one step above the teacher and they become the protector, instead of the leader. (BH, 1308- 1329)

She is, as she said from the onset, interested in helping women survive in the superintendency even though she holds a negative perception of the future for superintendents.

At this point it's almost sad to say it's not a leadership position emerging. With the way the School Board is continuing to go, it may be an authoritative one. It's not respected ....

There is no image there; the public is abusive. (BH, 1359-1369)

BH has been involved in a struggle in every superintendency she has held. She is straightforward and honest regarding her motives in each case. She is willing to lead the charge and prepares to be at war for the cause. She expresses the cause to be what's right for children and in her current superintendency she has prepared for and fights the battle to merge two very different schools to offer an excellent educational setting for all students. She knows that she

may not finish this battle, and when she finishes here she wants to teach other soldiers to lead. Had she been a more political leader she might find longevity in her position, but that would not match her convictions, interests and talents. Her professional life involves change and her battalion commander style supports this philosophy.

*You've got to be realistic about the job and it's not all glamour. If you can outlast the first contract and into the second one, then you can be a little more yourself. The pressure is so great. If you get Boards that still have faith in the superintendent then you have time to sift it all through. (BH, 1393-1401)*

### Summary

Chapter four described the findings of the case reports of this study investigating the leadership behaviors of selected female superintendents in an effort to determine the leadership assumptions employed by presently practicing female superintendents. In addition to descriptions and narrative specific to each of the superintendents studied, this chapter included data gathered on the responses of members of the leadership circle, community and Board to the leadership behaviors of the superintendent, and depictions of the political, educational and demographic contexts that frame the superintendents' behaviors. Many sources were considered in the field by the researcher. From these varied sources major leadership behaviors which emerged during each study were identified and described. In Chapter Five the conclusions drawn from these studies will be presented along with the relationship of these findings to the literature and recommendations for future research studies.

## Chapter V

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership behaviors that selected female superintendents display under the conditions of the superintendency in order to identify and describe, through case study, the leadership assumptions drawn upon by these women, the response of selected participants within each district's leadership circle to the superintendent's leadership behaviors, and the contexts that frame these behaviors. In this chapter, conclusions on the findings of this study are reported. They are organized for the reader as case by case responses to the study's research questions followed by overarching conclusions. The relationship of the findings to the literature and recommendations by the researcher for future research studies follow.

#### Conclusions

##### Research Question 1

*What leadership assumptions appear to form the basis for the leadership behaviors of these presently practicing superintendents?*

Major leadership behaviors of JMW, the Steel Magnolia superintendent in Case One, included: energetic expression, confident actions based on deep knowledge of community, and a multi-modal communication approach. Assumptions that form the basis for this superintendent's choice of leadership behaviors were based on experience and sociological factors, but most were supported by the superintendent's deep knowledge of the mores of the community in which she leads.

The superintendent expressed herself energetically in personal and professional situations. She devoted large amounts of energy promoting the image of her school system locally, regionally, state-wide, and nationally. The superintendent assumed that key community members and the Board trusted her to benefit the community by promoting the quality of the schools.

JMW's energetic lifestyle also affected her personal circle. She worried about appearing driven, yet proposed no change in pattern. She spent little time directing others. She had confidence in her assistants' ability and only took up their cause if they were frustrated in carrying out her goals. Her assumption was that people make of themselves what they will and good people ultimately make the right decisions. JMW knew her communities' expectations and her leadership behaviors conformed to this knowledge. JMW understood that if she was a part of the community, she would be able to lead with little conflict. She also had a keen awareness of what personal behaviors would be viewed as negative in a stereotypical way by the community. She assumed that she was constantly under scrutiny by those who were her support and acted accordingly. Finally, the openness and relationship that JMW offered the community both provided her with confidence and extracted a high price. The gain must have been worth price.

SB, the queen bee superintendent from Case Two, demonstrated three significant leadership behaviors. SB was establishing connections with the differing factions in this district, especially the building administrators and staff. Secondly, she demanded accountability and accepted no excuses for lack of quality. This superintendent provided a method to measure positive growth brought by the focus on accountability. Finally, she isolated herself to work with her team and focus on her tasks without diversion.

SB recognized early in her tenure that her peacemaking skills were what would help her mend the fractured system. Peacemaking efforts included utilizing collaborative strategies to include staff and building administration in decisions, initiating a program that rewarded continuous improvement, and making choices that favored staff when she felt the student was not affected. The superintendent recognized that these connections strengthened her power base. With the Board divided and the citizens opposed to a tax raise, there were tight economic times ahead for the staff. To keep this staff positive, the superintendent assumed that the staff had to feel appreciated. SB created a system of communication that allowed a clear and consistent message to be sent to the building staff through the directors who have credibility with the staff. She assumed that connection was vital to her continued effectiveness.

The superintendent expected accountability from all. The superintendent had set in motion an informal system to monitor continuous improvement. Her assumption was that there was a need to quantify and prove success, hers and the district's. She had focused on a visible benchmark system and was able to articulate clearly the district's mission, goals, and advancement toward those goals. She assumed the need to demonstrate success in concrete fashion to any interested party.

Finally, she worked in isolation. Paradoxically, the connection builder worked alone a large percent of the time. This superintendent was not heavily involved in the community. She focused on the school system as a whole, using research, available data, and her administrative team to keep her informed, but she did not enter the political arena. SB planned, delegated, then monitored very closely. Her assumption here was that well planned work that is tended gets results; her success was based on the results gained from careful preparation and diligent personal effort.

BH, the battalion commander superintendent in Case Three, displayed individual leadership behaviors. She carefully organized and prepared, managed change, and counseled her staff in leadership skills. Experience taught this superintendent how systems worked, what preparation was necessary to compete for the superintendency, and how to hold the position once achieved. She trained her administrative team on-the-job as she was trained. She was focused in her organizational objectives and not easily dissuaded from her goals. She assumed that she must individually prepare in detail for each endeavor. She has been unwilling to trust many.

Secondly, this superintendent was a change agent. She had always had difficult districts and enjoyed creating systems that functioned well and improved with age. She indicated that she attempted to remove emotion from change and keep things moving forward once a goal was set. She assumed major systemic change was healthy.

Finally, BH was a teacher. She enjoyed helping her central office administrators struggle to find their personal leadership style. She had always mentored others and promoted from the ranks. She intends to teach educational leaders in a university setting in the near future. She believed that there is a need to promote good leadership for the schools and assumed a

responsibility to share what she has learned.

## Research Question 2

*In what ways do those within each district leadership circle respond to these female superintendents when they function as leaders?*

In this research, the reactions of the leadership circle were considered. In observation and interview the following became evident to the researcher. In Case One, the Board had faith in the judgement of the superintendent. She won their respect as a superintendent who did what was necessary for the children. Her integrity was unquestioned and the Board appreciated that the superintendent taught the Board what they needed to know to be efficient. The Board was undivided in their support for the efforts of the superintendent.

A member of the central office team indicated that the superintendent allowed the team members to make mistakes and learn from them. The superintendent and her assistants sparked on some issues privately, but the detailed work style of the assistants complemented her global view. This team worked together with little dialogue. The leadership team in Case One appeared to be powerfully effective.

In Case Two, all the members of the leadership team parrot the same dialogue. They mention the same community issues, indicate the same district priorities, and all are comfortable with policies and proposed plans. Both Board and central office team members referred to the collaborative efforts of the superintendent and her opening of communication channels. The Board member was particularly pleased with the peacemaking efforts of the superintendent. Although a member of the central office team interviewed indicated that the team members were different in their opinions, when a united front was expected by the superintendent, they always complied. The superintendent's leadership style was directive and followed a process that was easily understood by her team. This unity was comforting and allowed for stability in this district.

In Case Three, BH was in a volatile situation. The Board was content with the superintendent's progress to date, but demonstrated little public support for her. The board trusted that the superintendent would draw from her past successes at rebuilding a system to help

bring change to this resistant district. The central office administrators, who were either new at leadership or new in the district, found the superintendent's style both motivational and awe inspiring. However, their allegiance to this superintendent isolated them from the staff, who had yet to accept the new superintendent. Their leadership tasks were difficult; therefore, the attempts of the superintendent to hone their leadership skills were appreciated and respected by these assistant superintendents. Her team was loyal. The members of the leadership circle all seemed to be aware of the difficult situation in CD and admired BH for taking on the problem. If this were a more experienced team, they would provide a buffer for the superintendent; however, the district events placed the teachers against the new central office team and a large number of citizens against the board. This leadership team had a bunkerlike aura about it.

### Research Question 3

*What political, educational, and demographic contexts frame the leadership behaviors of these female superintendents ?*

In Case One, the historic community of approximately three thousand residents was a gateway to major industrial and commercial properties. The residents were predominately blue-collar workers who had a personal connection with the schools. Over eighty percent of the town budget was committed to the schools, the residents in civic groups were involved in the schools, and the news media was positive in coverage of school events. The superintendent's strength was the community. They were proud of her purposeful attention to their needs. The community was the stage for this superintendent's success.

The community in Case Two was a rapidly growing rural/suburban area of almost 90,000 residents. This community was a divided economically, politically, and educationally. There were differing opinions on growth, taxes, community needs, and services. The school system had been in a building phase, having just opened two new schools, with no end in sight. The schools were under scrutiny to demonstrate that they deserved a high portion of available funds. The superintendent had set about to involve the school system in competitive academic success, to demonstrate the school system's continual improvement program and accountability procedure,

and to focus intently on the needs and progress of the school system. Her activities were directed inward. She was the answer this community needed in this time of change, anchoring and leading the school system while others were divided on the big issues.

In Case Three the community was an urban/suburban community of 52, 376 residents. It was growing gradually as the outlying areas become more densely populated. The gradual growth of residents in this district who differed from the original residents in socio-economic and cultural background created growing pains for this school system. Although the growth was not rapid, the Board felt it needed to be managed. Longtime residents resisted change. The Board had embarked upon a building project to combine school populations rather than build a new high school in the new community. The effort was to provide an equitable education for all students in the district. Into this melee came a new superintendent with a history of surviving and managing change. She had the experience and strength this community needed. She had no personal connection in this community and was able to distance herself emotionally from the fray. This distance allowed her to lead a campaign to accomplish the Board's goals, but it also made her tenure questionable.

#### Overarching Conclusions

The female superintendents in this study displayed some common leadership behaviors. The leadership behaviors held in common were as follows:

- All acted as facilitators or developers in implementing policy.
- All were meticulous in preparation and presentation. They worked long hours.
- All took an active interest in traditional administrative skills (budget).
- All viewed themselves as focused, demanding, and hands-on bosses.
- All used a visionary, global, and system oriented lens.

The assumptions that were held in common by these female superintendents were as follows:

- As a female leader you are alone. There are few safe places.
- Other's perceptions regarding gender must be considered.
- Women have to be extremely well prepared to be competitive.

- It takes time, effort, and attention to build a power base.
- Measurable progress and accountability validate effectiveness.

The differences in these superintendents' leadership behaviors also have meaning. Differences in the following constructs were manifested in behavior: political involvement, power and directionality, active mentoring, task-oriented behaviors, caring and nurturing, and creating unique working environments.

These superintendents turned toward the supportive elements in their context. They demonstrated an inside/outside or directional leadership behavior pattern based on where they found support. An inside/outside or directional leadership pattern means one set of leadership behaviors is demonstrated to those on the leader's inside circle, while another set of patterns is displayed to those on the outside of the leader's perceived circle of support. In addition to perceived support, the Board's internal stability appeared to be a determining factor in which set of leadership behaviors would be displayed by the superintendent.

Three constructs affected by support and board stability in context were political involvement, power and directionality, and caring or nurturing. The superintendent in Case One was involved heavily in politics, found her power in the community, was directionally tuned to the outside, demonstrated care and nurturing behaviors in the community, and had a unified Board. The superintendent in Case Two was not involved in politics, found her power in the administrative staff, was directionally tuned to the inside, demonstrated care and nurturing to the inside, and worked with a split Board. Finally, the superintendent in Case Three avoided politics, was directed internally, found support in her new administrative, central office team, demonstrated care and nurturing to this team, and had a Board that was beginning to divide on major issues. These superintendents shared their obvious nurturing and attention with the groups that were supportive. Where the Board was not united, the superintendent turned inward.

Other differences in leadership behaviors were found in the constructs of mentoring, task-oriented behavior, and creating a unique working environment. Although all superintendents were able to refer to the advantages of having had a mentor, only one superintendent, the third, was currently involved in mentoring another. In the area of mentoring, the lack of the

superintendents mentoring others is aligned with the findings of Cooper (1993) who also found that females in leadership positions may not mentor others into the position. In the area of task-oriented behaviors, the superintendent in Case One who displayed outside directionality was less inclined to demonstrate this behavior. The two superintendents whose directionality was turned inward from Case Two and Three were more task-oriented in behavior. Finally, the only unique working environment this researcher noted was in Case One. All of the staff in this office were female. The atmosphere was relaxed, meetings were rarely formal, and visitation between offices was frequent. The other two superintendents' offices while friendly, did not have the informal feel of Case One.

A final difference that emerged from the case data was the reaction to politics. Unlike the superintendents in Isaacson (1998) the second and third superintendent in this research study did not thrive on politics. In the first case, JMW demonstrated political savvy every day. She knew where each feeling, opinion, and vote was on each issue because she was a true part of the community. In case two, SB was respectful and aware of the political danger of her rapidly growing and diverse community with a split Board. She was somewhat conservative and traditional as she managed growth in this community, trying to foresee and respect political decisions rather than trying to affect them. Her penchant for peacemaking helped her avoid political problems. The third superintendent, BH, was rather disdainful of politics as a whole. She was clearly uninterested in taking part in any political maneuver, not seeing that as part of her job. It may be that this avoidance of politics is what makes her see the future of the superintendency in negative terms.

Assumptions did not vary from individual to individual. All were in place with each superintendent. However, the individual superintendents reacted in different ways to a set of common assumptions.

#### Relationship of Findings to the Literature

The results of this study related to the literature on leadership behaviors of female administrators in four distinct areas: preparation for the superintendency, building connections, contextual determination of leadership behaviors, and isolation in the superintendency.

The superintendents in this study all prepared for their superintendency by seeking and finding a mentor superintendent who supported their efforts. These mentors were all men, an event of circumstance. This would parallel the findings of Isaacson (1998) where the researcher also found that all of the superintendents in her studies found having opportunities to work with a mentor enhancing to their professional growth. Specifically, these females utilized their mentors to help prepare them to be competent in traditional management areas such as facilities and budget. Grogan's (1996) research indicated that there has to be a vast amount of traditional credibility in order for a female to be considered for a superintendency. These females all followed a purposeful path to the superintendency. For them, as Grogan(1996) points out, the discourse was typical and they were prepared with traditional answers to traditional questions. These superintendents were aware of the stereotypical perception of women as less rational (Haslett, et al., 1992; Shakeshaft, 1989) and presented themselves as problem-solvers who could work within the system to affect change. Grogan (1994) indicated that women have socialized gender-related strengths such as relationship building which cross over into leadership behaviors that meet the present needs of educational administration. All of these women noted strengths that were based on socialized behavior; however, they were careful to include traditional leadership strengths with these strengths to promote themselves.

Once they attained the superintendency these women placed great value on establishing and maintaining strong relationships. Gilligan (1993) noted that men viewed work through logic and law; women viewed it through relationships. In each of these superintendencies, relationships or the lack of relationships played a large part in the effectiveness of the superintendent. In WP, the superintendent forged active relationships with key members of the community and formed her power base there. In SC, the superintendent practiced consensus building in the school system. With that effort well under way, she was forging her power base in the central office and building staff. Finally in CD, the superintendent was building relationships in the central office. Her team, which she had for the most part created, were in the training phase. She was making no attempt to build relationships outside this group, seeming to prefer to work alone.

Several researchers (Chase, 1995; Haslett, 1992; Schmidt, 1992; Shakeshaft, 1989) note the isolation of female leaders. The isolation is attributed to several sources. Chase (1995) in recent writings indicated that women have been co-opted by traditional systems. Denying connections to one's gender allows these women upward mobility. In two of the case studies, the superintendents avoided any talk of gender, allowing the researcher to consider Bell's (1995) theory that marginality shapes expressions of gender consciousness in female superintendents by focusing on defeminization. In the case of the third superintendent, being co-opted is not an issue as she actively networks with and supports female peers. Still, all of the superintendents referred to isolation in the time of tough decisions. It appears that all sought and used support from close family members and considerate spouses, not peers, in times of need.

The most obvious connection to the literature was in the area of context determining leadership style. The context in which these female superintendent's made their decisions related to leadership behaviors that they chose to display. McBroom (1986) found that women who displayed task-oriented behaviors would be seen as masculine and women who used power in a masculine way would get negative reactions. Conversely, two of the women in this study demonstrated task-oriented behaviors. The superintendent who did not demonstrate this behavior came from the most traditional, of the three areas studied and had stated a concern with being perceived as non-feminine. In the two remaining areas, task-oriented behavior was accepted as sensible for any leader, male or female.

Regarding context determining leadership style, the more recent research closely aligned with these cases. In 1995, Bell and Chase found that effective leaders draw on both leadership and task orientations in an integrated fashion without regard to gender, but with regard to the environmental context. Gender is a contextual factor. They also noted that confronting gender-based difficulties does have an impact on leadership strategies women choose. Where these leadership choices must be made, the situation becomes the deciding factor. Schmidt (1992) continued, indicating that women differ from each other in leadership behavior because of the different contexts in which they lead. Differences in leadership strategies exist in all three cases based on the stereotypical gender perceptions of the community, and economic, political, and

social situations that surround the school system.

### Recommendations for Future Study

The findings of this study may have implications for other research in the area of leadership behavior of female superintendents. The following recommendations emerged from the research and are proposed by the researcher:

1. Conduct a study of the perceptions of female superintendents regarding their graduate experience and their preparation for leadership.

2. Conduct a case study or studies to determine how female superintendents have reacted professionally to other's stereotypical gender-based perceptions.

3. Examine the process of female to female mentorship as it occurs between female superintendents and those females aspiring to the position.

4. Focus on one the three superintendents in this study, examining her leadership behaviors and assumptions in a longevity study to view change over time.

5. Describe female superintendents' reactions to the assumptions in this study in order to determine how these assumptions have affected their leadership behaviors.

6. Employ demographics in a quantitative study regarding sitting fem superintendents that would indicate personal price paid by females for pursuing, achieving, and continuing in the superintendency.

7. Examine the relationship of the superintendency to family life in an attitudinal or biographical survey study.

8. Describe reactions of male administrators to the leadership behaviors of female superintendents.

### Researcher's Comments

The superintendents in this study were unique women who pioneered in positions generally held by males. They had few models before them. One purpose for embarking on this research was to describe the leadership behaviors of current female superintendents in order to define an image of "glass ceiling breakers". An image defined could be emulated. In studying the available research, it became obvious that there was little agreement in the area of the

relationship of gender to leadership. Therefore, following no set path, this search for the image of a “glass ceiling breaker” began.

What emerged was an understanding that these three women were talented in areas common to all leaders. They were able to articulate to others the skills they could offer when given the opportunity to compete for available positions. They entered this competition with a set of working assumptions including the concept that they had to prove themselves more competent than expected and certainly able to perform in traditional ways.

These females displayed varied leadership behaviors based on a common set of assumptions. The context of their leadership determined what leadership behaviors these women demonstrated. In preparation for the superintendency these women were mentored in traditional ways and skills, and each superintendent was aware of the expectations of the Board at the time of interview. The traditional discourse they heard and responded to during their interview and following affected their actions throughout their superintendency. To appear non-traditional, until well established would be to appear weak.

The female superintendents in the cases all talked about their use of a somewhat non-traditional style in their leadership. They spoke of leadership styles which were unaffected by their gender, were collaborative, and demonstrative of care and nurturing of children. This type of non-traditional behavior was not observed by the researcher during the time at the site. It may be that this behavior was difficult to incorporate on a regular basis in the traditional settings of the superintendency. Given more time, these behaviors may surface more commonly as the superintendents become more comfortable in their districts.

There has been a gradual rise in the number of female superintendents. Increased efforts at mentoring young female leaders, changing gender perceptions of School Boards, and a gender realistic graduate experience that prepares all interested candidates for the superintendency would support this continued entrance of females into the superintendency. In addition, there must also be a change in the concept of what good leadership entails, so that the idea of what a leader is or does is not rigid. Different situations call for different leaders. It is entirely conceivable that the superintendent should interview the Board more closely and be very particular about which

situations will allow them to highlight their strengths.

The glass ceiling breaker that emerged from this research was a woman who held the right tools, was not afraid to display these tools, and was knowledgeable about which tools to actually use in the situation. She had faith in her ability to fix the problem and improve the situation. She could convince others of her intelligence, competence, passion, and ability to lead. Finally, her confidence allowed others to put aside their stereotypical perceptions and take a risk.

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Appendix A  
Letter of Introduction

September 1, 1998

Dear Superintendent,

I am writing to ask that you consider participating in a research study which will begin this year. This study is entitled A qualitative study of female superintendents: Leadership behaviors in context. I will briefly outline the proposal.

Research finds that females in an administrative role demonstrate a wide variety of leadership behaviors. Female superintendents make unique leadership choices based on their socialization, training, past experiences, and the situation at hand. These choices may be further impacted by the fertile environment of the superintendency. This research will focus on the leadership behaviors demonstrated by female superintendents and the contexts that frame these behaviors.

There is little research to indicate what leadership assumptions female superintendents utilize, and this study will contribute information regarding these concepts and the leadership choices of the superintendent made over time.

The proposed research is a naturalistic case study project involving interview, observation and document review. The exact timetable for each case will be determined by the superintendent and the researcher at the time of the initial interview.

This research is an effort to complete the requirements of an Ed.D. at Virginia Tech and is undertaken with the knowledge and support of my dissertation committee chaired by Dr. Joan Curcio. I am an assistant principal in a large comprehensive public high school in Northern Virginia and have been involved with the graduate program in Virginia Tech for several years. My interest in the topics surrounding female administrators has been long standing and continues through my dissertation.

Please return the enclosed Questionnaire to indicate your interest in participation in this research study. Depending on your response, I will be contacting you to confirm your answer. I hope that you will consider my request to focus on your obviously successful personal leadership

efforts in my proposed dissertation this year.

Sincerely,

M. Lynn Amedy

## Questionnaire

Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I have been a superintendent for in this district for \_\_\_\_\_ year(s).

My district serves \_\_\_\_\_ pupils.

My path to the superintendency can best be described as:

\_\_\_\_ Principalship, central office administrator, associate superintendent.

\_\_\_\_ Central office administrator, associate superintendent

\_\_\_\_ Principalship, associate superintendent

\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**I have received your letter regarding the proposed research on female superintendents' leadership behaviors and choices:**

\_\_\_\_ I am interested in hearing about the study in more detail. Please send the abstract to me and follow up with a phone call.

\_\_\_\_ I am interested in hearing more about the study. Please schedule a meeting with me.

\_\_\_\_ I would like to talk with you before making any indication of interest. Please call me.

\_\_\_\_ I am not interested at this time in taking part in this research, but contact me at a

later date and I may be interested.

\_\_\_\_I am not interested in taking part in this research project.

**The responses of any superintendent to this request and subsequent involvement of any kind will be held in the strictest confidence.**

**PLEASE RETURN TO THE RESEARCHER IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED.**

Appendix B  
Standard Ethics Protocol

My name is Lynn Amedy. I am the researcher on a dissertation study entitled A qualitative study of female superintendents: Leadership behaviors in context., which I am conducting as a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Virginia Polytechnic University.

I may be contacted by phone at 703-594-2643 or 703-365-2900, FAX 703-365-6986, or by electronic mail at mlynnrob@AOL.com should you have any questions.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project. Your participation is very much appreciated. Before we start the interview, I would like to reassure you as a participant in this study you have several rights.

First, your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary.

You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time or discuss any given subject.

You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time.

This interview will be kept strictly confidential.

Excerpts of this interview may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics be included in this report.

I would be grateful if you would sign this form to show that I have read you its contents.

\_\_\_\_\_ (signed)

\_\_\_\_\_ (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_ (dated)

Please send me a copy of the finished document. (Circle one)

YES      NO

Address for those requesting a document copy:

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## Appendix C

### Superintendent Interview Protocol

A. Let's go back to your interview(s) for this superintendency. How would you describe the type of leader the Board seemed to be looking for at that time? Why might they have been looking for a leader of that type? How do you feel that you met their needs then and now?

B. How do you organize your staff? Your time spent on the job? What priorities do you make and keep? What caused you to make these organizational decisions?

C. Have you faced situations in the superintendency that have impacted your leadership behaviors? Describe the impact on your behaviors? (Bell & Chase, 1995)

D. How do you facilitate change?

E. If you could give any advice to a first time female superintendent, what would it be and why?

(The following list of concepts was developed from a review of the literature. The list includes topics and sample questions which may be used by the researcher to probe during the interview with the superintendent. As the matrix in Appendix D shows, questions A-E and Q have the highest correlation to the research questions, and will be used as probes before the others.)

F. aspirations (Cunanan, 1994; Ginn, 1989; Glass, 1992): When and how did you know you wanted to be a superintendent?

G. personal identity (Helgesen, 1990): How do your job and your personal identity mesh?

H. satisfaction (Helgesen, 1990; Shakeshaft, 1989): Describe the things about your job that bring you satisfaction.

I. connections (Helgesen, 1990; Loden, 1985): What affects the professional choices you make?

J. values (Noddings, 1992): How do values affect your leadership actions? k.

philosophies (Loden, 1985): Describe three philosophies that you rely on to do your job.

L. team (Gilligan, 1993) : Describe and illustrate your concept of "Team".

M. politics (Grogan, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1989): How do you feel about the political nature of your job?

N. energy (Helgesen, 1990): What steals your energy? What rebuilds it?

- O. networking (Bell, 1995; Naisbitt, 1992): Do you? How? Why? If not, why not?
- P. perceptions (Chase, 1995): How do people perceive you? How do these perceptions affect your actions?
- Q. power (Kanter, 1977; Powell, 1988; Tavis & Wade, 1984): Define power as it applies to your position.
- R. expectations (Tavis & Wade, 1984; Powell, 1988): What expectations do you hold of yourself as a superintendent?
- S. Risk: What kinds of risks are you willing to take to see an idea through? Example?
- T. Describe a leadership event. Include steps taken to bring about a new initiative from start to finish.
- U. Once things are set in motion, how do you get control?
- V. Has there been a change in the role of superintendent?
- W. What changes need to happen to attract more women to the superintendency?
- X. interview needs (Gosetti & Rusch, 1995; Grogan, 1996): What topics would you like to add to this list?

## Appendix D

### Matrix of the Interview Protocol and the Research Questions

Research Questions:

1. What leadership assumptions appear to form the basis for the leadership behaviors of these presently practicing female superintendents?
2. In what ways do those within each district leadership circle respond to these female superintendents when they function as leaders?
3. What political, educational, and demographic contexts frame the leadership behaviors of these female superintendents?

Interview Protocol:

The following matrix indicates relationship between the research questions that frame this study and the questions and topics included in the interview of the superintendents. A list of interview topics and sample questions may be found in Appendix C.

Matrix

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S
Question 1	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X				X		
Question 2	X	X	X	X	X		X			X				X	X	X	X		
Question 3	X	X	X	X	X			X	X				X	X		X	X	X	X

## Appendix E

### Member of Superintendent's Team Interview Protocol

How many years of experience have you had in your present position?

How would you describe your leadership style?

Describe the leadership style of the current superintendent. Other superintendents you have worked with in the past?

How does your leadership style blend with the superintendent's leadership style?

Describe the administrative team.

How has the operation of the administrative team evolved?

Describe chronologically the progression toward a team goal.

Describe the decision making process of the team.

What situational contexts have affected the actions of the superintendent and this administrative team?

Describe your work environment under this superintendent.

If you were a superintendent, how would you lead in the context or environment you are in at present?

What have you learned from the present superintendent?

How has this superintendent affected you professionally?

## Appendix F

### Board Member Interview Protocol

What are the leadership strengths you would expect to find in a superintendent? What strengths do you find in this superintendent?

What expectations did the Board have of the current superintendent?

How has she answered these expectations?

How does this superintendent act as a change agent or an agent of stability?

Using specific examples describe the leadership behaviors that you have noted in the current superintendent.

How has this superintendent surprised you?

How has the environment, political and social, affected this superintendent?

What advice would you have for a board member who was preparing to help choose a superintendent?

What would you do differently next time you prepare to choose a superintendent?

## Appendix G

### Case Cite Codes

The following codes were used in Chapter Four cases to replace true names.

#### Case One

WP-Town Name

JMW- Superintendent

BS- Central Office Administrator

LD- School Board Member

#### Case Two

SC- District Name

SB- Superintendent

JW- Central Office Administrator

MW- School Board Member

#### Case Three

CD- District Name

BH- Superintendent

SA- Central Office Administrator

PV- School Board Member

## Vita

Lynn Robinson Amedy was born in Sharon, Pennsylvania. She attended public schools until going to Mercyhurst College in Erie, Pennsylvania. There she began her pursuit of a degree in secondary education, which she completed at Western Kentucky University in 1970. Her major areas were English and History. Following that she completed her Masters in Education from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in 1975 in the area of Curriculum and Instruction. She continued to take classes and was certified for Administration in the State of Virginia in 1986. She earned her Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies in Educational Administration in 1995 from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Ms. Amedy has worked in Prince William County, Virginia since 1970. She taught English and Social Studies in the seventh and eighth grades at Godwin Middle School from 1970-1980. During these years she was a member of the Year Round School Committee and traveled throughout the county and state delivering presentations on this topic. Her next teaching assignment included teaching grades 7-12 at Brentsville Middle and High School. While there she initiated a student newspaper and taught Journalism. Since 1986, Ms Amedy has been an administrator at Stonewall Jackson High School an International Baccalaureate public school in Manassas, a diverse school of over 2000 students. There she has supervised all areas of curriculum including Special Education, served as administrator to the Parent Advisory Committee and various other committees, initiated the first GRADS (At Risk) program for teen parents and their children in Virginia, designed, implemented, and supervised a significant co-teaching program for Special Education students in regular education classrooms, and an in-house alternative program for At- Risk students.

Professional affiliations include: Phi Delta Kappa, National Association for Secondary School Principals, and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum.

Ms. Amedy currently resides in the small village of Nokesville, Virginia with her husband, Mark.