

THE HISPANIC SUPERINTENDENT

BY

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ABSTRACT

Almost twenty-one percent of public school students are Hispanic yet only 1.1% of district superintendents are Hispanic. The purpose of this dissertation was to examine the experiences of all the Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey with the aim of examining how their ethnicity and race has mediated their educational and leadership experiences. Using the voices of Hispanic superintendents, this study sought to identify strategies that might lead to the recruitment and retention of Hispanic superintendents. The research questions guiding this study were: What are the experiences of Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey? How does their ethnicity shape their beliefs and practices of leadership? What do the experiences of Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey suggest for the recruitment, retention, and education of Hispanic educational leaders?

A qualitative research design was employed to explore the experiences of every Hispanic superintendent in New Jersey. Two face-to-face interviews were conducted with each of the nine Hispanic superintendents in NJ. The data collected was coded deductively using Critical Race and Latino Critical theories, as well as inductively. Larger themes were constructed by looking at relations between and across coded data and in relation to the research questions. Triangulation, peer review, and member checking were used to validate the findings.

The Hispanic superintendents encountered institutional racism and negative perceptions about their abilities from the time they began their schooling through their experiences as district leaders. To negotiate the inherently biased system the superintendents sought to address the inequities by becoming more resilient, building a

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support system of mentors and family, and working harder to prove oneself. Their racist experiences were the catalyst for their leading for social justice.

This study adds to the limited research base on Hispanic leadership in public schools. To improve the retention and recruitment of Hispanic superintendents the findings of this study suggest the implementation of formalized mentoring programs, addressing diversity and equity issues in preparation programs and building a network of support through key stakeholder groups including school boards.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

National population trends show that Hispanic students are the fastest growing minority in the United States. Hispanic students come from a range of regions and communities that are of Spanish culture or origin such as Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, as well as South and Central America among others (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). The Hispanic student population has risen from 11.1% of the total number of students attending New Jersey's public schools in 1999-2000 to 20.6% in the 2009-2010 school year. While the number of Hispanic students in public schools has almost doubled in 10 years, the number of Hispanic educational leaders serving the students of New Jersey has not kept pace. This trend is especially noticeable in the underrepresentation of Hispanics in the position of superintendent or district leader. The state of New Jersey currently has 593 superintendents, but only 1.1% or 7 of these are Hispanic (NJDOE, Fall 2012 Staffing Report).

The small number of Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey is concerning given that Hispanic students often underperform on tests of math, literacy, and science when compared to their white peers. The situation is intensified by the fact that large numbers of Hispanic students live below the poverty line, do not have health insurance, are without access to pre-school services, and are unlikely to have parents that graduated from high school (Simon, Lewis, Uzzell, Palacios, Casserly, & Uro, 2011). When compared to White and Black students, Hispanic children begin their kindergarten schooling with lower levels of school readiness (Reardon & Galindo, 2009; Duncan & Magnuson, 2005). Similarly, the high school completion rates for Hispanic students are significantly lower than those of other students, as well. As a consequence, Hispanic students are less likely than their White peers to enroll in and graduate from college (Cameron & Heckman, 2001; Stoops, 2004; Reardon & Galindo, 2009). The

dramatic rise in the Hispanic population, coupled with the lack of academic success for this population presents significant challenges for educators.

As the person in charge of a school district (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Fullan, 2006; Siccone, 2012; Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young & Ellerson, 2011), the superintendent is responsible for addressing this achievement gap. It has been documented that one way to improve the academic achievement of students from non-white backgrounds is to diversify the teaching and leadership workforce. Because of their limited cultural knowledge, many white teachers/leaders are not able to respond to the multiple cultural, linguistic and learning backgrounds of their students. For Hispanic students same race teachers and leaders provide positive role models who understand and share common experiences, have a common language, value the knowledge and cultural frames of reference students “bring to school”, and at the same time demonstrate that Hispanics can be successful in education (Irvine, 1989; Magdaleno, 2006; Monzo & Rueda, 2001; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Tillman, 2004; Yeo, 1997). Despite this evidence, demographic studies of school leaders show that almost all superintendents are white males between the ages of 46-60 years of age. Scholars (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011) using critical race theory(CRT) have argued that schooling is an inherently biased system based on white middle class values that has both historically and contemporarily served to label all non-white others as deficient. Therefore, any superintendent that does not fit the typical profile of a white male is perceived as not having the leadership expertise necessary to lead a district.

To date, the research base on educational leaders, ethnicity and race is sparse and therefore offers limited insights as to why there are so few Hispanic superintendents. Most of the research that examines issues of race and educational leadership has been conducted on

African American leaders and not Hispanic leaders (Beard, 2012; Hunter & Donahoo, 2003; Redish, 2010). The handful of studies that exist on Hispanic superintendents focus on the experiences of female Hispanic superintendents in the Midwest and Southwest regions of the United States (Carrion-Mendez, 2011; Gonzales, 2007; Manuel & Slate, 2003; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Quilantan & Ochoa, 2004; Tamez, 2011). Framed by feminist scholarship, these studies primarily foreground the challenges of being a woman and secondarily on being a Hispanic leader, therefore this small group of studies while providing some insights into being a Hispanic superintendent do not foreground the issue of race alone as a construct mediating district leadership.

Despite the limited research base on the relations between educational leadership and race, the available research shows that leaders of color continue to face strong challenges and obstacles to their leadership (Campbell-Jones & Avelar-LaSalle, 2000; Ospina & Foldy, 2009; Tillman, 2004). These challenges include being overlooked for leadership positions because of the traditional bias toward white males in these positions (Magdaleno, 2006; Campbell-Jones & Avelar-LaSalle, 2000; Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008; Tallerico, 2000). In addition the literature documents a lack of mentoring and support programs for aspiring Hispanic educational leaders that implies that even when Hispanic educators do take up these positions there is not the support they need to help them navigate the challenges of working as a superintendent. These findings are important but without further research that examines the work of Hispanic superintendents and the challenges and supports that have enabled them to be district leaders, it will not be possible to think about relevant solutions to increasing the number of Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey.

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to examine the experiences of Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey and how they perceive their ethnicity has interplayed with their leadership experiences. Drawing on Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Theory, my intent is to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of Hispanic superintendents, their perceptions about being superintendents and their perceptions of the challenges and supports they have experienced in being a superintendent and Hispanic. Additionally, this qualitative research study will be utilized to address the absence of information regarding Hispanic superintendents in the literature on leadership. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the experiences of Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey?
 - a. What factors contributed to their becoming a superintendent?
 - b. How did their ethnicity mediate their becoming a superintendent?
 - c. What do they identify as supports and challenges to becoming a superintendent?
2. How does their ethnicity shape their beliefs and practices of leadership?
 - a. What do they identify as supports and challenges to remaining in the position of superintendent?
3. What do the experiences of Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey suggest for the recruitment, retention, and education of Hispanic educational leaders?

In the following chapters, I begin by first reviewing the relevant literature on superintendents, superintendent leadership, and Hispanic school leadership. In Chapter 3, I explain the methodology used to elicit the stories and voices of the Hispanic superintendents regarding their experiences. This is followed by an analysis of the findings in Chapter 4. After a thorough analysis of the findings in Chapter 4, I end with implications for policy and practice that address the underrepresentation of Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

As a focus of this study is on the experiences of Hispanic superintendents, I explore three areas of literature. First, to provide a context for understanding the population of educational leaders known as superintendents and their role, I begin with a history of the superintendency and a brief overview of what is known about this group of educational leaders. Second, I examine the research base on the school superintendent and what is known about this leadership role. I then delve deeper into the research literature that explores minority and Hispanic school leadership.

What is a School Superintendent and Who Are They?

The position of public school superintendent is one of the most complex, yet underappreciated positions in the education community. Today's superintendents are expected to have a large inventory of skills and an unlimited capacity in order to manage the complexities of an entire public school district, as well as the ability to navigate the obstacles of today's politics, economic instability and tumultuous societal issues. However, most citizens neither know the role the superintendent plays in the daily operations and management of a public school district nor understand how critical the position is to the ultimate academic success of every student within the public school district he/she leads (Fullan, 2006; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Siccone, 2012).

A school superintendent is the person charged with ensuring effective teaching and learning processes are implemented and utilized to facilitate academic achievement, as well as with the oversight of the financial, legal, and personnel operations of an entire public school district. Public school superintendents are hired by the local school board, comprised of elected

members of the community, for contracts of varying years, but most commonly for periods of three years (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young & Ellerson, 2011).

History of the School Superintendent

In order to appreciate and value the complexities of being a superintendent, it is important to understand the past and present responsibilities of the position. The position of superintendent of schools is 175 years old. The modern era superintendent is affected by issues that were inconceivable just 175 years ago, but are now part of his/her daily responsibilities.

The position of the public school superintendent was created in recognition that the public school system had become too demanding for a board of education made up of volunteers and community members without a background in education. Initially, schools were run by state boards, the members of which did not necessarily have an education background. As more and more students enrolled in schools and the public school system became larger and more complex, the state board realized the need for an educational professional to lead the schools (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

New York became the first state to appoint a superintendent when the Buffalo common council appointed a superintendent on June 9, 1837. Shortly thereafter, places such as Louisville, Kentucky and Providence, Rhode Island followed in Buffalo's footsteps by also appointing superintendents for their public schools. The early superintendents were primarily responsible for data collection and the appropriate distribution of state funds (Bateman, 1996).

By 1870, there were 30 superintendents working in large cities, managing the multiple schools operating within a district. By 1880, 34 of the 38 states had superintendents leading public schools and as of 1890, all large cities employed superintendents (Carter & Cunningham,

1997). As the United States expanded and its population multiplied so did the need for local districts and superintendents. By the 1960s there were more than 35,000 superintendents nationwide, and each had become an integral member of the communities and cities in which they worked. They were considered civic leaders who held their positions for many years and held the highest authority over all of the operations related to the public schools they oversaw (Houston, 2001).

During the mid-1960s the educational system continued to develop, while the emergence of the civil rights movement and professional organizations such as the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) materialized as firm advocates for teacher interests. At the same time parents and the community, as well as the federal government, became more involved in public education. In 1965 the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) marked the government's being more involved in the education process therefore creating increased scrutiny on the position of superintendent. As a result, superintendents often found themselves responding to mandates, as well as special interest groups while trying to provide educational leadership and improve student academic achievement (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

In 1983, then Secretary of Education Terrell Bell issued a widely publicized report entitled, *A Nation at Risk*. The report indicated that American schools were in need of serious reform in order to rise above the mediocre standards in place. The crux of the report focused on the fact that American students were being outperformed by students in other countries and were weaker in inferential skills and science achievement. The report also recognized that illiteracy had become a national problem. *A Nation at Risk* offered recommendations to ensure that student achievement would improve by advocating for the creation of a core curriculum, the

raising of academic standards, the lengthening of the school day and year, the improvement of teacher quality, and the importance of attracting more capable teachers. Almost immediately, states began to adopt standards for testing and assessing the growth of students' academic achievement. Increasing standardization created by the *Nation At Risk* report continued to change the purpose of schooling from equality of educational opportunity to excellence (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Ravitch, 2010).

As a consequence of these policy changes, there has been an increase in accountability for public school superintendents as evidenced by laws such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. As a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the NCLB Act of 2001 extended the role of the federal government in public education through the setting of high academic standards and the monitoring of those new standards via annual testing, adequate yearly progress (AYP), school report cards, highly qualified teacher requirements, and changes to school funding. Additionally school districts were further required to disaggregate state assessment results according to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, and English language learner status (Borkowski & Sneed, 2006; Sunderman & Orfield, 2007). The modern superintendent faces an enormous uphill task in the era of NCLB and increased accountability measures as well as external pressures from parents, the community, and the government. No longer is the job of the superintendent to oversee and manage but rather it is the job of the superintendent to create and maintain relationships while learning to navigate an uncertain terrain with skill and finesse. The modern superintendent is left to pursue the mandates of NCLB while simultaneously restructuring schools. In addition to the increased scrutiny placed upon the superintendent, the modern superintendent must also lead during a time of increased societal issues, such as increased crime rates, economic crisis, acts of

violence on school property, and escalating costs that have expanded the need for additional education services for students throughout the United States (Kowalski, Peterson & Fusarelli, 2007).

Lastly, according to Kowalski et. al (2011), the responsibilities of the modern superintendent are clearly more diverse than ever before: “The modern superintendent is responsible for student progress and achievement while balancing the diversification of their student and staff populations, the explosion of technology and addressing the digital divide, issues of social justice, an expanded set of expectations and involvement from the federal level, the media, the board and community relations, all in the context of an increasingly globalized education system” (p.xiii).

Demographic Characteristics of the Modern Superintendent

According to Tyack and Hansot (1982), the first one hundred years of the public school superintendency provided a consistent description of the persons in the superintendency. “The profession has been dominated by married, middle-aged, White males, who have a strong religious background” (Tyack and Hansot, 1982, p.118). Research on public school superintendents can be traced back to 1923. In 1923, the United States Department of Superintendence, a Department within the National Education Association (NEA), began collecting data on public school superintendents nationally. In 1952 and again in 1960, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), in cooperation with the NEA, collected data and conducted research on public school superintendents in the United States. Beginning in 1971 to the present, the AASA has been the sole organization that has continued the decennial superintendent study (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young & Ellerson, 2011). The population studied by the decennial AASA study are all superintendents employed in local

public school districts providing direct education services to students. The AASA decennial study employs a mixed methods approach. The sources of data for this research are both archival and include data from past studies as well as the self reports of current superintendents. In 2010, a total of 1867 superintendents from a possible population of 12,600 superintendents took part in the study by completing the survey (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young & Ellerson, 2011).

Race/Ethnicity. According to the 2010 Decennial Study, in 2000 5.1% of superintendents nationwide identified themselves in a category other than White. This number increased to 6.1% for the year 2010. This trend of modest increases in percentages of minority superintendents has actually been occurring over the past thirty years as confirmed by the superintendent studies conducted by the American Association of School Administration (AASA) (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young & Ellerson, 2011). Historically, African Americans have had considerable more representation than other ethnicities and races in the position of superintendent, especially prior to 1954. Before *Brown v. Board of Education*, African American superintendents led school districts primarily in rural and racially segregated school systems in southern states. Unfortunately, the representation of African Americans in the position of superintendent decreased dramatically after the U.S. Supreme court ruled that “separate but equal” was unconstitutional (Ravitch, 1983).

Gender. Although never a majority in the position of public school superintendent, women have increasingly claimed the top position in public school districts over the past 20 years. According to the 2010 Decennial study (Kowalski et.al., 2011), women comprise 24.1% of the total number of superintendents in the United States. The percentage has steadily increased since a low in 1982 when only 1.9% of all superintendents were female. In 1992 the

percentage of female superintendents was 6.6%, and in 2000 the percentage was 13.2% (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young & Ellerson, 2011).

The decennial studies conducted by the AASA have shown a slow and steady increase in the number of minority superintendents as well as female superintendents, although the underrepresentation of each remains significant.

Age. According to the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) studies, between 1950 and 1991, the median age of superintendents remained pretty consistent, ranging from 48-50 years. Findings from the AASA 2010 study interestingly reveal that there have been significant increases in superintendents under age 46 and over the age of 60. The data from the AASA 2010 report indicate that 14.6% of superintendents are under 46 years old, 34.7% are between the ages of 46 and 60, and 18.1% are over 60 years old. When the age data of superintendents is examined in relation to minority status, nonminority group respondents more often entered the superintendency before the age of 46 than did their peers in the minority group (Kowalski et al., 2011).

In summary, the evolution of the public school superintendent has dramatically changed over the course of the past 175 years. The modern superintendency is a highly scrutinized public position that has become increasingly difficult to lead. What remains the same is that the role is dominated by white males between the ages of 46-60, leading to a significant underrepresentation of minority superintendents that does not reflect the changes in the demographics of the students attending public schools.

Leadership and Superintendents

Leadership is not mobilizing others to solve problems we already know how to solve, but helping them confront problems that have not yet been addressed successfully.

-Michael Fullan

Student academic achievement is affected by many factors. In fact, among all school-related factors, leadership is second only to classroom instruction. Research has also revealed that the effects of leadership on student learning account for about 25% of total school results (Siccone, 2012). Additionally the work of Hallinger and Heck (1996a, 1996b, & 1998) concluded that direct and indirect effects of school leadership in student outcomes are educationally significant. Therefore, according to Siccone (2012) it is no surprise that research has also revealed that effective leadership is one of the most important factors influencing the turnaround of underperforming schools in the United States (Siccone, 2012).

As society has become more complex, so has the schooling of children and the demands placed upon the superintendents who lead them (Green, 2009). Leadership and the superintendency are two words that are so commonly used together that they have become synonymous in the education world. The linkage is clear, since one cannot be a superintendent without being a leader. Despite its obvious linkage, what remains a mystery is an exact definition of leadership, or what leadership is, especially as it relates to leadership in education and the role of superintendent. The complexities of leadership have been noted for hundreds of years, and as leadership researcher Stogdill (1974) stated, “there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (p.259).

At the core of most definitions of leadership are two functions: providing direction and exercising influence. Leadership typically involves two types of people, the leader and the led (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). Leadership can be defined as, “ the process

of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (Yukl, 2006, p.8).

Leadership Traits

In an effort to denote a difference between school leaders and non-school leaders, various studies have classified traits or characteristics of effective leaders via the terms: capacity, achievement, responsibility, participation, and status (Green, 2009). Studies such as those conducted by Stogdill (1974), Bass (1998) and Collins (2001) identified several traits/characteristics that are consistently associated with successful leadership such as vision, ambition, intelligence, knowledge, passion, integrity, persistence and self-confidence. These characteristics/traits are similar to, if not the same, as the leadership traits identified by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) for superintendents: vision, knowledge, communication, dignity, respect, ethics, trustworthiness, and collaboration (<http://coe.fgcu.edu/faculty/valesky/isllcstandards.htm>).

School leadership, according to Collins (2001), requires a slightly different set of characteristics and traits than leaders in other contexts that should be considered of utmost importance in order to influence the effectiveness of schools and increase the opportunity for positive student outcomes. Collins emphasized how critical it is for leaders to possess the traits of humility, drive, and professional will in order to become an effective leader who can bring positive change to organizations such as schools. Accordingly, Standard 5 of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) also identifies characteristics that are common among school leaders. Specifically, ISLLC Standard 5 states, “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and

in an ethical manner” (<http://coe.fgcu.edu/faculty/valesky/isllcstandards.htm>) and makes the argument that these qualities are necessary in order to be an effective school leader.

What remains difficult about leadership is that, similar to terms such as love, courage, and power, leadership is a complex construct open to limitless interpretation. Everyone who defines leadership has individual life experiences, work experiences and observations and therefore will perceive leadership from a unique perspective (Bolden, 2004).

Although leadership traits and characteristics do not specifically address Hispanic superintendents and their leadership, studies of the intersection between race, ethnic identity and leadership would suggest that leadership is more than just traits and characteristics. In this qualitative research study, I will focus on Hispanic superintendents and how they perceive their ethnicity/race has interplayed with their leadership experiences.

Research on Minority and Hispanic School Leadership

Many researchers have expressed their concern with the fact that the demographics of public school leaders have not kept pace with that of the increasingly diverse student population in the United States, leaving minorities school leaders severely underrepresented (de Santa Ana, 2008; Garcia, 2011; Hodgkinson & Monegro, 1999; Kowalski et. al., 2011; Magdaleno, 2006). Research also indicates that superintendents of color most often lead in school districts that are characterized as large urban districts that are low performing, problem ridden and whose student body is predominantly Black or Latino (de Santa Ana, 2008; Kowalski et. al., 2011). In a study conducted by Marshall and Kasten (1994) it was found that school personnel felt that “minority administrators should administer schools...with large minority populations and concerns” (p.5), although these sentiments were not publicly espoused. According to the AASA 2010 Decennial

Study minority superintendents were also considerably more likely to view community diversity as an asset than were members of the nonminority superintendent group. Additionally, minority superintendents were more than twice as likely as their peers in the nonminority group to report that they had encountered discrimination in their pursuit of the superintendency (Kowalski et al., 2011).

Research that examines the interaction between race and school leadership is scarce at best, although studies have shown that there is a positive correlation between student academic achievement, when taught by teachers of the same race (Clewell, Puma, & McKay, 2005; Dee, 2004; Dee, 2005; Irvine, 1989; Oates, 2003; Uhlenberg & Brown, 2002; Villegas & Irvine, 2010; Warikoo, 2005; Waters, 1989; Wiggan, 2007). One explanation for this finding is that students and teachers from similar racial and ethnic backgrounds develop interpersonal connections and these teachers, unlike many of their nonminority counterparts have high expectations for Hispanic and African American students and can relate to their life experiences. Whether similar effects occur as a result of students being in school districts led by superintendents from their own communities has not been researched as yet.

Barriers/Obstacles Affecting Minority Superintendent Success

Hispanic superintendents face different challenges than those of the overwhelming majority White male superintendent. In a qualitative interview study of five minority (three Hispanic and two African American) California superintendents, Campbell-Jones & Avelar-Lasalle (2000) identified several common barriers to success amongst the participants. First and foremost, each participant in the study reported that racial prejudice continues to be a constant reality for minorities even when they attain higher level administrative positions such as that of the school superintendent. The prejudice they experienced related directly to negative

preconceptions about their abilities, leadership, effectiveness, and qualifications by members of the organization and the citizenry in the community. As a result, superintendents of color felt pressured to be more knowledgeable and successful than their White counterparts. In addition to feeling pressured to be more knowledgeable, Hispanic superintendents reported the need to work harder and longer to be better than other superintendents in order to dispel the misconception by some that they did not get their position based on the merit of their qualifications (Campbell-Jones & Avelar-Lasalle, 2000).

The superintendents in the study conducted by Campbell-Jones & Avelar-Lasalle (2000) also expressed their feelings that many of the barriers experienced by Hispanic and minority superintendents were often “built into the system” in ways that were intended to inhibit the ascension of minorities as they attempted to climb the administrative ladder. One superintendent in the study explained, “I have seen well qualified, dedicated, African American administrators placed in isolation based upon racial politics. It’s usually mailed in some other package: ‘doesn’t get along with the community, disorganized, doesn’t follow through.’ In some cases they simply make it known that, ‘we don’t want him’” (p.13). In addition to their experiencing racial prejudice, Hispanic and minority superintendents reported feeling pressured to mobilize the ethnic communities within their school districts in a nonthreatening manner (Campbell-Jones & Avelar-Lasalle, 2000).

These findings are similar to that of Flores (1981) and Scott (1990) who found that minority superintendents often found themselves in the dilemma of being seen as advocating too much or too little for African-American and/or Hispanic youth, which are expectations that their nonminority counterparts do not encounter. As minority candidates ascend to the position of superintendent, members of their own ethnic groups expect that they will address the inequities

that exist between White and minority students within the public schools. When efforts to address the inequities do not occur, or do not take place quickly enough for the same race community members, they become disenchanted and often perceive the leader as a turncoat (Flores, 1981; Scott, 1990). Conversely, if changes are made immediately or too soon, the minority superintendents risks being perceived by the White community as working only for the interests of the minorities. White leaders, however, do not have to teeter on this delicate balancing act between White, African-American, and Hispanic youths and community members (Flores, 1981; Scott, 1990).

Another barrier to the superintendency for Hispanic superintendents is the phenomenon of sponsored mobility. According to Ortiz (2000), sponsored mobility is the sponsorship of junior administrators by senior administrators, in order to mentor the junior administrators in order for them to ascend up the administrative ladder. This practice of mentoring junior administrators serves as legitimate barrier to aspiring minority administrators while advantaging nonminority junior administrators. This system is also commonly referred to as the “good old boy network” through which the dominant White male in the superintendency hand-picked his administrators and successors and thus was able to exclude those he/she deemed not capable. This practice has often meant that African-American, Hispanics, and females have not been able to move up the administrative ladder as senior administrators almost exclusively mentored junior administrators that were demographically similar to themselves. The “good old boy network” is reinforced by the White male majority that has dominated the membership of public school boards of education. Similar to the senior administrators, board members most often vote for candidates that “look like themselves.” This practice has led to the superintendency in the

United States remaining consistently and almost exclusively a White male dominated position (Ortiz, 2000).

As the number of Hispanic superintendents nationwide, and more specifically in New Jersey indicate, the underrepresentation of Hispanic superintendents is also a legitimate barrier for future Hispanic leaders, due to the lack of opportunities for mentorship or sponsored mobility. According to Campbell-Jones & Avelar-Lasalle's (2000) study, minority superintendents expressed the need for more mentorship opportunities that involve minority superintendent candidates. The superintendents discussed the need to create these types of networks to produce opportunities for minority superintendent candidates to interact with African American and Hispanic superintendents. Although the percentage of superintendents who are minorities is rising, the number of minority superintendents remains low and therefore has great negative effects on the mentorship opportunities available for minority superintendent candidates (Quilantan, & Ochoa, 2004; Van Tuyle & Watkins, 2009).

Studies of Hispanic Superintendents

While the number of Hispanic students attending America's public schools continues to increase, little research has been conducted on Hispanic superintendents and their leadership. Of the limited studies that do exist, most are qualitative studies of the experiences of female Hispanic superintendents in the Midwest and Southwest regions of the United States through the lens of feminist scholarship (Carrion-Mendez, 2011; Gonzales, 2007; Manuel & Slate, 2003; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Quilantan & Ochoa, 2004; Tamez, 2011).

In her phenomenological study of four Mexican American female superintendents Mendez-Morse (2004) found that gender and ethnicity played a role in how the superintendency was accessed. In the research study Mendez-Morse identified five themes that crossed over the

administrative careers of the four female Hispanic superintendents. The first theme is described as the stereotyping and discrimination experienced by each female Hispanic superintendent as they became district leaders and administrators in their districts. Second, the women in this research study identified support of their families, namely their husbands, as important to their success as administrators. Third, each participant experienced what Mendez-Morse describes as the role accommodations they had to fulfill as a district leader, wife, mother, and administrator. Conflict between the multiple roles had to be minimal if they were to successfully attain a superintendent position. Fourth, each participant in this research study did not follow the traditional career path of teacher, principal, district leader, superintendent in order to become a public school superintendent. Instead, they remained in the classroom twice as long as most leaders and assumed informal teacher leadership positions before cautiously moving into administration. Lastly, each of the women that took part in the study had received support through mentoring that enabled them to progress through the tumultuous administrative ranks as they progressed on through to the superintendency. Additionally, the participants also stressed their need to constantly “prove” themselves as educational leaders (Mendez-Morse, 2004).

Another qualitative research study that involved three Latina public school superintendents in Texas, conducted by Tamez (2011) found that although the Latina superintendents demonstrated the abilities, skills and knowledge necessary to be effective leaders and hold executive positions within the public school systems, they felt that their gender and ethnicity created a “glass ceiling” effect for Latinas aspiring towards the superintendency. Similarly, in her qualitative research study of twelve Hispanic female superintendents Ortiz (2000) discusses how this glass ceiling is established. Ortiz found that some of the barriers that led to the exclusion of Hispanic females from the selection process for the position of

superintendent were the lack of strong personal contacts, sponsored mobility and the pipeline tradition that continues to exist in the public school system. Ortiz found that the Latinas lacked strong and informal job contacts based on professional relationships that supported those who ascended into the superintendent positions. A study conducted by Quilantan and Ochoa (2004) on Hispanic female superintendents supported Ortiz's findings by concluding that the structure of the educational system in the United States is a significant barrier to aspiring minority superintendent candidates as it continues to favor the white males that have traditionally assumed the superintendency and continues to ensure other white males take their places (Quilantan & Ochoa, 2004).

In her mixed methods study of five experienced Mexican-American women superintendents in Arizona Carrion-Mendez (2009) found the need to create formal mentorship programs for aspiring female Hispanic educational leaders to be critical to the future success of aspiring Latina superintendents. The Latina superintendents that took part in the study indicated that through the creation of formal mentorship programs, Hispanic women in Arizona would have the supports necessary to assume the position of superintendent, and be successful in the position, which in turn would make the position of superintendent more attainable for Hispanic women in education and therefore worth the enormous effort to strive for such an important educational position (Carrion-Mendez, 2009).

In summary, this review of the literature highlights that studies of Hispanic superintendents are minimal. Most of what we do know about these educational leaders is embedded within qualitative studies of minority superintendents as well as qualitative studies of female superintendents in the Midwest and Southwest of the United States. The findings of these studies echo one another in several ways, most specifically in that both minority and female

Hispanic superintendents face obstacles and barriers as they aspire to become district leaders and in their role as superintendents that the traditional white male superintendent does not face.

Additionally, the lack of mentoring for minority and Hispanic educational leaders as they ascended through the ranks to their role as superintendent was a prevalent theme for both groups of studies.

My research study expanded on these previous studies as I examined the experiences of Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey and how they perceived their ethnicity and race interplayed with their leadership experiences. In what follows I outline my theoretical framework and the methodology.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

As a Hispanic educational leader aspiring to the superintendency, my aim was to get an in depth understanding of the work, beliefs and perceived practices of Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey. Due to the limited number of Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey, I interviewed all seven of the Hispanic superintendents that appeared in the 2012 New Jersey Department of Education staffing report as well the two Hispanic superintendents who were hired after the 2012 staffing report and are current Hispanic superintendents serving in New Jersey public schools. By focusing on one state and interviewing every Hispanic superintendent in that state, I enable the rich contextualization of the interview data while also taking into account that 87% of superintendents spend their entire administrative careers in one state (Glass, 1992). For the purpose of this research study I utilize the term Hispanic because it is the term used in the state data; but I also refer to the participants as Latino because it captures the pan-ethnicity of who they are, and not the term imposed upon them.

My aim in conducting this study was to listen to the participants and attempt to build a picture of who Hispanic superintendents are based on their own ideas, thus “increasing the amount of relevant literature available” (Creswell, 1994, p.21). As such this qualitative study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey?
 - a. What factors contributed to their becoming a superintendent?
 - b. How did their ethnicity mediate their becoming a superintendent?
 - c. What do they identify as supports and challenges to becoming a superintendent?
2. How does their ethnicity shape their beliefs and practices of leadership?

- a. What do they identify as supports and challenges to remaining in the position of superintendent?
3. What do the experiences of Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey suggest for the recruitment, retention, and education of Hispanic educational leaders?

In what follows, I outline the basic tenets of Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Theory in order to foreground the voices and stories of the Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey who have until now been unheard. I then describe the various components of the research design employed to draw out the experiences of the Hispanic superintendents.

Theoretical Framework

As I am interested in examining the experiences of a group of Hispanic superintendents and how they perceive their ethnicity and race have shaped their leadership experiences, I drew on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit).

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in the early 1970s as a creation of activists, lawyers and scholars who began to realize that the advances of the civil rights era had begun to slow down and milder more subtle forms of racism were emerging. Early CRT scholars such as Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado and Allan Freedman began to closely examine and investigate the transforming relationship among race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). Rooted in critical legal studies, CRT includes race as part of the critique of mainstream legal ideology that has helped create, support, and legitimize the oppressive structures in American society (Ladson-Billings,

1998). Schools for example are one of these structures that perpetuate inequities through time, space and whose knowledge is legitimized.

The most basic tenet of CRT is the notion that racism is “normal, and not aberrant, in American society” (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). CRT suggests that racism is the common everyday experience of most people in this country. According to CRT, racism is so engrained in the fabric of the social order of America that it appears normal and natural. The dominant culture constructs realities in ways that promotes its own self-interest and more specifically the interest of elite groups which in turn perpetuates the marginalization of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011).

Secondly, critical race theorists understand that history matters and that the process of racialization is historical. CRT challenges the dominant liberal ideas of color blindness and meritocracy and shows how these ideas encourage the advancement of people of color only when promoting white self-interests, further advancing the white agenda. This is sometimes referred to as interest convergence or material determinism. Educationally, critical race theorists view mainstream education as one of many institutions that both historically and contemporarily serve to reproduce unequal power relations and academic outcomes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011).

The third tenet of CRT is the “social construction” thesis which holds that race and races are products of social thought and relations. The categories of race and races are socially constructed to place people of certain origins that share certain physical traits such as skin color, physique and hair texture together in distinct categories. These categories however, do not

correspond to any biological or genetic reality. Additionally, they have nothing to do with distinctly human higher order traits such as personality, intelligence, and moral behavior.

Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit)

Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit), although similar to CRT, emphasizes the progressive sense of coalitional Latino pan-ethnicity and it addresses issues typically ignored by critical race theorists (Valdes, 1996). Valdes (1996) suggests that LatCrit is supplementary and complementary to CRT and should “operate as a close cousin – related to CRT in real and lasting ways, but not necessarily living under the same roof” (p. 26-27). Issues such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, genes and sexuality are closely explored within LatCrit, while CRT scholars have overlooked these areas (Espinoza, 1990; Garcia, 1995; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Martinez, 1994; Montoya, 1994). Additionally LatCrit theory explicates the complex identities of Latinas/Latinos, and attempts to address the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression that exists to these persistently marginalized groups. LatCrit theorists aim to center Latinas/Latinos’ multiple internal diversities and to situate Latinas/Latinos in larger inter-group framework to promote social justice awareness and activism (Valdes, 1996; Espinoza, 1990; Garcia, 1995; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Martinez, 1994; Montoya, 1994).

The importance of the unique *voices* of color cannot be minimized in CRT and LatCrit. The narratives, stories and counter stories that express the different histories and experiences of the Hispanic people challenge the stories of the dominant culture and give voice to the experiences and histories of those who have otherwise gone unheard. As such, CRT scholars embrace the use of qualitative methods such as interviewing, storytelling and narrative inquiry (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Research Design

In keeping with the aim of LatCrit and CRT to elevate the voices of people of color and Hispanics in particular, I draw on qualitative research methodology based on Seidman's (2006) phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of every Hispanic school superintendent in New Jersey. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative methods of research are appropriate for discovering, exploring and gaining insight into the perspectives of individuals being studied, such as those of Hispanic superintendents. Additionally, Creswell (2013) explicates that qualitative research requires the "collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes" (p.44).

As such, utilizing a qualitative method design allowed me to elucidate the beliefs and perceived practices of Hispanic superintendents. The design involved the collection of two interviews with 7 active Hispanic superintendents and 2 retired Hispanic superintendents from New Jersey over the course of 6 months.

Sample

Utilizing the New Jersey Department of Education's Fall 2012 New Jersey Staffing data, I was able to filter the 593 existing public school superintendents by race. This filtering allowed me to pinpoint the sample I needed to conduct this research plan. In order to participate in this research study the participants had to be full time superintendents, working in the state of New Jersey who self identified as Hispanic. Given that the staffing report indicated there were only 7

Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey, and the recent hiring of 2 new Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey in 2013, I decided that I would interview all 9 of these leaders in New Jersey in order to have 100% of the Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey participate in my research study. In order to recruit these 9 Hispanic superintendents, I contacted each with an introductory letter (see Appendix A) and followed up with a telephone call explaining the purpose of the study and the benefits the results of the research study will have in adding to the knowledge base on the topic. Once they agreed to participate in the research study each of the participants signed a consent form (see Appendix B).

The final sample for this study consisted of nine superintendents, six male and three female ranging in age from 40 to 65 years. Although there was a 25 year age range for this sample of superintendents, only two had over 7 years of experience as a superintendent. The number of years experience varied from two first year novice superintendents to two retired superintendents, one with seventeen years experience. Seven are current superintendents working in New Jersey public schools and two had recently retired from their positions as superintendents at the conclusion of the 2012 academic school year, therefore appearing in the NJDOE 2012 staffing report utilized for this research study. These superintendents work in a range of districts that spanned rural to urban although the majority of the superintendents, five, work in urban districts. The size and type of district varied as well for this sample of superintendents as two superintendents lead in K-8 school districts, six are superintendents in the most common type of district in New Jersey K-12 districts and one superintendent is charged with leading a regional high school district. The smallest school district a superintendent led in this study was a small rural K-8 school district of 300 students; the largest was a large urban district with more than 24,000 students. The student population of the districts led by this

sample of superintendents also varied greatly. Three superintendents led in districts in which the student population is predominantly Hispanic, three led in districts in which the student population was predominantly white, one led in a district that is predominantly black and two led in diverse districts where the majority of students are minorities. Given that the participants in this study self identified as Hispanic, the immigration status of the participants also varied from a first generation American who immigrated to the United States when she was 17 years old to a third generation American whose grandparents immigrated to the United States over 100 years ago. The majority of the superintendents (7), however were second generation Americans born in the United States whose parents were born in Latino countries outside the United States.

Data Collection Methods

As I sought to understand the meanings and experiences of this group of Hispanic superintendents, I drew on Seidman's (2006) phenomenological interviewing approach. The phenomenological approach features understanding people's behavior when placed in the context of their lives. Without context there is little possibility of exploring the meaning of an experience. The purpose of interviewing is to access the participant's perspective in order to find out what we cannot directly observe, such as the perceptions of Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey (Patton, 1990). I conducted two face-to-face standardized open-ended interviews with the 9 participants. Standardized open-ended interviews consist of carefully worded and organized sets of questions that are asked of each participant in the same sequence with the same wording. The use of standardized open-ended interviews minimizes the variation in the questions asked of the participants and leads to more reliable data (Patton, 1990). The interviews were designed to elicit information relevant to Hispanic superintendents and their perceptions as they relate to

their backgrounds, leadership, and the supports, barriers and obstacles they have experienced in achieving the superintendency.

The qualitative interviews were conducted over the course of five months from November 2012 to March 2013 via two face-to-face standardized open-ended interviews conducted two weeks apart. As Seidman (2006) suggests, the participants were given the opportunity to choose the location of the interviews so that they were comfortable with their surroundings and felt secure throughout the interview. The interviews were conducted as standardized open ended interviews utilizing a conversational approach (Patton, 1990). Each interview began with a clear description of the purpose of the interview followed by the standardized open-ended questions that attempted to elicit participants' responses as they relate to the lived experiences of being Hispanic superintendents and the challenges, obstacles and supports they have encountered as they assumed the position of superintendent. Probes and follow-up questions were embedded within the interview protocols (see Appendix C and D).

In order to answer the research questions, the research participants were interviewed on two separate occasions two weeks apart. Adapting Seidman's three-part interview protocol, the researcher utilized the initial interview to develop a relationship, a level of trust and a positive rapport with the research participant in order to facilitate an open dialogue. The initial interview was structured to begin with fourteen general questions that focused on each superintendent's background, career path, barriers to achieving the superintendency and obstacles in the superintendency (see Appendix C). Two weeks later, the researcher delved deeper into the participant's life experiences. The second interview protocol was structured with eighteen interview questions, this time focusing on the superintendents' perceptions of being a Hispanic superintendent, and the intersection of race, ethnicity and leadership in the role of a New Jersey

school superintendent in order to address each of the research questions (see Appendix D) (Seidman, 2006). All interviews were audio recorded with the permission of each participant and transcribed verbatim.

Once the participants were identified and agreed to take part in the research study the interviews were scheduled at a time and place that was most convenient to the participant. Fourteen interviews took place in the participants' work office. Three interviews took place in the coffee shop of local Barnes and Nobles Bookstores and one interview took place at a restaurant.

Data Analysis

The data collected for this research study consisted of 18 interviews, two per participant, collected over a six month period. The organization of the interview data began with the transcription of the audio files into MS Word by the researcher. Each file was downloaded and labeled by participant name, the date of the interview and the length of the interview. The MS Word document for each of the transcribed interviews was then imported into Dedoose in preparation for the first step in data analysis. I then read carefully all of the data collected from each of the 18 interviews multiple times (Creswell, 1998; Marshall and Rossman, 1999). The transcribed interviews were reviewed and analyzed in several stages.

During the initial phase of data analysis, the data was organized and coded inductively utilizing open coding. Merriam (2009) describes open coding as identifying any segment of data that might be useful with an open mind understanding that "anything is possible" (p.178). I began the data analysis via open coding as I transcribed the interview data and recorded similarities and differences in the words and stories the participants used.

After open coding the interview data, I began to carefully review the data organized by code for patterns. I focused on grouping similar ideas and themes together as they related to the experiences of the Hispanic superintendents and their intersections with leadership and ethnicity. As LatCrit suggests issues such as ethnicity, gender, language and immigration status were explored as they are part of the experiences and the voices of the Latino pan-ethnicity. I also examined the coded data by gender, district size and school classification (urban, suburban and rural) in order to examine any patterns within those categories. Merriam (2009) describes this process of assigning codes to data and the development of themes as axial coding.

Next, I organized the coded data according to research question (obstacles, facilitators, mentors, education, institutional racism, career trajectory, and etc). I examined the relationships between codes in order to develop larger assertions related to my research questions. Throughout all of this process I kept returning to CRT and LatCrit concepts to consider issues of race, ethnicity, gender, immigration status and context and how these interplayed with individual participants experiences. All evidence, supporting and contradictory, were explored to help ensure thoroughness and minimize the possibility of errors (Creswell and Miller, 2000).

Validity

In order to ensure the validity of this qualitative study, the researcher employed three validity strategies. These strategies were triangulation of data, peer review and member checks.

According to Creswell (2013) the triangulation of data occurs when a researcher makes use of multiple and different sources, methods, and theories to provide and corroborate evidence. The act of coding requires corroborating evidence from multiple sources, in this case 18 individual interviews of nine participants were analyzed and codes developed based on the data from the 18 interviews therefore providing multiple and different sources of data as required for

triangulation. Additionally the data was analyzed with multiple theories as this research study utilized both CRT and LatCrit Theory for analysis. Triangulation was achieved as all of the codes and the categories that were developed inductively and deductively were present in multiple interviews and after extensive comparative analysis. Validity was established in this research study as findings were triangulated across all participants.

Peer review in qualitative studies provides the researcher with an external check of his/her analytic procedures and conclusions. The responsibility of the peer reviewer is to play “devil’s advocate” by asking the researcher difficult questions about methods, meanings, interpretations and the qualitative data. The peer reviewer asks the researcher these difficult questions in order keep the researcher honest, focused and thorough (Creswell, 2013). The peer review was conducted throughout the data analysis phase by members of the researcher’s dissertation group during scheduled bi-weekly meetings. The peer reviewers provided feedback on the adequacy of initial coding schemes and on early drafts of findings.

As a validation strategy, member checking involves the researcher requesting participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) member checking is “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p.314). Additionally, member checking is one of the most popular validation strategies utilized in qualitative research studies as it improves the credibility, accuracy and validity of the research conducted. For this research study, the member checks were conducted at the conclusion of the interviews as the researcher shared with the individual interviewees the transcripts of their interviews via email and conducted a phone conference, when necessary, with each interviewee to discuss the transcripts. Each of the participants responded via email confirming the receipt of the

transcripts. Three participants emailed the researcher to clarify the spellings of names of individuals that appeared in the transcripts but no participants requested any other changes via email or in writing.

In the next chapter, I introduce the key findings from this analysis of the interview data foregrounding the voices of these 9 superintendents.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the experiences of every Hispanic superintendent in New Jersey, a state where only 7 or 1.1% of the 593 superintendents are Hispanic. The limited number of Hispanics leading at the district level in New Jersey is disproportionate to the student population in the state's schools where Hispanic students make up almost a quarter (20.6%) of the total student population (NJDOE, Fall 2012 Staffing Report). Drawing on Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011), which argues that race must be foregrounded in examinations of schooling, this study seeks to give voice to these superintendents. By foregrounding this small group of superintendents' experiences and perspectives on district leadership, this chapter aims to provide insights into how to address the limited number of Hispanics leading in school districts in New Jersey.

Given the difficult odds of becoming a Hispanic superintendent in New Jersey, this chapter begins by examining how these Hispanic educators came to assume district leadership responsibilities. The second section of this chapter examines more deeply their work as superintendents and how race mediates their practices of leadership. Whether discussing their career trajectories or their leadership practices, issues of racial identity and racial discrimination predominate.

Becoming a Superintendent

As the leaders of America's public school districts, superintendents play a vital role in shaping the educational experiences of every child who enters a classroom on any given day. Research has revealed that the direct and indirect effects of educational leadership on student

outcomes are educationally significant (Hallinger & Heck, 1996a, 1996b, 1998) and among all school-related factors, leadership is second only to classroom instruction (Siccone, 2012). Given the achievement gap it is even more critical that those who lead districts are leaders of color. According to Kane, Fontana, Goldberg, and Wang (2008) school administrators of color are positive role models for the students and the communities they serve, have the ability to initiate and train the school community in cultural competence, and add a multi-cultural perspective to the school's administrative team. Like many educational leaders, the superintendents I interviewed, spoke about wanting to improve education as one motivator for their taking on leadership responsibilities. However, these individuals also conveyed the responsibility they felt as Hispanic educational leaders to give back to their community and make things right for the next generation of Hispanic children. Attaining the position of superintendent, however, was not a seamless path but instead involved negotiating a combination of social and organizational hurdles that began in the early years of their formal schooling.

The Promise and Limits of Education

The overwhelming majority of Hispanics living in the United States are either immigrants or the children of immigrants (Suarez-Orosco & Paez, 2002). For most Hispanic immigrants and their American born children, education has been viewed as an opportunity to improve their present and future situations, when compared to their former situation "back home" (Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Suarez-Orosco, 1991). What is not realized by many immigrant families however is that the American education system has been organized to benefit those with political, social, and economic power. According to Zamudio, Russell, Rios, and Bridgeman (2011) the structures of the American school system were created by the dominant culture as self serving and reproduce the very inequalities they should be actually breaking down. Sonia Nieto (2005)

explains these contradictions as, “both the dark and the light of contemporary U.S. society. The light is the promise and potential of education to vastly expand the human potential of students, while the dark represents the reality of systematic racially-based educational inequalities” (p. 61).

Echoing Nieto’s perspective, most superintendents in this study described their experiences in public schooling as a tension between their family’s belief that schooling would help them become successful and the racism they encountered as students.

Education as an Enabler.

I knew at a young age that I did not want to be poor and I knew I wanted an education because it seemed like the only way I would get that.

-Sofia

As Table 1 indicates, seven of the superintendents were second generation American, after their parents immigrated from countries such as Argentina, Cuba, Ecuador and Puerto Rico. One superintendent, Ana, had immigrated to the United States as a teenager, while Dante was the only third generation American. Eight of the nine participants in this study reported having grown up in working class households. Oftentimes their parents had not been educated themselves and in one case the parent was illiterate.

Table 1

Participants’ Backgrounds

	Gender	Generational Status	Country of Origin	Socioeconomic Status
“Manuel”	M	Second	Puerto Rico	Low

“Alberto”	M	Second	Cuba	Low
“Antonio”	M	Second	Puerto Rico	Low
“Dante”	M	Third	Argentina	Low
“Carlos”	M	Second	Cuba/ Puerto Rico	Low
“Gabriel”	M	Second	Puerto Rico	Low
“Maria”	F	Second	Puerto Rico	Low
“Ana”	F	First	Ecuador	Middle
“Sofia”	F	Second	Puerto Rico	Low

Despite their parents’ low educational attainment and low socioeconomic position in the US, nearly all of the participants spoke about how their families viewed education as the key to improving quality of life as Maria a superintendent of 2 years describes her experience:

I grew up with a mother who did not graduate from college, as a matter of fact she did not graduate from high school, but she wanted better for her children, that’s why they came to the US. I am the first born and it was very important, in my family that we not only graduated from high school, but that we had a plan for post secondary education.

The message that education is the pathway to better opportunities is not uncommon in immigrant families. A number of qualitative studies of college attainment and Hispanics suggest that in immigrant families these constant familial messages regarding education are important to the development of college and career aspirations (Carolan-Silva and Reyes, 2013; Ceja, 2004;

Ceja, 2006; Esparza and Sanchez, 2008; Gandaras and Contreras, 2009; Oakes, 2003; Perez and McDonough, 2008). Echoing the findings of these studies, most of the superintendents spoke of their families encouraging them to think about attending college. Alberto a seasoned superintendent of 17 years amusingly recalled the many conversations he had with his father while he was still very young.

I remember literally being around 7 years old on a Sunday morning and I was roughhousing with my dad and he asked me where are you going to college in Spanish. 'Que Universidad? What university?' So literally since I was like in the second grade I knew about colleges.

Similarly, Gabriel, a superintendent for one year, understood that the expectation was that he would attend college and be successful. He stated "My parents as much as they weren't college educated, they did set a clear expectation that I was going to college and that I was going to succeed."

While Maria, Alberto and Gabriel's experiences reflected the findings of research conducted on high achieving Latinos from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Gandara and Contreras, 2009), the role education played in Dante's life was somewhat different.

For 3rd and 4th generation Americans, the importance of schooling as a family value significantly decreases. Due to limited educational success for 1st and 2nd generation Americans, many 3rd and 4th generation Latinos wind up leaving school out of frustration and are overcome with a sense of hopelessness in terms of actualizing the American Dream (Acuna, 2003; Gandara and Contreras, 2009). Dante, the only 3rd generation American in the study, did not receive any messages about the importance of education in his family. Unlike his colleagues whose families placed a lot of hope in education being the pathway to more opportunities, Dante's mother had become so disillusioned with not realizing the "American Dream" that she ultimately never learned to read and therefore, did not stress the importance of doing well in school. For Dante, a

retired superintendent, however, watching his parents, grandparents, and relatives struggle because of their lack of education inspired him to dedicate himself to getting educated and going to college. Dante explains, “Education saved my life. In a sense that I think there were very few other options for me. I was the only male of my generation not only to go to college but also to not wind up in jail.”

Racist Schooling. Contrary to the meritocratic notion that assumes there is a level playing field for all children and that every child has an equal opportunity to learn and succeed within America’s education system (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011), the participants in this study spoke to the racial inequalities they experienced as students in public schools.

Many of the racist messages the superintendents encountered as students suggested that they may not be smart enough to excel academically and that they needed additional interventions. Carlos, a superintendent of one year, recalled an event in his childhood in which his reading abilities were questioned “I remember clearly being in the slower reading group in elementary school even though I was a good reader.” Like Carlos, Manuel, a superintendent for 8 years, recalled “I almost stayed back in kindergarten and that was a negative experience which I can still remember to this day. I still remember my mom and I crying during the little conference we had with the teacher.” These experiences of Carlos and Manuel are not surprising given that research (Wiggan, 2007) has found that teachers hold deficit beliefs about minority students which lead to their responding less supportively to their students. This issue of deficit views leading to deficient teaching and low expectations is only exacerbated when the minority student’s primary language is not English.

No Hablo Ingles. According to the Pew Hispanic Center (Lopez, 2009) approximately 10.2 million students, or slightly more than 20% of all public school students speak a language other than English at home. After English, the most commonly spoken language in the home is Spanish (Fry and Gonzales, 2008). For Hispanic students, the percentages that speak a language other than English at home is nearly eight times that of their non-Hispanic counterparts. In other words, seventy percent of Hispanic public school students speak a language other than English, or in addition to English, at home as compared to 9% for non-Hispanic public school students (Fry and Gonzales, 2008). In American society, Spanish speaking students are working from a disadvantage because their bilingualism is often seen as a deficit rather than an asset and therefore results in negative consequences such as being placed in lower academic tracks, higher numbers of discipline referrals, and a higher percentage of students that are classified as special education students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). Not surprisingly, the superintendents in this study described how their lack of English language proficiency was often viewed as problematic by educators. Gabriel recounted how he was proficient in neither English nor Spanish which led to the misconception by his teachers that he was not a capable student.

I didn't speak Spanish as my primary language and I didn't speak English as my primary language. I was somewhere in the middle. I was looked at as you don't speak English well, so you are a bad student.

Alberto explained that before English as a Second Language (ESL) programs existed, Hispanic students who did not know English were just thrown in a room with a teacher and expected to survive and learn "I entered school not knowing any English. I was an ESL kid, when there was no such thing as ESL. The Latino kids were just put in a classroom to sink or swim."

Carlos recalled a story from his elementary school years in which his lack of mastery of the English language along with a teacher who did not understand bilingualism led to miscommunication:

When I was in the 5th or 6th grade I wrote this paper and the teacher gave it back to me and it said in red rewrite this paper. So you know what I did, I took the paper home and I rewrote the paper word for word and she got mad at me because she said 'I told you to rewrite this paper'. ...I didn't realize and understand and I know it sounds silly but it was because there were no explicit comments on it.

Growing up speaking a language that is not the same as his peers while being placed in a classroom to "sink or swim" led to feelings of isolation for Carlos as he recalled, "I look at my experiences growing up Latino and I was excluded from many things and not having opportunities because of who I was and I couldn't speak English very well." According to Gandara and Contreras (2009), when it comes to schooling Latino students are more segregated than their peers, and their limited use of English outside the classroom adds to their isolation and separation from their school and neighborhood peers.

Inferior Perceptions. The racist messages and the negative perceptions of Hispanic students were just the beginning of the struggles the Hispanic superintendents would face throughout the course of their schooling and careers in education. All of the superintendents experienced and shared stories of encountering overt and covert racism in their schooling via counselors who refused to help them, teachers and peers who believed that Hispanics and other students are academically inferior. For Maria, the overt racism came in the form of a series of attacks, the most hurtful of which was that of a guidance counselor who refused to help her complete an application for an exclusive Magnet High School.

I applied to this magnet school for girls that began in the 9th grade, and when I went to apply for that school the counselor of the Junior High School told me I couldn't go. She didn't even want to do the application for me because she said I wasn't college material.

She said they would not accept me at the magnet school, so she refused to complete the application.

Fortunately for Maria, she ultimately applied on her own accord, was accepted and attended the Magnet High School for high performing students. Unfortunately, while attending the prestigious Magnet High School Maria realized that the inferior perceptions of Hispanic students meant she did not get the same opportunities as her classmates.

In high school I had no one. I was at a magnet high school and I did not have a counselor advise me to go to college, EVER. It was a very competitive place and the expectation was that everyone was going to college. So there wasn't that grooming or that support for the Latina kid to go to college, and I very much felt alone.

Maria's experiences were not unusual as Carlos had a similar racialized experience with a reluctant high school guidance counselor.

In high school I had a lot of teachers [who] treated me poorly and the counselor would say 'you are not going to be successful so why are you applying to University?' So you can imagine getting straight A's, and a counselor telling you that you shouldn't go to college.

Similarly, the perception that Hispanic students are incapable of succeeding academically became apparent for Antonio when he scored well on a state administered assessment, "I know that I scored really well for a Hispanic, but they look at us as lower class. Oooh, you got a B and you're Spanish. Look at you smarty pants." The assumptions made by Maria, Carlos and Antonio's educators clearly illuminate the "less than" perspective of Hispanic students that many educators hold. According to CRT, this perception is indicative of the institutional power that devalues the intellectual assets of people of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Valdes, 1996; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997). Even when trying to be helpful, the Hispanic superintendents experienced covert racism from their educators as Gabriel recalls,

I had my high school principal try to recruit me into the football program. I gave it a try and decided it wasn't for me. So of course the principal makes it a point to pull me out of

class to tell me the only chance I had of ever getting into college was by playing football. That made it even better when I was accepted into an Ivy League college.

Although trying to help Gabriel, his high school principal's actions embody the underlying stereotype that minority students can only attend college if they are athletic. Racism is so engrained in the fabric of the school establishment that when a young energetic Latina student attempted to celebrate her heritage via the creation of a Latina/o Club, the teachers and administrators deliberately made it difficult for Maria. She explains:

So in High school there wasn't a Latino or Latina Club and so I was one of the organizers to create one and man that was brutal because the administrators and some teachers, considered that to be almost an attack. They considered it a threat and they tried to stop me. I remember the day of graduation, the principal shook my hand and said, 'I won't forget you' and I said 'I bet you won't.'

Although the Hispanic superintendents faced the "dark" of the American educational system, they were also able to overcome these challenges to successfully enter into post secondary schooling. Considering that only 13% of all Hispanics are college graduates (Lopez, 2009) the fact that all of the superintendents in this study went to college and were able to successfully graduate is an achievement in and of itself.

Research indicates that Hispanic college students have lower rates of retention and lower rates of degree acquisition when compared to their White, Asian or African American counterparts due to the racialized and inferior K-12 education they received (Fry, 2004). The experiences of the superintendents in this study were no different. Carlos quickly realized the inadequacy of the K-12 education he received after turning in his first college papers.

I'll never forget those first papers I wrote in college and getting them back with all those red marks and comments, thinking, well where did I ever learn that and no one ever taught me that. I took some grammar classes that I didn't have to so that I could learn. They were classes like how to conjugate a verb so it was the first time I was really learning and understanding the English language.

In addition to the academic struggles the Hispanic superintendents encountered in college; many like Manuel, faced having to adjust to a new social class.

Most of the students in college were from public suburban schools. So there was an adjustment to middle class America and I came from a lower socioeconomic background. There were challenges around my preparation too. So I had to adjust going from the rigors of a low performing urban high school to the level required at an Ivy League University.

The struggles the Hispanic superintendents faced as they entered into post secondary schooling is indicative of what Kohli (2009) describes as a “culture of low expectations” for Latino youth that is rooted in the norms of racialized school systems that benefit the white majority. These “norms” negatively affected the quality of the K-12 educations the superintendents received which in turn resulted in negative consequences for them as they continued onto colleges and universities, as Maria, Antonio, Manuel and Carlos clearly described.

An Outlier: First Generation American

For nearly all of the superintendents in this study, education was not an enabler. On the contrary, their education experiences were a series of racist attacks based upon negative perceptions of the academic potential of Hispanic students. For Ana, however, her experiences were overwhelmingly positive. Unlike the other 8 Hispanic superintendents in this study, Ana immigrated to the United States at the age of 17 and therefore did not receive her formal education in the public schools of the United States. Through her interviews, I realized that this also meant that she did not necessarily face the challenges of America’s false meritocratic educational system as well as the negative experiences that came from not being part of the dominant culture while growing up. In her home country, Ana was from a well-to-do family that was highly regarded and was involved in local politics. Her parents and family expected only the best from Ana and her sister.

The expectations for school performance were always very high. We could not deviate from an A or A- because once again you needed to meet certain expectations and requirements. My father held a local government position, however a lot of relatives certainly aspired to do a little bit more and either became a mayor or governor, including one of the cousins who served for many years on the national level. He even came back to our small town and was the founder of the first university in that area. So I always had great role models.

Additionally, Ana's descriptions of her schooling experiences in her home country were all positive.

I attended a small elementary school. I remember that it was the school my mother had attended and also most of my relatives. It had a very nice and comfortable environment. Then the 6th grade to through 11th grade were separate. They were marked by positive experiences and just a great deal of learning.

When she arrived in the United States, Ana enrolled in the neighborhood public high school as a 12th grade student (senior year), successfully graduated that June and proceeded on to college.

Although she graduated, Ana did experience some challenges because of her limited English proficiency.

Going to school in the US was challenging in terms of learning the language but also getting the whole acculturation kind of process especially at my age. Within that year I had to fill out applications and my English was not the greatest. That was difficult.

Due to these experiences as a 1st generation American, Ana decided she wanted to enter the education profession as a Bilingual/ESL teacher.

I always had an interest in education but I really wanted to pursue bilingual and ESL education and I think that is something that came from my own experience as a high school senior. The ESL teacher certainly became our incredible ally and friend whom we relied on quite a great deal.

As the only first generation Hispanic superintendent that came from a middle class household, Ana unknowingly eluded the stigma the other 8 superintendents faced growing up in lower socioeconomic households in an education system that is inherently racist. This is important considering that the academic achievement of Latinos is affected by socioeconomic factors such

as parental income, occupation and educational level (Gonzales, 2001) and that studies have revealed that students from lower socioeconomic status tend to achieve at lower levels and are considered at-risk for long term academic difficulties when compared to students who come from higher socioeconomic status homes (Gandara and Contreras, 2012; Wang and Jonassen, 1993).

Although when compared to the other Hispanic superintendents, Ana is an outlier, the passion and desire to make a difference in the lives of children was common among every participant in this study.

Making a Difference

The public school experiences most of the Hispanic superintendents shared indicate that schools in the U.S. continue to privilege nonminority students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Kirkland, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). However, their racialized experiences in the false meritocratic system also inspired and motivated these Hispanic superintendents to become educators who could make a difference. Maria was the most passionate about how her negative experiences in public schools led to her decision to become a leader.

I think the fact that I was not happy with public education was a BIG factor. I wanted to make a difference for other people. I remember when I was about 17 and a half years old my mother asked me what I wanted to do in college and I said 'I want to be a principal because I want to change what happens in classrooms so that it doesn't happen to anyone else.' I was 17 and I was angry. I knew that I had some good teachers, but I knew that I was short changed.

Although Maria was the only superintendent who had her sights set beyond the classroom door, all nine of the superintendents expressed how their racialized experiences led them to want to improve the educational experiences of all students, especially those who are marginalized or discriminated against. Manuel explained:

I think the piece that is most tied to my ethnicity is my passion and my desire to improve results for this population of kids because I was that population of kids at one time. So that is a big connection for me that the students come from immigrant, low income, minority parents. If they own a home it's a multi-family home and a lot of them are renters and oftentimes their parents have minimal education themselves, and I can relate to that demographic profile.

Similarly Carlos said,

Growing up Latino made me very cognizant of making sure ANY population that is in the minority in my district and who may not be achieving receives equitable services. ...I look at my experiences growing up Latino and I was excluded from many things and not having opportunities because of who I was. I hope to make a difference for other students who have maybe similar but sometimes different issues.

As the participants began to establish themselves as teachers, they came to realize that making a difference goes well beyond the classroom door.

Establishing a Leadership Career in Education

The American School Superintendent 2010 Decennial Study (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young & Ellerson, 2011) reports that the typical career trajectory for public school superintendents is to enter the education profession as a teacher and then progress to building level administration before entering the central office and finally the superintendency. Marilyn Tallerico in her work, *Gaining Access to the Superintendency: Headhunting, Gender and Color* (2000) explains that when searching for superintendents the prototypical experiences candidates should possess include being a teacher for 3-4 years, a secondary principal for 3-5 years, a superintendent in a small district, and then a superintendent in a large district. This career trajectory disadvantages aspiring Latino/a superintendents as research (Glass, 1992; Hodgkinson and Monegro, 1999; Montenegro, 1993) indicates that although very few Latino/a administrators exist the majority of them are found in elementary positions and the highest proportions of

female administrators are found in administrative roles not viewed as typical for a superintendent path such as director and staff coordinator.

Although a superintendent in a suburban K-12 district with more than 8,000 students and a predominantly white student population (80%), Gabriel's experiences from teacher to superintendent exemplifies a nontraditional route to the superintendency for an aspiring Hispanic superintendent as he assumes roles such as technology coordinator, teacher on assignment, supervisor and director.

My career path started as an elementary, bilingual ESL teacher in an inner city public elementary school. I was in that position for approximately three years. At the time the principal moved on. The assistant principal became the principal and the technology coordinator became the assistant principal, so then I moved from my position as the bilingual/ESL teacher to the technology coordinator. At the same time I also became the testing coordinator. I then moved into a central office position as a teacher on assignment, within a month I was a supervisor and then within a year I was the Director of Assessment, Planning and Evaluations. That then led to me leaving the district to become a principal in a suburban elementary school. I was the principal of that elementary school for approximately 3 years. I then went back to the urban inner city school district that I began my career in to become the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. I remained in that position for a few years until I once again left that district and became an Assistant Superintendent in a neighboring community. In that district I was elevated to interim superintendent for 6 months and then accepted my first superintendent position in a suburban public school district.

Gabriel's career trajectory, although extensive illustrates the disadvantage nonminority superintendents face as they apply for superintendent positions without the benefit of having the experiences most often viewed as preferred such as secondary school principal, as described in Tallerico's study (2000).

As Table 2 indicates, not one of the nine Hispanic superintendents in this study had a career path that followed the standardized path that nonminority males historically have taken, which decreases their chances of being viewed as qualified for the position of superintendent.

Table 2

Participants' Career Trajectories

Name	Career Trajectory
"Manuel"	High School Social Studies Teacher, Supervisor of Social Studies, Director of Curriculum & Instruction, Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent
"Alberto"	Speech and Language Teacher, New Jersey Department of Education: Special Programs, Principal, Superintendent
"Antonio"	Guidance Counselor, Assistant Principal, Superintendent
"Dante"	High School Social Studies Teacher, Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent
"Carlos"	Para educator, Special Education Teacher, Assistant Principal, Principal, Assistant. Superintendent, Superintendent
"Gabriel"	Bilingual/English as a Second Language Teacher, Technology Coordinator, Supervisor of Testing, Director of Assessment, Director Planning and Evaluation, Principal, Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent
"Maria"	English as a Second Language Teacher, Assistant Principal, Principal, Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent
"Ana"	Bilingual/English as a Second Language Teacher, Child Study Team Member, Supervisor of Special Education, Principal, Director of Staff Development & Innovative Programs, Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent

“Sofia”	Bilingual/English as a Second Language Teacher, Reading Specialist, Principal, Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent
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At first glance, Maria, a superintendent in a K-8 district where over 85% of the student population are minorities, seems to have followed the trajectory that was outlined as most desirable by the participants in Tallerico’s (2000) study. Unfortunately, for Maria, even though her career trajectory emulates the desired path for a superintendent candidate, her teaching career was as a K-8 elementary school English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher which does not fit the mold for advancement in a white male dominated profession that benefits those who have taught and have been administrators in secondary school. Additionally, Maria’s teaching career as a Bilingual/ESL teacher further hindered her chances to ascend into a position of leadership as it is viewed as a predominantly female Hispanic position that has no opportunity for upward career mobility due to its specialized nature. Similarly, Sofia and Ana began their careers as elementary ESL teachers also limiting their opportunity for advancement.

Alternatively, Manuel, Antonio and Dante became superintendents while never having been a building principal, the cornerstone position for someone aspiring to be a superintendent, although this may have occurred because Dante and Antonio are in small districts consisting of one building and less than 1400 students. Antonio, however realizes that his atypical career path may become a barrier to his advancement as he may seek to apply for superintendent positions of larger districts in the future, “I wish I had been a principal at some point.” The absence of the principal position in Antonio’s resume may hinder his ability to lead a larger district as he was also the only superintendent in this study who had never been a teacher, entering the education

field as a guidance counselor. Alternatively, Manuel ascended to the position of superintendent without having been a building principal but through a series of central office positions. He too reflects upon his career wishing he had principal experience,

If I could do it all over again; Well, I was a central office person, I would have preferred being a vice principal and principal first and almost allowed this opportunity [becoming a superintendent through the central office path] when I was older in life because for one you have the experiences to guide you better.

The lack of women in the superintendency has been a well documented phenomenon that makes the ascension into the superintendency twice as difficult for the Latina superintendents in this study when compared to the Hispanic men. As noted in the research on female superintendents (Brunner, 2000; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Skrla, 2000; Tallerico, 2000; Tannen, 1995), women aspiring to the position of superintendent reported being treated unequally due to their gender even though they occupied powerful positions. In his 2000 article, *Where are all the women superintendents?* Glass outlines several reasons why women have difficulty ascending into positions of leadership such as reluctant school boards, women not being in positions that normally lead to the superintendency, failure to gain administrative credentials, women entering the field for different purposes and women seeking to become administrators too late in their careers. Echoing these findings, all of the Latina superintendents entered the education field in specialized positions that do not typically lead to administration. Their experience as elementary ESL teachers compared to secondary teachers places them at a disadvantage when seeking leadership positions. Ana, for example is a superintendent of a K-8 district. For Sofia and Ana, however an alternative route into administration led them to quasi administrative positions such as a Reading Specialist and Child Study Team (CST) member before they were able to ascend into the administrative ranks.

Marshall and Kasten (1994), in their study of minority administrators found that most leaders attained high level administrative roles because they were willing to work in minority communities. Interestingly, all of the Latina superintendents are leaders in urban districts with minority students accounting for more than 84% of the total student population in their respective districts. In contrast, only two of the male leaders worked in urban districts. Four of the superintendents, Alberto, Antonio, Dante, and Gabriel lead in either suburban or rural districts that are predominantly white. This trend indicates the possibility that public perception of Latino leaders as capable leaders regardless of context might be shifting.

Moving from the classroom to a leadership position, regardless of trajectory, was not something that eight of the nine superintendents had planned. Alberto reflects,

I always really wanted to be a teacher. I always I thought I would love to teach and be a part of a school community. I thought that if I could impart some of that knowledge, passion, and information onto others that would be a great way to make a life.

Similarly, Sofia explained how working with children had always been an interest which ultimately led to her decision to pursue a career in education, “I always liked to deal with kids in some type of capacity... I like trying to help kids and what better way than to teach kids how to be productive members of society.”

Excluding Maria, the superintendents in this study did not originally aspire to be district leaders. It was the role other people played that catalyzed their movement away from the classroom and up the educational leadership ladder within the public school system.

The People Factor

For all the superintendents in this study, someone they interacted with in an educational setting was influential in their decision to leave the classroom and move into positions of

leadership. These interactions varied from a onetime “tap on the shoulder”, to informal mentor relationships, to participation in formal mentoring programs.

Being Identified as a Leader

Many of the leaders reported that the idea of assuming a leadership role began with a onetime suggestion or “tap on the shoulder” from direct line supervisors who recognized their leadership potential. This kind of sponsorship has been documented in the leadership literature as the typical way teachers move out of the classroom and into various leadership positions (Campbell-Jones & Avellar-LaSalle, 2000; Enomoto, 2000; Glass, 1992; Ortiz, 2000; Tallerico, 2000), however, historically one of the barriers for Hispanics aspiring to the superintendency is the absence of being “tapped on the shoulder” due to the racism inherent in sponsored mobility (Campbell-Jones & Avellar-LaSalle, 2000; Couch, 2007; Padilla, 2003; Quilantán & Ochoa, 2004). “Good old boy networks” consisting almost exclusively of white males tend to sponsor other white teachers to become leaders therefore impeding minority educators from moving into administrative positions. However the Hispanic superintendents in this study reported being “tapped on the shoulder” by direct line supervisors, principals, and superintendents, many of who were not Hispanic. Suggestions from their leaders that they might think about taking on a new role in the district led the participants to return to school for a master’s degree or enroll in a certification program which would enable them to move into the administrative ranks. Manuel shared how his assistant superintendent, a white male, first suggested he return to school for his administrator certification.

When I was a teacher I went on a recruiting trip to a prestigious university with my assistant superintendent and he just encouraged me to go on to graduate school and get my administrator certificate and graduate degree. I probably would have put it off but he encouraged me to not wait too long. The Assistant Superintendent in my district kind of pushed me along and that was helpful because without the certificate and without the Masters degree the door is shut to you.

Becoming a leader in the school system is often assumed to be a masculine role and several studies (Brunner, 2000; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Montenegro, 1993; Tallerico & Blount, 2004; Tannen, 1995) note the difficulties female educators face in trying to move up the leadership ladder. Unlike the male superintendents in this study who reported being tapped on the shoulder by their white colleagues, the Latinas in this study started thinking about leadership opportunities because of Latina female administrators. Ana's Latina supervisor was the first to recognize her potential as a leader.

My immediate supervisor, the supervisor of the Bilingual and ESL program when I was teaching suggested I get my masters and was able to recognize the fact that I would be a good candidate for an administrative or supervisory position.

After receiving her master's degree, like many of the superintendents in this study, Ana's career was aided by a series of supporters who encouraged and facilitated her advancement through the administrative hierarchy.

It started with my supervisor (female, Hispanic) and later by my principal (white, male). I remember after having been teaching for 3 years and I was asked to consider a position that would be equal to a strategic coach and I thought, oh my gosh what an honor. When I was serving as a supervisor and expressed interest in the principalship the support from my supervisor was like 100% and the superintendent of schools as well. And so it began with them. They were just simply very encouraging very nurturing and very supportive along the way.

Davila (2002) explains that for aspiring Latina superintendents the absence of the networking required to ascend into leadership positions is a major barrier. This lack of networking limits their potential to be "tapped on the shoulder" by the white male dominated administration and therefore they have less opportunity to advance. Sofia, a retired New Jersey superintendent explained how her leadership potential was recognized as a ESL teacher and then again when she was a Reading Specialist, in a predominantly Hispanic, district by two Latina leaders within her network and how they inspired her to reach higher and think beyond the classroom

I was told that I would be a good leader. First when I was a teacher by my principal in East Howard. Again, one of the few Puerto Rican women administrators at that time, she sensed in me an extraordinary advocacy for kids. There was also Lydia Galan, I don't know where she is now but she was the head of Reading. I remember thinking, here is this Puerto Rican woman and she is the head of Literacy. I was within her circle of influence because I was a reading coach. She was vital. So they were both people who demonstrated leadership to me, motivated me and encouraged me to do more.

Sometimes the suggestion given to participants to become a leader came from spaces outside of their direct workplaces. Several superintendents, for example, spoke of college professors piquing their interests in a range of leadership roles. After Sofia returned to school at the suggestion of her principal and director, a graduate school advisor planted the seed of leadership possibilities beyond a principalship.

I remember being a Liberty University graduate school student and an academic advisor by the name of E.B. said to me 'What do you aspire to be?' and I said, 'I want to be a principal.' And he said, 'aaaaaaand?' So I said 'What aaaaand?' He said, 'and you don't want to be a superintendent or chancellor?'

Similarly, Antonio described how a Latino college professor first put the idea of becoming a superintendent in his head.

I also have to say the professors at the College of St. George were influential too. They trained me well and one of the professors said "hey you thinking of going to be a superintendent one day?" This was when I was going for my masters and I said no.. He said you should think about it.

While being recognized as a potential leader facilitated their moving from classroom teacher to a supervisory role, getting to the superintendency required much more than a "tap on the shoulder".

Informal Mentors

According to Mullen (2005) informal mentoring consists of a mentor-protégé relationship that occurs spontaneously and is self-directed, not managed, not structured, or officially recognized. All nine of the superintendents spoke of mentors who guided them, supported them,

and pushed them to become superintendents in districts throughout New Jersey. Given that mentors are usually more knowledgeable and experienced, those who informally mentored the participants in this study all held key leadership positions in participants' school districts such as supervisors, principals and superintendents. These district leaders recognized the talent and potential of the Hispanic educators and supported them by encouraging them to apply for new positions, placing them in positions that would help them gain valuable experiences, speaking to others about the skills of the protégé, and by connecting them with other high level leaders. For five of the six Latino superintendents the informal mentoring relationship developed with a male who was either white or Hispanic.

Alberto, a superintendent for 8 years, recognized the absence of formal mentoring programs for aspiring superintendents and shared how he sought out informal mentors that could guide him throughout his career. Eventually the informal mentoring relationship he developed with his white male boss in a diverse community led him towards a career in administration.

When I became a school teacher, there were no formal mentor programs at all. You were sort of mentored by going to people you knew and trusted. So I relied on one of my former bosses. He has sort of been my mentor and it's been a long relationship. Just someone I could call and in the early days was someone who would periodically say let's have lunch and talk about how things are going or when I thought I hit a roadblock or something that was going to be a tough decision I would give him a call.

Luckily Gabriel developed an informal mentoring relationship while a teacher in a predominantly minority urban setting with a white male interim superintendent that shared a similar philosophy of education with Gabriel and guided his administrative career.

It was 2004 or 2005, where an interim superintendent had come in to run the district while they were searching for a new superintendent and he really provided the vision of leadership and expectations of quality education and quality educational administration that really aligned to what I believed in and as a result I used him as my informal mentor to pursue my administrative certifications. He was the one who molded and mentored my educational administrative career. He saw in me, things that he was able to value and cultivate. So through his guidance, support and prodding, he really helped to shape my

career path and he would tell me ‘you know what Gabriel, don’t even think about becoming a superintendent until you do X, Y, and Z. And don’t even think about becoming an assistant superintendent, Gabriel don’t even think you are able to be a principal if you haven’t stepped foot into a high school.’ So again we connected on a philosophical, values and beliefs level. After that I continued to work with him and reach out to him to help me guide some of my decision making even to this day.

While working as an assistant principal, two interim superintendents, both white males, recognized Antonio’s potential and informally mentored, supported and groomed him in order that he be prepared to one day assume the superintendency in his rural district that is 90% white.

Ken, the interim superintendent that was here just before I took the position was very influential to me. After Ken, it was Barry who was very helpful. These interim superintendents mentored me. They were interims but they knew I was going for the position so they informally mentored me, and they still do to this day.

Carlos shares how he was fortunate to have been informally mentored by Ann Marie, an African American woman, who placed him in situations where he would gain valuable experience and have the opportunity to stand out and grow as an educational leader. These experiences opened doors for Carlos and helped him get noticed.

Perhaps the one person who has been the most valuable in this aspect has been my former superintendent who brought me to the East Coast. Her name is Ann Marie and she is probably why I am here today. When I was an assistant principal in San Sebastian and she came to our district, she called me into her office and I was like I’m going to the superintendent’s office what’s going on? Did I do something wrong? So I opened the door and she said I have seen you in meetings and I’ve been to your school. So tomorrow I need to remove a principal from a school and so tomorrow you are going to be the principal there. And I said well I don’t know if I want to do that; and she said don’t worry we will help you. We are going to help you and it just started there and from that point on it was just putting me in situations where I had to learn and grow. She always said to people you need to speak to Carlos, you need to interview Carlos and would tell me you need to do this, or you need to try to be that. She has been my biggest supporter since then.

The position of superintendent in a public school district can be difficult as you are the only one holding that position at the top of the hierarchy. As a consequence, superintendents often have no one to turn to for advice and therefore rely on the informal mentor relationships they have

created over the years. Dante explained how his Latino mentor provided him with supports over the years that have allowed him to be successful in spite of all the odds.

William Saenz was always there. I could always call him and still do and I always felt that being able to get his perspective was important. He would be able to tell me about someone who was in a similar situation, and that was a big deal. [As a superintendent] you don't have any colleagues in the district and there is no one you can sort of talk to in that way.

As noted by nearly all of the superintendents in the study, informal mentoring relationships that are sustained are critical to the success of aspiring superintendents. Although being “tapped on the shoulder” made the participants begin to think about becoming educational leaders, becoming an administrator was also the product of informal mentoring relationships. These mentors were able to guide, advise, support and promote the protégés. The informal mentors for the Latino superintendents ranged from men and women of various ethnic backgrounds. For the Latina superintendents in this study however, it was only because of other Latina women leaders that they began to move into various leadership positions indicating that Hispanic women are at more of a disadvantage than their male counterparts when being considered for leadership work.

Formal Mentoring

The education community has recognized that becoming an educational leader is not something that can be completely learned in the confines of a classroom, but that it necessitates some socialization opportunities. One way to do this is via formal mentoring programs. According to Mullen (2005), formal mentoring is an institutionalized arrangement between a mentor and protégé that is most often carried out through a one-on-one relationship. The few existing studies of formal mentoring programs for leaders (Carrion-Mendez, 2009; Couch, 2007; Gonzalez, 2007; Magdaleno, 2004) indicate that mentoring programs are beneficial for both the

protégé and the mentor. According to these studies the protégé benefits by learning the skills necessary to be a successful superintendent and enhances his/her own leadership style; while the mentor is able to develop their skills and gain a new perspective regarding the position of superintendent (Carrion-Mendez, 2009; Couch, 2007; Gonzalez, 2007; Magdaleno, 2004). A handful of mentoring programs for minority leaders exist in the United States. Research on these mentoring programs indicates that participation in these kinds of mentor-protégé programs leads to an increase in minority superintendents (Glass and Franceschini, 2007; Gutierrez, Castaneda & Katsinas, 2002).

Interestingly only two of the nine superintendents in my study reported participating in a formal mentoring program. These two superintendents began their careers as teachers and entered the administrative ranks in states other than New Jersey. Carlos was mentored as a member of the Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS) in California. In 2011, ALAS created a year-long Superintendent Leadership Academy (SLA) for aspiring Hispanic educational leaders. The mission of the SLA is to “improve and expand opportunities for emerging school system leaders by providing coaching, mentoring, and support to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to assume high level roles especially in high poverty and minority serving school systems.” (ALAS website: <http://www.alasedu.net/LeadershipAcademy.aspx>, retrieved November 1, 2013). Once accepted into the prestigious Superintendent Leadership Academy the aspiring superintendents enter into a yearlong training institute that educates, coaches and mentors them to become successful Superintendents (ALAS Website, 2013). Carlos explained the importance of the formal mentoring he received via ALAS and the Superintendent Leadership Academy (SLA) in his career.

Through the Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS) organization I was a part of the first Superintendent Leadership Academy for promising

and future Latino superintendent. The Academy is a year long process where we travel to different cities and we learn different topics but probably the best part of it was bringing in retired superintendents and current superintendents who would talk to us on the real as we say, just to have that valuable hour or two hours with these people, I'm very close with them. Just 2 days ago one of them flew out here and had dinner with me to see how I was doing. She is a retired superintendent from Burgos, California and so that is perhaps one of the most important things in terms of my own education. It wasn't just the jobs I had which I think helped me understand the different perspectives of the people in the district. It was also those formal connections with people that I could right now if I needed them I could call them and ask questions which is valuable and just priceless.

Sofia came to New Jersey from New York for an opportunity to be an assistant superintendent in the largest public school district in the state, she served in that capacity for several years before eventually becoming a superintendent in a predominantly Hispanic Central New Jersey public school district. Sofia recounted how the mentorship she received by the Puerto Rican Education Association (PREA) was critical to her success in her first district in New Jersey.

My superintendent had been the president of PREA, the Puerto Rican Education Association, and his whole thing was to nurture and model for us who were coming up and so we had classes on leadership and he gave the classes voluntarily under the auspices of PREA.

Interestingly, Dante was the only superintendent in the study who mentioned the mentor assigned to him by the state. As part of the requirements to attain a standard chief school administrator's license, all novice superintendents are assigned a mentor from the New Jersey Department of Education's (NJDOE). According to Dante the experience and knowledge he gained from the formal mentor relationship would help guide his decision making for years to come.

[In New Jersey] to get a chief school administrator license certification you need a mentor. Dr. Peters became my mentor and we are very close to this day. Dr. Peters is someone I can count on. We still have a good relationship from the mentoring program years ago. Dr. Peters has always given me the sense of the larger possibilities of what being a superintendent is all about.

In summary, becoming a superintendent for all of the participants in this study was a process of negotiating racism as they moved through the education system as students. Unlike their experiences as students, it was having the fortunate experience of meeting someone who “tapped them on the shoulder” and developing some kind of mentoring relationships that facilitated the rise into leadership positions which eventually led to them becoming superintendents. The Latinas in this study however were able to ascend due to the Latina mentoring they received and despite the additional institutional barriers created by gender which limited their opportunities to climb the educational ladder.

Being a Hispanic Superintendent

According to Daniel A. Domenech, the executive director of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), over the last one hundred years the role of the superintendent has become increasingly complex and diverse. Superintendents are “responsible for student progress and achievement while balancing diversification of their student and staff populations, the explosion of technology and the digital divide, an expanded set of expectations and involvement from the federal level, the media, and board and community relations, all in the context of a globalized education system” (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young & Ellerson, 2011, p. xiii). When describing the nature of their work, the superintendents spoke of the complexity of the position and how it requires them to be a “jack of all trades”. Maria explains:

Let’s see a superintendent is a jack of all trades. I oversee the instructional leadership and operations, and managerial operations of a district of 14 schools; 10 elementary, two intermediate, one middle school, one high school and one alternative education school. What do I do? I work with both professional and paraprofessional staff to really accomplish the vision and mission of a district which is to ultimately provide high quality education programs for students to complete high school. As superintendent I oversee the management of the district. I have fiscal responsibility and I work to engage the public

and the community to really understand the direction of the district. I work with the board of education to accomplish all of these tasks for the district.

Managing the multitude of responsibilities that comes with holding the position of greatest administrative authority in a public school district for Antonio is in his words, “insane” because of the daily demands, but he also clarifies “I consider my job to be much more than that. My job is to be the visionary and plan for where the school and district is going to go and make sure that plan is being implemented and followed through.” For Dante and Sofia, the priority must be student success. Sofia states,

Our overarching goal is to ensure that children are being educated and being offered the best possible opportunities, the best possible materials, and the best conditions under which to learn which necessitates understanding where these children come from and their actual needs.

In order to support student learning, Dante argues that a superintendent has to be the mediator between various policies and the local context.

The purpose of the job was to make sure that politics did not infringe on the district and that I was able to provide a stable educational environment; an ecology where teachers could teach and students could learn. To try to juggle the demands of state compliance and monitoring with our own individual initiatives that we thought were more important than what the state was asking.

Carlos concurs and emphasizes the superintendent’s role as overall instructional leader:

I really view my role as the chief instructional leader of the district and my responsibility is to make sure that all the supports in the district whether its human or fiscal and even community partnership supports come together and are aligned for the betterment of our students and achievement... I see my role as really trying to build capacity and develop the talents of the individuals that are here, and making sure the right people are in the right seats.

While all of the participants recognize that being a superintendent is complex, multifaceted, and politically oriented; what made their task even harder was the fact that they were Hispanic.

Despite having ascended to the highest level of district leadership, every one of the superintendents spoke of continuing to experience discrimination.

Continuing to Navigate Racial Discrimination

I think that the specific barriers are directly related to the stereotypes held, and the values and beliefs held by individuals about what Latinos can achieve or by others regarding what Latino superintendents can do. I think the obstacles in attaining a superintendent position are directly related to ethnicity. So if you remove ethnicity then you remove the obstacle.

-Manuel

According to CRT theorists Delgado and Stefancic (2012), the mere fact that a person of color might assume the superintendent position, such a powerful position that has been historically and overwhelmingly controlled by white males leads to feelings of suspicion, distrust and low expectations. Unfortunately, superintendents can't remove their ethnicity as Manual suggests although some may "pass" as white. Instead all of the superintendents in this study spoke about how enduring images of a superintendent as a white male made it difficult for them to be taken seriously for some positions and when they did become a district leader to be able to lead effectively.

In an ideal world, leaders should be chosen based on their expertise, track record and leadership skills. However, a number of studies indicate (Couch, 2007; Dillard, 2003; McCreight, 2002) that one of the barriers for Latinos is the hiring practices of school boards, selection committees, and communities who tend to hire superintendent candidates that are demographically similar to themselves. As Gabriel eloquently put it, "I'd like to say that everyone puts color and ethnicity aside but [racism] is unfortunately a reality." Sofia describes the outright racism she experienced when she applied for a particular job,

We live in a racist society that has designated certain people as not capable. There is benign [racism] and then there is vicious [racism]. Benign is ignorance and they really truly believe that anybody with a vowel at the end of their name can't possibly function as a leader. And then there is the vicious kind. I met a mayor from Point Break who said there is no way that Hispanics were going to move forward and it was going to take time. You know, an out and out racist. When he interviewed me I was the number one candidate for superintendent and he said to me, "Well, you know you have my board and

you have the Hispanics but you ain't never getting the blacks...and as far as the whites; they don't send their kids to the public schools." This was from the mayor. The mayor!! He hired somebody who he felt was right. A white male.

From a critical race theoretical perspective (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011), social institutions like schools and school boards have historically privileged white, middle class values which has resulted in a legacy of discriminatory practices. Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman (2011) summarize this historic privilege as a basic CRT assumption in which the Civil Rights movement and the laws of a liberal and democratic society are "inadequate in remedying the legacy of over 200 years of state-sponsored racial inequality" (p.22). Six of the nine superintendents in this study noted how this privileging is present in all levels of school governance and is a significant obstacle for Hispanic leaders. Manuel elaborates:

I think the element of legacy and political power in a community is probably more of an obstacle for Hispanics than it is for a white person. If you look at the state legislature, the mayors, city council people I think that you'll find, even in the urban centers where you have large numbers of minorities you still have a representation of white folks because they are the powerbase.

Dante explains how the legacy of white privilege has played out historically,

If you are looking back to some of the oldest districts and you look back at their original superintendents through to the present you would find a great number of the superintendents were German and English. Then at a certain point they become Irish and then there were a huge number of them that were Italian. It's fascinating to me in a sense that they continue to dominate the position.

Carlos elaborates on how white privilege has led to the advancement of white males not because of their skills but because they look like what is expected in leadership positions

And I have seen many administrators that have been promoted because of their race only and it wasn't because of their skills that go along with it and they happen to be whites, especially white males and it was expected because they are the leaders and they should have these roles. Why would Hispanics get it they don't look like what we expect leaders to look like. So they choose white administrators that may have not had the skills to become administrators but they look the part.

Given the white power base in many districts Manuel argued that “Being able to convince the board that you can become a superintendent isn’t often [about] what you know and what you can do; but who you know and what your relationships are.”

Along with the privileging of White leadership is the “othering” of non-white educators. Because it is assumed that Hispanic leaders do not have the necessary skills and dispositions of their white counterparts, when they do ascend to a position of leadership there is often the assumption that they got the position because of some other reason, such as affirmative action or quotas, and not because they have the skills to do the job (Carrion-Mendez, 2009; Davila, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Quilantán and Ochoa, 2004; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). Antonio spoke about how frustrating this type of assumption is to minority educators who want to lead:

It is tough for us [Hispanics] to move forward because we walk that fine line. We don’t want people to sit there and say you’re promoting yourself... you’re using that race card. No, I am who I am, and these are the skills that I have. The same skills that the white man, right there has.

Manuel recalls that when he began to move into leadership positions within his district, it was documented that decisions were made in favor of a Hispanic leader, a comment that implies he was only being given such positions because of his race.

The outgoing superintendent made allusions in some court documents about being replaced by a young Hispanic superintendent. He was in his late 50s early 60s Irish American. It also came up when I became a supervisor, I think the woman she was white of Jewish descent and she made claims that the board gave it to a young Hispanic supervisor.

Carlos recounts how as a new superintendent his ability to lead was so severely doubted that extreme measures were taken in failed attempts to prove he was not a capable leader,

...but then there is a lot of questions like well how did you get there? And people trying to find things and they follow you and take pictures. They try to find something you are

doing wrong because they can't believe you are there. So it feels like a lot of weight and pressure on you as a superintendent.

Similarly, Gabriel felt the eyes of the predominantly white community waiting for him to fail in order to validate their racist beliefs,

Everything that I did was with the assumption that everyone is looking at me and everyone is waiting for me to step out of line so that they can catch me doing something or at least use it to substantiate their own preconceived notions and stereotypes.

For the Latina superintendents in this study, this discrimination was a double edged sword as they had to deal with both racial as well as gender politics. Not only were they seen as token Hispanics but also as token female leaders. Sofia explains

There are physical attributes and there are some intellectual attributes that are always questioned. Success is equated in our country by Anglo-Saxon males who are six feet tall. They don't come in the Hispanic variety. So initially wherever I went my voice was muted because of who I am. A Latina leader, I am just some token they were forced to take.

Maria remembers how alarmed the community was that the new superintendent was Latina, that people would make up reasons why she may have gotten her position

It's interesting as to how you get characterized. People talk as to why you got that position. It couldn't possibly be because you have a skill set. I think that followed me for a while. The 'she got the job as a token' comments. It really hurt me.

Research on women in the educational leadership field (Montenegro, 1993; Tallerico & Blount, 2004; Tannen, 1995) has revealed that women seeking leadership positions have been discriminated against in school organizations as these leadership positions have been historically created as highly gendered patriarchal roles thus leading to perceptions that women should not be in leadership positions.

The combined stereotypes that women can't lead as they are not strong enough and that Hispanics do not have the skill set to lead results in a kind of intense scrutiny of women Hispanic leaders. According to Quilantán and Ochoa (2004) Latina superintendents endure more scrutiny

than their male counterparts as board members and the community question their professional competence. As a Latina superintendent, Ana realizes that every move she makes will be dissected and scrutinized as she does not fit into the historically gendered patriarchal role.

As a Latina, I think from the moment you are hired as the superintendent everyone is going to be looking at you, in terms of either the changes you are promoting and the way you are entering the superintendency and how you are going to engage people in the initial conversation to promote any changes that need to be made. So I believe that we [Latinas] are more so under than microscope than any other group.

Maria quickly realizes the double standard she faces as the first nonwhite superintendent in her district,

I know I have been scrutinized here more than others that have been here before me. That has been my experience since coming here, whereby the person that was sitting here before me did not have to explain ABC, I have to explain ABC all the way to XYZ. Now is that because I'm Latina? The feeling that I have to justify or be in situations that are very uncomfortable and very mean spirited at times has been very hurtful because it didn't happen to other people here. And this is according to the people that are here. So one has to ask, well why is it happening now? If it didn't happen before, why all of a sudden are we going to pull a rabbit out of a hat?

Several of the male superintendents also highlighted the gaze they felt from their communities, who seemed to be waiting for them to make a mistake in order to be able to reaffirm their beliefs that a Hispanic person could not be an effective superintendent. Gabriel recalls a community event in which as a newly appointed superintendent, he felt the eyes of the community on him which let him know that his actions and inactions would be monitored closely as the new "Hispanic" superintendent. In his words, "I never got outwardly met with resistance but there is no question that people said "Oh, you're the new superintendent?"

As suggested by CRT theory, "society implicitly values whiteness and devalues all that is not white. Whiteness is the default cultural standard" (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). As Latino leaders are not viewed as capable as white leaders, their achievements are often undervalued or attributed to some other source. Manuel describes the double standard he

felt as a successful superintendent in an urban district. Through his leadership the district had made significant strides, yet he did not receive the same accolades as his predecessor, a white male.

He was able to win the state superintendent of the year award and he really didn't do anything award winning for the schools. For the seven and a half years that I have been here I've improved academic performance, opened schools with large numbers, I have five of the best schools in the nation, three pre-K – 8 are national blue ribbon schools, two of my high schools are nationally ranked. I got the sports program converted back to winning because they had floundered under his superintendency because he didn't really pay attention to them, our band is nationally ranked now and it had never been. So all the indicators that are substantively important to an objective observer...well I'm doing a whole lot better than he did during his term but I will never be a superintendent of the year because I do not look the part.

In summary, like minority superintendents in other studies (Campbell-Jones & Avelar-LaSalle, 2000), "racial prejudice is a constant reality" (p. 13) for these superintendents. That is best summed up by Gabriel, the first Hispanic superintendent in a predominantly white suburban community with a small percentage of Hispanic students.

When I came to the district articles were written in the paper and printed online about me as the new educational leader and when the anonymous comments are permitted... people start to share their underlying prejudices or racist sentiments whether it be referring to me in a derogatory manner or mocking my last name or referring to me in lights that clearly were making fun of my ethnicity. It was evident that there was some deeply held resistance. Then other comments would be made like "we don't want you bringing your people here."

In order to be able to lead effectively, these Hispanic superintendents have employed various defense strategies and supports.

Leadership Strategies to Address Discrimination. While CRT highlights the racialized nature of schooling, studies of minority leaders (Campbell-Jones & Avelar-LaSalle, 2000; Couch, 2007; Davila, 2002; Mendez-Morse-Morse, 2000; Quilantán & Ochoa, 2004) also suggests that there are strategies or points of resistance educators can take up and use to counter dominant stereotypes while working within the system. The superintendents in this study

identified 3 strategies or ways they address racism. The first two, resilience and proving oneself, are more focused on the individual while the third, building supports through family is outwardly focused.

Resilience. Echoing the findings of other studies of minority leaders Campbell-Jones and Avelar-LaSalle (2000), Couch (2007), Hibbets (2005), and Quilantán and Ochoa (2004), the superintendents in this study all described developing or having an inner resilience, a determination to persist and follow through on their leadership decisions despite the discrimination they experienced. Gabriel describes how he developed this inner strength over time

Recognizing to some degree that I was never truly accepted 100% by everyone as I enter a predominantly white community I am always keenly aware that there are people that are going to say you are not one of us. But more importantly though, I think it has developed those values and character traits that just make me that much more resilient, that much more determined, that much more steadfast in my beliefs, in my commitment to whatever it is I choose to do.

Gabriel elaborates, “as a Latino experiencing racism and prejudice in a variety of ways it’s just something that has allowed me to be that much stronger, resilient and committed to whatever ideals that I possess or aspirations I had.” Maria also identified resilience as key to her success.

Well let’s see the law of resilience. Work in spite of all the obstacles. It’s just knowing that I can and that I should. It’s having that inner belief system because being a leader isn’t easy work. It’s not easy and the environments are not often positive. As a matter of fact they are often toxic and so it’s important to know that you can and that you should lead.

Many of the superintendents shared that having the fortitude and resilience to move forward in the face of adversity and racism was directly related to their feelings of greater responsibility to the children. Sofia puts it this way:

It’s just fortitude. You just have to keep the kids in mind. The politics, they’ll be all over you. They are like flies on shit. The flies are all over you, but you keep going and say

[to yourself] X percentage of the students made this based on the test scores. Okay, how can we get to the next level?

Being resilient and having the fortitude to overcome the obstacles of a racist system has enabled the participants in this study to press forward and stay focused on the students and the academic achievement of the school districts they lead. However, the ability to lead in the face of adversity is not enough for the participants to be successful in a long career as a superintendent.

Proving Oneself.

We [Hispanics] consistently have to prove ourselves and I think you are only as good as your last decision. You must continue to prove yourself again and again.

-Carlos

Because of the racism pervading public schools that positions Hispanic leaders as less capable or lacking the expertise to be able to lead a district, the Hispanic superintendents in this study deliberately worked harder. Like other minority leaders (de Santa Ana, 2008; Campbell-Jones & Avelar-LaSalle, 2000), working harder is a strategy that acts as a defense against racists assumptions. Working harder to prove oneself creates a buffer for the superintendents that can help shield themselves from negative criticism from the community while also removing credibility from the false perceptions that they are not capable leaders (de Santa Ana, 2008; Delgado and Stefancic, 2012).

In his interview, Alberto noted that for Hispanic superintendents working harder to prove oneself as a leader is a constant, “What does it feel like? Well it is a lot of pressure... negative and positive because you feel like you need to really work a little extra harder and show people that it can be done.” Gabriel commented that he kept “a squeaky clean record” while proving himself as a capable leader,

I’ve always felt that I’ve had to prove myself. I always felt that this was something that was just a cross that I had to bear for whatever reason. So as a result it shaped who I am

by always making me push harder. Always making me recognize that these things are out there but that I couldn't let that stop me from doing what I had to do and being the best that I could do and always making sure that

Dante's experiences as a superintendent in a suburban community with very little diversity magnified his "need" to "prove" himself as a Hispanic educational leader. In his words "I felt I had to prove myself. I wanted to be able to succeed since I was in a predominantly white wealthy school district." To also counter the racism he felt working in a predominantly white district Dante also obtained a doctoral degree. He explains, "I wanted to be able to prove myself as a scholar who had enough erudition that it would be difficult to criticize me. So I wanted to present myself as a scholar. "

While working harder to prove oneself as competent to lead was a strategy employed by all of the superintendents as a way to counter racism, for the Latina superintendents this strategy was also needed if they were to counter the sexism of public school communities. Campbell-Jones & Avelar-LaSalle (2000), de Santa Ana (2008), and Grogan & Brunner (2005) found that Latino/a superintendents possessed the willingness to work harder than anyone else in order to prove their worth. Maria shares, "There is always some kind of hoop you have to jump that others may not have and you have to work harder to prove them wrong and that you are capable as a Latina leader." For Sofia, proving her worth by demonstrating her leadership competence was a more effective strategy than working harder, although both were beneficial, in her words, "I had to prove more, not necessarily that I had to do more...I knew I had to struggle harder as a Latina and it was something that was always there." Proving oneself as competent is also a strategy Ana commented she employed as she was always under the spotlight given there are so few Latina superintendents.

Being the only Hispanic superintendent in the county I have to work harder and prove myself all the time...I represent a demographic subgroup. We have to constantly prove

ourselves through leadership skills and the work that needs to be done to improve test scores, academics and our work with the board.

Anan goes on to comment,

I truly believe that from the moment I was appointed that I truly needed to maximize my potential and do my very best work to be able to once again demonstrate to the community and particularly the board and the district in general that I was capable of doing the work.

In an effort to demonstrate her leadership impact, Sofia described how she used data.

It wasn't until again data proved otherwise. I would argue from the point of data in that I would say now I have 10,000 kids and of the 10,000 kids X number have increased their scores by Y percentage. I would prove otherwise, and I would talk about the data.

“Mi Familia”. In Maria’s words, the position of superintendent is “lonely”. The number of supporters and colleagues drops dramatically when you become the head of a large organization such as a school district. To offset the isolation they face and to cope with the additional pressures thrust upon them as educational leaders, the superintendents once again turn to the support group that has been there since the beginning, “mi familia”. According to Magdaleno (2006) familialism is at the forefront of cultural assets for Latinos as it denotes, “a cultural value that involves a strong identification with, and attachment to, their nuclear and extended families” (Magdaleno, 2006, p.13). Almost all of the superintendents in this study expressed the importance of family in their role as superintendents. Maria describes her family, and more specifically her mother, as having been and continuing to be her one constant support system that has enabled her to have the strength to climb to the position of superintendent, and continues to support her as a superintendent in the face of racial and gender discrimination.

My family and my mother keep me grounded and support me every single day. My family and my mom are my biggest champion. My mom tells me that all things are possible and I just believe it is possible. So I do believe and it helps me lead.

Ana noted that her parents were not only her primary supporters but also her role models.

I don't think I would have been able to possibly develop such leadership traits without having them as role models then and the support they give me now because if there is anything that they did it was work very very hard and support me to the fullest.

Having the knowledge that no matter what happens “mi familia” will stand behind him and support him has given Gabriel the confidence to succeed as an educational leader in a position that had been traditionally dominated by the white majority, “So, I would say my family by all means is my greatest support group being a superintendent. They have always and continue to believe in me... That's important to me.” Manuel's family has also proven to be the rock that supports him and pushes him forward when the going gets tough, “Mom and dad are always there for me. So they are very powerful motivators, supports and encouragers.” Carlos recounted the extensive influence his support system has had on him as a superintendent in a large urban district that educates more than 10,000 students daily.

I think it influences me in the sense of the cultural background I had growing up where at least in my family...it was really about a family. I think in the Latino or Hispanic community we have a value amongst us around community oriented and there is a big value on family. Whether it's coming together and understanding each other's differences. Laughing and joking and partying...it's a big part of who we are as a people and it was certainly was a big part of my upbringing.

All of the superintendents in this study discussed the integral role their families have played in their ability to ascend to the position of superintendent. Through familialism and the support of “Mi Familia” and drive of family, the Hispanic superintendents have been able to shield themselves against stressors and roadblocks through the natural support system of family.

Leading for Social Justice

Given that the participants in this study had to employ several strategies to be able to lead effectively and combat the ongoing racism they encountered, it is not surprising that these leaders identified equity and social justice as a major part of their work as district leaders. In

other words, their identities and experiences as Hispanic leaders shaped how these leaders said they led.

Leading for social justice is about being aware of and trying to address the inequities that exists in the structure of schools. Issues of access, language, diversity and inclusion are a priority in efforts to eliminate the injustices that continue to occur to students who have been historically underserved (Agosto & Karanxha, 2012; Jenlink & Jenlink, 2012; Riehl, 2000; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Taking a passive stance to the injustices that exists in education was not an option for the participants in this study as they knew all too well the injustices of an education system that did not value them as a students and continues to marginalize them even as adult educational leaders. For Carlos social justice has to be a priority,

I do think being Hispanic does influence is that I am very cognizant of making sure ANY population that is in the minority in my district and who is not achieving or receiving equitable services. So I am cognizant of that. So when I was working in a district that was predominantly African American students I was a big advocate for them not because I was Latino but because I have experienced not having an equitable educational environment. Here we have a large Latino population that have not experienced. When I worked in a district with an Asian population I was very much an advocate for them. I think [my leadership] stems from the fact that I, as a Latino, have experienced that same type of exclusion and lack of opportunities. So being Hispanic doesn't define me, who I am or what I do but it does affect me because it is a part of me.

Similarly, Sofia, a superintendent in an urban setting with a predominantly Hispanic student population describes her commitment to social justice.

I lead to ensure that children are being educated and being offered the best possible opportunities, the best possible materials, and the best conditions under which to learn which necessitates understanding where these children come from and their actual needs.

As the first Latina superintendent in a diverse community where Hispanic and Black students make up close to 72% of the student population, Maria explains that it is not about vocalizing the inequities that exist, but about taking action.

I've had colleagues screaming, oh this is terrible and I don't see this and I don't have that. So what we have to do is go back to our districts and I make sure whether the kids are black, Hispanic, white or whatever that they are being educated.

In line with Maria, Manuel reiterates that having been part of a group that has been historically marginalized has made him value the needs of those who have been traditionally set aside as he often invites them into a discussion.

Being a part of a community that has been marginalized and not well respected you make sure that you consider others to ensure that everyone is embraced. It isn't that we are just making decisions and we don't care about you or that you are going away angry because you are a small group overall. I would rather invite the group to come on in and let's have the conversation because you are important and we value and honor your presence enough to have you engage in a conversation and to try to understand each other. It's hard but that has been my style for years.

The superintendency in a wealthy suburban community might suggest less need for attention to issues of injustice. However Alberto argues that his identity as a Hispanic leader means that he is always oriented to those who are marginalized.

I think what I am conscious about is that even in elite communities there are kids who need special attention and there are kids who are poor and there are kids who come from homes that are struggling economically. I think that my background [being Hispanic] has enabled me to do is bring those experiences and that sensitivity so that I very often find myself championing for those kids or helping people understand the experience of helping people see that these parents aren't coming to school not because they don't care but because dad is working three jobs and mom is working 2 jobs. So what I think what you are bringing to it is a cultural sensitivity.

Carlos reflects how by attaining the most powerful position in a public school, he can impact the system that placed him at a disadvantage.

I think our [Hispanic Superintendents] rewards are around being social change agents. I think we are social change agents because we understand the impact of what it's like coming up and growing up in a system that wasn't there for us.

Regardless of context, whether the Hispanic superintendents were in small affluent districts or large urban centers, one of the key ways the superintendents led for social justice was by shaping policies and practices aimed at improving the opportunities for marginalized student

groups in their districts. By breaking it down to percentages, Gabriel explains how leading for social justice involves ALL students, “I am always looking at it from okay, so, if I make this decision it may help 95% of the population but I also have to consider and worry about the other 5%”. Manuel a superintendent in a large urban setting with a student population of 70% Hispanic and 10% black students explains how he has improved opportunities for students who have been traditionally excluded from higher level courses such as AP courses,

Well, I made changes in the high school. And it's more about access at this point because the AP scores have stayed at about a 2, but when I first started as superintendent we had about 250 kids taking AP exams. This past year we had approximately 1800 kids taking it, so it's a very very big change. It's more about access but it is also a programmatic change in the sense that if we have more volume and access for kids taking the SAT exams. The downside and the upside, it's both right, is that we haven't moved to an average of three yet but with the volume we stayed the same because people make the argument that these kids couldn't take the course because they couldn't perform. But they are performing as well as when there was a smaller population of kids.

Alberto explained how he focused his efforts on two groups that have been historically marginalized: Hispanics and Special Education students in his district,

I looked at the achievement of minority students and the achievement of special education youngsters and we were able to identify the achievement gap and then we began to work with staff. So first we were trying to identify the problem which was the gap and then we began to work with staff by training principals and training teachers to look at the data and to begin to understand the data and to begin to interpret the data. You see data is not just about grouping kids high, middle and low but within those groups what are the disparities. So we created a real culture around thinking around data and thinking about how data influences instruction. And what we saw over the course of about five or six years is that we actually began to close the gap. For special education kids who were performing as a group in the 35th percentile, 5 years later as a group they were in the 65th percentile and those were significant gains. We saw the gap among African American kids close significantly in language arts. We also saw the gap among Hispanics rise and we really credited it to the fact that everybody began to own the data and everybody began to own how we thought about kids.

Maria elaborates on the influences that a superintendent can have as a change agent regarding policy and decision making.

I am in the position to influence policies that can make the difference for the next generation. Hopefully I can make a difference in not just formal legislation but board members who hire and make decisions to really lead in a way that convinces people to do what's right for other people's kids.

Dante, a superintendent in an affluent community where almost 90% of the student population is white, shares how his commitment to social justice led him to reach out to the Hispanic community in order to give a voice to a student population which had until then been unheard and ignored.

The only Hispanics that existed in our schools were the children of day workers who worked in one of the towns and it was fascinating to watch the towns reaction to those sorts of demographics because they knew that there was not a neighborhood that was for Hispanics, they knew there were not a large number of Hispanics in the k-8 schools, so it made me try to do a little bit of outreach towards recent immigrants within the school. That the sorts of things that we did in terms of trying to help with ESL and those sorts of questions. ,These were people who needed my help.

The value of social justice and socially just practice is not only in the here and now, but must be valuable and long lasting in order that it be worthwhile and effective. Carlos shares his feelings on influencing socially just policy,

Having influence over policies and decisions that are not just for the adults, but are going to help kids over time they are important but they cannot be short quick fixes. So you have to understand and say "What do I want to do here" because no one lasts 20 or 30 years in the same position anymore. So if I'm only here for 3 – 5 years what can I do in that time that will last for 20 or 30 years because I'm not, probably (laughs) because of politics. There is a lot of politics in an urban district and I do think the racial side of politics comes up a lot as well. Being Latino does influence you a lot.

Lived experiences of racism and marginalization has made it imperative for the superintendents to advocate for those populations that continue to struggle. Sofia describes her work as that of being in a war "because it is a war to secure the resources you need; to go the extra mile and to go to war for all students." For these superintendents their ethnicity shapes their leadership and is an asset that they bring to their leadership work. Alberto states,

Being a part of a community that has been marginalized and not well respected you make sure that you consider others and to ensure that everyone is embraced. Understanding of peoples' struggles and the immigrant experience and talking to people that are here and trying to make it. You get it, you understand because it's very similar to my experiences. My parents were poor and it sort of puts a kind of a fire in your belly. I think knowing two languages and being or having the knowledge of two cultures has been extremely important. Not only when I'm dealing with Hispanic kids but any population. It has given me the kind of sense of dealing with many diverse people. So there is a phrase which is "buscale la vuelta" which is sort of find the angle. That is part of my culture to make things work without necessarily alienating people but really engaging all people and bringing all people along.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the narratives of the nine Hispanic public school superintendents in New Jersey, it becomes very apparent that their educational and leadership experiences require them to negotiate an inherently biased system. Being a superintendent is a vulnerable role as district leaders cannot gain tenure, and therefore can be at the whim of school boards and communities. However, in addition to this challenge the Hispanic superintendents in this study had to adopt a range of strategies to challenge racist stereotypes that threatened to usurp their power and agency as leaders. In an effort to lead and change the system within their own sites of practice, all of the Hispanic superintendents take a social justice orientation to leading. However, given they are so few in number, how much impact they are able to have in addressing educational equities for marginalized populations is questionable. In the next chapter, I examine these findings in relation to what they mean for the recruitment and retention of a cadre of qualified Hispanic educational leaders in schools.

CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS

I think that the specific barriers [for Latinos] are directly related to the stereotypes held, and the values and beliefs held by individuals about what Latinos can achieve or by others regarding what Latino superintendents can do. I think the obstacles in attaining a superintendent position are directly related to ethnicity. So if you remove ethnicity then you remove the obstacle.

-Manuel

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine the experiences of Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey and how race mediates their work as educational leaders. As Manuel indicates while ethnicity should not be a barrier to Hispanic educators becoming superintendents, it is. In a state as diverse as NJ where 1.6 million people are Hispanic (Pew Hispanic Profile, 2011) the underrepresentation of Hispanics leading public school districts is concerning. In this chapter, I turn to my third research question “what do the experiences of Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey suggest for the recruitment, retention, and education of Hispanic educational leaders?” To do this, this chapter begins by providing a short overview of the research design employed; I then examine the key findings in relation to the research literature and what they imply for my practice as an aspiring Hispanic superintendent and educational change agent.

Research Summary and Findings

This study sought to foreground the voices of every Hispanic superintendent in New Jersey in order to get an in depth understanding of their work, beliefs and perceptions regarding educational leadership.

As I was interested in examining the experiences of every Hispanic superintendent in New Jersey and how they perceive their ethnicity and race have shaped their leadership

experiences, I draw on CRT and more specifically, LatCrit Theory. CRT includes race as part of their critique of mainstream legal ideology that has helped create, support, and legitimize the oppressive structures in American society. Educational institutions for example are one of these structures that continue to perpetuate the inequities that benefit few and disenfranchise most (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Villalpando; 2004; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011).

Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit), although similar to CRT, emphasizes Latino pan-ethnicity as it addresses issues typically ignored by critical race theorists such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, sexuality and genes which are closely explored within LatCrit (Valdes, 1996; Villalpando, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011).

In keeping with the aim of CRT and LatCrit to elevate the voices of people of color, Hispanics in particular, I draw on qualitative research methodology based on Seidman's (2006) phenomenological interview approach to explore the experiences of every Hispanic school superintendent in New Jersey. The sample consisted of all 9 Hispanic superintendents serving in New Jersey public schools.

I conducted two face-to-face interviews with each of the participants. The interviews were designed to elicit information relevant to the Hispanic superintendents and their perceptions as they relate to their backgrounds, leadership, supports, barriers and obstacles they have experienced in achieving the superintendency.

During the initial phase of data analysis, I organized the data according to research question. I then developed inductive and deductive codes, or labels for assigning units of meaning to text, for the next stage of the analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Then, I coded all data within each research question, sorted by code within each research question and

compared and contrasted according to participants within each code. Next, I examined the relationships between codes in order to develop assertions related to my research questions. All evidence, supporting and contradictory were explored to help ensure thoroughness and minimize the possibility of errors (Creswell and Miller, 2000) as well as to create possible themes for answers to individual research questions across participants.

The analysis led to two main sets of findings: a) The paradox of race and ethnicity in the careers of educational leaders, and b) supports are essential in order to overcome institutional racism and become an educational leader. In what follows I summarize each set of findings in relation to the research literature. I then explore what these findings suggest for improving policy and practices that might lead to higher numbers of Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey.

Education System as a Paradox

If superintendencies were filled in the same way the Voice, the musical performance show did where you are judged on your experience, your character, your commitment, your ability to communicate but not knowing what your last name is and what you look like then I think it's a different story. But the moment you factor in your ethnicity then it starts to add in things that people won't readily admit or even recognize.

-Gabriel

Whether talking about their early schooling experiences or their work as district leaders, all of the superintendents in this study spoke about the promise of education and the inherent racism they constantly had to overcome. From a CRT and LatCrit perspective, Zamudio, Russell, Rio & Bridgeman (2011) refer to this paradox as the "myth to meritocracy." Education in the United States is supposedly a meritocratic system in which those who work hard and do well are rewarded. Yet, throughout their educational careers the Hispanic superintendents spoke about constantly having to resist dominant racist discourses that positioned them as intellectually inferior and lacking the skills and knowledge to be a good student or an effective educational

leader. The paradox therefore, lies in a school system that has been labeled meritocratic, yet is set up to favor some while marginalizing others.

At the same time, the racism experienced by these superintendents was not similar but varied by immigration status and gender. Ana, the only first generation American in this study, received her formal education in her home country where she was a part of an affluent family. Unlike the other superintendents who were first and second generation immigrants, Ana did not mention any racist experiences in her schooling until she migrated to the US at the age of 17.

In keeping with studies on women educational leaders (Brunner, 2000; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Tallerico, 2000; Tannen, 1995), and in congruence with qualitative studies on Latina superintendents (Carrion-Mendez, 2011; Gonzales, 2007; Manuel & Slate, 2003; McCreight, 2002; Mendez-Morse, 2004), the Latina superintendents in this study reported being treated unequally due to their gender even when they assumed the position of superintendent. Their ascension into the superintendency was twice as difficult as they were discriminated against for being women as well as for being Hispanic.

Yet, it is the negative experiences that these leaders had in school as a result of racism that catalyzed their educational careers. All of the superintendents went into education with the aim of making a difference especially for students from minority backgrounds. As a consequence, and perhaps not surprisingly, when asked to describe their leadership work, all of the superintendents spoke about social justice, equity and access. For these leaders, social justice involves enacting policies and practices that address inequities. The superintendents spoke of having a mindset always attuned to the needs of marginal groups in their school communities. They also said they saw their role as change agents, enacting policies that could address the achievement gap.

In an ideal world, as Gabriel in the quote that opened this section notes, people would be judged on what they are able to do, not the color of their skin. Yet because of their ethnic and racial identities these leaders are enacting a different kind of leadership that is attempting to address inequities and ensure that all children especially underrepresented or minority groups of students learn. Thus the cultural resources these superintendents bring to their job is an important contribution to leadership. However the persistence and reach of institutional racism in schools means that with so few educational leaders who are Hispanic, whatever the equity policies and practices they implement, the impact will be limited.

Support is Essential

Studies of Hispanic educational leaders (Campbell-Jones & Avelar-LaSalle, 2000; Davila, 2002; de Santa Ana, 2008; Iglesias, 2009; Ortiz, 2000; Tallerico, 2000) and from a CRT and LatCrit perspective (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Zamudio, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, 2011), have found that there is often a lack of formal mentoring opportunities for Latino/as as a result of the institutional racism imbedded within the white majority structure of public schools. The “good old boy” networks tend to mentor and support those who were demographically similar to themselves therefore creating a significant barrier for anyone who does not fit the white male role of what an educational leader should look like. Only two Hispanic superintendents mentioned having had the opportunity to be formally mentored. Interestingly, the two superintendents that had been mentored formally had done so in states other than New Jersey. This is significant as research studies on minority leaders show (Carrion-Mendez, 2011; Couch, 2007; Gonzalez, 2007; Magdaleno, 2004) that mentoring is a key component to the ascension of minority leaders into high level positions such as superintendent. Additionally, research studies of these formal mentor programs (Glass &

Franceschini, 2007; Gutierrez, Castaneda, & Katsinas, 2002) reveal that aspiring superintendents who take part in formal mentoring programs more seriously pursue superintendent positions. The fact that the only two Hispanic superintendents that mentioned formal mentoring in their interviews are from out of state is compelling and indicates the need for formalized mentoring programs for aspiring Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey.

However in keeping with other research on Hispanic educational leaders (Davila, 1997; Enomoto, Gardnier, & Grogan, 2000; Magdaleno, 2004; Magdaleno, 2006; Mendez-Morse, 2004) every one of the superintendents in this study identified informal mentoring relationships in their careers as critical to their ascension into the superintendency. These relationships were usually formed with a supervisor who saw their leadership potential. However, meeting such a mentor was simply a matter of being in the right place at the right time although for the male leaders in this study, some kind of informal mentoring was more likely.

The lack of support for the Latina superintendents was greater as they were discriminated against for being Hispanic and for being women. Maria explains,

First, male superintendents are viewed differently as leaders. They are viewed as more prominent. They are part of the "Golf Club" and are invited to the "Golf Club" events. Where as it is a little bit different for the females and you add onto that Latina and you have a double whammy. So I think it's different. I think that for males the benefits, or some of the rewards, is that you are viewed as leaders and assertive. They are leaders. When a female does the same, you are a bitch.

The three Latina superintendents reported that their first supporter or mentor was a Latina educational leader meaning that their opportunities for support and mentorship are even more limited than the Latino superintendents who reported being mentored by men and women who are black, Hispanic and white. This is evidence that Latinas aspiring to the superintendency have a more difficult road than Latinos as they are less likely to develop an informal mentoring relationship due to the limited number of Latinas in leadership positions in education.

Additionally, the Latina superintendents in this study were employed in urban districts with a predominantly Hispanic population and began their careers as Bilingual/ESL teachers, as they continue to get stereotyped in specialized positions in hard to staff urban districts. It has been documented (Marshall & Kasten, 1994) that there is an unwritten understanding that minority leaders should lead in minority districts, with minority students and minority concerns. Analyzing the data of these nine Hispanic superintendents it seems that the unwritten understanding continues to exist for Latinas further perpetuating the belief that if they can be successful at all, it is only in low performing districts with high concentrations of minority students. It is for these exact reasons that the Latinas superintendents felt so strongly about working harder than anyone else and proving themselves as capable leaders.

It would seem therefore, that getting to the position of superintendent is left up to chance, whether someone in a higher position suggests the possibility to Hispanic educators or whether an educator is lucky enough to encounter and build a relationship with a mentor who steers that person through the leadership ranks into the superintendency.

Potential Hispanic leaders are already in the minority in the teaching workforce and with few role models or formal mentoring programs available it would seem that succeeding in the role of superintendent comes down to individuals and their resilience

Implications

I think that there is a limited amount of Latino superintendents because we simply have not had the opportunities that others have had because of the institutional racism that exists and the lack of cultural awareness and prevalence of cultural ignorance. You don't have a lot of Latino leaders so they are not mentoring and developing other Latinos and the people who are leaders are not necessarily mentoring us.

-Sofia

For all of the leaders in this study, becoming and staying a superintendent was mediated by race and ethnicity. Their identities as leaders for social justice is intricately entwined with their experiences as a person of color living and working in the U.S. However, nine Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey cannot enact all of the social justice work needed to address inequity and injustice for disenfranchised populations to much effect. As part of the interview I asked the superintendents what strategies they thought would help to recruit and retain more Hispanic leaders. Using their voices and my own reflections as a Hispanic leader there are several implications for my own and others' practice. These actions are: a) the institutionalization of formal mentoring programs, b) creation of professional leadership networks that recognize, advocate and support aspiring Hispanic leaders, and c) preparing leaders about social justice and inequity.

Institutionalization of Formal Mentoring Programs

I think what we need to do is mentor. I think informal mentoring is important and helped me but I think formal mentors are important too because I think they could have helped me and guided me but there weren't any there for me.

-Manuel

If mentoring is not to be left to chance, and upcoming Hispanic teachers and leaders are to consider moving into superintendent positions then as Manuel and many of the other superintendents suggest the profession needs to do a better job of mentoring. To ensure that every aspiring superintendent receives mentoring that provides them with the skills and knowledge to succeed in a racist system, mentoring opportunities must be institutionalized in some kind of formal way.

New Jersey can learn from organizations like the Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS) or the California Association of Latino Superintendents and Administrators (CALSA). These mentoring programs pair protégés and mentors of the same

race. The mentors “understand and share common experiences, a common language, and similar racial and equity concerns and can also relate to the specific cultural experiences as their protégé” (Magdaleno, 2006, p. 13). Additionally, both ALAS and CALSA have created Superintendent Leadership Academies (SLA) for aspiring Hispanic superintendents which further aids the development of aspiring superintendents through situational learning. These academies offer a year-long training and networking program that develops the knowledge and skills of aspiring Hispanic superintendents through professional development and experiential learning.

Alberto recognized the importance of organizations such as ALAS and CALSA and how they can address help develop that exists amongst Hispanic educators.

I think we need to do some of what ALAS is doing. I think identifying talent and helping to develop that talent and then trying to network the talent through mentoring programs. So that's where an organization like ALAS is becoming the champion I talked about earlier. They are not only doing the mentoring piece but they are also trying to then be the connectors and get talented folks in front of others who are going to notice them.

As a researcher and aspiring Hispanic superintendent this implication makes a compelling argument for the need to either create a formalized mentoring program or to collaborate with existing organizations such as ALAS with the goal of developing a New Jersey chapter to address the underrepresentation of Hispanic superintendents in the state of New Jersey. ALAS has a yearly national conference, to be held in Atlanta, Georgia in October of 2014. I intend to submit this research study to ALAS in order to begin to network with other Hispanic educational leaders around the country and to investigate what is needed to create a chapter of this formal mentoring program in New Jersey.

On a more local level, the research findings from this study will be used to prepare a policy brief/white paper to be presented to leadership organizations, such as the New Jersey

Principal and Supervisors Association (NJPSA) in order to raise awareness of the need for formal mentoring programs that can support minority candidates to become superintendents. With only 1.1% of superintendents in New Jersey being Hispanic, we recognize that limiting these efforts to Hispanics mentoring Hispanics is not an effective strategy. On the other hand a concerted effort by all educational leaders, educated in issues of social justice, is a strategy that can help address not only the under representation of Hispanics but minority leaders in general.

Professional Leadership Networks

You need a way to create a support system of superintendents. I think it is critical that you create a group that you can reach out to maybe within a county; within a similar type of system.

-Antonio

Before aspiring to the superintendency, I was a special education teacher who never thought about leaving the classroom until a district meeting in which a Latino who was the Supervisor of Bilingual and ESL programs in my district approached me during a district wide professional development day. He asked if he could speak to me in his office. As a special education teacher in a large district, I was surprised Mr. Medina knew who I was and I was even more taken aback by the fact that he needed to speak to me. I wasn't even in his department. After the professional development session I found his office and knocked on his door. He invited me in and proceeded to tell me that he had heard good things about my teaching and leadership within my school and around my work on district projects. He asked me if I had any aspirations to enter administration. Honestly speaking, I had never even thought of it. He said, "Well you need to start thinking about it because we can use another Latino with your talent running things around here." Although, I never really spoke to Mr. Medina after that conversation, it was that meeting that piqued my interest in administration and I will never forget him for that. I have also grown to wonder, what if he hadn't seen me that day in the professional

development session. What if we hadn't spoken? How many talented and committed Latino educators are not entering the administrative ranks because they weren't lucky enough to have a Mr. Medina sit them down for a talk? And most importantly, where was my support after that initial spark of interest?

As a present day educational leader, I find myself looking through crowded professional development sessions in my own district wondering who is the talented educator that hasn't received that "tap on the shoulder" yet? And how can I, as an educational leader, increase the chances of talented minority candidates receiving the support they need to ascend through the ranks of a public school system and be successful? I also realized that as an individual I would not be able to informally mentor every talented Latino/a in my district. As the findings of this research study indicate, this is not the most effective way to address the underrepresentation of minorities in the administrative ranks. Alberto suggests the networking of Latino leaders,

I think identifying talent and helping to develop that talent and then trying to network the talent. So that's where an organization like ALAS is becoming the champion I talked about earlier. They are not only doing the mentoring piece but they are also trying to then be the connectors and get talented folks in front of others who are going to notice them. So that would be my advice.

Following the advice of Alberto, I believe that creating a network of Hispanic administrators and aspiring administrators is integral to addressing the underrepresentation of Hispanic educational leaders in the state of New Jersey. Through the network, Hispanic educators will be able to meet Hispanic educational leaders to share their work and ideas in order to build support and become resources for one another as they ascend into positions of leadership. As I am an educational leader in my district, I will begin by speaking to a small cadre of Hispanic educators that have shown interest in becoming educational leaders in order to establish a foundation for a larger network. I will meet with them on a bi-weekly basis in order to establish a strong network of

support within my own district by addressing issues of concern in their own careers, the barriers to ascension the face, and how we can address those concerns and barriers in order to successfully transition into positions of leadership. Once this cadre of Hispanic educators within my district is firmly established, I will look to branch out to neighboring districts and the county through a snow ball effect in order to expand the network slowly and successfully.

Preparing Leaders to Address Issues of Social Justice and Inequity

The racism perpetuated by schools and the fact that the majority of educational leaders for the time being are white, necessitates that attention be given to how all leaders are prepared. Leadership preparation programs are key to addressing many of the inequities that continue to exist. The courses I took in my leadership preparation program centered around school law, financial planning, curriculum, evaluation and human resources, omitting any content about the inequities of a system that disenfranchises minorities and strategies leaders can use to address educational inequity. Social justice education cannot be crammed into a 3 credit course, but must be infused into every leadership preparation course such as school finance, school law, curriculum, evaluation, and human resources as each of these courses are integral when addressing equity issues. By infusing a social justice lens throughout leadership preparation programs it might be possible to prepare a new cadre of leaders who foreground issues of equity in their day to day decision making.

As I only interviewed the 9 Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey, the need for additional research focusing on how Hispanic superintendents lead for social justice would also provide critical information that can be utilized to inform changes to leadership preparation programs. With this aim in mind, I intend to publish the findings of this study in various

leadership oriented journals , with the aim of inspiring both more research on Hispanic leadership and also to inform the content of leadership preparation programs.

Moreover, as my participants reminded me, the work of leadership occurs in a social and political context and it is not simply district or school leaders who should learn about racism and social justice. Some of the individuals and organizations that can benefit from social justice training include central office administrators who are influential in the hiring of new teachers and leaders. Moreover, research (Glass, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Tallerico, 2000; Valdes, 1996; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997) has found that one of the most significant barriers to the ascension of Hispanic superintendents has been the perception of communities and school boards that Latino/a leaders are incapable of being successful superintendents. School boards tend to hire superintendents demographically similar to themselves, therefore putting marginalized groups such as minorities and women at a distinct disadvantage. School Boards must also be educated to understand what effective leadership is and means and how they can be racially biased in favor of someone who looks the part or that they can relate to due to similar backgrounds. In order to address this, school district recruitment policies must reflect a commitment to diversify not only for the position of superintendent but also for teachers and administrators as well. Maria explains how educating those charged with hiring on social justice and cultural awareness can address the underrepresentation of Latinos in the superintendency,

It's the whole idea that those who are responsible to hire the superintendent have to also have an awareness. So I think the greater question would be who represents the boards of education, since those are the people that are hiring. It's just raising awareness for who is needed and why they are needed. Is there a need to hire Latinos for positions where there are a significant number of Latinos? Bilinguals? And why? Should there be a differential in looking for Latinos for positions where there are a significant number of Latino students. It's not just cultural awareness but this idea that we [Hispanics] do have talent. That we have people that are highly qualified. I think too often we here the excuse of well they don't exist. I hear that so much; that we are so

underrepresented, and I just think that we do not try hard enough to go find our leaders. They exist.

One way to perhaps get this training started is to work with unions and organizations such as the New Jersey Principal and Supervisors Association (NJPSA). As the largest organization for principals and supervisors in the state, NJPSA currently fails to address issues of inequity and leadership responsibility and practices through professional development. Therefore, it is my intent to share the findings of this research study with them in order to implement a series of social justice professional development sessions that focuses on the inequities related to the education for minorities. By addressing these issues of social justice it is my hope that principals and supervisors around the state may look at their students, staff, faculty and communities differently and begin to address the inequities in their respective schools thus minimizing the racial discrimination that the superintendents in this study had to endure from the moment they entered the kindergarten classroom. Additionally, principals and supervisors charged with hiring in their respective schools can begin to reflect on their hiring practices and how it can be a barrier for minority educators with aspirations to have a career as teachers and eventually school leaders.

Along the same lines, and as stated by several of the participants, it is critical for New Jersey school board members to receive training and education regarding the inequities that exists in the modern day school structure that disadvantages minorities, as they are charged with the hiring of integral district leaders such as superintendents, assistant superintendents, directors and etc. This can be accomplished through the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) as community members that are elected board officials become members. This is a critical piece as the vast majority of school board members are elected officials that do not have backgrounds in education and therefore may not realize the false meritocratic system that exists.

As an aspiring superintendent of color, I will use this research to provide future and aspiring superintendents, such as myself, with a base of knowledge and awareness of what they may encounter as they assume the top position in America's public school districts. My hope is to use the research to develop policy briefs, white papers, and articles in educational leadership periodicals that challenge the practice and policies that continue to disadvantage minorities while also recognizing and supporting talented Hispanic educators to become school and district leaders.

Conclusion

Why would Hispanics get the position, they don't look like what we expect leaders to look like so they choose white administrators and they may not have the skills to become administrators but they look the part.

-Carlos

This qualitative study examined the perceptions and experiences of all the Hispanic superintendents in New Jersey. As such it provides important insights into how to begin to increase the numbers of these leaders in New Jersey's school districts. Additionally the findings of this study adds to the sparse research base on Hispanic educational leaders, namely those who serve in the role of superintendent and illuminates possible strategies for recruiting and retaining Hispanics in the role of school superintendents. Moving forward research will be needed to address the impacts of various strategies for recruiting and supporting superintendents of color to enact social justice pedagogies as well as the impact having more leaders of color might have on student achievement.

In the words of Carlos, there is much work to be done to eradicate injustice and the racism that perpetuates schooling whether one is a student or leader. The stories of these Hispanic superintendents provide some hope that with attention to mentoring, programs of preparation and

networks of support that the underrepresentation of Latinos in important educational positions will decrease. Along with more Hispanic educational leaders there needs to be a concerted effort by all of us who lead to ensure that we are identifying and supporting others to become leaders for social justice.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Letter

Dear Superintendent,

I am a graduate doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University. I am conducting a research study that will investigate Hispanic Superintendents, their experiences in attaining the superintendency, their experiences as Hispanic superintendents and the challenges and obstacles associated with being a Hispanic superintendent in New Jersey.

Ultimately, this research will be used to inform and educate, as well as to encourage, inspire and motivate aspiring Hispanic educational leaders to pursue high level leadership positions such as that of the Superintendent.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve two face-to-face interviews regarding your personal, educational and professional background. The interviews will be audio recorded and last for approximately an hour. I will need your permission to audio record your interview. Results of the interviews will be analyzed qualitatively and descriptions of the participants' experiences as they relate to leadership, ethnicity and the recruitment and retention of Hispanic educational leaders will be explored and developed.

The research study will consist of Hispanic superintendents in the State of New Jersey. Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any

time, there will be no penalty. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

Your responses will be confidential. The results of this research study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications. To ensure confidentiality, each subject will be assigned a pseudonym. All data will be kept in word documents that are password protected, as well as kept in locked storage.

If you choose to participate in this in this study, please contact me at (201) 406-8785 in order to facilitate the scheduling of the interviews.

Respectfully,

Mr. Anibal A. Galiana

APPENDIX B**Participant Consent**

TITLE: The Hispanic Superintendent

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Anibal A. Galiana
Graduate Student
Rutgers University
Graduate School of Education
(973) 632-3016
anibal.galiana@gse.rutgers.edu

Dear Superintendent,

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Mr. Anibal A. Galiana, who is a doctoral student under the direction of Associate Professor Dr. Sharon Ryan in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University. Before you agree to participate in this study, you should know enough about it to make an informed decision. This consent form contains information regarding the study. If you have any questions, you may ask the principal investigator, Mr. Anibal A. Galiana. When all of your questions have been answered and you are satisfied with the answers, you will be asked to sign this consent form if you agree to partake in the study. A copy of the form will be given to you to keep for your records.

The purpose of this study is to investigate Hispanic Superintendents, their experiences in attaining the superintendency, their experiences as Hispanic superintendents and the challenges and obstacles associated with being a Hispanic superintendent in New Jersey. Ultimately, this research will be used to inform and educate, as well as to encourage, inspire and motivate

aspiring Hispanic educational leaders to pursue high level leadership positions such as that of the Superintendent.

Your participation in this study will consist of two face-to-face interviews regarding your personal, educational and professional background that will be scheduled 2 weeks apart and will each last approximately 60 minutes. Results of the interviews will be analyzed qualitatively and descriptions of the participants' experiences as they relate to leadership, ethnicity and the recruitment and retention of Hispanic educational leaders will be explored and developed.

The research study will consist of the twelve Hispanic superintendents in the State of New Jersey. Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate at any time without penalty to you. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be removed from the data set and destroyed. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation in this research study

This research study will be confidential. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you such as personal, professional and educational background, but you will not be identified in the research results. The results of this research study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications. To ensure confidentiality, each subject will be assigned a pseudonym. All data will be kept in word documents that are password protected, as well as kept in locked storage to ensure confidentiality.

If you have any questions at any time about the research or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Mr. Anibal A. Galiana at anibal.galiana@gse.rutgers.edu or 201-406-8785. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB

Administrator at:

Rutgers University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901-8559
Tel: 848-932-4058
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Sign below if you agree to participate in this study. The principal investigator, Mr. Anibal A. Galiana has answered all my questions. You will be given a copy of this consent to keep for your records.

Subject's Signature

Date

Investigator's Signature

Date

By signing this form, I agree to be audio/video recorded. A copy of this assent form has been provided to me. Mr. Anibal A. Galiana has answered all of my questions.

Subject's Signature

Date

Appendix C

Interview Guide Day 1

The Hispanic Superintendent

Getting to know you:

1. Please tell me a little about yourself in terms of your demographics, age, ethnicity, race, color, religion?
2. Please tell me a little more about your background including information about your family?

Probes: Family/childhood background, heritage, where you were reared, socio-economic status growing up.

Now let's talk a little about your educational background:

3. Let's start with where you went to elementary school and then move to high school and college.
4. Why did you decide to become an educator?
5. Was a career in education your goal while in college?

Probes: What was your major? What job(s) did you have before you became an educator?

So thinking back on your education to date and your own Hispanic identity:

6. Can you tell me about some of the times during your schooling where you think being Latino/Latina was an advantage/a positive thing?
7. Who was involved, what was the event, where did it take place and what was the outcome?

Now conversely, think about some of those experiences during your schooling that maybe weren't so good, where you think your Hispanic identity made it difficult for you:

8. Tell me about some specific events
9. Who was involved, where did it take place and what was the outcome?
10. What barriers to advancement did you experience while attending school?

Becoming a superintendent

Excellent, we will now move on to discuss your *attaining the superintendency*:

11. Tell me about the path in education that took you to the superintendency?

Probe: How did you find out about the positions?

12. What factors/ experiences/people contributed to you becoming an administrator in public schools?

13. What facilitators to advancement did you experience?

Probes: Mentors, Support Group, Family, etc.

14. Tell me the story of how you got your first position as superintendent.

15. What supports do you think helped you to become a superintendent? Were there or could you share specific facilitators you encountered along each step of your career?

16. Who are the significant individuals who guided you through your career path? How did they contribute to your success?

17. Were these supports the same or different at each stage of your career?

18. Have you had mentors or been mentored in any way? Describe.

- Encouraged you to apply for leadership positions

- Opportunities for advancement

Probes: During undergraduate/graduate school, as a teacher, administrator, and superintendent.

Obstacles to attaining the superintendency

Thank you, next I'd like to talk about barriers and obstacles in attaining the superintendency:

19. Were there or could you share specific barriers/obstacles you encountered along each step of your career?

Probes: Looking at your first administrative experience: supervisor, assistant principal, principal, district administration, assistant superintendent and superintendent.

Thank you once again for taking part in my research study, the next interview will consists of questions that delve a little deeper into your perceptions about being a Hispanic superintendent, ethnicity and leadership.

Appendix D

Interview Guide Day 2

The Hispanic Superintendent

Today I'd like to begin by asking you about your Perceptions about being a Hispanic superintendent: (Be clear here you want them to think about what it means to be Hispanic and a superintendent simultaneously).

1. So tell me about what you do as a superintendent? If you had to explain what you do to someone else what would you say?

Probe: Describe a typical day
2. When compared to the Hispanic student population in New Jersey (20.6%), Hispanic superintendents are underrepresented (2%). Why do you think there is such a disparity?
3. What factors do you believe contribute to the underrepresentation of Hispanics in the superintendency?
4. Given this disparity, what does it feel like to be one of only a handful of Hispanic superintendents?
5. How does being only one of a few influence how you approach your job as a superintendent?
6. Tell me a story about handling an event that illustrates your leadership style.
 - a. How did being Hispanic lead to the issue that had to be addressed?
 - b. How did being Hispanic help you handle the event?

7. Please tell me what the rewards are in being a superintendent? How does being Hispanic affect this?
8. Are they different or the same as non-Hispanic superintendents?
9. Do you believe you have to work harder at the position of Superintendent because you are Hispanic?

Probes: Could you provide an example of when you needed to work harder to prove yourself? What, if anything would you have done differently?

Great, next I'd like to ask you about Ethnicity and Leadership:

10. How do you believe ethnicity shapes the way you approach your job?
11. How has your background prepared you to work, as a Hispanic superintendent?
12. What obstacles do you feel Hispanics face who aspire to becoming a superintendent?
13. Do you believe these barriers/obstacles are different than those of non-Hispanic superintendents?
14. What obstacles do you believe Hispanic superintendents have in retaining the position of public school superintendent?
15. What characteristics and strengths help make you a successful superintendent?
16. How has being Hispanic helped you develop those strengths?
17. How has being Hispanic required you to have those strengths?
18. Tell me a story about improving instruction in your district.
19. Tell me about how you work with the community in your role as a superintendent.

Can you describe a memorable moment in your interactions with the community?

What was the situation? What did you do, who was involved, what was the outcome?

Do you think your ethnicity came into play in this situation?

20. What advice do you have for other Hispanic educators aspiring to become a superintendent?
21. What are some of the ways you think your preparation could have been improved to help you handle being a minority educational leader?
22. What do you think current superintendents could do to support and increase numbers of Hispanic educational leaders?
23. Anything else ...