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A Study of Latina Superintendents in New Jersey: “Cumpliendo Metas”

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A STUDY OF LATINA SUPERINTENDENTS IN NEW JERSEY:

“CUMPLIENDO METAS”

Nurka Liz Nieves

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

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SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Nurka Nieves, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ed.D. during this Spring Semester 2016.

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Abstract

Latinas¹ have been known for certain leadership roles throughout the history of the United States. They have impacted the country's government as having the reputation of being strong, resilient women capable of great ingenuity and creating paradigm shifts for the welfare of Americans. These endeavors are a demonstration to other Latinas in the United States that they too are capable of attaining any profession they prepare themselves to embrace. It is that *si se puede*² attitude that such role models express by their examples in positions of power that with perseverance *cumpliendo metas*³ is possible.

The focus of this dissertation was to explore the reasons why there is such minute representation of Latinas employed in powerful positions such as the superintendency in United States public school districts. The numbers have increased and movement is seen in the hiring of Latinas to lead school districts, yet they are not moving at the same speed as other minorities or Caucasian women in general. In this study, with New Jersey as its focus, Latina school administrators aspiring to become superintendents were questioned, and the study's findings help describe their plight, as well as discussing challenges faced by Latinas aspiring to become superintendents and support the public school communities they currently serve.

This study was conducted using qualitative methodology. Its findings yielded important information regarding Latina superintendents and their journeys to the superintendency, challenges they have faced, and attributes and skills necessary to succeed as school leaders. The importance of being role models for the growing population of Hispanic children in New Jersey public school districts also surfaced in the participants' responses.

¹ It is important to note that the terms "Hispanic or Latino/a" and "Hispanic" will be used interchangeably in this research, as it is used in the 2010 United States Census.

² yes you can, Spanish

³ reaching goals, Spanish

Dedication

To the Nieves family, especially our patriarch Felines Nieves, for your endless support
throughout this endeavor.

To my children Hector and Tatiana, I did this for you.

Thank you for being so patient and understanding while I completed my degrees.

Mami loves you so much!

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Last but not least, my warmest appreciation goes to the nine successful Latina superintendents I met during this experience. You gave me your precious time, as participants, to add to the literature on Latina superintendents in New Jersey. Thank you for assisting me to complete this study and for believing in my cause. Your voices and stories are an example to future Latina superintendents!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The United States has experienced significant changes since half of all recent births were to minority parents, a shift that will influence policy in the future (Frey, 2012). According to the 2010 Census, 308.7 million people resided in the United States on April 1, 2010, of which 50.5 million (or 16%) were of Hispanic or Latino origin. More than half of the growth in the total population of the United States between 2000 and 2010 was due to the increase in the Hispanic population. Frey (2011) projects that by 2050, the nation will face the following variations in demographics: 46% White, down from 66% today, and 30% Hispanic, double the 15% we have today. This projection is subject to the paradigms of immigration shifts, economic conditions, and the like. Immediate implications can be made from Hispanic populations driving demographic shifts in major American cities.

Carrion-Mendez (2008) postulates that diversity in school administration creates opportunities for minority students to make connections with leaders of their own ethnicity and gender and to see role models within their own people. Other researchers, such as Gonzales (2007), complement this view, stating that since the Latino population is the fastest growing population in our nation, having Latina females lead our schools may be beneficial to students. Latinas can serve as role models for Latino children. This is due to Latinas having a deep understanding of the nature of Latino families and, as a result, being able to positively influence student success and academic performance (p. 12). In addition, others feel that it is valuable for children to have people in leadership roles who look like them (Melendez de Santa Ana, 2008).

The Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS) believes that there should be a more comparable representation of Latino superintendents with the Latino

student population and are committed to identifying, recruiting, developing, and advancing Latino school administrators and thus potentially improving the educational accomplishments of Latino youth (Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents, 2014).

Latinas practice *familialism*, where Latina/o youth respect parental authority, recognize the sacrifices made for their families' survival, and honor their struggles (Cammarota, 2008). There is an understanding in Hispanic communities that a Latino/a in a position of power serves to function as a role model for other Hispanics. Latina and Latino school superintendents are most often perceived by Latina and Latino students as positive role models, who represent their future (Magdaleno, 2006, p. 66). Similarly, Hispanic women school leaders serving districts with low Hispanic student population can become role models to numbers of Latino students (Santiago, 2008, p. 6).

The Latino dropout rate and gap that persists in our country is a massive and urgent problem. Yet we know that it is solvable, states Fernandez (2011), and that educational opportunity can make all the difference. By continuing our work to build a myriad of Latino leaders who will commit to ending educational inequity, we hope to help more Latino children reach their full potential and realize their dreams.

Statement of the Problem

School board members must effectively fill the superintendent's position. In a climate of increased accountability, hiring a superintendent who is visionary and who encompasses the vast skill set needed to lead in the 21st century is more critical than ever (Haar, Raskin & Robicheau, 2009).

Carrie Chapman Catt, the first woman superintendent in the United States in the school district of Mason City, Oregon, served until the late 1800s. During the period 1900-1930, women

enjoyed the golden years as activists in the National Women's Party promoting social and economic advantages that brought favorable changes for women, especially for those who aspired to the superintendency (Shakeshaft, 2006, p. 39). In 1909 when Ella Flagg Young became the first woman superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools, she declared: "Women are destined to rule the schools of every city." Included in her speech was her bold statement of a woman's intentions, stating that she is no longer satisfied to do the greatest part of the work and yet be denied leadership (Blount, 1998, p. 1).

The most recent American Association of School Administrators (AASA) decennial study of the superintendency, conducted in 2013, reveals the growing presence of female superintendents (24.1% nationwide), which has not been affected by either district enrollment or the level of a school district's racial or ethnic diversity. Across four district enrollment categories, the range of female superintendents was 20.4% (in the largest districts) to 29.8% (in the smallest districts). By comparison, females accounted for 17.7% of very small-district superintendents and just 5.4% of the largest-district superintendents a decade earlier. Across five district diversity categories in the data, the range of representation of women was 21.4 % (in low-diversity districts) to 29.9% (in highly diverse districts). Although the hiring of women for the superintendency is on the rise, the overall inequity between male and female representation in the superintendency continues to exist and is even more prominent in the sparse numbers of Latinas in said position.

In the American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial study, Porterfield (2008) states that the percentage of female superintendents has increased substantially since 1992. In this study, nearly one in four respondents (24.1%) was a woman. (In 2000, the percentage was 13.2). Statistics for New Jersey reveals differences in the national trend that women are employed more

in superintendent roles, since the percentage of women in this role is higher than the national figures (Edmunds, 2007). The report documented that 282 New Jersey public school districts out of 692 (49%) in total, listed women as their chief school administrators. New Jersey statistics display a significant increase in women superintendents. Therefore, the gap in New Jersey is relatively small and closing fast for women. Although New Jersey statistics display a significant increase in women superintendents compared to national trends, more specific data are needed to determine the percentage of superintendents that are minorities, including Latinas.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges faced by Latinas in New Jersey when seeking the superintendency; in addition, to gain insight into how current Latina superintendents overcame obstacles in reaching their goals of leading public school districts. This information may prove helpful for other Latina aspirants to the superintendency, especially since there are only a few studies which go into detail on this topic.

Uncovering the challenges and barriers current Latina educational administrators have experienced to reach their positions is worth mentioning, since these stories are scant in the literature. Also, what was done to overcome those challenges is worth noting for Latina aspirants to the superintendency, another important need for the study.

Research Questions

1. How do Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents perceive challenges when seeking the superintendency?
2. How have Latinas overcome barriers in becoming superintendents/assistant superintendents?

3. What personal attributes assisted Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents to secure their positions?

The questions I created for this study assisted me in looking for patterns that surfaced from one informant to the next and making connections of such to establish domains and conclusions to my study.

Population

The New Jersey Department of Education School Directory of Public School Districts (2015), which provides county and district codes, county and district names, superintendent and school administrators' names, was utilized in this study, to retrieve information of female school administrators to interview for this research. In addition, 2015-2016 data of certificated staff categorized by sex and ethnicity by numbers and percentages was also used. I selected my candidates by networking with school administrators and colleagues of assistant superintendents/superintendents they know who are Latinas. For my own part, I knew of two assistant superintendents/superintendents in northern New Jersey. Finally, I found leads on the Internet of other Latinas who were qualified to be interviewed, if they chose to be.

Twenty Hispanic women superintendents/assistant superintendents employed by New Jersey school districts who met the recruitment criteria were selected as potential candidates, for interviews from a pool of potential candidates. Of the twenty candidates, nine were interviewed. The participants remained anonymous.

Study Design and Methodology

The study design and methodology was qualitative in nature in an ethnographic form, which provided a description of trends, attitudes, and opinions of an educational leadership population. This method was used to provide a portrait of New Jersey Hispanic women leaders in

education. The study sampled a select population through the use of open-ended interviews and questions as the primary method of retrieving data. In addition, the sample pool of New Jersey Latina school administrators such as superintendents and assistant superintendents, covered not only urban areas but also provided representation of New Jersey suburban areas as well. The responses from Hispanic women who are or have been employed in positions of power leading public school districts in New Jersey addressed my research questions.

The research consisted of identifying, surveying, gathering, and disaggregating data detailing the challenges, if any, Latina school administrators faced when trying to advance their careers in becoming superintendents in one of 692 New Jersey school districts. The study also presented information on how current Hispanic women superintendents' attributes assisted them in obtaining their school district's leadership.

When developing the questions to ask of my informants, I kept in mind the fact that I was interested in discovering the ascendancy of Latinas to the superintendency in New Jersey. I considered the significance of noting the barriers and/or obstacles that my potential informants experienced when applying for assistant superintendent/superintendent positions and the importance of asking how they found means to overcome those challenges.

The interviewees' responses to my research questions were handwritten, tape-recorded, and transcribed, since ethnographic records are comprised of field notes and tape recordings (Spradley, 1979, p. 69). Frake's (1962) description of culture is one that is shaped from an ethnographic record of the events of a society within a given period of time, including of course: informants' responses to the ethnographer and his/her queries, tests, and apparatus (p. 144).

Typical ethnographic research produces three kinds of data: quotations, descriptions, and excerpts of documents, resulting in one product: narrative description. This narrative often

includes charts, diagrams, and additional artifacts that help to tell the story (Hammersley, 1990). Ethnographic methods can give shape to new constructs or paradigms, and my role in analysis covered raw data on one extreme and interpretative comments on the other. Analysis brought order to my data, organized what was in the data into patterns, categories, and basic descriptive units. The analysis process involved consideration of words, tone, context, non-verbal communication, internal consistency, frequency, extensiveness, intensity, specificity of responses, and important ideas, as Krueger describes (1994).

After the interviews, I divided the responses into ethnographic categories or domains to make inferences and interpret my data. Gensuk (2003) explains that interpretation involves attaching meaning and significance to the analysis, explaining descriptive patterns, and looking for relationships and linkages among descriptive dimensions (p. 144). Once these processes were completed, I reported my interpretations and conclusions. Since description is balanced by analysis, this led me into interpretation.

Conceptual Framework

According to Mujer Sana Comunidad Sana, Healthy Women Healthy Communities (2013), a conceptual framework is a set of coherent ideas or concepts organized in a manner that makes them easy to communicate to others. It is an organized way of thinking about how and why a project takes place and about how we understand its activities. It is the basis for thinking about what we do and about what it means, influenced by the ideas and research of others, and an overview of ideas and practices that shape the way work is done in a project through a set of assumptions, values, and definitions under which we all work together.

This study was based on the premises of the conceptual framework: Latina and Latino Critical Legal Theory (LatCrit Theory). LatCrit originally emerged out of a series of debates

stemming from various critical race theory meetings during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The first meeting for what would become LatCrit, occurred in San Juan, Puerto Rico, as part of a Hispanic National Bar Association Law Professor's meeting in 1995. Since then LatCrit has grown from a series of annual meetings to a collection of initiatives and projects with both a local and global presence (2014, para.1).

Emerging from the legal academy of the United States following a 1995 colloquium in Puerto Rico on Latina/o communities and critical race theory, LatCrit theory, as defined by LatCrit, Inc. and Cornell University, is a relatively recent genre of critical outsider jurisprudence – a category of modern scholarship including critical legal studies, feminist legal theory, critical race theory, critical race feminism, Asian American legal scholarship, and queer theory. That cumulative record has served as LatCrit's point of departure, and their basic twin goals since 1995 have been to develop a critical, activist and interdisciplinary discourse on law and policy towards Latinas/os and to foster both the development of coalitional theory and practice as well as the accessibility of this knowledge to agents of social and legal transformation. LatCrit theorists aim to center Latinas/os' multiple internal diversities and to situate Latinas/os in larger intergroup frameworks, both domestically and globally, to promote social justice awareness and activism (2006).

Critical Race Theorists (CRT) and Latino Critical Race Theorists (LatCrit) propose that an analysis that centers the notion of intersectionality, challenges traditional research constructs, is interdisciplinary in nature, values the voices of members of marginalized communities, and is guided by social justice can at best offer a critique and solutions to unjust educational experiences and opportunities (Covarubbias, 2005).

Significance of the Study

The study sought to expand the existing literature on the rise of Latina public school leaders by exploring the experiences and perceptions of Latina superintendents in the state of New Jersey. This was with the expectation of gaining insight into the challenges and successful strategies current or former Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents shared for those Latinas desiring a position of authority in the educational decision-making process of New Jersey public school districts.

There are only a few studies which go into detail on the topic of the challenges faced by Latinas in New Jersey when seeking the superintendency and to gain insight on how current Latina superintendents have overcome obstacles in reaching their goals of leading public school districts. Hence, the literature is meager at this point in time.

Limitations

The limitations of the study were as follows:

1. The sample size was small and may have hindered the possibility of the findings to be comprehensive of all women superintendents/assistant superintendents, in the state of New Jersey.
2. The study design, which employs an insider's perspective, made the qualitative research an intensely personal and subjective style of research.
3. Researcher bias was a limitation given that the researcher is a Hispanic woman and former school administrator in two New Jersey public school districts whose perceptions and personal experiences may have paralleled those of the participants.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study were as follows:

1. Only nine Latina participants in New Jersey were interviewed.
2. The participants in the study were concentrated in one regional area: the state of New Jersey, where increases in percentages are noted for Latinas employed as superintendents.
3. Interview time consisted of only thirty minutes. This was adequate time to respond to my research questions.
4. Because the interaction of personalities of informant and ethnographer has a profound influence on interviews, as Spradley (1979) suggests, ethnography was chosen as my methodology (p. 45).

Definitions of Terms

AYP: According to NCLB requirements, setting annual objectives and intermediate goals with the final goal of 100% of students reaching the proficient level on state-mandated tests (United States Department of Education, 2002).

BARRIER: A law, rule, or problem that makes something difficult or impossible (Merriam-Webster, 2016).

EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR: Smooth operation of an educational institution requires competent administrators. Education administrators provide instructional leadership as well as manage the day-to-day activities in schools, preschools, daycare centers, colleges, and universities. Education administrators set educational standards and goals and establish the policies and procedures to carry them out. They also supervise managers, support staff, teachers, counselors, librarians, coaches, and others. They develop

academic programs; monitor students' educational progress; train and motivate teachers and other staff; manage career counseling and other student services; administer recordkeeping; prepare budgets; handle relations with parents, prospective and current students, employers, and the community; and perform many other duties. In an organization such as a small daycare center, one administrator may handle all these functions. In universities or large school systems, responsibilities are divided among many administrators, each with a specific function (United States Department of Labor, 2006).

DISCRIMINATION: The practice of unfairly treating a person or group of people differently from other people or groups of people (Merriam-Webster, 2016).

FAMILIALISM: Latina/o youth respect parental authority, recognizing the sacrifices made for their families' survival, and honor their struggles (Cammarota, 2008).

HISPANIC OR LATINO/A: A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture of origin regardless of race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

MACHISMO: Strong sense of masculine pride: an exaggerated masculinity; an exaggerated or exhilarating sense of power or strength (Merriam-Webster, 2016).

MAMISMA: Feminine nature of maternal qualities such as acts of love and trust as well as the building of relationships rather than the traditional exercise of power in a leadership role. It is the maternal and emotional use of language that gives this sense of hope in a leader's clear plans. It is building the trust and collaboration in relationships while providing the hope for a stronger school district (Rubin, 2008).

MARIANISMO: Ideology that accepting one's place in life *con resignación* (with resignation) is the ultimate virtue of *la mujer perfecta* (the perfect woman), *la marianista* (a woman practicing *marianismo*) par excellence; traditional ideal woman expected to be dependent, submissive, and subservient to her man (Gil & Vasquez, 1996).

MENTOR: Someone who teaches or gives help and advice to a less experienced person (Merriam Webster, 2016).

MINORITY: A group of people who are different from a larger group in a country or area in some way (such as race or religion) (Merriam Webster, 2016).

NETWORK: A usually informally interconnected group or association of persons, as friends or professional colleagues (Merriam Webster, 2016).

RACISM: A belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race (Merriam Webster, 2016)

RESILIENCE: The ability to bounce back, recover, and successfully adapt, following exposure to stressful life events, and successfully cope with risks and adversity (Merriam-Webster, 2016).

UNDERREPRESENTATION: Inadequately represented (Merriam-Webster, 2016)

VICISSITUDE: A difficulty or hardship attendant on a way of life, a career, or a course of action and usually beyond one's control (Merriam-Webster, 2016).

Chapter Summary

The rising percentage of women school superintendents in the United States has been a topic of research and study. Although the number of Latinas employed as superintendents is gradually increasing, the research on this phenomenon is scant. Studies have not flourished in

this educational leadership category though paradigms are evident. This is especially true for Latina superintendents in New Jersey.

The fast-growing Latino population immigrating to the United States and the need for Latino/a leadership suggest an invitation to enhance the literature regarding the Latina's journey to public school leadership. Last, from this study effective practices from current New Jersey Latina superintendents have been identified to assist their *comadres*¹ aspiring to the superintendency.

¹ female friends, Spanish

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

To provide a viewpoint for my study, this selective literature review is segmented into seven sections inclusive of the following: duties and responsibilities of superintendents, women in the superintendency, minorities (including Latinas) in the superintendency, commonalities and differences of leadership styles of non-Hispanic women versus Hispanic women, social factors for Latina underrepresentation in the superintendency, and the need to conduct these type of studies for literature purposes. In addition, the literature review has been written for the benefit of exposing how Latina superintendents have proven successful in their plight of acquiring said leadership role.

Studies on the subject of Hispanic women in the superintendency have been heavily based on states in the Western part of the nation, such as California, Arizona, Texas, and so forth. From the research I conducted, I found that the state of California had the most documented studies on Latina superintendents. The East Coast is not represented in current literature. This includes the state of New Jersey. There are a small number of current studies on Latinas in the role of superintendents, yet most of the literature has been published decades ago. These types of studies are not relevant to the need for more Latina superintendents in today's increase in Hispanic immigration to the United States; thus, these types of studies have been excluded from my literature review.

Literature on Hispanic women bringing cultural wealth and integrating such into their leadership (for the benefit of Latino/a students), For Latina superintendents who have proven successful in their journey of acquiring said leadership role, successful strategies to gain the superintendency and an ethic of care were the basis for inclusion in this literature review.

The nature of the literature reviewed was mostly conceptual/theoretical: papers concerned with description or analysis of theories or concepts associated with my topic (Colling, 2003, p. 300). Other types of sources reviewed were studies from primary sources or the original researchers of a study (Colling, 2003, p. 300). These writings were included in my study and were drawn from sources such as educational databases, periodicals, journals, dissertations, news articles/reports, and books. Online sources were also used to retrieve published documents from school administrative associations among others.

I selected a small potential pool of 20 Latina assistant superintendent/superintendent candidates, due to the methodology I chose for my study, which is qualitative in nature. This type of methodology allowed for my candidates to answer my open-ended research questions that I asked during timed interviews. I chose to frame the interviews in this way for the purpose of allowing my participants to have a story-telling role, which allowed me to have a narrative of their experiences, from which I later created domains. Past studies that I have reviewed used qualitative methods, which lacked rhetoric and further explanation as to why a participant responded the way she did. Furgerson and Jacob (2012) state that researchers need people's stories for many reasons including to assist the researcher to describe people and explain phenomena and can lead to improvement in many fields of study. In hearing other people's stories, the field of qualitative research can be enriched by what we learn.

Introduction

The following review of the literature was based on studies of women in educational leadership positions. It is a historical display of women's efforts for gender equity, specifically in positions of power. A central focus was the state of New Jersey and the hierarchical movement

of women, particularly Latinas, to lead public school districts as chief school administrator/superintendent, making decisions on the education of children.

Superintendents

The first state superintendent was established in 1812 in New York, and the duties assigned to the position included developing a plan for a common school system, reporting the management of public funds, and providing school-related information for the state legislature (Butts & Cremin, 1953). The position of local school superintendent emerged in the mid-1800s. Between 1837 and 1950, thirteen districts (all urban) established the position. By 1890, most major cities had followed this lead (Knezevich, 1984).

Spring (1994) states that the development of the role of the superintendent was important in the evolution of the hierarchical educational organization. The primary reason for creating the position was to have a person work full-time at supervising classroom instruction and assuring uniformity in the curriculum. According to Andero (2000), the superintendent's role is key in communicating the elements of curricula and in providing supervision to ensure its implementation. Superintendents are more commonly viewed as the chief bridge-builder between the school district and the foundation of the greater community. They must clearly express the needs of the school district as well as handle the accountability pressures that all public schools face.

The superintendent's job responsibilities with respect to a school base are many: bridge builder, convener, chief communicator, and visionary; but with focus and diplomacy, a superintendent can find a school foundation to be among the most potent tools available to win the day in the court of public opinion (Andero, 2000). A superintendent maintains an ongoing dialogue with the wider community because the public increasingly expects superintendents to

be builders rather than caretakers. Writing about a new generation of administrators, Johnson (1996) stated that new superintendents are expected to diagnose local educational needs and suggest strategies for improvement. In addition, the current nature of the role of school superintendent is also being shaped by technology. Technology is not just about information; it is also about communication (p. 17).

The superintendent has a very different role from the principal in curriculum policy making. Campbell and Greene (1994) defined the superintendent as the chief administrative officer and a vital part of the governance team and the essential link in the chain connecting the school board to the programs and activities of the school system. The superintendent is the most influential player in the business of forming curriculum policy. His/her function is to influence curriculum policy on the local level in a positive way. The superintendent has a role to play in the education of students that are in his/her district. This is a part of the leadership that is looked upon by the local community to lead the schools. The superintendent is expected to provide the best possible curriculum to the children, a curriculum that prepares each student for the future and maximizes the potential of each.

According to McNeil (1996), one of the major functions of the chief school administrator is to gather and present data so that school board members can make intelligent curriculum policy decisions. The superintendent has a wide range of responsibilities. One of these duties is developing and evaluating instructional programs and curriculum. McNeil (1996) states that the superintendent influences curriculum policy by responding to matters before the board of education, creating programs for staff development, making personnel aware of changes in schools, and moderating outside demands for change. The superintendent must also take federal and state requirements into consideration when developing the course for the school system. The

superintendent, then, like the school board, loses his/her influence over local curriculum policy to federal and state government, as well as the court (p. 11).

The Council of the Great City Schools' (2003) report, *Urban School Superintendents: Characteristics, Tenure and Salary*, states that being the superintendent of a major urban public school system is one of the most difficult jobs in America. It requires leadership, management, instructional, political, and operational skills not necessary in other positions. It is also a job that experiences frequent turnover, given the need in urban education to create more stability and momentum for reform (p. 6).

The job of superintendent has become increasingly difficult. The pressure placed on superintendents has increased exponentially, with the growing demands of federal and state accountability requirements. Mansfield (2008) notes that it is not surprising that nearly 60% of superintendents in the United States reported that they are under considerable or very great stress. Meeting the demands of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and New Jersey's accountability measures, such as Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), is no small feat for any school district. State report cards and other accountability measures create an enormous burden on administrators and teachers alike. At times, the system appears to be designed to punish schools rather than support them. A superintendent, as the leader of a school, is responsible for providing the support that is absent from state and federal mandates. Ensuring that each student receives an adequate education is the highest priority, and superintendents are the leaders who are critical to meeting this state constitutional requirement (American Institutes for Research, 2008).

Women in the Superintendency

According to Washington, Miller, and Rene (2007), women superintendents work from the center of a web-like organizational structure rather than a top-down structure; are collegial,

supportive and empowering; create a culture of achievement stemming from instructional leadership; create a positive environment for change; justify tough personnel issues on the basis of “children-first”; develop supportive networks to address political and budgetary issues; and stay true to their core values of integrity and caring about people (p. 281).

Women bring distinct qualities to the superintendency—qualities that complement the leadership needs of current school districts, state Haar, Raskin and Robicheau (2009), such as the following:

- Expertise in Curriculum and Instruction

Women superintendents spend more years in the classroom before moving into administration than men. Women superintendents demonstrate a stronger belief in the knowledge of teaching and learning and in the emphasis on improving instruction.

Brunner and Grogan (2007), in their study of women superintendents, discovered that 35% of women superintendents were hired as instructional leaders compared to 24% of men.

- Embracing Challenges of Reform and Change

Women tend to embrace the challenges of reform and change as providing opportunities for action and for growth. Women interpret the knowledge and understanding they have gained through their professional development and academic pursuits as increasing their capacities to act and to achieve district goals. By obtaining professional development in curriculum and instruction, women tend to manage the current pressure of high-stakes testing and the elimination of the achievement gap (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

- Interpersonal Skills

Research has noted that women superintendents display a strong and consistent set of interpersonal and relational skills (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Robicheau, Haar, & Raskin, 2008; Washington et al., 2007). Women demonstrate patience and nurturing when dealing with students, parents, and school employees. Women take care of their classrooms, schools, and districts the same way they take care of their families (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

Women superintendents report more professional development activities in Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development-sponsored activities compared to men. Both men and women superintendents cite interest in and focus on instruction and curriculum as beneficial for advancing career opportunities for women. Specifically, both groups identified emphasis on improving instruction and knowledge of the instructional process and curriculum as significant factors for women's advancement. They also considered the ability to maintain organizational relationships, interpersonal skills, and responsiveness to community groups as being important for women's careers. These strengths may give women entry points into the superintendency in this current era of high-stakes testing and accountability (Grogan & Brunner, 2005).

Other factors commonly reported as important to advancing career opportunities for women in the superintendency include interpersonal skills, ability to maintain organizational relationships, and responsiveness to parents and community groups. These are natural strengths in women superintendents, especially since most generally come from elementary schools.

Grogan and Brunner (2005) postulate that although sometimes cited as a disadvantage, familiarity with elementary-level experience as teacher, principal, and often central-office supervisor for elementary education actually prepares superintendents well. For example, they often are more knowledgeable about the fundamental instructional issues of literacy and numeracy—important considerations if superintendents are expected to be instructional leaders. They also have more experience working with diverse communities of parents and other caretakers who are more involved at the elementary school level than at any other level.

School boards did not hire full-time superintendents until the 1830s, when growing school populations made it nearly impossible for unpaid, part-time board members to manage schools (Institute of Educational Leadership, 2001). The superintendent is usually appointed by the local school board. Others must run for election just as other public officials must. According to Glass (1992), appointments to the superintendency are made by school boards and search committees.

In today's world, school districts with women superintendents reported more women members serving on the school board and revealed larger districts had more women-majority boards (Kowalski et al., 2011). Tallerico (1999) found that female-majority boards hired more women superintendents than did male-majority school boards in smaller districts and continued to act independently in the superintendent search process (Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski et al., 2011). Thus, paradigm shifts have occurred for women leaders. Melendez de Santa Ana (2008) points out that today more women and minorities are becoming school superintendents than ever before. As the nation's population becomes more diverse, women and minorities are moving into the role that has been called the most male-dominated executive position in the United States.

Minorities in the Superintendency

According to Melendez de Santa Ana (2008), minorities lead school districts whose student bodies are predominantly Black or Latino. Black superintendents tend to be found in large urban districts, while Latino superintendents are generally concentrated in the southwest. They often lead challenging districts where they serve not only as educational leaders, but also as inspirational role models for students and staff. Sanchez, Thornton, and Usinger (2009) feel that leadership that represents the cultural and ethnic groups that make up U.S. society is important for all students because the world students will join as adults is richly diverse. This can make unique contributions to students' levels of comfort, motivation, and achievement in schools with high populations of minorities.

Commonalities and Differences of Leadership Styles

Women are more likely to use democratic and transformational leadership styles than men (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992; Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Eagly & Carli, 2007a; Eagly & Carli, 2007b; Moore & Buttner, 1997; Hoyt, 2013; Rosener, 1990). Women do well at planning and organizing and demonstrate traits like emotional intelligence, empathy, and compassion. (Eagly & Carli, 2007). These characteristics create the adhesive necessary to establish trust with all stakeholders. With trust and a free exchange of ideas, mutual problem solving is fostered and a democratic environment can be produced, thus enabling women superintendents to revolutionize school districts.

Latina women living in the United States have had to integrate themselves into American culture while still staying connected to their Latin American heritage. Living in two worlds impacts all aspects of their lives, including their interpersonal skills, work ethic, and leadership styles. Hispanic women bring personal and cultural attributes that may be politically and symbolically useful. They bring personal attributes associated with the Hispanic culture and

community. Collins (1987) states that they bring emotional energy that is attractive and useful to the school district and community. They also bring skills, knowledge, and attitudes that, because of their personal and professional experiences, form a composite that differs from others.

Latina leaders highlight the importance of belonging to a collaborative and supportive group; giving back to the community is an example of Latinas' leadership style (Campell, 2013; Gomez et al., 2001; Vasquez & Comas-Diaz, 2007). Many Latina leaders create change and fulfill their strong sense of responsibility towards others; these are reasons why they are attracted to leadership positions (Gomez et al., 2001). Also, being bilingual and bicultural allows Latinas to integrate into Hispanic communities with greater ease and inform parents on how to best assist in their children's education.

Bonilla-Rodriguez (2011) creates five categories of characteristics, which study participants in *A Profile of Latina Leadership in the United States: Characteristics, Positive Influences, and Barriers* believed effective leaders should possess:

1. High integrity—ethical, honest, and reliable
2. Marianista—compassionate, understanding, and willing to sacrifice
3. New Latina—assertive, competitive, and determined
4. Transformational leader—team-oriented, charismatic, politically savvy
5. Visionary—creative, passionate, and risk taker

Therefore, Hispanic women, specifically, transfer their *mamisma* qualities and the phenomenon of legacy of care into their work experiences.

Social Factors for Latina Underrepresentation in the Superintendency

A close analysis of the literature strongly indicates that Hispanic female school administrators have been and continue to be underrepresented throughout school districts in the

nation (Banks, 2000; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). This is not the case today, since more Latinas are aspiring to the superintendency; yet many factors may well be regarded as reasons for their underrepresentation.

Career Paths

Nearly all superintendents previously have worked as building principals and a majority are former assistant principals. Therefore, the ladder from the classroom to the superintendency often begins as an assistant principalship or as a high school department chair. According to Glass, (2000) women are not in positions that normally lead to the superintendency.

Credentials

Hispanic women are achieving education doctorates at comparable rates to their Caucasian counterparts, an important credential to obtain the superintendency. The National Science Foundation's (NSF) 2010 report of doctorates in education awarded to U.S. citizens and permanent residents by sex, field, and race/ethnicity registered that Caucasian females and Hispanic females both have the same percentage of degrees awarded at 26%. The difference lies in three-tenths of a point where Hispanic women led at 26.4%. However, the percentage of Latinas holding doctorates does not meet the percentage of their being hired as chief school administrators.

Familial Roles

According to Glass (2000), women principals and central-office administrators recognize that the superintendency may interfere at times with family life and choose to spend non-working time with family rather than school board members and citizens. This is consistent with traditional gender socialization. Men, on the other hand, have been socialized to aspire to be a

leader and to better provide status and resources for their families. Some of this difference may be attributable to having children at home (p. 22).

The topic of raising a family has long been considered at odds with effectively performing the duties of the superintendency. Today, as men and women superintendents are both confronting this issue, it is encouraging to note that raising a family does not disqualify women for the superintendency (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). This may be the scenario for women in general but poses a problem for most Latina educational leaders and is where *marianismo* comes into play, possibly another factor for the slow rise of Hispanic women to superintendent positions.

Marianismo, as Gil and Vazquez (1996) note, clashes with career ambitions for Latinas. The many Latinas who want to shatter the glass ceiling must deal with a radical reversal of priorities in which, suddenly, husband and children are not only not the be-all-and-end all; they are relegated to second place after job and progression. Further, in order to occupy the executive suite, Hispanic women must display traits such as ambition, competitiveness, assertiveness, independence, and the willingness to work many hours outside the home in a self-disciplined manner—great on a resume but a possible invitation to rejection if you want a Hispanic husband as part of your life package. Clearly, any Latina with managerial ambitions must be especially highly focused, determined, and very brave to battle *contra viento y marea*, against all odds.

Grogan and Brunner, in a study conducted in 2005, found that their marriages suffered because as women superintendents they seemed to feel they could do it all. In answer to an open-ended question, many of the divorced superintendents cited divorce as a lifestyle change made to accommodate the demands of the superintendency. One female superintendent explained that she and her husband divorced because he did not support her career. Women who remained in

marriages were strongly supported by their partners in managing family responsibilities. Obviously, women do find ways to manage the responsibilities of both family and executive-level leadership. Many reported their spouses or partners were willing to take a more accommodating job and help with the household and children.

As Hispanic women aspire to top educational leadership positions, they must overcome traditional perceptions, as well as personal, social, and academic pressure (Quilantan, 2004). Women, in general, face many challenges in their careers. Yet, as Gil and Vasquez (1996) assert, Hispanic women face the added challenge of overcoming common stereotypical sex-role expectations. Governed by a value system that has been in place over many years, young Hispanic women are expected to remain docile and passive. Tradition and culture dictate certain behaviors that Hispanic women must display in their personal and professional lives. Behaviors such as passivity, submissiveness, and reluctance to compete with the opposite gender in a nondomestic situation influence career choice and permanence in the workforce (Walker & Barton, 1983).

A significant role in the lives of Latinas is the idea that she needs to be a pure woman, wife, mother, daughter, sister, etc. Many Hispanic girls have been raised with antiquated principles of the role of the woman being a homemaker who takes care of her husband and children and should aspire to be the best at doing so. This idea favors men to be the sole providers of the household, and therefore their wives would be at their command. The traditional Latin-American movement of machismo inhibited Latinas from seeking employment, especially in managerial roles, where most felt inhibited by men thinking this is not a position for women.

During the mid 20th century, the term *machismo* began to be criticized by Americans and ridiculed in literature, television, and film. The stereotypical Latino immigrant was described as

an oversexed, overly aggressive, macho loser. During the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the term began to be used by feminists to describe male aggression and violence. It was also used by Latina feminists and scholars to criticize the patriarchal structure of gendered relations in Latino communities. Their goal was to describe a particular Latin American brand of patriarchy (Savage, 2014). Machismo has declined as a result of this and with the reality of Latinas being forced to earn an income, to support living expenses of the household, and becoming empowered through education and networking with other Latinas who have adopted other ideologies. The Hispanic woman, however, is evolving; as she is exposed to more challenging positions and circumstances, she is forced to reflect and make changes to survive in a new world, not an easy task.

The Glass Ceiling

The glass ceiling is a transparent barrier that keeps women from rising past a certain point in administrative positions and suppresses the advancement of women who aspire to positions of leadership in the educational and corporate worlds (Quilantan, 2004). Blanco (2013) states that the concept of the glass ceiling was traditionally applied to all women in the workplace. It was very hard, if not impossible, for talented women to reach upper management positions. No matter how qualified or experienced, they simply were not given opportunities to further advance their careers. Fast-forward 45 years and things have changed dramatically. The world has become smaller. Knowledge is available to everyone, everywhere.

Today, there are many Latinas in high management and in powerful positions. However, the glass ceiling still seems very real. Blanco (2013) believes that whatever the reason for it, Latinas have a choice. They can accept their situation and be happy, or they can smash the glass with purpose and determination. The glass ceiling exists but can be overcome. By consciously

creating opportunities for leadership at the executive levels, these facts may change. Diverse teams bring varied opinions, skills, and experiences to an organization. Latinas—whether given the right opportunities and/or determined enough to create them—will inspire, deliver, and succeed. A tremendous pool of creative and professional energy can be found and tapped in talented Hispanic women. Actioning diversity is not only a competitor differentiator; it's also a compelling human value (Du Vernet, 2013).

The Hiring Process

It is clear that those persons in charge of making recruitment placement and promotion decisions can make decisions to include Hispanic females. This factor creates an environment conducive to women obtaining administrative positions (Cusick, 2003). Given that there is a school leadership shortage, school districts need to be proactive in the recruitment of not only educational leaders in general, but Latino/a school leaders in particular (Santiago, 2008). Demographics support the diversification of academic leadership and demonstrate the growing need for it (Cusick, 2003; Scheckelhoff, 2007).

The Need to Conduct Studies on Latina Educational Leaders

Mentoring and Networking

According to Grogan and Brunner (2005), simply occupying the role of educational leadership is not enough. Women superintendents and women central-office administrators must network. The superintendency is a lonely, highly public profession that can be dangerously stressful without adequate relief systems. Many women identify mentoring and support systems as crucial to their success. If being connected is important for women in general, data reveal how much more important it is for women of color to form and maintain professional and personal networks (p. 47).

Mendez-Morse (2004) reported on the mentoring aspects of a qualitative study of six Mexican-American female school leaders in west Texas. One goal of the study was the identification of any individuals who had been role models or mentors important to the careers of these women. A role model was defined as someone whose characteristics or traits another person would want to emulate; a mentor was defined as someone who actively helps, supports, or teaches someone else how to do a job so that he or she will succeed. The findings indicate that for the Latina educational leaders in the study, significant role models and mentors, came primarily from nonprofessional areas of the women's lives, given the absence of a formal, traditional mentoring relationship. Moreover, the experiences of these school leaders demonstrate that these Latinas assembled or constructed a mentor from varied sources that collectively met their specific needs and priorities (p. 565).

As a centerpiece of its 20th anniversary activities in 2007, the National Hispana Leadership Institute (NHLI) engaged Innovative Consultants International to conduct a national survey of its alumnae. Alumnae identified many benefits of the mentoring experience, including its being one of the best ways to learn. Some of the reasons cited by alumnae for serving as mentors included:

1. Assisting others in their personal/professional development by paying back to the community
2. Providing sustenance
3. Developing role models
4. Caring for their Latina sisters
5. Being a *comadre*
6. Breaking the stigma of Latinas working alone and reinventing the wheel

7. Become the other's best example of success

Mendez-Morse (2004) explains how mentoring impacts career path and choices for Hispanic women. She claims that careful attention placed on adequate planning for career advancement through formal education, coupled with a variety of positive strategies such as seeking out and learning from several mentors, helps many Latinas in attaining the position sought after. Women seem to have a less-developed mentoring system compared to men. Mentors are important because they many times act as go-betweens among superintendent candidates and school boards (Glass, 2000, p. 28).

Mentors also provide in-district mobility opportunities for women aspiring to the superintendency. The importance of Hispanic women having mentors, either female or male and Hispanic or non-Hispanic in order to make significant advances in administrative careers, is just as important as Hispanic women being mentors to others who typically have few mentors from whom to draw support. The need exists for building a community of mentors, particularly amongst Hispanic women, if Hispanic women are to succeed. It is agreed that mentors are essential for women aspiring to educational leadership. (Santiago, 2008).

Information gleaned from the lived experience of Hispanic female educational leaders can offer hope and inspiration to aspiring school leaders (Gardiner et al., 2000; Gupton & Slick, 1996; Howard, 2001; Smulyan, 2000).

Houston (2001) states that the 21st-century superintendent faces several challenges: changing demographics (growing diversity), the divide between haves and have-nots, devaluation of children (reliance on remediation over prevention), de-emphasis on education for citizenship, deregulation, devolution of power, demassification (fewer common information sources), and disintermediation. The superintendency is a mission, not a job.

Career progression to arrive at the most senior levels continues to be an opportunity to improve the presence of diverse populations such as Latinas. While some women may cite unique challenges, such as work-life balance with children, eldercare demands, or the lack of role models to emulate as challenges to their career trajectory, the relentless pursuit of one's objectives does create new professional opportunities. Having an active, senior sponsor is also essential, just as being dynamic and having the ability to accept new roles as they arise—or creating them to fit a critical organizational need—are some methods to help drive this agenda. (Du Vernet, 2003).

The Hispanic population is the nation's youngest major racial or ethnic group (Pew Hispanic Center, 2014), which means that our young people, more than ever, need guidance, and mentorship in obtaining leadership roles and achieving professional success (Rivera, 2014). It is essential to have more Latino leaders because they can serve to meet the academic needs of our rapidly increasing Latino student population (Elizondo, 2008). Latino role models have the potential of creating a positive impact on Latino students' educational goals and achievements by showing them education and success are within their reach (Elizondo, 2008; Zalaquett & Gallardo, 2008).

Carrion-Mendez (2011) states that researchers who have studied and/or continue to study underrepresentation of ethnic groups like Latinas and women in leadership roles reflect the current state of affairs regarding this underrepresentation. They verify that most school districts serving predominately Latino populations have few, if any, higher-level academic Latina leaders. Hence, a need exists to provide Latina school leaders with an influential message that schools containing high Hispanic student populations will benefit when Latina role models like

themselves are representative in higher-level educational leadership positions such as the school district superintendency.

Expanding Literature on Latina Leaders

Upon doing my review of the literature, I noticed a lot of themes emerge on women in the superintendency, specifically Latinas. The concept of the glass ceiling has become less and almost nonexistent for minority women. More opportunities for leadership positions, particularly in educational administration are noted in the literature. Tying closely to this theme is that many minorities are employed as superintendents in large urban public school districts. This is understood to be due to relevance to community alliances where minority superintendents serve. Leadership that represents the cultural and ethnic groups that make up U.S. society is important for all students because the world students will join as adults is richly diverse. These leaders can make unique contributions to students' levels of comfort, motivation, and achievement in schools with high populations of minorities (Sanchez, Thornton & Usinger, 2009).

Many themes focused on the cultural attributes Latinas bring to the superintendency, such as bringing emotional energy and an ethic of care into their leadership. Collins (1987) states Hispanic women bring personal and cultural attributes that may be politically and symbolically useful. They bring personal traits associated with the Hispanic culture and community. They bring emotional energy that is appealing and valuable to the school district and community.

Latinas running school districts bring a familial connection to their craft. This is spread to schools and to the community at large. They embody a leadership style that is collaborative, supportive, and gives back to the community. In addition, Latinas' own bilingualism and biculturalism allow for clear communication with stakeholders by solidifying their educational

message to the public while understanding the needs of language minority students. By being bicultural, a connection is made to the understanding of the struggles and/or challenges of others who are of other cultures adapting to American culture and schooling in the United States. This assists Latina leaders in embracing multiculturalism and advocating for culturally responsive teaching.

Finally, the last theme that was present is the acknowledgment of the need for more Latinas in educational leadership positions for the benefit of the growing numbers of Latinos in the United States. A need exists to provide Latina school leaders with an influential message that schools containing high Hispanic student populations will benefit when Latina role models like themselves are representative in higher-level educational leadership positions such as the school district superintendency (Carrion-Mendez, 2011). This is where my central idea originated when beginning to formalize my study and when discussing ideologies with my colleagues entrenched in bilingual/bicultural education.

Even though I was able to find some literature on Latina superintendents, it is still scarce. According to Mendez-Morse (1999), information on Latina superintendents is almost nonexistent and this lack of information has created a grave shortage in the knowledge base of educational administration (Alemán, 2002). Mendez-Morse (2002) made note of the dearth of Latinas in the literature and within the research. She states that this absence indicates exclusion and neglect and negates the contributions of Latina leaders (p. 584). This is still the case today. Latinas have become increasingly active in various leadership roles across all sectors in the United States (Rivera, 2014). Evidence suggests a need does exist for more studies on Latina educational leaders for the purpose of setting the platform for other scholars interested in this field of study. In addition, more studies will also benefit the Latina audience, demonstrating

how other Latinas have overcome obstacles in reaching the superintendency and also to examine their strategies.

Empirical research is research derived from actual experience. That is why I chose this type of research for my study, in which participants provided answers to my research questions based on their experience as superintendents in New Jersey public school districts. According to Explorable Psychology Experiments (2014), empirical research can be defined as research based on experimentation or observation (evidence). Its objective is to identify and learn from the collective experience of others from the field and to identify, explore, confirm, and advance theoretical concepts to further improve educational design. It also promotes an environment for improved understanding, combines extensive research with a detailed case study, and proves relevancy of theory by working in a real world environment.

The objectives of empirical research connect with the purpose of my research, which was to gain insight on how current Latina superintendents have overcome obstacles in reaching their goals of leading public school districts as well as adding to the literature, especially since there are so few studies from which Latina aspirants to the superintendency can draw.

Chapter Summary

Today more women and minorities are becoming chief school administrators than ever before. As the nation's population becomes more diverse, women and minorities are moving into this role in the United States (Melendez de Santa Ana, 2008). The opportunity to lead public school districts and maximize the numbers of Latinas in those influential leadership roles is no longer a fantasy. Given that the Latino population is the fastest growing population in our nation, the benefit of having Hispanic females lead our schools is justifiable. Latinas will serve as role models for all children, especially for Latino children (Gonzales, 2007). For these reasons,

conducting more studies and seeking more narratives of Latina superintendents is important for enhancing literature on this topic

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges faced by Latinas in New Jersey when seeking the superintendency; in addition, to gain insight on how current Latina superintendents have overcome idiosyncrasies in reaching their goals of leading public school districts.

Research Questions

1. How do Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents perceive challenges when seeking the superintendency?
2. How have Latinas overcome barriers in becoming superintendents/assistant superintendents?
3. What personal attributes assisted Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents to secure their positions?

I arrived at my research questions by focusing on the purpose of my study. Revealing how current Latina school district leaders have overcome challenges was important to my study. Framing the research questions the way I did, in open-ended format, allowed the participants to disclose more of their climb to the superintendency and will hopefully fill a gap in the research.

Research Design and Methodology

The design of my research was a qualitative approach, using the ethnographic method. Ethnography is defined by Spradley (1979) as the work of describing a culture, an essential core

of an activity, aiming to understand another way of life from the native point of view, and learning from people. Cultural inferences were made from three sources: from what my participants said, from the way they acted, and from the artifacts they provided.

The qualitative method makes use of some model of social and cultural processes in both gathering and interpreting data (Spindler & Spindler, 1987). This approach was used to explore themes and factors involved in the experiences of Hispanic women currently or formerly employed as superintendents/assistant superintendents in the state of New Jersey. To answer my research questions, interviews were held with a small sample of Hispanic women superintendents/assistant superintendents who agreed to participate in my study.

Qualitative procedures demonstrate a different method to scholarly inquiry than techniques of quantitative research. Qualitative investigation employs different philosophical assumptions; strategies of inquiry; and methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Although the processes are similar, qualitative procedures rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse strategies of inquiry (Cresswell, 2009). For these specified reasons and for its naturalistic discovery approach, I used this methodology and its techniques, such as the in-depth interview, to draw my study and answer my research questions. I used several of Creswell's (2007) lists of characteristics of qualitative research, such as the following:

- Natural setting - As a qualitative researcher, I collected data in the field at the particular site where my interviewees are currently employed or at one of their choosing. I gathered information by holding face-to-face interviews and established a positive interaction, where the informants freely responded to my research questions. This allowed me, as the researcher, to observe my participants' gestures and facial

expressions throughout the interview, while assessing how they behaved in their context.

- Researcher as key instrument - I relied on my own interview protocols to discern contextual dimensions that arose through observation of behavior and interviewing of participants.
- Multiple sources of data - I relied on multiple forms of data: conducted interviews and wrote findings on my observations, reviewed all sources of data to cluster domains and themes that arose within the participants' interviews, made sense of it all, and drew conclusions to my study.
- Inductive data analysis -The objective of building upon patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up was upheld so that an inductive process occurred and my participants could collaborate to help shape the themes that emerged.
- Participants' meanings -The meanings regarding my problem of study centered on my participants' views, experiences, and perceptions.
- Emergent design - Being tolerant of phase change in the process of collecting data and allowing for shifting to occur enabled me to gain insight into reaching my goals in the study and addressing the research questions.
- Theoretical lens - I used various concepts to allow for differences in my study and various contexts of my study such as hardships encountered or cultural differences of my participants.
- Interpretive - Interpreting what I saw, heard, and understood and valuing expressed views from my participants on the problem at hand was another focus in my study.

- Holistic account - Reporting multiple perspectives and sketching a larger picture that emerged through my study to acquire a holistic picture of the research problem assisted me in making conclusions to the issues.

Target Population and Setting

The State of New Jersey Department of Education School Directory of Public School Districts 2015-2016 data of certificated staff categorized by sex and ethnicity by numbers and percentages was used to retrieve information on female superintendents/assistant superintendents. This information also provided the setting of the study, which was a representation of New Jersey's urban and suburban public school districts with varying demographics, where the sample pool of New Jersey Latina school superintendents/assistant superintendents are or have been employed. In addition to searching for potential participants through these sources, I also networked with professional associations/organizations and colleagues to identify and locate superintendents/assistant superintendents meeting the qualifications of my study. Thus, purposeful sampling was used for the identification and selection of Latina assistant superintendents/superintendents in order for me to obtain a wealth of information when I asked for responses to my research questions.

A total of 20 potential participants meeting the selection criteria were identified. These 20 Latinas were sent an invitation letter (via electronic mail). This was an informational letter in which I introduced myself as a doctoral student from Seton Hall University, detailed my educational and professional background, the primary purpose of the study, total interview time, details regarding data collection and confidentiality as to the use of their names and personal information. I also stated in my invitation letter the time frame allotted for this interview, which was 30 minutes, and stated the characteristics of the interview: confidential in nature, responding

to my research questions, their participation being voluntary, and their choosing to become anonymous participants in my study. The research questions were also shared with them. Finally, the Statement of Consent was also attached to my invitation letter, informing them where to send the original signed document.

Of the 20 participants, nine agreed to be interviewed. The factors for the others not participating were as follows: one was a school administrator but never had been an assistant superintendent/superintendent, two were married to Latino men but were of Portuguese descent, three were no longer in their positions (either retired, relocated, or no further contact information was given from their former school districts), two had scheduling difficulties, two were denied participation by their superintendent, and one Latina superintendent declined.

Although nine may seem like a small number of participants for the study of Latina superintendents in New Jersey, the nine interviews yielded a tremendous amount of rich information to the study, especially since the interviewees voluntarily extended their participation from 30 to 45 minutes or more of ethnographic time. Due to extra time allotted for interviewing, more insight was provided by the participants as well as more categories for discussion and “storytelling” time.

After accepting the invitation to participate verbally and formally by written consent, the participants chose where to be interviewed, allowing for complete comfort in doing so and to elicit responses to the open-ended research questions. The interviewees were audio-recorded based on their consent, and the interviews were later transcribed. The interviewees were encouraged to provide as much detail as they felt comfortable providing when answering the research questions and sub questions pertaining to being Latina superintendents in the state of New Jersey.

The participants were given a copy of their interviews for verification purposes. They received a thank you letter for their participation in my study as well as the results of the data collected, my analysis of the data, and my final product.

Descriptions of Latinas in positions of the superintendency are provided in this study, as well as demographics of the districts they represented, career paths, the hiring process for reaching the superintendency, familial roles, challenges, glass ceiling, overcoming barriers, personal attributes, mentoring and networking, and other categories that surfaced when interviewing the participants in the study. The responses to the research questions and sub questions yielded additional categories, which are considered in this study, as they form an essential part in enhancing the literature on this topic.

Participants

The major factors participants had in common were the following:

1. Although their families were not educators, the families had instilled a strong passion for learning
2. All women had their own families
3. All participants had moved up the ranks to the superintendency
4. Participants were encouraged by their colleagues to apply for the superintendency
5. Participants who did not have doctoral degrees already aspired to have them

Four out of the nine participants have doctoral degrees. The other five are seeking doctorates in education. Six out of nine Latinas are Cuban, one is Ecuadorian, and the other two participants are Puerto Rican. Participants are in the age range of late forties to early sixties.

The school districts represented by the participants in this study were mostly urban except for three participants who are or formerly had been a superintendent in a suburban

district. Only one participant is an Executive County Superintendent for a New Jersey county. Most of the school districts had a large student population with the majority being of Hispanic descent.

Responses given for the study by Latina superintendents were outlined in a manner to provide anonymity and confidentiality.

Anastasia

Anastasia is a Cuban woman in the age range of 50-60 years old. She is a former assistant superintendent. She was not seeking the superintendency; it came to her through a referral. She was very happy at her job as a tenured Supervisor of World Languages before taking on the position of school district leader. She was two years into her position as an assistant superintendent before going back to her original school district as a school principal. Anastasia has a doctorate in education.

Elba

Elba is a Cuban woman in the age range of 50-60 years old. She leads an urban public school district with about 87% Hispanic student population, and the rest of the student body are Caucasian, African-American, and a very small Indian population. She has celebrated a year since her appointment as interim superintendent of schools. Prior to this, she was a tenured assistant superintendent, who had been in the same district on and off for ten years. After serving there as assistant superintendent for three years, she became Associate Dean of the College of Education at a university in New Jersey for two years. Then she came back to the same school district and has been there ever since. Prior to being an assistant superintendent, Elba was an elementary principal for a total of nine years. Elba has a doctorate in education.

Elena

Elena is a Puerto Rican woman between the ages of 50-60 years. She is an assistant superintendent for an urban public school district, supervising a group of schools. This is Elena's second year as assistant superintendent. Prior to this position, she was an elementary school principal.

Angela

Angela is a Cuban woman between the ages of 60-65. She is a retired assistant superintendent for an urban school district and is now a full professor at a university in New Jersey. Her time as an assistant superintendent was close to seven years. The district she oversaw was over 70% Hispanic. Angela states she never regrets not going into another career. Her disciplinary core is being diplomatic. Angela holds a doctorate in education.

Maria

Maria is an Ecuadorian woman in the age-range of 50-60 years. She is an executive county superintendent. She began in this position just about a year ago. Her last position was serving as the superintendent of schools in a small district that is suburban with urban-like characteristics. The counties she serves are diverse and unique in the sense that they have a blend of small suburban districts as well as districts that might be considered urban-like. They sit in the middle of or are surrounded by, she says, slightly larger, very affluent districts.

Jennifer

Jennifer is a Cuban woman between 40-50 years of age and has been an assistant superintendent in an urban school district for four years. Prior to that she was a director of early childhood education, and before that she was a supervisor of early childhood education. Jennifer has been in the same district since the 1980s and describes never having had the desire to work

anywhere else. She started as a teacher and is also a native of this particular community where over 50% of the population are of Latino descent. The district has a portion of immigrant children and many Latino children born in the United States.

Sara

Sara is a Cuban woman between 50-60 years of age. She began her educational career as a teacher in a gifted/talented program. She then accepted a position as a district math and science supervisor and stayed in this position for ten years. After many years in this position, Sara became a principal and four years later she became assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction for eleven years. She is currently in her second year of the superintendency.

Ana

Ana is a Puerto Rican woman in the age range of 50-60 years. She came from Puerto Rico in the 1980s as a bilingual teacher to one of the biggest school systems in New Jersey. Since she has a biological sciences and pre-medicine degree and has finished her masters degree in supervision, Ana was offered a supervisor of science/math position. She then became an assistant principal. A few years later, Ana took on a directorship in instruction and curriculum. When the position of superintendent opened up, she became acting/interim superintendent in the absence of the previous superintendent. However, Ana had to complete an application to be considered a candidate for the position. She has been a superintendent since 2013. Ana currently holds a doctorate in education.

Christina

Christina is between the ages of 60 and 70. She has been a superintendent for eight years. She began her career in education in the state of New York and taught for eight years before attaining a master's degree in educational leadership. She obtained this degree in Europe under a

scholarship. Christina was a vice-principal in New York and a director of elementary curriculum in New Jersey. She has worked in both urban and suburban districts. Christina currently leads a suburban school district in New Jersey, yet her passion lies in spreading her expertise to impoverished Latino children. Her mission is to one day have the opportunity to serve as superintendent of urban public schools and give back to the community.

Data Collection

The research procedure included an in-depth interview with each of the Hispanic female superintendents/assistant superintendents that participated in my study. I anticipated that the interview would take no more than 30 minutes. In the beginning of the interview, I established rapport and provided reasons of the basis for my research. The interview protocol began as follows: the beginning set of questions consisted of the informants' ages, their employment statuses as current or former superintendents/assistant superintendents, the school district they lead or have led, years as superintendents/assistant superintendents, and the last position held before becoming a chief school administrator.

The interview questions were developed and tested based on the conceptual framework of this study, following Creswell's (2003) description of the role that theoretical perspectives play for qualitative researchers: to provide a lens (theory) to direct the researchers as to the important issues to examine and the people that need to be studied, and to uncover as much about the participants and their situations as possible (p. 133). Using the words of Nancy Mellon in *The Art of Storytelling* (1998), I wanted to ask open-ended questions because there is a natural storytelling urge and ability in all human beings, and even just a little nurturing of this impulse can bring about astonishing and delightful results (p. 174).

I used the dearth of information in the literature as a springboard to formulate my

questions. I asked myself what it is I want to learn about Latina superintendents as a whole and then what information I could report on Latina superintendents in New Jersey. All of these personal questions I had on the subject matter and the curiosity for the answers prompted me to focus on creating the interview questions that follow.

Table 1

Interview Questions Based on Conceptual Framework

Challenges	
Interview Question	Conceptual Framework
Describe your journey into your current or former role as a superintendent/assistant superintendent of a school district. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal History – education, parents’ education, goals, other influences • Professional History – college degrees, licensures, career experiences, associations 	Critical Race Theory – counter-storytelling, framing what we do, why we do it, and how we do it LatCrit Theory – alternative social construct, commitment against race and gender inequality, recognition of struggle, empowerment
Thinking back on your personal experience is there anything you would have done differently in order to attain the chief school administrator role? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social factors-Familial ties • Alleviating home stressors • Mentoring • Networking 	Critical Race Theory – counter-storytelling, framing what we do, why we do it, and how we do it LatCrit Theory – Opportunity to understand Latinos/as experiences with self-doubt, survivor guilt, imposter syndrome, and invisibility
How have you overcome vicissitudes in becoming a superintendent?	LatCrit Theory – alternative social construct, commitment against race and gender inequality, recognition of struggle, empowerment
What has been the most challenging incident you recall and how were you able to turn it into a positive experience? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the district level? • With stakeholders? 	Critical Race Theory – counter-storytelling, views sentiments as legitimate and important to understand the individual LatCrit Theory – alternative social construct, commitment against race and gender inequality, recognition of struggle, empowerment

Race	
Interview Question	Conceptual Framework
<p>How do Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents perceive challenges when seeking the superintendency?</p> <p>Do you ever feel that due to being a woman, a Latina specifically, that you are doubted on your decision-making?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this practice overt? And if so, describe how. • What role does this play in your job efficacy? • How have you overcome this? 	<p>Critical Race Theory – social justice, offers transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression.</p> <p>LatCrit Theory – examines where racism intersects with other forms of subordination, such as sexism and classism</p>
Attributes to Leadership	
Interview Question	Conceptual Framework
<p>Explain personal skills that have allowed you to have been awarded the position of superintendent/assistant superintendent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remain the leader of a school district? • Been respected as a Latina school administrator? <p>What personal attributes have assisted Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents to secure positions?</p>	<p>Critical Race Theory – social justice, offers transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression</p> <p>LatCrit Theory –development of theories of social transformation for the purpose of opportunity</p>
<p>Do you feel accomplished as an Latina educational leader?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Goals met? ▪ Role model to other Hispanic women? 	<p>LatCrit Theory – alternative social construct, commitment against race and gender, recognition of struggle, and empowerment</p>
<p>If you were to provide insight to other Latinas aspiring to lead school districts, what would that be?</p>	<p>Critical Race Theory – social justice, offers transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression</p> <p>LatCrit Theory –development of theories of social transformation for the purpose of opportunity</p>

Last, my research questions were asked. The interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed verbatim of all the participants. Notes were taken during the interviews and data were

analyzed, as I have previously suggested. I tested my interview questions with three Latina leaders and then with two additional Latina leaders to qualify my questions. According to Kvale (2007), an important element to the interview preparation is the implementation of a pilot test. The pilot test assists the researcher in determining if there are flaws, limitations, or other weaknesses within the interview design and allow him or her to make necessary revisions prior to the implementation of the study. Turner states (2010) a pilot test should be led with participants that have complementary interests as those that will participate in the implemented study. The pilot test will also help the researcher with the refinement of research questions. The use of a pilot test took place in this study.

Table 2

Specific Procedures Used to Collect Data

Research Question	Data Source(s)	Objective(s)
What are specific challenges Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents face when seeking the superintendency?	Interviews with current or former Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents; literature review	To understand the past experiences that impeded Latinas from seeking the superintendency and what was done to overcome the obstacles
How have Latinas overcome barriers in obtaining the superintendency?	Interviews with current or former Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents; literature review	To gain insight on how current Latina Superintendents have overcome obstacles in becoming superintendents
What personal attributes have assisted current Latina superintendents to secure their positions?	Interviews with current or former Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents; literature review	To provide guidance to Latinas who desire a position in the educational decision-making process of New Jersey school districts, as chief school leaders.

Data Analysis Procedures

Analysis or the process of bringing order to data, organizing what is there into patterns, categories, and basic descriptive units, as Krueger (1994) postulates, was used in this study. My goal of noting the reflections of the superintendents' during the interviews have been documented and reviewed for domain and taxonomic analysis. It was important to emphasize that descriptive research methods only described a set of observations or the data collected. After participants answered my research questions, I described the given responses. Since I cannot draw conclusions from those data about which way the relationship goes (Hale, 2011) the analysis is entirely speculative.

The measurement was a narrative, constructed a posteriori, on the basis of open-ended interviews. Data analysis was essentially ongoing and involved synthesis. The raw data (words) were first transcribed. After reviewing the transcripts and becoming familiar with the data, I took notes on patterns and themes that emerged. Once this occurred, coding took place.

In essence the procedure was, as Spradley (1979) states, a domain analysis. First, I selected a single semantic (logical) relationship. Next, I prepared a domain analysis worksheet, which became a visual for me. This allowed me to uncover domains embedded in the sentences spoken by my informants. Then, I selected a sample of informant statements and searched for possible terms that appropriately fit the semantic relationship. Next, I formulated structural questions for each domain, and finally I made a list of all hypothesized domains.

A taxonomic analysis, which finds subsets, followed the domain analysis. Then, a taxonomic diagram was created from the subsets. The next step was making a componential analysis, the search for attributes associated with cultural symbols. As in the domain analysis, I

created a worksheet titled “paradigm worksheet,” to fill in noted attributes and, as Spradley (1979) suggests, links with other domains with the intention of discovering cultural themes.

Interpretation followed, attaching meaning and significance to the analysis, explaining descriptive patterns, and looking for relationships and linkages among descriptive dimensions (Genzuk, 1999). Finally, my goal of analyzing responses based upon my research questions yielded findings of facts and fulfilled the purpose of this study.

Chapter Summary

In summary, I chose the qualitative research methodology, the naturalistic discovery approach that utilizes the interview process in an in-depth manner and the interpretation of observations to study a problem. This study explored the obstacles faced by Latinas in New Jersey when seeking the superintendency; in addition, it helped me to gain insight into how current Latina superintendents have overcome obstacles in reaching their goals of leading public school districts. My intention was to add my findings to the scant literature on the topic. Having held conversations involving perspectives of a sample of informants assisted me in identifying, describing, and analyzing the emerging themes and factors involved.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges faced by Latinas in New Jersey when seeking the superintendency; in addition, to gain insight into how current Latina superintendents have overcome obstacles in reaching their goals of leading public school districts. There were three research questions guiding this study, which allowed for an expanding discourse related to the increase of Hispanic women superintendents. This chapter reports on the findings through research questions.

Research Question 1: How do Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents perceive challenges when seeking the superintendency?

When answering how Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents perceive challenges when seeking the superintendency, my nine participants had a lot to discuss: career paths, the hiring process, familial roles, and immigrant shifts and role models. The participants were very candid in their responses, providing vivid narratives detailing their rise to the superintendency.

Career Paths

When asked about their career paths, the participants provided their accounts on how they moved up the ranks from classroom teachers to the superintendency. According to Angela:

I moved up the ladder from teacher to assistant principal, supervisor of bilingual/ESL, and then to executive assistant. From this position, I applied for the position of assistant superintendent of instruction and curriculum. I had a good chance of competing, having been in the system as a teacher and moving up the ranks.

She goes on to say the following:

You need to work your way up. Be the best teacher you can be, always with future goals in mind. Ask yourself where you want to be in the next five years? Ten years? You need to be prepared with degrees, experience, and be proud of that. Some people feel they have to assimilate to be successful, and that is not the case.

As all the participants in this study who began their careers as classroom teachers, Anastasia described her journey to the assistant superintendency as follows:

I saw the posting in the newspaper, but I didn't do anything because it wasn't something I was looking to do. I was very happy at my job. I was a supervisor at the time of world languages. That was my very last position in the other district and another Hispanic educational leader told me that I should apply, that I would be great at that position. I spoke to my family about it, and I applied.

Elena's journey to the superintendency was similar as well. She says that what she feels most proud of is the fact that she came through the ranks. She started as a teacher and then became a supervisor of teachers. Afterwards, she worked in the central office and then became a principal and now assistant superintendent. Elena states that everything she did prepared her for this position, even though she never thought of or wanted to be an assistant superintendent. She never set out to reach this level. She states that she would have been happy if she had remained in the classroom because teaching is her first love. "The day that I no longer do this, I think that I will go back to teaching. If I do retire, I see myself going back to teach again. So I really never set out to become what I am right now; but along the way, I see how, looking back now, everything prepared me for this role," she says. Elena's first degree was not in education; it was

in journalism. She completed this degree from the University of Puerto Rico and had a very difficult time finding a job in the field of journalism in Puerto Rico. She states the following:

I went back to college; and with the degree that I had, I just added a few more courses and became certified as a teacher. Then I took the National Teacher's Exam (NTE), passed it and became a fourth grade teacher here and have been in education for 32 years. Of the 32, I spent 20 in the classroom and the other 12, I spent as a supervisor at central office level. I did that for about six years and then I was a principal for seven and a half years. Finally, I was given the opportunity and the privilege to come to central office as assistant superintendent to supervise a unit of schools, and now I am in my second year of doing this.

Elba shared that she received a bachelor's degree in elementary education and double-majored in Spanish. She continued her studies to obtain bilingual and early childhood certifications. After graduation, Elba secured a job at a Catholic school as a fifth grade teacher. After less than a year, she got a job in the public school system and was encouraged to obtain a master's degree in ESL. Elba then decided to seek part-time employment due to bearing another child. She accepted a job as a site coordinator working with a company instead of for a board of education:

This company was running a study on the effects of bilingual education, and they needed a site coordinator for New Jersey, and Elizabeth and Union City were going to be the two sites that were going to be studied. It was a three-year national study. I had to coordinate everything that had to do with the study for New Jersey. Since it was a national study, I met with colleagues from other places. There were seven sites all together. It was The Immersion Study of the 1980s. I would come in

at times to train teachers, then I would help conduct the testing. I would go to California to train. They would train us every year. It was the best job! I hired teachers that were in similar situations that I was in before to conduct some of the requirements of the study, and it was great. So, basically I was out of the school system for three years, but I was really working with two systems. And, what that did was it created in me the zest to know more about education but outside the classroom, not just inside the classroom. After that study was over in 1987 is when I decided to go and get my doctorate degree. So, I enrolled at Fordham University. Elba became an adjunct professor at Fordham and co-wrote her first book while there.

She finished her doctorate degree and then could not find employment. She explained as follows:

I wanted to be a professor at the university level, but I wanted a tenure-track position. They had some instructor positions, but I wanted tenure track. So, I decided to go to the XXXXXX board of education, and I started teaching sixth grade bilingual after getting my doctorate.

Elba was a teacher for one year, then she applied for a position as supervisor of world languages. After a year as a supervisor, she was offered the position of vice-principal at the high school level. Then she was appointed principal of an elementary school in another school district. She served her administrative role for five years there and then changed school districts, taking on the same role. Finally, she was presented with the opportunity of being recruited into the superintendency.

Jennifer is an assistant superintendent in an urban school district and has been in the role of assistant superintendent for four years. Previously she was a supervisor of early childhood for six years and then a director of early childhood for four years. Jennifer has been in the same

school district since 1986, and she states that she has “never had the desire to work anywhere else.” She is a native of the community where she began her teaching career and is now an administrator.

Jennifer never saw her role outside of the classroom. She states the following:

I loved being in the classroom, and I loved being a bilingual teacher who serviced immigrant children. I was servicing children from parents who came to this country seeking a better life and wanting their kids to have a great education. So for me, that was really, really important, and I didn't see my role as anything else but that.

Maria said the following when responding to the question on perceiving challenges to the superintendency:

I would say that I wouldn't do anything differently simply because throughout the years of my journey I encountered colleagues within the working environment that I might have been in a school, central office, or whatever with, that might have been those who truly cared about the work that I did. I think they respected and valued the work that I did. So, for me, that recognition and that appreciation served as the catalyst to do a better job each and every single day.

This recognition served as a catalyst for Maria to improve herself and move along the ranks to becoming superintendent and now county superintendent.

Sara feels that career experience is necessary to reaching the superintendency. She feels this way because “as you gain and move up the ranks in education, you need to be well versed in various positions. When you reach the superintendency, teachers and non-instructional staff will know you moved your way up and are prepared to do a good job because you have the

experience to back up your credentials and preparedness for the position.” Sara states that people who are promoted too quickly with little experience do not know how to react. Therefore, experience in different phases of education is important because a person can establish a wealth of knowledge in different areas of education.

Ana is another participant in this study that has gone through the ranks from teacher to supervisor and other administrative positions to finally becoming superintendent. She, like Sara, feels that a lot of experience provides the framework and the knowledge base to make sound decisions.

Christina began her career in education in the city of New York. She accepted a position of substitute teacher before moving up the ladder to the superintendency. Christina taught in a very large urban area and was enticed to undertake a bilingual coordinator position that became available at the school and district level. She calls it a “quasi-administrator” position. This role is what opened the doors to her assistant superintendency and later the superintendent position.

The importance of following career paths to the superintendency was emphasized through the participants’ narratives. They mentioned how a career in education from being a teacher and moving up the ranks into leadership positions is what landed them into the superintendent position. The findings note that work history and credentials actually advanced them into the uppermost position in the field of education.

The Hiring Process

When I asked Anastasia if she perceived any challenges when seeking the superintendency, she said, “No” and added, “No specific challenges to being Latina either.” Anastasia, on the hiring process, stated the following:

The interesting thing when applying to these positions is important to know of the

district where you are applying in order to be prepared. But I remember for some reason there were three of us that were left for interviews, and I remember that I needed to say something about myself as a person because just by telling them the facts that everybody else told them, since it was a big committee interviewing, the message would be lost in the tracks. I think it's a very big preparation for future Latinas, applicants of these positions, to open up their soul a little bit. The way I did it was that I told them, "You heard everything I need to say about education, but you don't know who I am, so I am going to tell you a little bit about myself," and I did it through stories. I told them two stories, and I was able to, because I wanted them to know that apart from being a proud Hispanic woman, I also have these ideals or these ways of working and one of them had to do with honesty and the other had to do with equity.

Anastasia clarified that she had someone who encouraged her and had insight into the school district; and as a result, she had an "in" during the application process. She doesn't know if that had anything to do with being one of the finalists, but that is certainly something to think about. As she stated previously, Anastasia didn't seek this job. She didn't think she wanted it. She looked at the duties and responsibilities, and someone encouraged her to apply. That person had a very strong position in the district where she was eventually hired.

When asked if she was sought after for the superintendency, Elena immediately said, "Yes."

My superintendent came to me and said, "We need you at that school. We think you as the principal have what it takes to turn it around." I had to think about it for a couple of days; but I did accept, and it was the best decision I ever made I think

in my entire career. And then, I was not seeking to be an assistant super, and it came because I think it was because of the work we were able to do making it work. And so, I didn't want to leave that. I was offered the opportunity to become an assistant superintendent three times; and three times I declined because I was loving what I was doing so much, and I didn't feel that the school was ready for me to leave things the way they were. I wanted to finish and see that some of those initiatives we had started in the school were successful and implemented with fidelity and ensure the levels of success. But on the last call from the superintendent, I said if I were allowed to choose the person that could oversee the school and to stay in my role alongside that person to help them transition, that I would consider the assistant superintendency. And I was lucky to have my superintendent agree to that, and he allowed me to select the person. It took me a little bit to find the right person, but I did. She's doing an outstanding job right now.

Jennifer shares a similar experience as the other participants. She too was asked to move up the ladder. After the development of an early childhood program she was asked to come out of the classroom, and she struggled with that. When I asked why it would be a struggle moving up the ladder, Jennifer stated, "Because I had no plans to move up the ladder."

Elba also experienced a very smooth hiring process, since she was recruited for the superintendent position. She states that after getting tenure during her principalship, which was not an easy thing, she was asked to become assistant superintendent in her former school district. She says she was really recruited to go back there. They had two searches

for assistant superintendents, and after two searches they couldn't find anyone they wanted. She was recruited through XXXXXX, who is one of my participants in this study. She recruited her and initially Elba said no. She was called again and told this was a job she should really consider, and she finally said, "Ok, I'll listen and I came here. I did my research about the town. What really made me decide to come here was the fact they had an incredible bilingual program—a model program." Even though Elba was happy at XXXXXX, she felt there was a part of her that still wanted to come back to bilingual education. Her dissertation was in the area of bilingual education and she had written a book about it and also one about English as a second language in the mainstream classroom and how to work with teachers. She really felt that part of her was better suited with a district like this one. Elba left her wonderful principalship to go back. "And, I've been here now on and off, like I said, for nine years. More like ten. This is my story, Elba adds.

Maria shares a similar scenario:

I would say that . . . and I've been interviewed many times, and I know this question comes up again, I don't think of barriers. This is simply because one of the key factors would be that I think about the fact that I was in a district for a long, long time, for twenty-three years. And I believe that I have established myself in the district; therefore, it allowed me to grow. It allowed me to take advantage of opportunities in terms of professional growth. So, I don't believe that I had any barriers. I think one of the biggest assets was that fact that I had continuity. I had been in a particular place for an extended period of time. So, I think it says a lot about tenured administrators in a way. I was able to grow and

move up the ladder, mainly because I had demonstrated myself to certainly have the ability but also the commitment to do whatever it takes in terms of doing a job that benefits the families, the children, the community; so, I don't view it as a barrier.

Maria did not encounter a challenge. She says she "had the pleasure or the honor of actually being approached about assuming the superintendency."

According to Angela, she too was encouraged to apply for the superintendent position since she had all the traits of an excellent administrator and was well known in the district in which she was employed for many years.

Sara knew she wanted to be a superintendent one-day. She became the right hand of the superintendent at the time. He decided to retire; and as a result, she was appointed interim superintendent for two months, answered to the New Jersey school board of her district, and later was appointed superintendent of schools.

On the other hand, Ana had to compete for the superintendency, even though she was interim superintendent and had already been sixteen years in the district, covering the duties and responsibilities of the superintendent when he was absent. In her case she had to apply with 30 other applicants when the board of education opened a search. The search was for a minority. The position of superintendent in the school district in which she worked was normally given to a Caucasian male. Ana states that for the district to consider a woman, and more importantly a Latina, was a big undertaking. The search was down to two candidates when the board made the decision to select another six and do another set of interviews to become more secure of the candidate and to make the process more challenging. At this point Ana "became open with the board stating that to bring someone in for three years that doesn't know the school district and

make changes was absurd.” Of the three final candidates the board selected her. Her experience of getting hired for the top school position was not easy. Normally, New Jersey school boards have a pool of candidates to interview, diluting the pool to two candidates and then making their decision. This was not the case in Ana’s experience.

Christina’s experience in getting hired for the superintendency was a smooth one. She says that due to her work in an urban school district and the curriculum work she did in a suburban school district, these experiences opened doors for her to acquire the superintendent’s role. In New York City standards were already developed and she was experienced with these; coupled with her work history, the opportunity of the superintendency was granted to her in New Jersey. Christina was actively seeking the position in this state since this is where she lives with her children.

The participants complemented each other with their responses on how they were hired for the superintendency except for one participant who experienced a rather challenging route into the superintendent’s seat. The majority of the participants were either recruited for the superintendency or were encouraged to apply.

Familial Roles

The majority of the participants mentioned positive familial roles. They stated that their families were very supportive during their careers and that they assisted in helping them grow as individuals with a passion for education. Maria stated the following:

I can certainly begin with my parents’ values in terms of viewing education as the key to success and to have a brighter future. While they only completed high school, they were certainly role models in the sense that they always promoted a sense of hard work, determination, and work ethic. They would do anything to

support my education, my aspirations, I would say. They truly believe that education is an area that needs to be maximized at all levels and therefore they were there to serve as cheerleaders. They were there to support. They were there to encourage. They were there to love in a way where they promoted . . . the love of learning in promoting success and aspirations for a future that would be determined by the work that I did. So, it was serving as role models that really inspired me to be the best that I can always be in an effort to also support and help others along the way.

As I asked Jennifer to reflect on familial ties, social factors, home stressors, and asked her to note if she had any experiences that would stop her from being a successful candidate for the superintendency, she responded, “No. I was blessed. Truly, truly blessed. Although my mom always tells me or she will remind me that family is always first.” Jennifer says she works hard to find balance with her family life and her work life. She says while growing up and going to school she always worked, even when she had two children. She states, “But I had an awesome, awesome support system. When they were younger, I did have that struggle. I did have the struggle of “Is it just about me? Am I taking from my kids?” I often still think to myself. “Should I have done it differently? Should I have stayed a little bit more?” Jennifer always goes through that inner struggle, but in the end she doesn’t regret anything that she has done. “I really don’t, and I’m about to embark on my doctorate degree. So, that’s up next,” she states.

On the flip side, Angela’s familial roles caused her to experience obstacles. She states that she could not finish her doctorate earlier in her career as she would have preferred to. Financially, she could not, and she needed to give time to her children. Angela balanced a lot of

stressors, and eventually it worked out for her. Major challenges she had included completing a doctorate and juggling a demanding job while being a single mom.

Sara's grandmother said, "Hard work pays off," and said that Sara needed to get ahead. Sara states that from that time she knew no matter how educated one is, one has to start from somewhere. She said to herself, "I am an important person; and when your family struggles, the best gift is an education." For this reason, Sara and her family give back to the community in the form of a scholarship created when her father passed "to provide Latino students that come up in the system the support they need." So far 16 students have been awarded the scholarship to help them pay for books and part of their college tuition.

Christina lost her father in her early teens, and it was her mother, a preschool teacher during the day, a student at night and later a kindergarten teacher, who was a great role model for her in terms of education. For both her parents, education was paramount and a priority in their household. That is why Christina and her siblings are all college-educated.

Familial roles played an important part in the participants' lives when it came to education. Throughout their storytelling, the participants mentioned that the positive connections their families made with education are what allowed them to persevere to the superintendency, since they felt the support from their families from an early point in their lives.

Immigrant Shifts and Role Models

The participants in this study had a lot to say about the demand for role models due to the rise in immigration. This is specifically due to the increase in the Hispanic population. Many of my participants felt that it used to be the Hispanic woman was viewed solely as a figure managing a household; yet this ideology has changed, and for this reason exposure to successful

Latina leaders is necessary. For example, Jennifer shares the plight of what her parents experienced and the plight of an immigrant child:

This is something very familiar to me, because I grew up in that type of household where I had two very strong women, who raised me. And, I always recognized that the roles change through time and through circumstances as in way back when the woman was the person who was in the house. Her job was the house. Her job was to be the mother. Her job was to be the caretaker. But, moving to this country and living in this country, those roles changed, yet I think that a lot of people still think that way.

Although times have changed so much, children really need to see women in leadership positions. They need to see and they need to have that person be representative of who they are. I think it is very important.

Jennifer continues to state that she is a firm believer that girls do need a role model. She says, "I'm a firm believer that role models can come in any color and of any background. However, you know, it is different to hear a message from someone who looks like you, who speaks like you, who has gone through the same types of challenges or experiences as you than someone who has not."

Angela feels the same as Jennifer. She feels Latino students need to see accomplished teachers as role models in educational leadership, especially if they take the time to explain the difficult road that goes beyond teaching and leading any school. "The message has to be if I can do it, so can you. Children can't think we magically arrived at this venue. They can't think, well, you were lucky. No, I worked hard." This is Angela's message through her leadership.

Maria thinks that while she does serve as a role model and knows she or she inspires many, she would love to have a way of documenting that, perhaps from others who have benefited from her work in inspiring others and serving as a role model for them. Maria goes on to say, "I've been pleased with the work that I've done in my specific positions simply because I've devoted my all to those positions. So, I know that a lot was accomplished and continues to be done right now as well, since I am truly dedicated to my work." She also states that she always wants to do her best possible work. "That was my commitment, my decision, and it's something that I loved and enjoyed. I was just simply doing my best possible work to support the lives of children and also teachers and administrators."

Maria states the following:

I think this goes back to the conversation we had that being a Latina superintendent really means assuming responsibility as a role model, which means you are going to lead by example. You are expected in a way to be able to demonstrate a level of commitment to the school community/district whatever that may be, in a way that they really see you being authentic. Being authentic in your concern for the welfare and success of the children, but also taking into account that the families play a significant role in the education of their children, but also how others within the community are part of that process as well. So, it does require a great deal of hard work. It does require trying to establish a balance between your professional and personal lives as you are going to be devoting a lot of time to serving as an effective leader.

After growing up in the same city in which she is superintendent, Elena believes that “our students deserve to have role models that can show them that they can attain positions of leadership and that those positions are not out of their reach and that education is actually the door to reach them.” She is a firm believer that students need to see themselves reflected in the role models that run their educational setting.

After asking Elena about having Latina role models, she had this to say:

Why I believe so. I think that women in positions of leadership is crucial for our communities to see. Our children often come from households where there is a single mother or where the strong leader is a woman.

I had the experience of having students who it is the grandma who leads that family. It is mom who has two to three jobs and is leading the family. So, seeing a woman or Latina women in leadership roles, I think sends a great message to our students, especially for young girls.

She continues, “I am a role model absolutely without a doubt. I give a sense of hope and a sense of you can aspire to be anything you want to be. Your gender is not a limitation. It should not be.”

Sara still cannot believe she is a Latina role model to her community. “The importance of all this is to do the right thing. Forget you’re a role model and just give back. This is what you show kids,” she says. She supports leadership conferences for women to come together and support other future leaders to be role models for their communities while continuing to support one another.

Ana feels the same way as the other participants. She says that leaders need a to have a clear vision in order to accomplish. She states that respect, care, and high expectations for the

individuals you oversee are important. “Have character and integrity. Be role models. All little girls look at other female actors. Be a transformational leader and change them. Allow others to reach the masses. Then transform the masses. As Latinas, we do. We are different from others. The challenges we find are demanding. Little girls need to see that to excel,” Ana states.

When asked about role models, Christina says that her best role models were her mother and the teachers she had in her lifetime. She says that in many Latina homes the parents are not educated and the girls are not exposed to professional venues as compared to their White female counterparts. Some Latinas are living in poverty and are lower middle class; they need to find role models, and having an education is so important to finding opportunities. Christina was lucky to have opportunities such as scholarships to help her with her studies. There are so many opportunities for Latinas in public school settings through their middle and high schools. They just need to tap them.

I asked Christina if she saw herself as a role model. This was her response:

Yes, I see myself as a role model. I have fought to provide Latinas with opportunities for educational growth and opportunities for their futures.

I am cognizant of doing this and for women in general. At the superintendent level you have the opportunity for change and to really help kids. You’re the person that can establish priorities. You can make people aware that children of color, Latino, and/or impoverished children need special attention and opportunities for their futures.

The optimism shared by the participants in noting the importance of having Hispanic women leaders as role models marked an essential role in this study. The fact that increasing immigrant shifts are occurring in New Jersey marks the onset on needing Latina school leaders,

such as superintendents, to demonstrate to the growing Hispanic communities that they too can achieve success, especially, as the participants, echoed for young girls.

Research Question 2: How have Latinas overcome barriers in becoming superintendents?

Challenges

The participants in the study were vocal about their personal challenges and barriers (not unique to Latinas) while beginning their superintendencies. Maria said that in terms of looking at the work she did in XXXXXX as a district superintendent, especially when dealing with a diverse population, not only economically but also linguistically and socially, every single day presents a new situation, a new challenge for her to deal with. It is the work that she has to do in terms of becoming part of the community that is challenging. She thinks not only about how the school community will respond to her work but also how the local government will respond. However, she feels that if one has established a positive working relationship with those individuals, they will be part of the solution. “You make them part of the solution. You invite them to be part of the solution in a way and therefore the challenge turns into a shared kind of responsibility, and it doesn’t just become my problem and how I am going to deal with it.” She does not isolate herself and actually brings stakeholders to the discussion. By including them, she feels she is going to be more effective in the way she addresses a situation.

Maria finds resolution to the challenges brought on by the superintendency by being proactive on instructional initiatives. For her, the most important aspect is developing an action plan and always trying to instill in others the concept of planning and thinking and monitoring and evaluating in a way that she promotes creative problem solving in a proactive way.

Upon asking Elena about her challenges in the superintendency, she retold how she became a superintendent and states, “I will tell you there wasn’t a challenge. It was more that I really wanted to see through what we had started at our school, and I really loved that.” More than a challenge for Elena was worrying that coming to work in the central office, would remove her from that day to day work of making a difference in a school. Therefore, she had to convince herself that she would now make a difference in more than one school.

Jennifer’s challenge came in the form of others not understanding her decisions. She explains that adversity arose because of what she was trying to do and could not do:

We were trying to reach out to all the community for services for special education and to do that I had to make a hard decision about another aspect of the program. That to me was my biggest adversity—that people would not understand or could not understand why I made a certain choice or why I did a certain thing. But, I did it, because it was the only way that I could possibly say enough is enough.

These services need to be here and these people need to be here, and I need to recruit and I need to gather all the right resources for what I need to do with these kids who have special needs.

Challenges also surfaced for the participants in the form of taking care of their own children while being school leaders. Jennifer thinks that the challenges women have is that they are definitely a minority in the profession of superintendent, and thus people tend to listen to them differently. “People tend to think that you don’t understand all it takes to be in a political arena and that whole ‘man-kind of work ethic,’ basically, because we have

different responsibilities than men.” Jennifer thinks that people still think that. She says, “You know if we have kids and our kids get sick, we take off from work. There are many studies out there and many articles about women taking more days off than men. Why? We tend to take days if our kids get sick and if we’re sick, we take even more days. So, those kinds of things I perceive as a challenge, because I think they are still very alive.”

Elba describes a different kind of challenge. She states several situations she encountered with a colleague, which were the most challenging for her while being a school leader:

Mine is so big that I really believe it’s bigger than me. It’s bigger than anything that’s happened here. Three years ago there was a new superintendent here. And this person, since the moment that she met me, I think she was threatened by me. People who were here during that time say that she was threatened by me, that she was jealous of me. Her working with the board was not working out and they put her on administrative leave, and they asked me to step in as interim, which I did for about two weeks. Then the commissioner of education brought her back. And then I was placed back as assistant superintendent, which really hurt our relationship big time. But again they put her on administrative leave a second time. And then she leaves again, and they bring me back in for the second time. So, I was here for two weeks again. And, after that, they bring her back for a third time. She is so upset with me that overnight she takes me out of my office, and she puts me in a basement of an elementary school. She takes away most of my duties, and I’m there from October to March. She started giving me other duties. I was doing teacher observations, which I love, but other than that she would give me reports to do, and everything I did was wrong.

Anastasia's experience was similar to Elba's in that her superior was causing the challenge for her, but Anastasia claims this came from a personality clash. She states that the most challenging situation was that her style was very different from the superintendent's style. She was doing what she thought was good; for example, committee work, incentives, and visiting more schools. Yet in her superior's eyes it was not enough. As a result, Anastasia had many discussions with the superintendent, who had a style of leadership that was different from hers. She had to work and overcome that. Although Anastasia did not want to change her style, she had to find a way that it fit with what he wanted. When I asked her if this individual was Hispanic or of another race, Anastasia responded, "No, non-Hispanic, White Caucasian male." However, Anastasia still felt respected as a Latina school administrator. She states, "What I find is that this was a clash of personalities. I had a clash of personality with the superintendent, someone who was there for a long, long time; and for some reason, I think my personality was a bit too friendly."

After asking Sara to describe a challenging incident, she recalls being a superintendent for two to three weeks and getting a call at 2:00 a.m. from the mayor and state senator that the brand new high school was on fire. When she got to the place, one of the firefighters told her she could not go onto the scene, not knowing she was the superintendent of schools. Sara states the following:

People don't believe you're in charge. I took charge and got the technology shut down to not lose hardware and back up the information that was there. I called roll call, closing a section of the school and held one session, while members of the administration were in a daze of what was happening."

Ana's challenging moment was going from interview to interview before finally obtaining the position of superintendent. She says it was not discouraging because she is always a fighter, yet it was a challenge. She feels that "social injustice presents challenges to overcome and to make yourself better so you make sound decisions based on the knowledge you have."

Christina has an Italian last name, and she feels that her biggest challenge revolves around her last name. Given that she has light skin and light hair, she looks very American. She is, however, of Cuban descent. Her resume demonstrated that she is bilingual and has bilingual experience throughout her years in education, yet she encounters barriers once people find out that she is Hispanic. This has happened and continues to happen in her school district. According to Christina, "Walls have gone up. Perhaps I am not the 'package' they were looking for. In this suburban district, I have felt a 'Latina after effect.' The dynamics changed after people found out I was Hispanic." Christina says that barriers have surfaced "especially since it is a predominantly American English-speaking board" in her suburban school district. She says that if she were in an urban setting, there would be diversity among board members; yet in her current school, board members (especially the men) have formed a barrier with her. Christina is able to cross that barrier with female board members by forming relationships with them, "but with the males there's a lot more convincing to do," she says. That is because they "don't respect you as much because they discovered that I am Hispanic, and I don't hide it." This is even after eight years as the superintendent.

Christina continues to say that there is a very "waspy Anglo woman" on the board and there is no getting through to her. Christina sees how the woman relates to other women directors, but once she found out Christina was Latina she wants nothing to do with her. To

overcome this, Christina simply works with “people who want to work with you and don’t feed it. I keep a positive tone with the ones that don’t want to work with me,” she says.

From a clash of personalities, to wanting everyone in the community to work with them and face situations together, commonalities existed among the participants when it came to challenges. The challenges were all different, yet they did exist. Some challenges were in the form of stakeholders not understanding certain decisions made by the participants and others just challenging themselves to do more and to do right by their students, yet the participants were all somehow tested on their strengths at some point in their careers.

The Glass Ceiling

According to some of my participants, the glass ceiling still exists in the public school districts they serve. Angela recalls that traditionally there are more men than women in her district and that a glass ceiling does exist:

It is [a] woman problem, not a Latina one. It is subtle and informal. It is an informal boy’s club community. Women are not let in; however, it is not an outward community. Women are not privy to the decision-making. Women need to overcome the glass ceiling. For example, women [are] asked for their opinions on this and that, yet men leaders do not follow their advice. There were informal groups of men. They attended a lot of social events.

Elena states that is often the case. She sees that depending on the Latin American countries our students come from, for the most part positions of power or of leadership are often held by men. When mentioning the glass ceiling to Elena, she exhales at how great it is when women have an opportunity to serve in those same roles as men.

Sara agrees. She states it is not so much about being a Latina. It is the male-dominant part that is always present. Sara participated at a roundtable in Hudson County and when she started going, there were two females; now there are six. She continues to say that at state meetings she mainly sees males, yet teachers are female. “The higher up you go, the more males you see. Women need to try to break the glass ceiling. Women need to work twice as hard. It’s a common theme; as Latinas you have to work even harder to prove your strengths.”

Ana says that the “suit position” is for males. The position of superintendent is male dominated. She calls it ‘testosterone leadership.’ It is difficult for females and especially for Latinas. Despite gains, she says, Latinas in top positions are underrepresented. There is also the difficulty of a woman getting proper compensation as compared to a man. Ana feels that the woman’s voice is still not equally heard. “There is a gender pay gap and inequities in wages. For example, males get \$150,000, while the female doesn’t question the contract and gets \$140,000. Part of what has been the ‘Equal Pay Act’ in Civil Rights.” Therefore, according to Ana, the glass ceiling still exists, especially with disparity in wages. “Men are strong and decisive when bargaining for a contract. The female is not. They tend to settle for less. The male is more aggressive there.”

Christina also feels that the glass ceiling exists. She feels this occurs even more in non-urban areas. She feels that the difference lies that in urban areas Latinas have more opportunities because that is where the high concentration of Latinos mostly live. Thus the opportunity for Latinas to become superintendents is driven by need.

The glass ceiling still exists for many of the participants in this study. The “boys’ club” seems to still play a subtle role in the lives of the participants. They account for disparities in the manner the women are treated when among their male counterparts. One

of the participants cited differences in wages for male superintendents versus female superintendents as an example that the glass ceiling still surfaces in positions of power.

Overcoming Barriers

After I asked the participants how they overcame barriers while trying to reach the position of the superintendency, Anastasia recalled the following:

I was clearly told whom I was overseeing and I was clearly told that I had to, but the one barrier that I think happened to me was I really didn't know all the personalities that well. There was a director of grants, who was well liked by the superintendent, and I had clashes with her because I was her boss and that caused some friction with the superintendent. I spoke to the superintendent about it, you know, but I'm sure she was the one who first told him about her concerns. And that was the beginning of problems that we had, the superintendent and I.

Anastasia saw this as a political barrier, yet she understood the situation as one of which to be cautious.

The barrier Jennifer experienced and overcame was one of ageism. Jennifer is considered young among her counterparts in the superintendency. She has been judged for this over and over again. She feels her age is a factor for judgment by others. She says her colleagues are the worst because they're the ones "who say things like, 'Ah, you know you don't know that yet. You haven't been there yet.' Or, 'What do you know? You're young, you know. You're a baby. I've heard that many times, 'You're a baby.' And, I think to myself, No. You shouldn't really judge me by the way I look." Jennifer says that for her this is something she constantly thinks and worries about. She wants others to look at her for who she is as a professional. Jennifer overcomes this barrier by being firm to her colleagues that her age has nothing to do with her

work, and she decides to redirect her energies into being the best professional she can possibly be.

Sara says that it has always been that Latinos are the “new kids on the block” because for generations it has been Italians and other ethnic groups where people know each other, and Latinos, for example, are left out. It is hard to break that barrier, and in a way that’s a challenge.

Sara’s words of advice are as follows:

Work up the ranks. If you’re a good teacher, word spreads. People will say, “She’s fair,” and they will work harder for you. I’ve been in education for thirty-four years and have friends who work harder for me, because they respect me doing the right thing. If you can sleep at night, you know you did the right thing at all times.

In Ana’s school district, historically nothing has been done differently. As a result, there are barriers towards her in the community. She speaks of her accent and how people in the community have made a correlation with her amount of curriculum and instruction knowledge to her not pronouncing English well. This is one of the perceptions of the community. They say, “How can a leader not pronounce words correctly?”

Ana says that one just has to overpass certain barriers and put them aside. Latinas must be resilient, strong willed, let things bounce, and not take things personally. “You grow everyday, learn, move on, and leave it in the past.” Yes, many times people have stated that Ana’s “not from this culture, not born and raised here, what does she know?” Yet, Ana does not let this form a barrier to her accomplishments as the district leader.

Commonalities in the form of barriers did not come in the same examples for my participants, yet barriers were discussed. Common ground came in the form that all the

barriers the participants experienced were overcome due to the strength and resiliency each and every participant expressed, to rid themselves of anything that impeded them from exercising their roles as superintendents.

Women in Leadership

Angela has felt respected in previous positions. However, as a woman, she had always had to prove herself. She feels it was not an issue of being Hispanic, just of being a woman. It is a gender issue. In diverse districts, there are a lot of women principals; yet where she was once assistant superintendent, there were more men than women in the district. She says women are good at taking leadership opportunities and applying their natural strengths, such as organizational skills, being community builders, etc.

Other participants in this study had more to say about Latinas in leadership positions, such as the superintendency, than about women in general.

Latinas in the Superintendency

Angela compared women superintendents other than Latinas to Latina superintendents. She says, “Latina women tend to transfer mother-like qualities to leadership positions.” She also feels that being bilingual/bicultural allows the Latina leader to reach more Hispanic parents, calling this a “legacy of care.” There is an emotional exchange in overcoming traditions when minorities are in the superintendency, especially in urban areas. There is giving back to the community, a common language, focus on diversity, and reaching at-risk youth.”

Elena “doesn’t like to generalize” but thinks the following:

Latinas are nurturing in nature. As Latinos, our tendency is to be
Community- and family-oriented. We care about feelings. Now, we
have to cultivate it sometimes. I witnessed people that . . . Latinas or

Latinos, in general, that reach positions of power, and they forget about the importance of serving. To me, leading and serving go hand in hand. You know, it's a service. You're providing a service to your community, to the schools, to the country. So, I think it has to be cultivated some, but for us as Latinos it's almost like part of our nature to be caring and nurturing.

Ana's opinion is that Latinas are very open to what needs to get done. "Males sugarcoat more; females' communication skills are different. They are humanistic in that they're open and more direct when they communicate." Yet, when it comes to being superintendent, "nationality has nothing to do with it."

There is no questioning that my participants felt that Latinas should have a place in the superintendency. They narrated the importance and the dire necessity of having a person to whom Hispanic children can relate in an educational setting that resembles them. This is also due to the characteristics that Latinas have, making their positions as superintendents even more fruitful for the communities they serve.

Research Question 3: What personal attributes assisted Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents to secure their positions?

Personal Attributes

In order to be successful in a position such as the superintendency, candidates have to have certain attributes. Upon interviewing the participants and asking what they think their personal attributes are, their responses are as follows:

Jennifer says that the ability to see the entire picture of something is important. Even more important is the ability to be flexible, to be humble, and to be reflective

because everyday one learns something new. Jennifer says that in this role (district leader), one needs to understand that part of one's job is to build leaders who are cooperative. She thinks that it is really important to know that it is okay if one does not have the answer. What is important is how to find the answer and follow through.

Elba says that what is important is to remain a lady and a professional. That is it. "That's it for me. I think my number one has always been to be courteous and always a professional. I don't want to say dress like a lady, but I like more of a professional flair in my dress and in my way of addressing people consistently." She adds, "It is lonely at the top. You don't have a lot of friends. You have colleagues." That is how she sees it. Outside of her work world, Elba has friendships and family. She states that one cannot survive at the central office level unless one is professional, collegial, and not involved in any cliques because people will know anything and everything about you.

Sara's personal attributes include knowing how to react with a very calm demeanor.

Three major things happened to her:

1. The vice-principal at her school died in the school due to a stroke.
2. On another occasion she had to evacuate the building because of a gas leak. Due to great communication off site, the situation was handled very well.
3. September 11 occurred; and even though she was afraid, she went into "command mode," which means the more organized and calm one is, the better people react.

Sara says these things come up; it is how one handles them that counts:

It sets the tone for people around you. If you panic, they panic. Setting the tone of the building and the school district is key. Letting parents and the community

know that safety is the first thing we want for our children, and education is just as important. If you take it from there, the community will trust you.

Overall, the decisions she has made were very positive. “I like to think things through when I need to make a quick decision I do, but I’d rather think about it,” she says. “This shows strength,” she adds. “When an individual reacts and doesn’t think about options or consequences, that’s when problems arise. You need to study things. Think overnight and analyze them, then make the best decision possible.”

Another of Sara’s attributes is being a “people person.” “When I go to a building, I say hello to the janitors, secretaries, etc. It makes you approachable.” She takes a “pulse” of what’s going on at the school and community. She enjoys speaking with parents. She built relationships with parents when she was a supervisor, principal, etc. Why? Sara states because they are her biggest supporters. She addresses their concerns by forming a committee to resolve questions parents come up with. “They appreciate that,” she states.

It is important when administrators know the problems in a community because they lived with them. It’s not someone from the outside who doesn’t know. Communication with the community is key. Administrators in an ivory tower without consulting with teachers or the community, where there is no dialogue, won’t get the support they need for their decisions.

Agreements need to be made. Administrators need to consult with the community because the community might have a point of view that you didn’t think of.

According to Christina, being very experienced is a plus for becoming a superintendent. There are a tremendous amount of responsibilities to a superintendent’s job. As an educational leader, she says, “You have to care very much of your education. You have to encourage leaders

to lead and be educational leaders.” She likes creating new leadership opportunities, even for teachers, especially for Latinas where normally they are not called to do that. Her personal attributes include learning how to work with her school board. Although challenging, she has learned to form positive relationships with board members. This then enables her to get her goals met. The key is getting their support in order for her to effectuate her goals.

My participants mentioned many personal traits and shared what makes them attributes to live by when in the superintendent’s position. They had similar stories to share about collegiality, collaborative efforts, creating opportunities for others, and serving others as key characteristics that enabled them to succeed in their jobs as instructional leaders.

Mentoring and Networking

Mentoring and networking played an active role in the responses of the participants. For example, mentoring served as support and inspiration for Angela. She felt that if another woman can do the job of a superintendent, so could she. Angela sought ways to improve herself through networking with other women. She felt that in this way she could shed old ideologies of what she could or could not do.

Maria offers her ideas on mentoring as follows:

Assistant superintendents or superintendents need to have that support not only during the first year but also the second year on the job by looking at a mentoring plan system with them that will allow that superintendent to truly be nurtured and recognized, guided, encouraged in a way that he or she can continue to grow. A good mentor is going to be critical. Someone who is going to be also really honest in terms of progress that is being made/progress that is not being made, offering alternate solutions, possibly introducing the new superintendent/assistant

superintendent to new resources that they may be able to tap. Otherwise, a mentoring program is just not going to be beneficial, and it's not going to help the individual.

Maria was happy to have been part of the Aspiring Superintendent Institute at Seton Hall University, which was an incredible opportunity for her to really network and work closely with superintendents who were in the field and learn from them, in terms of what to do and maybe sometimes what not to do. She says that anything that can be done to further build a foundation that will build up confidence is important. Maria says, "At times, while working with administrators, particularly Hispanic ones, I see that they're lacking confidence, which may become a problem in the sense that it will impact the work that they do and their decision-making. That's why it is critical they engage in networking opportunities."

Jennifer claims to have been very fortunate in her life to have women in this profession who were mentors and great leaders. She describes mentorship as follows:

I think mentorship is two things. I think you can always have a mentor, you know, that can guide you, that can help you understand different policies, different procedures, what the law is, and how you should take care of something. But, I think that having it be a woman and having to build a connection with a mentor is very powerful. It kind of likes shifts the relationship. Where you begin to listen to your mentor and see what your mentor has gone through and you begin . . . sort of like recognize things that you see in her that you see in yourself. The mentor starts becoming a living role model because you think, well here's all the things she did, this is how she sees it,

and she was successful.

Jennifer continues to state that she thinks that mentorship is important, and sometimes the relationship with a leader does not begin as a mentorship. Yet, for her this happened. They were her bosses at one point and then “. . . our relationship kind of shifted, and they became like mentors to me.” She thinks the women that she has encountered as leaders are great! She thinks what makes them great is that they always empowered her and they always gave her the confidence to make her own decisions while guiding her. They let Jennifer make her own decisions and empowered her to make changes or do the things she wanted to do, and Jennifer thinks that is important. She thinks that as women in leadership we need to build. We need to empower potential leaders.

Elba sees mentoring as something she can do to help others. She says that it would have been great to have more mentoring from someone like herself now. She would love to mentor someone. “Yes, I think it’s needed. I try to do that with my students when I teach at the University. I try to mentor them and talk about what they should be doing to get ready. For example, I always say you want to add another line to your curriculum vitae every day.”

However, Ana states that if it is positive mentoring, then can it be fruitful. If a person’s initiative is scorned, then it may dampen the movement. She feels that a mentor should always allow a person to make mistakes and learn from them in a positive way. “If mentoring is controlling,” Ana says, “then it is useless.”

Networking goes hand in hand with mentoring according to the participants in this study. Through networking you meet women that can assist you with advice, support, and mentorship who have years in the field of the superintendency. This is of importance.

Elena favors networking, stating, “Yes, that is important.” She has seen networking at different levels. “There’s networking that can be done for your own development in your own professional growth, and that is the networking where you are going to reach out to other colleagues outside of your district or to colleges because you want to seek your own professional growth.” There is also a different type of networking. Elena says, “That’s my favorite type of networking! And, that is the one where you are going to network with others for the benefit of the school. So for example, I supervise eighteen schools; I am always looking for agencies that are willing to partner with our schools, to move projects forward. I’m looking for grant opportunities. I’m looking for community based-support services that we can offer our families.” She says that this type of networking in an urban setting is crucial because our families and our schools need and deserve to have opportunities to provide services for the families, the students, the teachers, and the school. Therefore, networking, which is community- or partnership-based is very important to her.

Maria agrees. She says we need to build a network for Latina administrator superintendents so they can feel support or just have a place where they can come to have conversations and to have people that they can easily access and view as partners in their journey. Latina leaders could welcome constructive feedback too.

Maria always welcomes feedback and demonstrates self-confidence because according to Maria, “It is a key characteristic that is going to define who you are. Self-confidence has to be there, or it is going to be viewed as a weakness, and it may present other issues. So, I think self-confidence is key but also the knowledge base you must have

to be able to guide a district. It also is not about working alone but being able to tap others to support your work.”

She continues by saying the following:

I think the networking piece is critical. I have never ever declined or not taken advantage of an opportunity that allowed me to learn from others or work with others whether these people were colleagues who worked with me, scholars, and professors, and whoever in whatever setting. I always looked at how that would benefit me in my journey but also would help the overall organization that I served, whether it was a school, a classroom, or a district. What would the benefit be? I am always looking for ways by which I could maximize resources in a way that I learn and grow, but also benefiting those I serve.

Maria has no reservations about reaching out and seeking assistance. Her statement acknowledges this:

We’ve had many, many situations where in fact I remember actually reaching out to a colleague, a scholar, someone that I have had the opportunity to network and learn from. I have no problems in doing that by calling them and saying, “By the way, this is a situation we’re dealing with, this is how I would like to proceed. In your experience, through the work that you’ve done nationally, can you . . . do you have any thoughts? What is your insight? I would love to hear your insight.” And it was just so rewarding to hear, “You are on the right track. Maybe the only recommendation I would make is x, y, z.”

Maria feels that one thing she enjoys is working and supporting others and

anything that one can do to guide the work of new administrators, and that has always been her recommendation that she has made to new administrators. “They need a good mentor because good mentoring is key,” she adds. Sometimes they come from within a school district, sometimes they come from the outside, but it is very important to be able to have discussions that take place as a small group; for example, a group of Latina superintendents who come together on a regular basis to look at common issues. Just having that ability to network, connecting with others, learning from others, you feel comfortable knowing that you have a person that you can reach out to. And, that for Maria was key in her trajectory. “I think, as I said earlier, I certainly was not afraid to contact anyone that I felt might be of help if I found myself deciding on a solution to a problem. They were not little issues. They were big issues. I would ask what do you think? This is what I’m planning to do. Do you have any other ideas? Why not?” Maria sees it as validating but also learning quite a deal more from that contact that you make with that individual. “So, as XXXXXX would say, a rolodex is one of the most important things needed in the work that you do. It’s enabled me to pack people in it.”

On the same note, Anastasia feels that networking (with other superintendents) is definitely important, or finding an association that assists new central office personnel or any type of Latina educator group. Angela concurs, stating that networking makes one privy to players of other districts. Sara says that men have their own network. “Women have to support each other, especially Latina superintendents, because they go through the same thing. Therefore, the network piece is key,” she says.

Christina took a mentoring and networking course for leaders in New Jersey. She would love to be a mentor one day and have Latina administrators as her mentees. This way she can

share through her pain and wisdom. Christina never had a mentor while in leadership. She said she “learned through the school of hard knocks.” That is why she places value in mentorship. She does do a lot of networking though. The day of our interview Christina was in Salem County with superintendents from across the state that get together once a month to network. She says that approximately six years ago she belonged to a network of Latina administrators, yet that dissipated. The group she now belongs to is sponsored by Panasonic and is a great ethnically diverse group of superintendents from all over New Jersey.

Mentoring and networking went hand in hand for the participants. They felt the strong need of having mentors who could guide them through the responsibilities of being a superintendent. While the majority of my participants did not have mentors, they sensed a longing for one and voiced they could have benefited from one in the early stages of their careers as superintendents. Networking was seen as a key element to establishing contacts with other superintendents who lead similar school districts to simply bounce ideas from or to associate with on educational issues at hand.

Work Ethic

When it comes to work ethic, Elena had the longest response. She says that it takes developing because in this work one can be scrutinized and one can be questioned. “You need ‘thick skin.’” Elena thinks that what she has found is that women that want to pursue a position like the superintendency must think of what it is that is a non-negotiable in their emotional and intellectual being. To her, the non-negotiables involve integrity. “That is something that I will never be willing to compromise; your work ethic—that’s a non-negotiable—that you are in this with your heart and that your work ethic speaks for itself, and you must be willing to lead by example. You cannot ask anyone that you supervise to do something you wouldn’t do yourself.”

That is, as a principal, how she led her school. She did not have second thoughts about taking a mop and mopping the floor if it needed to be mopped. She would not think twice about it. As a principal, Elena still taught in the classroom. She would do demo lessons for her teachers. She would even cover a class for her teachers if she needed to.

Another adjective describing Elena's leadership is "servant" leadership. She is a strong believer of this. After asking Elena what servant leadership is, she gave me the following definition: "Servant leadership is that concept that to lead you must be able to serve first. A leader is truly a server. It's someone that is in a leadership position, in a powerful position, not to use the power to say you know, 'oh! I'm powerful!' It's about I have this power and therefore how can I use it to serve others?" When Elena does her superintendent duties, she looks to serve others. "I look to serve my principals. What can I do to facilitate their work? What can I do to serve them in a capacity that will allow them to bring their buildings to a level of success that makes them proud? What can I do to serve the parents that come to my office looking for a better school or for a better opportunity for their children? How do I serve my community when I do this work?" Servant leadership is about that. It's about being a leader that decides to serve.

Ana states that resiliency is important. Her work ethic involves having a human touch, a humanistic approach to leadership. She also says that being a person of character is just as important. Ana leads with her heart. When she speaks, she is truthful and people see that. "You will come up as a leader with sound decisions, direct, and with good judgment—a true professional with a deep desire to accomplish." She says, "Always do your best and be your biggest cheerleader because it is very lonely at the top. Sometimes success is being by yourself."

Christina says she has learned to prioritize a lot so she sees the big picture. She says that focusing on positive communication with people and trying to listen more and help whenever she

can is most important to her. Collaborating with people to come up with better solutions is key instead of coming up with what she thinks is better for the school district alone.

When it comes to work ethic, commonalities in the participants revolved around being optimistic and showing professionalism. This was in the form of servant leadership, being the best leaders they can possibly be and looking for the good in others. Embracing their integrity was a key component as well.

Participants' Recommendations

My participants were open to provide insight to other Latinas aspiring to lead school districts. They had the following recommendations:

1. Do not feel afraid to show people your true self.
2. If you do not know something, feel free to ask.
3. If you respect someone, tell him or her you respect him or her and show it.
4. If you see something good in someone, acknowledge that. Elba says, "Do not be afraid to share that sort of recognition with others because when you do that, people will work for you. They will support you at the time you need it because that's what the work world is."
5. Give and take with people—negotiate.
6. Keep rapport with parents. Deliver messages of children's strengths and weaknesses.
7. See the glass as always half full! For Elba, this means seeing the good in people versus the bad. Always looking for the positive instead of the negative. Thinking in terms, for example, that "the vast majority of the people that worked here today in this district were trying to do a good job."

8. Learn as much as possible. Get a Ph.D. Preparation will open doors and make you a stronger professional, according to Elena. Christina reiterates this statement by adding, “To be very well educated with excellent credentials will open doors.” Expose yourself to as many leadership positions as possible. This helped her to handle the job of superintendent when the opportunity came to her.
9. Handle relationships with care for the sake of helping students improve.
10. Hire your team. Ana says, “Surround yourself with people that know as much or more than what you know to make a team decision. Consult and research.”
11. Don’t say no to challenges.
12. Relax.

Chapter Summary

Certainly the position of superintendent is not only one of power but also one of responsibility to the public. There are countless duties prescribed by educational policies, the rules and regulations of the commissioner of education and laws and regulations of the United States. Operating a school district effectively requires strong networking skills. Good relationships allow for the overall success of a superintendent along with solid academic and career preparation.

Becoming a superintendent is not a race to the top but rather an eventful journey. Although the position may still be rooted in male dominance, its doors are opening for women, specifically Hispanic women. Latinas must recognize that the superintendency is not out of their reach. As one of my participant’s states, “Latinas need to use their gift of endurance, embrace it, and run with it.” There are no barriers or social injustices that can stop a Latina willing to succeed. There are fewer challenges today to attain the uppermost position in school

administration. If Latinas come through the ranks and are academically equipped, then no one and nothing today can stop them from doing so.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter includes the conclusions and the discussion of the findings to the responses of three research questions related to exploring the challenges faced by Latinas in New Jersey when seeking the superintendency; in addition, it discusses gaining insight into how current Latina superintendents have overcome obstacles in reaching their goals of leading public school districts.

This chapter is formatted into five sections. After summarizing the findings of this study, I discuss their relationship to previous research on the topic of Latina superintendents and make connections to my theoretical framework. The implications section delivers a discussion of how this study's findings can be used to increase the hiring of Latina superintendents. Finally, I complete this chapter with recommendations for further research and for practice.

Summary of Findings

While being a Latina superintendent in New Jersey is now a reality, the numbers are still low. Through the lens of critical race theory (CRT), a conceptual framework used to examine and to understand how race and racism affects students and communities of color (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012) and Latino critical race theory (LatCrit), a branch of CRT that is specific to the experiences or race, racism, and ethnicity of the Latino community (Perez-Huber, 2010), the experiences of nine Latina school leaders were examined, recorded, and analyzed. The study found the participants to be strong humanistic instructional leaders. Even through adversity, the uppermost position in a school district was sought after and awarded to the Latina leaders. Their

struggles, endurance, and passion for education created examples for future Latina leaders willing to excel at positions of power, such the superintendency.

The ethnographic study provided hours of participants' storytelling time to understand their experiences while moving up the ranks to the superintendent's chair. Through qualitative measures, this study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. How do Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents perceive challenges when seeking the superintendency?
2. How have Latinas overcome barriers in becoming superintendents?
3. What personal attributes assisted Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents to secure their positions?

Analysis of interview transcripts provided vivid information regarding the lives of nine Latina superintendents in New Jersey. As a result of this rich data and analysis, major themes emerged: career paths, the hiring process, familial roles, immigrant shifts and role models, challenges, the glass ceiling, overcoming barriers, women in leadership positions, Latinas in the superintendency, personal attributes, mentoring, and networking.

The interviews of the superintendents reflected a strong passion for learning and giving back to their communities. They demonstrated through the interview process their desire to acknowledge other women in their lives that have been inspirational as well as the camaraderie that exists between the participants and their *comadres*, who encouraged them to apply for the superintendency. Similar stories were represented from participant to participant, complementing their journey through the ranks of education, including the importance of mentorship and networking. They shared their desire to become role models for other Latinas, especially young

Latina girls, to see a life beyond menial positions and strive to positions of educational leadership.

The superintendents experienced many challenges throughout their course into leadership, especially obstacles that involved networks of men challenging the Latina superintendents through intimidation, either for being Latina or simply being women. The glass ceiling was a factor in some of the participants' lives, as they mentioned strong male ties and alienation of women in the position of chief school administrator.

Other obstacles participants had to overcome involved caring for their families while balancing the superintendency with home duties, thus playing a strong balancing act between their professional and personal lives. The guilt over being working mothers also played a major role as challenges for the Latina superintendents. Mention of ageism and other adverse situations also formed barriers that needed to be overcome.

The Latinas mentioned the importance of embracing the paradigm shifts in education when it comes to Latino immigrants. The influx of Latino immigrants was discussed and paralleled with the importance of creating avenues and opportunities in education for Latinas championing the cause of equity and success. Being empathetic to immigrant shifts and young students of Hispanic background and of disenfranchised status was another major component in the narratives of the participants. This was a message of working tirelessly to find solutions to Latino/a struggles when it comes to acquiring education. Mentorship for students to advance after high school was also given emphasis by the participants.

The participants identified personal attributes and skills necessary to have for becoming viable candidates for and being in the position of the superintendency. These included having a strong work ethic, parent and community involvement, the ability of being bilingual and having

been “through the struggle,” and the importance of moving up in educational ranks. Although the majority of the superintendents did not have doctoral degrees, the significance of having a doctorate in education was highlighted.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: How do Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents perceive challenges when seeking the superintendency?

Career Paths

The participants in the study mentioned the importance of going through the ranks from teaching positions to the superintendency. The positions included principalships and central office administrative positions, such as department directorships and the assistant superintendency. Holding these sequential positions marked commitment to the school district and the experience necessary to fulfill the position of superintendent. Spending years in the school district or demonstrating growth within a particular school district enhanced the possibility of being promoted to the superintendency. According to Grogan and Brunner (2005a), 45% of women superintendents they surveyed were promoted from within their districts; often the larger the district, the more often the woman will be promoted from inside. Whether a woman is promoted from inside or achieves the position from outside the district, the goal is to keep her successfully working in the position.

Having gone through educational ranks and through professional trajectories allowed the participants to feel less of a challenge in reaching the superintendency. They feel others are willing to work with them and trust in the work they do as superintendents, having already been through experiences that surface in the various positions they have held, thus allowing them to be viable candidates for the position.

The Hiring Process

Researchers have demonstrated that qualified women are actively seeking the superintendency, have the expertise to lead systems, and enjoy the work (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Due to the extensive academic and career-driven background of the participants, getting hired for the superintendent's role was a smooth process, but for one participant. The eight women participants were so involved in their careers as school leaders that they automatically were summoned for the position of superintendent or were the next in line to ascend to the position. In other instances, their *comadres* felt the need to push them to the power position by encouraging them to apply for the position when it became vacant. It is a mix of camaraderie, educational attainment, work experience, and the drive that led the participants to passively circumvent their way into the superintendency, making challenges in the hiring process seem null and void.

Familial Roles

Having family that supported the Latina participants through their ascendancy to the superintendent position was the saving grace for balancing work and personal life while executing the duties of school leadership. From childhood, the passion for education instilled in the participants from their families marked the trail of success into the uppermost position in education. This, coupled with reinforcement in the home that the participant can reach her goal of being in the superintendent position proved useful in becoming successful school administrators. Support has continued to be an important factor for women moving into administration. Most researchers have found that family endorsement and support and mentoring made the difference in encouraging women into principalships, the superintendency, community college presidencies, and other high level positions in education (Alston, 1999; Brunner, 2000,

2003; Edson, 1988; Enomoto, Gardiner & Grogan, 2000; Grogan, 1996, 2000b, 2002; Grogan & Brunner, 2005a, b; Hill & Ragland, 1995; Jackson, 1999; Mendez-Morse, 1999, 2004; Scherr, 1995; Smulyan, 2000; Young & McLeod, 2001).

Immigrant Shifts and Role Models

Like much of the nation, New Jersey has seen its Hispanic population grow at an amazing rate over the last ten years. This is nothing new in a state with long-established Puerto Rican and Dominican communities. What's perhaps most surprising about new United States Census demographic figures, though, is the dramatic jump in the state's Mexican population—which saw its numbers rise by 115,000 people since 2000. Overall, New Jersey's Hispanic population increased by nearly 40% to 1.5 million people. Those identifying themselves as Hispanic now represent almost 18% of the state—an increasingly larger voting block with political implications for the future (deVries & Sherman, 2011).

According to new data, there are 55.4 million Hispanics in the United States as of July 2014, an increase of 2.1% from the previous year. Of course that change has not been uniform. In New Jersey, for example, the Hispanic population grew from 1.6 million to 1.7 million between 2010 and 2016 compared to the non-Hispanic population, which has remained stationary at 7.2 million. The surge in Latinos moving to the Garden State has helped New Jersey's overall population grow from 8.8 million to 8.9 million over the last four years, with the counties close to New York City seeing the largest growth in their Hispanic populations (Fox News Latino, 2015).

The migration of Latinos into New Jersey translates into a burgeoning population of school age Latinos/as in public schools (Malott, 2009). This is a paradigm shift that is necessary to address for educators to become prepared to teach in culturally responsive ways and to address

Latino/a school leaders. The Hispanic population in the United States is uniquely poised to play a more significant leadership role domestically and internationally (Ramirez, 2006, p. 85).

It is with pride that Latina participants in the study recalled the need to have, in their words, “Latinas as role models,” especially for young girls who may emulate them. Gonzalez’s (2007) statement that there is a benefit to having Latina females lead our schools is indeed justifiable. The participants felt that due to their ethnic backgrounds and common experience, they would be champions at giving back to their communities while serving as agents for change. The participants “served with a social justice agenda,” working tirelessly to eliminate the achievement gap, promoting a safe and viable educational setting, and providing leadership and mentorship to all stakeholders (Ramsey, 2014, p. 150). They seek the job of superintendent out of interest, confidence, and a desire to make schools better for children (Beekley, 1999, p. 161). Mendez-Morse’s (2004) study of Latina school administrators found that Latinas entered the realm of administration due to their desire to make a difference in the lives of Latino/a students in response to their personal experiences.

Research Question 2: How have Latinas overcome barriers in becoming superintendents?

Challenges

Challenges came in the form of a tug of war among recently-appointed Latina superintendents with their colleagues, in the form of personality clashes, intimidation, being categorized by age, or simply for being Latina. Other participants’ challenges came in the form of holding off on acquiring doctoral degrees.

The obstacles faced by the Latina participants proved to be minimal when they used their strengths of endurance and resiliency. Using problem-solving skills, keeping an optimistic

attitude, and showing their value through their work ethic proved to be the remedy when handling the challenges the participants encountered.

The Glass Ceiling

Mention was made throughout the narratives of the Latina participants of the reality of the glass ceiling still existing today. Although it is not an overt practice, men have their social networks where women are excluded. The notion of leadership positions being solely for males is reflected by the alienation of women in conversations among male leaders. Women's viewpoints, although expressed, are not adhered to. Worse on other occasions, women not being privy to actions made by their male counterparts until after the decisions are made. Tallericco (2000) conducted qualitative research of superintendent candidates, 'headhunters,' and school board members. She found social prejudices, gender stereotyping, and androcentric or ethnocentric constructions of leadership, and certain ideologies that...narrow the flow channels to the superintendency for those who are not White males (p. 32). As Blanco (2013) notes, Latinas have a choice to smash the glass and to overcome the glass ceiling.

Overcoming Barriers

Overcoming the barriers or obstacles Latinas experiences during their superintendency was accomplished through demonstrating education and not fighting those who challenged them. The participants used their work as a vehicle to demonstrate their effectiveness and competency for the position of superintendent. They did not let adversity get the best of them during those difficult times. As one of my participants stated, she remained "a lady."

One of the participants has met racism face to face. She feels that once board members, especially the males, found out she is Latina, they completely turned on her. The way the

participant handled this was by working with those who wanted to work with her and not letting the situation continue being an issue to her. She developed what many described as “thick skin.”

Women in Leadership

Being a female leader brings qualities to leadership that are different from men's. Mother-like qualities for female leaders make it an advantage for collaborative efforts to take place. *Mamisma* occurs. She leads a school district as she would take care of her family, as Brunner and Grogan (2007) state. Haar, Raskin, and Robicheau (2009) are strong believers that women bring different qualities to leadership. They are experts in instruction and curriculum, embracing challenges of reform and change, and have interpersonal skills traits necessary for leadership.

As females, the participants form a legacy of care into their superintendency, making a difference in their leadership styles compared to their male colleagues. The female leaders' nurturing qualities, such as patience, allow them to think in different ways and look closely at fulfilling the socio-emotional as well as academic aspects of the student, therefore, viewing different ways to assist the whole child. As Washington, Miller, and Rene postulate, women superintendents work on the basis of children first.

Research has also emerged that shows that women's leadership styles are often more collaborative and facilitative than those of male leaders. They are interested in moving the best idea forward, not necessarily their idea forward (Brunner, 1997; Grogan, 1996; Grogan & Smith, 1998; Gupton & Slick, 1996; Hill & Ragland, 1995; Marshall, Patterson, Rogers & Steele, 1996; Regan & Brooks, 1995). Brunner (1998) discovered that women separated themselves from the definition of power as control, authority, or dominance over others. Genuine collaboration occurs when all participants are considered equals (p. 156). Female superintendents tend to build more

interpersonal relationships by interacting with all stakeholders, especially members of the board of education (Gilmour & Kinsella, 2008).

Latinas in the Superintendency

Tying their work ethic to their ethnicity and gender was a theme throughout the ethnographic study. Latina superintendents feel that they bring even more important qualities to leadership than their own female counterparts. The theme of “understanding the struggle” of other people like them (*familialism*) and giving back to their communities was evident throughout the narratives. They were aware that their ethnicity plays a major role in their actions while in the superintendent’s seat.

Being bilingual, understanding the hardships of being raised Hispanic, and speaking a common language of support were among the topics of discussion when the participants described themselves as Latina leaders. Forming links between the school district and the community, involving all stakeholders, was common ground for the participants. Allowing the community to have a voice in their children’s education was a key component to their leadership. They characterized themselves not only as instructional leaders but as servants of leadership—*marianistas* as Gil and Vazquez (1996) call it. According to Greenleaf (1970), the servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served— analogous to a mother feeding her child before she feeds herself.

Research Question 3: What personal attributes assisted Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents to secure their positions?

Personal Attributes

The personal attributes that assisted Latina superintendents to secure their positions include the following: collaboration, professionalism, and being a “people person.”

Collaboration was one of the major traits seen by the participants as a means to succeed in the superintendency. Collaborative efforts like involving stakeholders in planning sessions and before making big decisions were stated as important to gain trust and respect from others, especially from the communities they serve. These efforts were seen as best practices and strategies to keep the relationships flourishing among the superintendent, board members, and the community at large. In this venue, everyone is held accountable for student achievement.

Collaborative relationships reflect the needs and strengths of the district, schools, and community stakeholders. As Collins (1987) mentions, Hispanic women bring personal and cultural attributes that may be politically and symbolically useful. Educators in the system develop and nurture a professional culture and collaborative relationships marked by professional learning, mutual respect, and trust inside the organization, between and among parts of the organization, and outside the organization (Bergeson, 2004, p. 45). The collaborative work creates a feeling of team building where leadership opportunities are developed. Fullan (2004) postulates that teams work together to develop clear, operational understandings of their goals and strategies, fostering new ideas, skills, and a shared commitment to districtwide development (p. 44).

Remaining a professional in times of crisis by keeping calm and collected was noted as another important attribute of the women participants. Thinking things through and weighing

possible outcomes is what the Latina participants pride themselves on when speaking of their personal traits that assist them when executing their duties and responsibilities as superintendents. Keeping a professional demeanor allows the Latina superintendents to see the big picture and balance consequences of their decisions.

Having the unique quality of being a “people person” with great communication skills is an additional personal attribute of the Latina superintendents. Having authentic conversations with others and being genuine is key to creating good relations with others and a trait worth having to succeed in the superintendency.

Mentoring and Networking

Having support through mentoring by making connections with other superintendents through networking is a major endeavor seen as effective in the superintendency of Latinas. Being able to seek advice and insight from other Latina superintendents in the field and learning from them is an essential component of successful leadership. Méndez-Morse (2004) has emphasized that the single most important way to support the development of Latina superintendents was in the development of mentors and mentoring relationships.

The participants in the study were not given as much mentoring as they would have liked, yet see mentoring as a tool to reach out to other Latina superintendents and form partnerships to help each other in their journeys throughout the superintendency. They felt mentoring and networking go hand in hand to assist them in growing professionally while helping others and allowing others to help them find alternate solutions to problems or to help them in supporting their actions along the way to the superintendency. Quilantan and Menchaca-Ochoa (2004) found in their study of Latina superintendents that when Latinas had access to a mentor, it was a critical factor in their professional attainment. According to Grogan and Brunner (2005), being

connected is important for women in general; data suggests it is more important for women of color.

Work Ethic

Caring, respect, and community service were mentioned as work ethic examples by the Latina participants. Caring for the profession and the children they served marked the biggest impact of their lives as superintendents. The passion for the job was in eliminating the achievement gap of students, thus leading with their hearts.

Having non-negotiables that revolve around integrity and being truthful to self and others marked the respect the superintendents manifest towards those they serve and those to whom they respond. Those non-negotiables make up the ethic of care they have towards the profession.

Participants' Recommendations

The Latina participants felt it necessary to make recommendations to future Latina aspirants to the superintendency. They felt the need to offer advice to up-and-coming Latina superintendents to assist them with their search. They also expressed their desire to see more Latinas in superintendent positions, therefore making recommendations to other Latinas interested in the top school leadership position. The recommendations included being true to self, not feeling afraid to ask questions, showing respect, acknowledging the good in others and commending others for it, not being afraid to negotiate, creating strong ties with parents, being optimistic, continuing their studies towards a doctorate in education, building relationships, and never saying no to opportunities.

Recommendations for Policy

The need for Latina superintendents across the country suggests that there is a substantial opportunity for growth in terms of educational executive positions among members of this ethnic

minority (Gilmour & Kinsella, 2008). Cultural markers that define Latinas provide a rich opportunity to effectuate a quality of leadership being promoted in the current social, economic, and political milieu (Hardy-Fanta et al., 2007; Hite, 2007; Holvino & Gallegos, 2008; Kellerman & Rhoades, 2007; Munoz, 2010; Wilkerson, 2009).

There is no time like the present to increase Latina superintendents in New Jersey. As more and more Latinos come to New Jersey, it is imperative that they have culturally responsive leaders on their side. Advocates for social justice and change need to be present and who better to make those changes than Latina superintendents, given their nurturing qualities and ethic of care, and their personal attributes complementing the Hispanic culture and community, as Collins (1987) suggests.

This study has shown that Latina leaders are and can be successful and that more of them need to be in the superintendency since they have the skill set to close the achievement gap for Latino/a students, and ensure that tomorrow's workforce is well prepared. The number of Latina instructional leaders must be exponentially increased to mirror the student populace (Ramsey, 2014, pp. 161-162). The data findings of this study demonstrate the need for more opportunities for Latinas seeking the superintendency and for school districts to make this happen for them. Policies are needed for creation of preparation programs to assist Latinas with securing the credentials needed for the superintendency in New Jersey. Policies should be implemented by school districts for recruitment of Latinas into top school leadership positions, and also for retention of such.

Creation of Preparation Programs

Preparing Latinas to lead school districts is important, and more programs should be created in New Jersey to assist Latinas interested in the superintendency. Providing orientations

and professional workshops regarding licensure for chief school administrator positions would prove beneficial. The state should (a) partner with traditional and Latina-focused teacher and administrator associations, (b) promote administrator preparation programs with an emphasis on social justice, (c) create policies that increase alternative administrator preparation programs, and (d) provide financial assistance via grants for Latinas to enter leadership, as Ramsey (2014) suggests.

The following solution outlined by Méndez-Morse (2004) is that individuals teaching in educational leadership programs could form partnerships with district leaders or school board members to have conversations about any persons of color and women of color who are exhibiting leadership skills at the campus or district level and to examine the institutions' recruitment efforts.

Recommendations for Practice

New Jersey Public School Districts

New Jersey public school districts should consider qualified Latinas for the superintendency and do so by mobilizing their efforts to actively recruit Latinas into leadership positions where Latinas can grow into the superintendency if the position is not vacant at the time. Also, a safe place needs to be created where Latina leaders can network, support one another, share best practices, and advocate for improving the quality of education for Latino students (AHSAA, 2013). Tamez (2011) suggests developing mentoring programs to place Hispanic females in leadership roles as superintendents of schools (p. 34). School districts need to be proactive to enable the number of Latinas in superintendent seats rise.

Retention of Latina Superintendents

Mentoring programs that allow for the growth of Latinas in positions like the chief school administrator are needed to help retain the women in their positions. Magdaleno (2006) states that implementing and sustaining an administrator mentoring support program that improves the probability of success for future Latina educational leaders is essential. Learning from mentors who have gone before them and who share significant learning through personal experience brings added value to program participants and makes position success and sustainability more likely to occur (Magdaleno, 2011). Dreher and Cox further this argument by stating that the formation of a mentoring relationship has clearly been shown to have positive career effects for the protégé. Previous research has found that mentoring is related to advancement in organizations, organizational influence, salary attainment, and satisfaction with salary and benefits (1996). Networking opportunities should also be considered.

Recommendations for Further Research

Latinas being in the superintendency is not a prevalent topic in the literature even though the numbers of Latinas in said position has risen. There is a necessity of having Latinas in these executive school-level positions, and mention must be made in the literature, especially with today's influx of Hispanic immigrants.

Suggestions for further research include exploring the areas of hiring practices of school boards in New Jersey for securing and retaining Latina superintendents, career preparation programs for future Latinas, and mentoring and networking associations that assist Latinas to pursue school leadership positions, such as the superintendency. In a study conducted by Magdaleno (2010), key findings were as follows: (1) a positive professional and personal relationship between the school board and the superintendent is critical to position tenure, (2) the

superintendent position is intensely isolated, and (3) research should be extended to other participants.

Conclusion

It is time to advance Latinas into the superintendency in New Jersey, given the numbers of Latinos/as migrating to the state. Immigrant children are our future citizens and labor force. An organizational need is essential to drive the agenda of hiring and retaining Latinas in top educational positions such as the superintendency. Latinas in chief school administrator positions can serve as role models to represent an influential message of success in schools of high Hispanic population.

The conceptual framework used in this study involved critical race theory (CRT) and LatCrit, which aim to center Latinos/as' multiple diversities to promote social justice and activism. The study's results mirrored critical race theory and LatCrit in that the law and policy in fostering the transformation of the superintendency to one where Hispanic women can rise in numbers is justified. By using these conceptual frameworks in drawing the experience of the lives of participants, awareness and activism through policy and practice is promoted.

The ethnography produced in this study focused on adding to the literature regarding the rise of Latina superintendents and the chance to have conversations that would shed light on how future aspirants to the superintendency can do so. The study examined challenges in obtaining the superintendency, barriers that Latinas had to overcome, personal attributes needed to be successful as a superintendent, and recommendations for success.

Nine Latina participants granted their time, through their busy schedules, to make this study come alive. The participants spoke candidly about their willingness to cooperate with the study and voiced the importance of having such a study flourish. From the conversations with the

participants, the following themes surfaced: career paths, the hiring process, familial roles, immigrant shifts and role models, challenges, the glass ceiling, overcoming barriers, women in leadership positions, Latinas in the superintendency, personal attributes, mentoring, and networking. As a result, their efforts can add to the literature on the topic of Latina superintendents in New Jersey and also aid policymakers in establishing norms to assist future candidates to the superintendency as well as retain current Latina superintendents.

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Appendix A

LETTER OF SOLICITATION

Date

Candidate's Name

Superintendent

School District's Name

School District's Address

Dear Colleague:

My name is Nurka Liz Nieves. I am currently employed as a lecturer at Kean University. In addition to lecturing, I am a doctoral student in the College of Education and Human Services, Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy, at Seton Hall University.

I am interviewing current and former Latina superintendents, in New Jersey public school districts. The purpose of said study is to explore the challenges faced by Latinas in New Jersey when seeking the superintendency; in addition, gaining insight on how current Latina superintendents have overcome barriers in reaching their goals of leading public school districts.

I am inviting you participate in a one in-depth interview, which could be audio recorded. The audio recording is optional, based on your consent. I anticipate that the interview will take no more than thirty minutes. It will take place at your current site of employment.

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. If at any time you decide that you do not want to participate in this study, you can simply withdraw.

The study will be conducted face-to-face with me. There will be no identifying data on you, since you will be asked for a pseudonym to conceal your identity. Before interviewing, the pseudonym will be used in the beginning of the audio recording, if you give permission to do so, otherwise notes will be taken instead.

If you are willing to become part of my study, or have questions as to your right as a human subject, please feel free to reach me at (973) 761-9397 or email at nurka.nieves@student.shu.edu by [end date]. Your support and participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Nurka L. Nieves, Ed.S.

Doctoral Student Seton Hall University

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The researcher is Nurka L. Nieves, Ed.S. Doctoral Student at Seton Hall University, College of Education and Human Services, Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy, Executive Ed.D. Program.

Purpose:

The purpose of said study is to explore the challenges faced by Latinas in New Jersey when seeking the superintendency; in addition, gaining insight on how current Latina superintendents have overcome barriers in reaching their goals of leading public school districts.

Procedures:

Subjects will participate in a one in-depth interview. If permission is given to be audio recorded it will be done, otherwise the researcher will take notes. The interview will take no more than thirty minutes and will take place at participants' current site of employment. In the beginning of the interview, the researcher will provide reasoning of the basis for her research. The interview protocol will begin as follows: the participant will be asked to provide a pseudonym, by which will be used when transcribing the audio recording. The beginning set of questions will consist of their employment status, as current or former superintendent, the kind of school district they lead or have led (i.e. urban, suburban, or rural), years as a superintendent, and the last position held before becoming a superintendent/assistant superintendent. The researcher will then proceed to ask her research questions, such as:

1. How do Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents perceive challenges when seeking the superintendency?
2. How have Latinas overcome barriers in becoming superintendents?
3. What personal attributes assisted Latina superintendents/assistant superintendents to secure their positions?

Voluntary Nature of Participation:

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary and participants do not have to answer any questions they do not want to. If at any time the participant decides that she does not want to participate in this study, she can withdraw by just saying so with no penalty.

Anonymity:

The study will be conducted face-to-face with the researcher. There will be no identifying data on participants, since they will be asked for a pseudonym to conceal their identities. Before interviewing, the pseudonym will be used in the beginning of the audio recording or note-taking from the researcher. Only audiotapes and a recorder will be used, during the interviews, if given

permission by the participant to do so.

The researcher will then transcribe the recordings and keep the data in a USB memory key. Please note: only the dissertation committee, faculty advisor at Seton Hall University, and the researcher will have the right to listen to the audiotapes and have access to all materials. Once the interviews are transcribed, the audiotapes, interview transcripts, and the USB memory key will be kept for 5 years under lock and key with the researcher's faculty advisor, at Seton Hall University. The participants' signed statements of consent will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office for 5 years as well. Upon that time, the audiotapes and the USB memory key will be destroyed. The transcripts and the participants' signed statements of consent will be shredded, in their separate locations.

Potential Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks associated with this research.

Potential Benefits:

There are no direct benefits to participants.

Compensation/Treatment:

No compensation is associated with participation.

Contact Information:

If the participant has questions as to her rights as a human subject, she can contact Seton Hall University IRB at: telephone (973) 313-6314 or email irb@shu.edu.

If the participant has any questions about the research, she can contact the Primary Investigator/Doctoral Student Nurka Liz Nieves, Ed.S. at: telephone (973) 761-9397 or email nurka.nieves@student.shu.edu or her Faculty Advisor Dr. Barbara Strobert at: telephone (973) 275-2324 or email barbara.strobert@shu.edu.

Agreement to Participate:

A copy of this signed and dated Informed Consent form will be provided to you.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Agreement to be Audio-Recorded or Not:

Please checkmark your preference about audio recording:

- I agree to be audio recorded.
- I do not agree to be audio recorded.