

Add Hoop Earrings:
An Examination of the Career Pathways, Supportive Factors,
and Barriers Experienced by Latina Superintendents in the Midwest

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore the career trajectory, supportive factors, and barriers experienced by Latina Superintendents in K-12 public school districts in the Midwest. Latina Superintendents represent only 1% of K-12 Superintendents in the United States. Using a LatCrit framework, this research aims to lift up the voices of Latina leaders who are underrepresented in the Superintendency and academic research. Through the use of *testimonio* and semi-structured interviews, the findings give insight to the lived experiences of Latina Superintendents. The results of this study indicate that Latina Superintendents have a longer journey to the superintendent, a finding aligned with existing research. Key findings from this study include (a.) early experiences navigating predominantly White spaces (b.) the role of family, faith, and collective support (c.) the role of White men along the career path (d.) Latina identity as an asset in diverse and changing communities (e.) armoring up with academic and professional qualifications (f.) leadership roles and recognition beyond the district (g.) finding solidarity and support through Superintendent networks (h.) experiencing bias and discrimination at key career milestones (i.) bias related to physical appearance (j.) reclaiming identity through physical appearance (k.) navigating bias and discrimination beyond the district walls (l.) intentionally building a diverse staff and (m.) bilingualism as an intentional tool for connection. Findings from this research contribute to the limited body of literature on Latina Superintendents and offer insights and recommendations to help inform practice of key groups with the goal of creating a more representative leadership across public school districts in the Midwest and beyond.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

There are over 62,000,000 people in the United States who identify as Hispanic and/or Latino (United States Census Bureau, 2021). Latina/o/xs¹ are the fastest growing demographic group and the largest ethnic minority group in the country. The growing and changing demographics of the nation has had a noticeable impact on the composition of students served in K-12 schools. In Fall 2021, Latina/o/x students comprised 28.4% of all students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022). Representing over a quarter of our nation's K-12 students, the success of Latina/o/x students is important for the future of the country.

America's public schools have generally failed to meet the academic needs of Latina/o/x students, demonstrating a measurable achievement gap reported in both Reading and Mathematics (NCES, 2022). Graduation rates of Latina/o/x students also lag behind other peer groups, including Black and White students (Crawford & Fuller, 2017). With projected growth in the Latina/o/x population over the next decade (NCES, 2002), it is imperative that school districts seek solutions to reaching their increasingly diverse student body. One area to explore in the search for solutions, is a closer examination of those who serve in educational leadership roles.

Over the past thirty years, public education has seen an increase of women and people of color holding leadership positions in schools, yet these groups are still significantly

¹ The term Latina/o/x will be used in this paper as an inclusive term to describe the people living in the United States who have cultural connections to countries in Central and South America (Murakami et al., 2015). Language used to identify Latina/o/xs within the literature review may vary (Hispanic, Latino, Latina, and/or Latinx) to reflect language used in the referenced research and reporting.

underrepresented in K-12 public education (Avalos & Salgado, 2016). As American schools struggle to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse country, school districts need to consider a new pool of candidates to lead schools. As the country diversifies, researchers continue to study and aim to build a greater understanding of why representation in K-12 leadership roles are not changing alongside the people of the nation. Despite the growing population of Latina/o/x students, Latina/o/x educators are not proportionally represented in K-12 public school staff. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), 79% of teachers and 78% percent of principals are White while only 9% of teachers and 9% of principals are Latina/o/x. These statistics point to one potential gap in educating our country's growing and changing student population.

The lack of representation of Latina/o/x teachers and administrators in the field of education, amidst the growing Latina/o/x student population in the United States, is concerning. The percentage of Latina/o/x students enrolled in K-12 public schools is projected to increase over time (NCES, 2022), making the need to address the gap of Latina/o/x educators even more urgent.

The Superintendent position is the most powerful and influential position in a school district. Tasked with the responsibility of instructional leadership, facility management, fiscal oversight, staffing, and community relations (Miles Nash & Grogan, 2022), the Superintendent has the ability to make concerted change and set direction in how a district meets the needs of the students and the community that they serve. Superintendents across our country's schools are not as diverse as the students whom they serve. Latina/o/xs hold less than 2% of district Superintendents positions (AASA: The School Superintendents Association, 2023). Furthermore, despite women comprising a large majority of teachers in the profession, women are

underrepresented in this role, only accounting for 27% of active K-12 Superintendents (AASA: The School Superintendents Association, 2023). The underrepresentation of females and Latina/o/xs serving in the Superintendent role, creates lines of inquiry and sets the stage for the purpose of this study. At the intersection of ethnicity and gender, Latina Superintendents account for only 1% of Superintendents in the country (AASA: The School Superintendents Association, 2023).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of Latina Superintendents and gain a better understanding of their journeys. This study aims to identify the supportive factors and barriers that Latina Superintendents have faced as they ascended the career ladder and acquired the top position in their field.

Research Questions

Guiding questions informing this study:

- (1) What are the professional backgrounds of Latina Superintendents?
- (2) To what or whom do Latina Superintendents attribute their success?
- (3) What challenges have Latinas faced while ascending and serving in the superintendency?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study add to a limited body of research on Latina Superintendents. Aside from a few research studies centered on Latina principals (Martinez et al., 2016; Martinez et al., 2019; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015; Rodela et al., 2019) and Latina central office administrators (Murakami et al., 2018), limited research has been conducted on the experiences of Latina Superintendents. The lack of research in this field, however, has been piquing the

interest of doctoral students. A growing body of student dissertations have emerged over the last decade providing some insight into the experiences of Latino/a/x Superintendents (Carrion-Méndez, 2009; Corona, 2022; Cortes, 2022; Hernandez, 2018; Olivarez, 2019). It is with great hope that the field will see continued interest and studies on Latina Superintendents reflected in the literature in the coming decade.

Sylvia Méndez-Morse (2000), a leader in the study of Latina Superintendents, asserts that Latinas’ “absence from historical accounts or research studies does not mean nonexistence. Rather, it indicates exclusion and neglect and negates the contributions of Latina leaders (p.584).” This study aims to be a microphone that amplifies the voices of Latina Superintendents within the research. The literature whispers notes of knowledge that can pave the way for Latina educators who aspire to serve in this role. Paired with the knowledge of other research studies over the past few decades, this study also creates a window for other educators to learn about the experiences of their Latina colleagues who pursue this career path. The results of this study can provide valuable information to those who have the ability to influence hiring and retention practices in K-12 public schools, including, but not limited to, school boards and search firms.

Methods

To conduct my literature review, I used several library databases including EBSCOHost, ERIC, and Education Research Complete.

I initiated my search using the following terms: Latina AND Superintendent. Despite the broad categories of research that could be encapsulated within both of these search terms individually, when paired together, the terms yielded limited results. For example, after filtering the search to account for only peer-reviewed articles between 1985-2022, the EBSCOHost database retrieved 10 results, only 3 of which were immediately relevant to the research area.

This experience was similar across databases. Mining the literature reviews of the limited studies that I initially found through my search produced additional relevant literature in the subject area.

In addition to the peer-reviewed articles that were obtained through the database search, relevant information from the United States Census Bureau along with the National and State Departments of Education, were used in this review. Key information was also gathered from professional Superintendent and administrator organizations, including AASA: The School Superintendent Organization (formerly American Association for School Administrators). As a result of these processes, I included over seventy sources in this literature review.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

To anchor this study, I will review relevant literature that will inform my inquiry of Latina Superintendents. I will begin with a brief history of the superintendency in K-12 education to provide historical context and clarity of the role. Following that information, I will conduct a comprehensive review of literature that centers the career paths, supportive factors, and barriers reported by women and people of color while aspiring to and serving in the superintendency. Finally, drawing on the limited research available, and including studies of Latina/o/x administrators, I will highlight research that center Latina Superintendents and their experiences.

Through the convergence of these topics, and building an understanding of gaps that exist in the literature, this review will serve as a foundation for the research study.

History of the Superintendency

The Superintendent position has existed in public education for over a hundred years. The idea of a state-level Superintendent began to popularize in the mid-1800s, while the district level Superintendent position became a more common position in the late 1800s (Kowalski, 2013). The role of the district Superintendent has changed over time and context. In the 1800s, as schools began receiving evaluations and transformed from one-room school houses to single grade classrooms, the position of Superintendent became necessary to drive instruction, manage finances, and conduct administrative tasks (Kowalski, 2013). Since then, the field of education has been responsive to numerous political shifts, including high stakes testing and compliance reporting (Björk et al., 2014). Due to local control, which gives states the ability to establish expectations and govern state-by-state, the role of a Superintendent varies across states and regions.

In 1993, AASA: The School Superintendent Organization published standards for Superintendents. These standards include the following categories of practice: leadership and district culture, policy and governance, community relations, organizational management, curriculum development, instructional management, human resources management, and values/ethics (AASA, 2013). The responsibilities of a school Superintendent are contained within each of these areas, though the priority areas may vary depending on school district context.

In a summary of Superintendent roles and responsibilities, Björk et al. (2014) recaps and expands upon the reported responsibilities of a Superintendent. Superintendents across the country were asked to rank the top job functions expected by their school board. In order of importance, the top five responsibilities reported by Superintendents included: communicator, manager, instructional leader, democratic-political leader, and social scientist. Based on the findings of the study (Björk et al., 2014), it is not surprising that being an effective communicator is the most critical role that Superintendents play in their district.

Superintendents are required to provide accurate, thorough, and timely information to all stakeholder groups including the school board, faculty, students, and community members. Following their role as chief communicator, the role of manager is reported by Superintendents as the second most important characteristic. This includes financial responsibilities, compliance with federal and state mandates, staff relations, and accountability. Ranking third, is the Superintendent's role as instructional leader or teacher-scholar. With increased expectations, accountability, and focus on student outcomes, serving as an instructional leader is one of the most important roles that a Superintendent plays. (Björk et al., 2014).

Wearing many hats, Superintendents play a large role in managing both the operational and instructional aspects of K-12 education. Miles Nash and Grogan (2022) indicate that the responsibilities of today's Superintendent is to "govern the instruction, facilities, fiscal, personnel, and community relations matters in ways that comprehensively prioritise students' academic success and social wellbeing [*sic*] (p. 24)." The mention of community relations in Miles Nash and Grogan's research (2022) and the role of Superintendent as Democratic-Political Leader mentioned in Björk's study (2014) reminds us that while serving in the Chief Executive Officer role for the organization, the Superintendent is not the sole decision-maker. The Superintendent is a servant of the community and the publicly-elected school board plays a critical role in overseeing the Superintendent.

Within the United States, school boards often have the authority and responsibility to hire the district Superintendent. School boards have local control; they provide district oversight and make decisions on behalf of the community (Land, 2002). The members of a district's school board are typically elected by the community on staggered terms and the group is typically composed of five to nine members, though some larger districts may have up to fifteen members on their board (Björk et al, 2014). When seeking to fill the Superintendent role, school boards may choose to promote a member of the staff internally or seek to hire a candidate from outside of the organization.

To assist school boards with the process of hiring, boards may seek assistance from consulting agencies often referred to as headhunters or search firms (Chase & Bell, 1990; Tallerico, 2000). These groups are often responsible for key actions in the hiring process including candidate recruitment, candidate screening, and overall structure of the Superintendent search. Oftentimes, headhunters and search consultants who are hired to support the

Superintendent search are former Superintendents themselves (Chase & Bell, 1990). Contracted search firm consultants are uniquely positioned to influence a district's search and have power coupled with influence in who gets hired. School board members and search consultants are two groups who are critical participants in and decision-holders for Superintendent hiring (Chase & Bell, 1990; Tallerico, 2000). School boards and hiring firms are influential in maintaining or shifting the current demographics of those who serve in the Superintendent role.

According to the American Superintendent 2020 Decennial Study (Tienken & Domenech, 2021), the modal Superintendent in the United States is a married, White male. Furthermore, this man has prior experience serving as a principal and is currently holding two to eight years of experience in the Superintendent role. The study reports that 72.9% of Superintendents are males compared to 26.7% females. Only 8.2% of Superintendents in the United States identified as a race other than White. There have been small, positive shifts in the number of women (2.5% increase,) and people of color (2.2% increase) serving in the Superintendent role in the last decade, though the wide gaps in representation are still evident.

Superintendents serve in a wide variety of contexts including urban, rural, and suburban districts. Some work in affluent school districts, while others work in impoverished areas. Some Superintendents are responsible for one school, while others hold responsibility for many schools. White men dominate the Superintendent seats in the nation holding the highest percentage of positions across all contexts (AASA: The School Superintendents Association, 2023).

Contrasted by the diversifying nation in which nearly half of all students served in public schools are students of color (United States Census Bureau, 2021), the current profile of the American Superintendent remains unlike most of the students sitting in desks across the country.

However, the opportunity for change is on the horizon. Only 59.5% of Superintendents who responded to The American Superintendent 2020 Decennial Study survey indicated that they plan to still be serving in a Superintendent role in 2025, with 34% of these folks indicating that they plan on retiring. With over 40% of our nation's Superintendent roles potentially available over the next couple of years, there is room for new leadership and to make strides towards more equitable representation in the role.

Women and the Superintendency

Currently, 26.7% of Superintendents are female (AASA: The School Superintendents Association, 2023), a dramatic increase from the reported numbers twenty years ago. While the number of women serving as Superintendents has increased by only 2.5% between 2010 to 2020, the current numbers are nearly doubled in comparison to the reports in 2000 (AASA: The School Superintendents Association, 2023). Women have made great strides in representation at the Superintendent level over the last two decades, though the number of female Superintendents is still disproportionate in relation to the U.S. population and demographics of the current teaching force.

The study of female superintendents has evolved over the decades, with a resurgence of interest in the field occurring in the 1990s (Björk, 2000). Academia has seen an increased interest in exploring the experiences of women aspiring to and serving in the Superintendent role reflected in the literature. From the available studies, it is evident that women face unique challenges in the superintendency and navigate their jobs differently than men.

Career Pathways

The unique experience of female Superintendents begins long before applying and serving in the Superintendent role. A wide body of research shows that the career pathways to

the superintendency vary distinctly between men and women (Björk et al., 2003; Davis & Bowers, 2018; Kim & Brunner, 2009). In comparison, men typically take a more vertical, direct path to the superintendency while women who serve in the role make more horizontal movement up the career ladder (Kim & Brunner, 2009). Kim and Brunner's study (2009) highlights the pathway that women take throughout their careers, making more lateral moves and spending more time in the roles.

Male Superintendents are more likely to be hired straight out of the principalship than female Superintendents (Björk et al., 2003). Women, on the other hand, often hold a district-level position prior to ascending to the superintendency (Kim & Brunner, 2009). Björk et al. (2003) also found that men were twenty times more likely to move from a teaching position to the superintendency than women. Muñoz et al. (2014) comments on these differentiated career pathways, noting that it appears that male Superintendents may be hired for their potential while women Superintendents are hired for their experience and proven results.

Research about the career trajectories of men and women give insight to the disproportionality that exists between the genders. The idea of a male as the ideal Superintendent for a school district is not a new concept. In the onset of this role in the late 1800s, the first Superintendents were hired because they simply looked like a leader, and districts intentionally attempted to hire a tall man for the role (Kowalski, 2003). This concept is deeply embedded in the history of K-12 public education.

Davis and Bowers (2019) analyzed 15 years of data collected in Texas, comparing demographics and trends of those who achieved their Superintendent certification. The researchers found significant differences in the proportional representation by both sex and race/ethnicity among those who obtained their Superintendent certification and those who later

went on to become Superintendents. White males were overrepresented in this category. Furthermore, the study found that the most common career pathway for male Superintendents was a direct hire from the principalship, while the most common career pathway for females and educators of color was from an assistant Superintendent position. The researchers concur with previous research that shows women and educators of color may have to jump through more hoops than their White, male colleagues while working their way up to the superintendency.

Research shows that women who serve in the superintendency also tend to have more years of classroom experience than men (Maranto et al., 2019). Prior to obtaining an administrative position, Brunner (2003) found that both women and people of color have significantly more teaching experiences in comparison to most Superintendents. Additional time in the classroom means that women and people of color enter the superintendency at an older age than White male Superintendents (Brunner, 2003; Gullo & Sperandio, 2020; Sharp et al., 2004;). The additional time that women and people of color spend in each role throughout their career may be a contributing factor to the low number of people from those groups who go on to achieve the superintendency.

While one may presume that additional years in the classroom can be a benefit to serving in an educational leadership role such as a Superintendent, an extended length of time in the classroom can also be unattractive to school boards and search firms (Brunner, 2003; Tallercio, 2000). Teaching for ‘too long’ can be a turn-off for employers seeking to hire a district leader. A search consultant in Tallercio’s (2000) study made the following comments about length of service in the classroom as related to the superintendency:

My model is [a man who] was a teacher for 3 to 5 years ... Many [others] of them teach too long. When you teach 10, 15, 20 years, you get socialized into the norms of teaching. Now, in my book, administrators *are* teachers. But teach 5 to 8 years, then move on.. Now if you’ve taught for 15 years and haven’t even gotten into a principalship yet, or

some other central office position, when you finally get to that superintendency position, you're 50 years old. (p.73-74).

More years of classroom experience often means less years of administrative experience throughout one's career.

When considering candidates for the Superintendent role, the school board may also be critical of the type of administrative roles that a candidate has held. School boards and Superintendent recruitment firms tend to view candidates with previous positions as a high school principal as more qualified candidates for the Superintendent job (Tallerico, 2000). High school principalship is a male dominated position and this position serves as an evident entry point to the superintendency (Davis & Bowers, 2018; Sharp et al., 2004; Kim & Brunner, 2009). A common viewpoint held by those who hire Superintendents is that the high school principalship allows for better preparation for the superintendency, including the larger size, management of athletic teams, differentiated staff, complex budgeting and other features (Maranto et al., 2019). Pounder and Merrill (2001) found that views on high school principalship, being perceived as a traditionally masculine role, creates some of the 'sex-role congruence' and contributes to the continued male overrepresentation in that position (p.49). This perception is the same incongruence that positions men as ideal candidates in the Superintendency.

Structures and conditions that favor White males and disadvantage women in roles are evident in positions like the Superintendency (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). Tallerico and Blout (2004) explain that roles segregated by gender exist in many industries, including education. This social division of labor, based on gender norms, shapes the way organizations hire. The gender difference among teachers, as well as those who ultimately serve in the Superintendent role, shows that the field of education is no exception to that rule.

The National Center of Education Statistics (2019) points to changing demographics of principalships with 67% of women serving as elementary principals, 40% serving as middle school principals, and 33% serving as high school principals. The high school principalship has shown to be a key lever in securing the superintendency. High school principals often have greater visibility and the opportunity to network with school board members and the larger community (Maranto et al., 2019). Due to external responsibilities that are associated with high school roles, such as athletic events, high school principals may be positioned to be more successful in acquiring a superintendency through their community connections.

While males are overrepresented at the high school principalship, women are overrepresented in the area of curriculum and instruction. Women who have more administrative experience in the area of instruction, often have less experience in positions that work directly with personnel or finance, which can be unattractive to school boards looking to hire (Björk et al., 2003; Maranto et al., 2019; Sharp et al., 2004). While this assertion is present in the literature, Brunner and Kim (2010) offer a new perspective, noting that while women's overrepresentation in the area of curriculum and instruction is a different pathway from those of their male counterparts, it may better prepare women to serve in the superintendency. Superintendents report that educational leadership is one of the school boards' primary expectations of them, which positions those with backgrounds in curriculum and instruction as primed for the role (Brunner & Kim, 2010).

In addition to differences in job titles and experience, there are patterns among female Superintendents and where they serve. Female Superintendents tend to work in small school districts. Most female Superintendents serve in districts of 3,000 or less students; furthermore, women are overrepresented in smaller districts of 300-2,999 students (AASA: The School

Superintendents Association, 2023). Women Superintendents are also more likely to serve in districts where there are 25% or more students of color (AASA: The School Superintendents Association, 2023). There are distinct differences between men and women Superintendents and evidence showing that difference both in their journeys to the superintendency and where they serve.

Supportive Factors for Women Aspiring to and Serving in the Superintendency

While men have historically dominated the superintendency, women are making strides in the right direction. Investigating how women navigate the traditionally male-dominated role from securing the role to serving in the role unveils interesting points for school boards and hiring firms to consider.

Some researchers argue that women are simply not interested in being Superintendent. Data from a study on female Superintendents in Texas (Allred et al., 2017) counters these claims, with the researchers finding evidence of preparation in their personal and professional lives even from women who state that they did not intend to become Superintendent. When asked directly, only a handful of women affirmed that they aspired to be Superintendent; however, those who did not directly indicate that this was a goal were making career choices that would position them well for the role.

Another explanation that some offer to explain the discrepancy in the number of male and female Superintendents is due to women's roles in the household and family responsibilities. Brunner and Kim (2010) found that in a survey of non-aspiring Superintendents, only 11% of women indicated that they were not interested in the role because the demands of the Superintendent position would interfere with their role and responsibilities with their families. This dispels myths that women do not seek the superintendency due to the conflict

between work and home. While some studies have suggested that women are unable to manage their household responsibilities while balancing the Superintendent role, others demonstrate that family serve as a source of support and encouragement (Connell et al., 2015).

In a survey of female Superintendents in Alabama, Connell et al. (2015) found that respondents in their study did not identify family responsibilities as a barrier to securing their superintendency. In fact, the women in the study indicated that they received support from their spouses and children to achieve their advanced degrees and pursue an executive leadership position.

In a study of female Superintendents in Texas (Allred et al., 2017), all of the female Superintendents indicated that they were married and many cited their husbands as a significant sustaining influence, or even the greatest sustaining influence, to support their job. In a quantitative study conducted by Campbell and Campbell-Whatley (2019), female administrators, including Superintendents, were asked to indicate the most highly successful strategies for advancing their career goals. The top five strategies reported were: seeking advanced training, developing a positive self-concept, becoming professionally visible, improving professional image, and obtaining support from family/peers.

In the current landscape, in many instances, men hold the key to women's access to the superintendency. According to the American Superintendent 2020 Decennial Study (Tienken & Domenech, 2021), the most common response when asked about the most influential person in helping a person become a Superintendent was other Superintendents. This can pose an issue for female candidates considering that most Superintendents are men. Research shows that for women, male mentorship and sponsorship are one of the key supporting factors to securing the Superintendent position.

In a three-state study of female Superintendents (Sharp et al., 2004), 98.4% of women reported listing males as professional references when securing their position as Superintendent. In a qualitative study of 270 female Superintendents across northern and southern states (Lane-Washington & Wilson-Jones, 2010), participants credited male administrators and Superintendents as responsible for their successful ascending to the superintendency providing support, advice, and sharing their experiences. In fact, participants reported receiving support not only during their job search, but that their male mentors continued to motivate them to succeed even after they secured their Superintendent positions.

Connell et al. (2015) found similar results when surveying female Superintendents who overwhelmingly credited their male mentors for the role that they played in their career path to the superintendency. These studies point to the importance of women having male mentors and sponsors in the current landscape. While the respondents did not indicate why they used male professional references, the authors propose that the high number may be due to a disproportionate amount of women's former supervisors being male or that women made conscious choices, understanding males would be more helpful as a reference to secure the superintendency.

Networking and developing social capital may also be a supportive factor for women serving in the superintendency. In a study comparing two female Superintendents during their first years of service, Isernhagen and Bulkin (2013) emphasized the importance these women placed on networking and building social capital within the communities in which they served. The participants in the study found social networking to be critical to their success.

Supportive factors for women aspiring to and serving in the superintendency include spousal and family support, mentorship by male mentors, building social capital, and investing in

oneself through both experience and gaining advanced credentials. These factors are themes among the research that may provide insight to women who are successful in the role despite being a minority. These supportive factors are important to understand as the number of women who are serving in Superintendent positions continues to increase across the nation.

Barriers Experienced By Women Aspiring to and Serving in the Superintendency

While males and females both experience barriers ascending to the superintendency, women report experiencing higher levels of barriers than men (Brunner, 2003; Cassidy et al., 2021). A wide body of literature over the past thirty years documents gender bias experienced by women aspiring to the superintendency (Bañuelos, 2008; Björk, 2000; Brunner, 2003; Connell et al., 2015; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015; Muñoz et al., 2014; Tallerico, 2000; Wallace, 2015). Gender bias includes overt and subvert acts that discriminate against women and perpetuate the current status quo of male dominance in the superintendency.

Gatekeeping Theory, developed by Lewin (1951), speaks to how social change is created. While Lewin's theory (1951) originated to describe phenomena that applied to food selection and consumption, gatekeeping theory has since been applied more broadly in many fields of study, including education. School boards and search firms, due to their role in the hiring process, can be referred to as gatekeepers while the processes embedded in the hiring process are referred to as gatekeeping (Chase & Bell, 1990; Tallerico, 2000). It is important to understand the gender bias experienced by female Superintendents and how it manifests for women long before the hiring process begins.

Women who aspire to be Superintendents face additional challenges, including discrimination and stereotyping (Muñoz et al., 2014). Gender bias and stereotyping can influence the decision of school boards in the selection process (Tallerico, 2000). School board members

may question whether female candidates can make tough decisions, have the ability to balance home and work, and have the necessary experience in key areas of the job, such as budget (Tallerico, 2000). There is a prevailing assumption that women do not have budgetary skills or fiscal knowledge (Méndez-Morse et al., 2015; Tallerico, 2000). In large parts, that assumption is intertwined with the career pathway and roles that women serve prior to ascending to the superintendency. The American Superintendent 2020 Decennial Study showed that finance and budget planning were listed in the top five topics that all Superintendents wanted to focus on for future professional development (Tienken & Domenech, 2021). This self-reported data, collected from Superintendents across the country, indicates that there is a skill gap and/or desire to learn more in the area for all Superintendents, including male Superintendents, who were the primary responders to the survey.

In a study of thirty-two female Superintendents in California (Bañuelos, 2008), participants reported being cognizant of their gender from the moment that they woke up and dressed for work in the morning. The women in this study described the additional steps that they had to take to gain the same respect and authority that they believed men received by default. For example, the female Superintendents reported that they put in additional work to provide their school boards with extensive evidence and explained things more fully to get the same amount of support that they believed men received without taking these additional steps.

Female Superintendents in Bañuelos' (2008) study also reported inappropriate touching as they climbed the ranks in education. They mentioned that these occurred in roles such as principal and assistant principal, but subsided once they stepped into the Superintendent position, as they felt the role brought more of an authority that helped reduce incidents.

The impact of gender bias in their roles extend beyond their experiences at work. Female

Superintendents report frustration, anger, depression, lack of sleep, stress, and other negative effects that bleed into personal lives due to their regular exposure to gender bias (Bañuelos, 2008).

While some research studies indicate that women are not interested in the superintendency (Gullo & Sperandio, 2020), others refute the premise of the idea (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). Maranto et al. (2019) reports that female administrators express less desire to pursue the superintendency, though the researchers offer that less desire to pursue the superintendency may be because they perceive a negative gender bias. There are structures and conditions that favor White males and disadvantage women in roles like the superintendency (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). The superintendency is viewed as a man's job and sex-discrimination reproduces the environment for men to maintain overrepresentation in the role (Tallerico & Blount, 2004).

Female Superintendents report that men have played a central role in their success, not only serving as mentors and references on the journey to the superintendency, but also providing support after they acquire the position (Connell et al., 2015; Lane-Washington & Wilson-Jones, 2010). While men play a critical role in the success of women's careers as they aspire and serve in the superintendency, they can also serve as a barrier. Career advancement and access to the superintendency is reinforced through sponsorship and informal networking processes that have been predominantly controlled by men (Tallerico & Blout, 2004). These opportunities, which exist outside of the traditional credentials and career pathways, are the hidden staircase to ascending to the Superintendent role.

In a study of female administrators in the Midwest, Campbell and Campbell-Whatley (2019) found that female administrators reported exclusion from the "good old boy" network and

evidence of a buddy system as the top barriers impacting their pursuits and professional goals. Reference to a good old boy network is prevalent in numerous studies and referenced both directly and indirectly when discussing barriers that women face pursuing the superintendency (Avalos & Salgado, 2016; Campbell & Campbell-Whatley, 2019; Gullo & Sperandio, 2020).

Chase and Bell (1990) point to the more subtle processes embedded in the hiring process through the way that gatekeepers, or those who have hiring authority, talk about women in that position. In their study, Chase and Bell (1990) interviewed school board members and search consultants, two important groups of gatekeepers to the superintendency, who have hired female Superintendents. The researchers (Chase & Bell, 1990) analyzed the verbal discourse of school board members and search consultants as they described the female Superintendents whom they hired and their experiences working with them.

The results of their study indicate that even though these board members and consultants played an active role and displayed positive intent in hiring and supporting female Superintendents, they still unintentionally reproduced thoughts and actions that reiterated male dominance and gender biases (Chase & Bell, 1990). Actions, such as not inviting female Superintendents to social events, perpetuates the good old boy network of excluding women, even those who make it to the role.

Knowing and navigating the unspoken rules of leadership is important for success (Avalos & Salgado, 2016; Rodela et. al., 2019). Inclusion and access to leadership networks and having mentors can demystify these norms. Women identify that lack of a professional network can be a barrier to the superintendency and other educational leadership roles (Avalos & Salgado, 2016; Sharp et al., 2004). Campbell and Campbell-Whatley's research (2019) found that exclusion from the informal network and denied access to power groups were among the top

barriers noted among educational female leaders, including Superintendents. Formal and informal networks allow individuals to build relationships that directly or indirectly may lead to job opportunities in their work. These opportunities may include invitations to the happy hour, get-togethers in private residences, parties, or other community events.

While making great strides in the profession, women still face many challenges as they aspire to lead and serve in the superintendency. Women are one group of many groups that are underrepresented in the role and their stories are adjacent and sometimes intertwined with the stories of other groups that are slowly working toward breaking down barriers of representation at the top position in the field.

Superintendents of Color

Research studies investigating women in the superintendency often exclude or minimally represent women of color, though studies that include and/or center women of color have increased in the last two decades. Research that highlights Asian, American Indian, Pacific Islander, and other racial/ethnic minority Superintendents are nearly nonexistent in the literature. Furthermore, few studies about Black and Latina/o/x Superintendents inform current research. Although studies about Superintendents, or those centered more specifically on female Superintendents, can provide insight on the career pathways, supportive factors, and barriers that Superintendents face, leaders of color have distinct experiences ascending to and serving in the role (Alston, 2005).

The American Superintendent 2020 Decennial Study (Tienken & Domenech, 2021) shows slow progress for Superintendents of Color. With an increase of 3.5% since the 2010 decennial survey, people of color still only represent 8.7% of the nation's Superintendents. While still lagging behind national population trends, the field of education has seen an increase in the

number of teachers of color (20%) and principals of color (22%) in our nation's public schools (NCES, 2019). With nearly half of our nation's K-12 students unlike those who teach and lead the school system, the sluggish rate of change is a cause for concern.

Superintendents of color serve across rural, urban, and suburban districts, despite common rhetoric that they primarily lead in districts that are urban (Miles Nash & Grogan, 2022). White men are the leading demographic of Superintendents who serve in urban schools comprising 40% of the Superintendent seats, followed by White women who hold 22.86% of Superintendent seats (AASA: The School Superintendents Association, 2023). Superintendents of color, however, primarily serve in districts in which 25% or more of the students are students of color (AASA: The School Superintendents Association, 2023).

The current representation of educators and leaders of color is intertwined with historical realities and movements. Legal cases including *Méndez v. Westminster* (1947) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) had implications not only for students in public education, but for educators of color.

The 1946 Supreme Court decision in *Méndez v. Westminster* (1947) boosted public sentiment against segregation and brought awareness to the negative impacts of segregation in schools (Ramos, 2004). This case, lesser known than the infamous *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), overturned segregated schooling of Mexican children in California. Many groups supported the Méndez case including the NAACP, ACLU, and the American Jewish Congress due to the implications of ending school segregation for all groups (Ramos, 2004).

While over-simplified, *Méndez v. Westminster* (1947) is often cited by folks as a monumental achievement in school integration, not only for Latina/o/xs, but many racial and ethnic minority groups (Santiago, 2019). The *Méndez v. Westminster* (1947) case allowed for

some progress in the area of school integration, but there are still some problematic factors. For example, one of the reasons that permitted this change is the categorization of Mexicans as White. In this instance, the social construction of race permitted students to attend White schools, though the ruling still allowed for students who have “language deficiencies” to be segregated (Santiago, 2019, p. 91). Latina/o/xs faced discrimination and bias as they integrated into some Anglo schools, despite the lack of a roadmap for integration within the ruling. The ruling in the *Méndez* case set the stage for the *Brown v. Board of Education*, which ultimately overturned the separate but equal education practices by law. These two landmark rulings, along with many other acts of resistance, helped shape the desegregation of the nation’s K-12 public schools for Latina/o/x, Black, and other racial/ethnic minority students across the United States.

While many people cite the infamous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision as a step in the right direction for equity and justice, counternarratives about the negative impacts are well documented in the literature (Horsford, 2010). Horsford (2010) highlights the positive aspects of Black schools including exemplary teachers, curriculum, extracurricular activities, parental support, and principal leadership. While the narrative is centered on poor Black schools, there were many “good Black schools” and the assets that these schools had were often overlooked (p. 59). Hosford (2010) interviewed nine Black /African American Superintendents who grew up in segregated school systems between 1950 and 1970 and now serve as the Superintendent in today’s integrated schools. She also spoke of the communal bonds, caring of students, and the sense of collective responsibility in Black schools that appears to be missing in today’s system.

The Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the decision which led to the desegregation of schools across the country, had a negative impact on the number of Black educators teaching and leading schools. More than 38,000 educators lost their jobs in the integration efforts, and Black administrators who secured jobs often had to accept lower, non-administrative positions (Alston, 2005).

The impact of these legal decisions shaped modern day enrollment in public schools as well as career choices and opportunities for people of color. This historical context, coupled with the stories from Superintendents of color, shape our understanding of the current educational landscape.

Career Pathways for People of Color Aspiring to and Serving in the Superintendency

Superintendents of color take pathways that are distinctly different from the pathway to the superintendency for White males. More than half of people of color serving in the superintendency followed the path of teacher, principal, central office, and then Superintendent, while their White counterparts tend to follow a shorter path, which includes teacher, principal, and then Superintendent (Björk et al., 2003). This pathway is similar to the pathway described in the research for female Superintendents with extra steps and lateral moves (Björk et al., 2003; Davis & Bowers, 2018; Kim & Brunner, 2009). The path to the superintendency for people of color is longer and filled with more hoops to jump through.

Principals are the primary sponsors of career mobility and gatekeepers for entry into the principal pipeline (Berry & Reardon, 2022). Since the position of principal is often a key step along the way to the Superintendent role for all demographic groups, it is important to understand that the process of sponsorship, mentorship, and career advancement opportunities begins occurring for many at the teacher level. Since the principalship is one of the primary

candidate pools from which Superintendents arise, it is important to understand the career implications and barriers that exist for people of color climbing the career ladder.

In addition to spending more time in the classroom, people of color spend more years ascending from the assistant principalship to the principalship in comparison to their White counterparts; this has an impact on the leadership pipeline and career trajectory (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). This data is reinforced by The American Superintendent 2020 Decennial Study (Tienken & Domenech, 2021). In an analysis of data from the American Superintendent 2020 Decennial Study, Miles Nash and Grogan (2022) note the issues that Superintendents of color face, pointing out that current data reflects previous research that show people of color have inequitable access to promotion opportunities, with many Superintendents of color serving in a different district from the one that they worked in prior to attaining the superintendency.

Miles Nash and Grogan (2022) observed trends comparing women and men of color from the 2020 AASA Decennial Study. They reported that, based on the data in the survey, that women of color reported experiences that are very different from the experiences of White men who traditionally held the position. In the study, female Superintendents of color reported working as master teachers, instructional coaches, roles in higher education, non-education leadership positions, and several jobs that were not included on the prescribed list at a higher rate than other groups.

Supportive Factors for People of Color Aspiring to and Serving in the Superintendency

Female Superintendents and Superintendents of color indicate that mentors are an important factor that contributes to their success, or, in their absence, limits their success (Alston, 2005; Angel, 2013; Avalos & Salgado, 2016; Brown, 2014; Cassidy et al., 2021; Castillo, 2021; Wyland, 2016). Akin to the findings on women Superintendents, candidates of color indicate that

White, male mentorship and sponsorship has been a critical factor in their career success (Brown, 2014; Enomoto et al., 2000; Ortiz, 2000). The role that men, particularly White men, play in supporting women and people of color in their journey toward superintendency is a recurring theme in the literature. Seeking mentorship from White men may be a strategy that could be intentionally deployed by those seeking the role. However, mentoring roles are typically initiated by mentors who recognize the potential in their prospective mentees though occasionally mentees seek out and establish the relationship with their mentor (Enomoto et al., 2000).

In a study of African American and Hispanic female mentees (Enomoto et al., 2000), the researchers found that the relationship between White male mentors and leaders of color to be mutually beneficial. While mentors were able to help their mentees navigate their career, including political components of the role, mentees also brought a more diverse perspective to the conversations which can grow both mentor and mentee in their knowledge. While White male mentors provide Superintendents of color with unique benefits, such as navigating the hidden rules of leadership, participants in the study noted that sharing cultural background with mentors is also important. The researchers note that it is important for female leaders of color to have multiple mentors who are different in age, education, work experience, and backgrounds. Enomoto et al. (2000) identifies six needs that are especially important to women of color in education and suggests that both mentors and mentees attend to them including: gaining political savvy, accessing networks, finding mentors who are similar to their mentees, finding mentors who are different from their mentee, having more than one mentor, and securing alternative support systems. Securing multiple mentors may provide those who are marginalized by the current landscape with benefits in various ways.

Mentors often find their mentees. Berry and Reardon (2022) summarize the process of ‘tapping,’ describing the impact that the practice can have on a person who is selected:

Tapping of an individual by a supervisor initiates leadership training and administrative experience, and may consist of the grooming of an individual for advancement by that supervisor who provides access to networks of support, thereby increasing the tapped individual’s visibility. Tapping may go further and increase access to unique and customized training or work experiences- created or initiated by the supervisor- that sharpen skills, raise proficiency, and increase the exposure that leads to advancement (p. 30).

Sponsored mobility has a positive impact on promotions and job acquisition for White employees and people of color (Smith, 2005). Accessing sponsored mobility is the key. Miles Nash and Grogan (2022) also noticed in the AASA Decennial study (Tienken & Domenech, 2021) that women of color were more likely to report that a professor was influential in securing the superintendency, while an equal portion of women and men of color reported support of a former supervising principal.

In addition to having mentors, being highly credentialed and experienced is key for leaders of color. Analyzing existing data that was derived from the National Center of Education Statistics, Berry and Reardon (2022) found that Black principals have more advanced academic credentials and a greater number of administrative experiences (e.g., coach, curriculum lead, etc.) prior to the principalship. Additionally, Black principals were found to have participated in more administrative training. For example, Black principals were more likely to have participated in an aspiring principal program than White participants. Latina leaders also express the importance of obtaining advanced credentials as a supportive strategy (Quilantán & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004).

Internal motivation and purpose are also a common theme among leaders of color. There is evidence that Black and Latina/o/x female Superintendents are motivated by a strong desire to serve and drive to make a difference in education and for minority students (Alston, 2005;

Hernandez et al., 2014). Research shows that leaders of color may have personal experiences that allow them to approach their work with children differently (Santamaría, 2014). This internal motivation is a supporting factor for Superintendents of color. Educators of color in leadership positions often report that they believe that their presence as a leader uniquely allows them to serve as role models for other children to see what is possible (Moorosi et al., 2018).

Mentorship, investing in oneself, and internal drive to serve as role models are some of the key supporting factors that allow Superintendents of Color to be successful in their roles.

Barriers Experienced by Superintendents of Color

Superintendents of color, representing a minority of the nation's Superintendents, report barriers and challenges in their roles. Furthermore, women of color in leadership positions face additional challenges and bias, attempting to discern whether the discrimination that they are experiencing is due to their race, gender, or some other aspect of their identity (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). A variety of terms have been used across the literature to describe the phenomenon of multiple forms of marginalization that female leaders of color face. Terms include: dual burden and double jeopardy (Martinez, 2014; Rodela et al, 2019). At times, female Superintendents of color may also have other layers of minority identities and terms such as triple oppression (Montoya, 2000) or triple minority (Quilantán & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004) are used to describe this intersectionality. In a positive spin, Manuel and Slate (2003) offer the term dual anomaly, which refers to the rarity or deviation from the norm. Regardless of the term used, women of color in leadership face challenges even before they get in the door.

Research shows that the Superintendent interview process can disadvantage candidates of color. Tallerico (2000) conducted interviews not only with school board members and search firms, which adds an additional layer to the conversation. Tallerico (2000) also interviewed both

women and Superintendents of color to obtain their perspective and insight. She found that oftentimes hiring comes down to chemistry and gut feelings where biases held by gatekeepers to the superintendency can emerge and put women and people of color at a disadvantage in the hiring process (Tallerico, 2000).

Some people have difficulty believing that overt acts of discrimination still occur in the workplace in the hiring and onboarding process. Harris and Ogbonna (2016) found that both overt and subtle forms of racism towards Black and ethnic minority groups are prevalent and well in modern day. While their study (Harris & Ogbonna, 2016) centered around a working class field, methods including who is viewed as a suitable candidate for employment based on fit, similar to the commentary that participants in Tallerico's study (2000) found in education. Both explicit and coded methods of racism and discrimination were present.

While externally, the formal process of recruitment and selection may appear to be fair and accessible; however, the barriers to the superintendency for women and people of color are influenced by the mindsets and decisions made by those with the power to hire (Brown, 2014).

Brunner (2003) interrogates the idea of an ideal Superintendent citing that:

The dominant discourse...often limits the success of women and persons of color as they aspire to the superintendency because in a number of significant ways their attributes and experiences fall outside of the norms or notions of what is best or natural for candidacy (p. 430).

It is not that women and people of color do not have the right experiences, but rather, the need for a societal shift to open our minds to other potential pathways to superintendency.

While bias is present in the interview and selection process, even getting to the door is not always easy. Studies show that having male, particularly White male mentors, help leaders of

color gain access to spaces that they would be unable to access with the assistance of a mentor who was similar in race or background (Enomoto et al., 2000). Support from mentors can manifest in a variety of ways, including making phone calls of support, creating contacts, and writing letters of recommendation on their behalf, as reported by leaders of color in the study. A lack of mentors can provide a challenge for administrators of color, including Superintendents. Angel et al. (2013) found that African American women in North Carolina identified a lack of network, including mentors and sponsors, as a barrier to securing the superintendency.

Participants in a three-state study of female educational leaders of color and mentoring relationships (Enomoto et al., 2000) spoke of the challenges they faced as a minority in both gender and race/ethnicity in their roles. Respondents in this study indicated that they viewed themselves as a person of color first and as a woman second, indicating that the leaders of color viewed race as a more predominant identity than gender.

Barriers for Superintendents of color continue while serving in the superintendency. African American Superintendents, for example, are often given less autonomy and support from political officials while serving in the superintendency (Hunter & Donahoo, 2005). Being micromanaged and scrutinized can provide additional stress in the job. In a study of leaders of color, one principal noted that even small complaints would find their way to the central office, noting that her authority and decision-making abilities were being questioned and challenged (Enomoto et al., 2000). African American Superintendents are also more likely to serve as puppets or scapegoats rather than be allowed to lead (Hunter & Donahoo, 2005).

Women of color who hold leadership positions in schools that exist in predominantly White male dominated organizations, experience stereotyping and bias while serving in their roles. In a study of African American and Hispanic female leaders across three states, Enomoto

et al. (2000) found that many participants shared common experiences of being stereotyped and assumed to hold lower positions in the organization. Both Hispanic and African American female leaders shared stories about being mistaken as the secretary rather than the principal or assistant Superintendent. While these female leaders of color worked across different contexts, their experiences were similar.

Superintendents of color, including female Superintendents of color, experience the path and role of the superintendency differently than their White counterparts.

Latina/o/x School Administrators

It is well-established that White males have dominated the Superintendent role throughout history and that men are still overrepresented in this position in the modern day (AASA: The School Superintendents Association, 2023). A number of studies that have increased in volume over the last two decades have been conducted to learn more about the career pathways, supportive factors, and barriers faced by women and people of color aspiring to and serving in leadership positions. Common themes and understandings have emerged from these studies that give us insight to these underrepresented groups in educational leadership. There is much to be learned about Latina/o/x administrators and their experiences navigating the journey towards educational leadership.

Career Pathways of Latina/o/x Administrators

Pathways of women and people of color are different than their White male counterparts and simultaneously have additional barriers for these aspiring leaders to overcome (Tallerico, 2000; Kim & Brunner, 2009). For example, studies show that female administrators and administrators of color tend to have more teaching experience than their White male counterparts prior to entering leadership positions (Brunner, 2003; Maranto et al., 2019; Méndez-Morse,

2004; Tallercio, 2000). Women also tend to have more experience leading elementary schools and more experience working in curriculum and instruction (Maranto et al., 2019; Sharp et al., 2004). While ascending to and serving in the superintendency, women and people of color often deal with gender bias, ethnic/racial discrimination, and stereotyping (Tallerico, 2000). While these trends centering women and people of color provide insights to the experiences of those who are underrepresented in the role, few studies have been conducted to learn more about the unique experiences of Latina/o/x leaders, and an even smaller body focuses their studies on Latina leaders.

Bonilla-Rodriguez and Karsten (2016) highlight that Latinas are increasingly visible in leadership positions across sectors including business, nonprofit organizations, and government. Noting successful Latinas including Justice Sonia Sotomayer, Anna Maria Chavez, and Ursula Burns, the researcher highlights the growing number of Latinas in top positions across the country. This visibility, however, is not yet seen in the top roles in the field of education. Only 7% of principals in the United States are Latina (NCES, 2022) and furthermore only 1% of Superintendents are Latina (AASA: The School Superintendents Association, 2023).

Exploring the similarities and differences between the experiences of Latina leaders in comparison to other women and educators of color will allow us to build greater understanding of how the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity impact Latinas serving in these leadership roles. A small body of research has been dedicated to studying Latina leaders, which provides a foundation for knowledge on the career pathways, supportive factors, and barriers that Latina principals take as they ascend to leadership positions such as the superintendency.

Career Pathways for Latina/o/xs Aspiring to and Serving in School Administration

Like other educators of color, the journey of Latina/o/xs as they ascend into educational administrative positions is a longer road than the journey of their White counterparts (Crawford & Fuller, 2017; Méndez-Morse, 2004; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015). This finding is not surprising. It is well established in the literature that women and people of color generally enter administration with more teaching experience than their White male colleagues, overall (Brunner, 2003; Maranto et al., 2019; Méndez-Morse, 2004; Tallercio, 2000).

In a study of Latina/o/x principals conducted by Méndez-Morse et al. (2015), the researchers learned that some Latina/o/x principals started their career as educational assistants. Furthermore, findings in this study show that twice as many Latina principals, in comparison to Latino males, started their educational career as an educational assistant (Méndez-Morse et al., 2015).

Amongst Latina/o/x principals, Latinas report even more teaching experience than Latino male colleagues (Méndez-Morse, 2004; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015). This finding also aligns with the research that women have more teaching experience overall (Brunner, 2003; Maranto et al., 2019).

Méndez-Morse (2004) noted a theme among Latina principals in her study; Prior to taking on an administrative position and making the decision to go into administration, these women took roles as a ‘mandona.’ A mandona, Méndez-Morse, describes, is someone who takes on informal leadership roles and is known for getting things done (p. 574). As teachers, the Latina leaders in this study recount taking on responsibilities including leading grade level meetings, serving as a model teacher for others to observe, taking an active role in curriculum development, and use of bilingual skills to support across the school and district. These teachers

take on responsibilities well before considering moving into administration, yet another step along the career journey.

In a national study of Latina/o/x principals and assistant principals conducted by Méndez-Morse et al. (2015), 62% of Latina respondents indicated that they served as athletic directors or coaches prior to taking on the principalship. The researchers point to the athletic director/ coach position as a well-known gateway to the principalship for men and potentially a pathway for Latinas to gain access to school leadership (Méndez-Morse et al., 2015). This is a unique contribution to the literature that merits further investigation and emphasizes how little is known about the career pathways for Latina educational leaders.

Once Latina/o/x educators ascend to administrative roles, they spend more time climbing the ladder. In a study of assistant principals in Texas, Crawford and Fuller (2017) found that Latina/o/xs spend more time than their White counterparts in Assistant Principal positions, documenting slower rates of moving up to the principalship for the first five years after receiving their certification. Research tells us that some Latina leaders do not initially seek out to become an administrator (Martinez et al., 2016). This factor may be a contributing factor to the extended journey of Latinas who eventually pursue the principalship.

Latinas are hired to serve in distinct demographic and regional areas. The placement of Latina leaders in high-poverty schools with high populations of diverse students may impact the opportunities that Latinx leaders have on advancement (Martinez et al., 2016). Latinas are also more likely to serve in populations with high multilingual, English learner student populations (AASA: The School Superintendents Association, 2023).

It is evident, even from the limited body of research on Latina principals, that the journey for Latina leaders is a long, winding road, with extra stops along the way. Investigation into the

supportive factors that impact Latina leaders can provide insight into how Latina leaders navigate their journey.

Supportive Factors for Latina/o/xs Aspiring to and Serving in School Administration

As important for all Superintendents, especially women and people of color, mentorship is a supportive factor for Latina principals. Méndez-Morse (2004) defines a mentor as someone who “actively helps, supports, or teaches someone else how to do a job so that she will succeed” (p. 565). For Latinas, this is important for both personal and professional areas of their lives (Méndez-Morse, 2004).

Despite findings in several studies that indicate lack of mentors is a barrier for Latina leaders, Sylvia Méndez-Morse (2004) found that while traditional mentoring may not have occurred, Latina leaders take a unique approach to constructing their own mentors. Like a collage, the Latina principals in this study describe constructing role models and mentors by taking portions of attributes and lessons from people whom they admired or taught them specific skills. This included those who they interacted with directly and through indirect observation of people. Groups of people that the leaders recounted include their own parents, colleagues, supervisors, professors, and other people within their communities. This cut, copy, and paste method allowed the Latina school leaders to receive the impact of role models and mentoring, though not in the traditional manner typically seen among educational leaders.

In a study of Latina school leaders (Martinez et al., 2019), the participants spoke of the significant role that mentors play in the recruitment and retention of Latina school leaders. The principals in the study reported how they were tapped on the shoulder and explicitly encouraged to the administrative pipeline and what they themselves were doing to help recruit and support

Latina Leaders. In a study by Méndez-Morse et al. (2015), two-thirds of Latina school leaders indicated that the mentors had a significant impact on their development.

Supportive factors include the internal motivation on why Latina principals serve and whom they serve. Latina leaders seek administrative positions with the goal of making a difference, especially for students of color and those who are underserved (Méndez-Morse, 2004). This passion is a driving force that propels Latinas to and through their leadership journey.

Latina administrators may be able to relate to students and staff of color who belong to various racial/ethnic groups. One Latina principal notes that both Latina/o/x and African American families can see a connection with her because she is an administrator of color (Hernandez et al., 2014). The principals in the Murakami et al. study (2017) indicated that they serve as a role model for students and staff of color. Several noted the importance for staff to see that they can ascend professionally and for students to aspire to achieve. This sentiment of serving as a role model for staff and students was also shared in Hernandez et al. (2014). Serving as a role model for Latina administrators is a rewarding position that propels Latina leaders forward in their role.

Many Latina leaders who are bilingual and speak Spanish noted that their bilingualism serves as an asset and allows them to more deeply engage with their students and communities (Martinez et al., 2019). It is not to be assumed that all Latina leaders speak Spanish. Some Latina leaders are monolingual and speak English exclusively, while others may be bilingual and speak another language, such as Portuguese. Latina/o/x principals who are bilingual and speak Spanish indicate that their ability to speak Spanish allows them to communicate on a different level with many families, which creates trust, and a sense of comfort (Murakami et al., 2018). Latina

principals advocate for access for bilingual families. Examples of this include translated newsletters and communications, ensuring the staff has access to interpreters, and message recordings in multiple languages (Hernandez et al., 2014). Bilingualism serves as an asset to many Latina leaders.

Murakami et al. (2017) found that Latina/o/x principals were much more comfortable discussing how race/ethnicity serves as a benefit to administrators rather than serving as a barrier. The principals reported a wide variety of ways including the ability to build a connection with the community through shared upbringing, language, and culture.

Barriers Experienced By Latina/o/xs Aspiring to and Serving in School Administration

Latina administrators report challenges serving in their role related to a wide range of experiences including feelings of isolation and experiencing discrimination based on their race or gender. While in school leadership, Latinas report heavy feelings of isolation (Martinez et al., 2019; Rodela et al., 2019). These feelings of isolation are captured by comments from Latina principals in the study:

...Being a school leader is so lonely, so lonely on so many levels. And it's hard because sometimes you make decisions, and sometimes they're not the right decision at the end of the day, but they needed to have been made. It's tough when you know they come from a good place, but it just didn't turn out how you would have wanted them to be. I think, particularly for me, even though I'm the majority- Latinos are a majority or at least half of the population in our city- there's not enough people in this same role. So, it's hard for me to have a mentor that understands what it means to be successful. And because of me being Latina, I bring my culture and my way of being to my work. It really makes an impact on how you learn and how you operate. So, when you really don't have anybody that can guide you in a way that makes sense, it's tough right? (p. 484).

...And a lot of times, you're the only Latina sitting in a classroom or a meeting with fifty APs [assistant principals]...because that still happens. I sit in meetings and I'm like, 'Why is it that we have so many Hispanic kids but so few Hispanic leaders?' and they always tell me, 'You know we've got the principal at [X] High School and she's Latina. She's really good! She's really good.' If she's really good, why don't we put more in that position? Why does it take longer? And then give us the opportunity to work

with someone like that, share her stories. What do you do? How do you run your campus? If she's good, there's got to be more out there that are just as good (p. 486).

Recognizing that Latinas serving in educational leadership roles are often the only, or one of few, Latina administrators among their network sheds light about some of the issues that manifest in the recruitment and retention of Latina leaders. Being a Latina leader among primarily White male colleagues can be isolating. This furthers the need for the research on career pathways, supports, and barriers of Latina leadership in our field.

Some Latina principals report experiencing discrimination and bias based on their gender and ethnic background (Martinez et al., 2016; Martinez et al., 2019; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015, Rodela et al., 2019). In a study of Latina administrators, 75% of participants indicated that gender and race did not impact their work, however when reviewing the written commentary, the opposite was found (Méndez-Morse et al., 2015). Women's denial of the impact their gender has in attainment and performance is not an uncommon finding (Méndez-Morse et al., 2015). Studies have historically shown that participants under-report the impact of identity-based factors including race and gender, though evidence is present through other data-gathering methods, such as verbal and written responses.

Méndez-Morse et al. (2015) found that when working with adults, including administrators, parents, community members, and teachers, that Latina leaders' racial/ ethnic identity was more of an obstacle. Latina principals reported dealing with biases and discrimination, often qualification and competency came into question. One principal stated:

Many new people (parents and colleagues) that come into our area have a difficult issue with my ethnic background (color). They usually change their mind after they get to know my philosophy. I constantly have to prove I'm qualified to do this job. It was tolerable when I was young but as a veteran professional, it's frustrating (p.182).

Reports of discrimination, bias, and feelings of isolation are major factors for current

Latina principals. As Latinas ascend the leadership ladder, these are important factors to consider in the discussion about the recruitment and retention of Latina leaders.

Latina Superintendents

Research studies that center the experiences of Latina Superintendents are limited. Méndez-Morse (2000) offers two potential reasons that a lack of research on Latina Superintendents exists: the small number of researchers focused on Latina studies and the even smaller numbers who focus on educational leaders or the small number of Latinas in school administration.

While there are a small number of researchers and academic sources publishing research about the topic of Latina Superintendents, an increasing amount of research has been recorded by doctoral students (Corona, 2022; Cortes, 2022; Hernandez, 2018; Olivarez, 2019). The number of dissertations on the topic of Latina Superintendents has grown over the past two decades. Additional knowledge from these dissertations written about Latina leaders have not made their way into books, research journals, and other more popular sources for researchers yet. Based on surnames and positionality statements within the research, it appears that a large majority of those who choose to conduct their dissertation studies on Latina Superintendents also are Latina.

Though few in numbers and, at times, conflicting, the research that highlights and centers Latina Superintendents provide important information on this understudied group of leaders including the pathways that Latina leaders take to acquire the position, where they serve, their motivations and supportive factors, and the barriers that they face.

Career Pathways of Latinas Aspiring To and Serving in the Superintendency

Research studies that focus on the career pathways of Superintendents are plentiful, however few studies include Latina Superintendents. If Latinas are included in the study, the data is rarely disaggregated or there are too few Latinas represented for researchers to make generalizations. The career pathway of Latina Superintendents, and how similar or different their pathways are to the pathways of women and other Superintendents of color overall, is unclear due to the limited studies that center this research.

Studies of Latina principals show that Latina administrators have an extended journey as they ascend the career ladder (Méndez-Morse, 2004; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015). Some Latina administrators start as educational assistants (Méndez-Morse, 2015) and spend more time in assistant principal roles (Méndez-Morse, 2004; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015). Little research has been dedicated to the career path of Latinas as school-based administrators, let alone through the superintendency.

In a study of Hispanic women Superintendents (Manuel & Slate, 2003), the most common career pathway reported by Hispanic women Superintendents was teacher, elementary principal, and then position in central office. This pathway is similar to the pathway that many women have reported taking in their careers to obtain the superintendency (Davis & Bowers, 2018; Young-Lyun & Cryss Brunner, 2009).

Latina leaders report teaching and serving as an administrator in schools with high populations of students who are bilingual or English learners (Rodela et al., 2019; Rodriguez, 2019). Rodela et al. (2019) warns that being bilingual and bicultural does not necessarily mean that Latina/o/xs are equipped to support students acquiring English as a second language. The researchers stress the importance of English Language certifications and adequate preparation;

One factor that may influence the hiring of a Latina Superintendent is an increasing Hispanic / Latino population within the district (Ortiz, 2000).

Rodriguez (2019) identified the pattern that Mexican-American Superintendents are being selected to lead small, rural community, and often low-income school districts with Hispanic populations. Castillo et al. (2021) found that some Latina Superintendents are attracted to working in small, rural districts because of the familial environment and strong sense of community that these districts often embody. Rodriguez (2019), however, argues that the representation of Latina Superintendents, specifically Mexican American women, in the limited context of small, rural settings is due to bias cloaked as 'fit'. Latinas are not often selected to lead school districts with high socio-economic populations and high enrollment of White students.

Latina/o/x leaders may find expanded opportunities and locations that seek their expertise. States that have not historically been home to Latina/o/x families are seeing an increase in Latina/o/x families. Schools in these communities, that have not traditionally served Latina/o/x students, are finding themselves underprepared to meet the needs of their new students (Gándara & Mordechay, 2017; Rodela et al., 2019).

Latinas often serve in schools with higher numbers of students of color and students experiencing poverty (Rodela et al., 2019; Rodriguez, 2019). One Latina Superintendent describes an existential question that emerged as she was working as a Superintendent and pursuing her doctoral studies, she asks "is this where I choose to work, or is this the only place where I'll be hired?" (Martinez & Méndez-Morse, 2021, p .5).

Quilantán and Menchaca-Ochoa (2004) found that Latina Superintendents carefully select where they work by intentionally avoiding positions that they felt that they could not

politically navigate. For example, the eleven Superintendents interviewed in the study mentioned that they did not feel as though they could be successful in a large school district in a primarily White community. Being aware of potential barriers/challenges allows Latina Superintendents to position themselves in a community where they could be more successful.

Supportive Factors of Latinas Aspiring To and Serving in the Superintendency

When Latina leaders are asked who or what encouraged them to pursue leadership roles, among the myriad of motivating factors, is a resounding answer: MYSELF. Latina Superintendents report that personal drive and determination is one of the primary motivating factors in achieving and succeeding in the superintendency (Avalos & Salgado, 2016; Manuel & Slate, 2003; Rodriguez, 2019). Strong self-determination is important for breaking barriers and serving in roles that are unprecedented.

Investing in oneself may also be a key supportive factor for Latinas aspiring to the superintendency. In a study of Latina Superintendents in Texas (Quilantán & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004), participants stated that displaying professional competence was an important part of their success as Latina women in the superintendency. This included many components including earning degrees and certifications and accumulating a variety of work experiences. The numbers for Latina/o/xs attending college and receiving degrees is at an all time high (Rodríguez et al., 2015).

Due to cultural and patriarchal norms, a common point of conversation is that Latinas' primary responsibility has been traditionally within the home, which is cited as a reason why Latinas lack representation at higher levels of leadership. The participants in Quilantán and Menchaca-Ochoa's (2024) research study did believe that cultural expectations and traditional gender roles served as a barrier in their role. Participants mentioned navigating the balance

between home and work, as well as dealing with conservative expectations held of Latinas in the household (Murakami et al, 2018). This assumption is not necessarily true for all Latina leaders. Studies on Latinas in leadership positions include minimal evidence of role conflict between home and professional life, despite assumptions and stereotypes (Méndez-Morse, 2000). In fact, family may be a supportive factor, rather than a barrier, for some Latina Superintendents.

Manuel and Slate (2003) also found that over half of Hispanic women in their study reported that their careers were not interrupted by family. Furthermore, only eight percent (8%) indicated that their career was interrupted for five or more years for their children.

Latina leaders often cite receiving encouragement and support from their family and their spouses (Méndez-Morse, 2000). Méndez-Morse (2000) suggests that the extended families may provide a particular benefit to Latina leaders which allows them to balance dual responsibilities, though more research in this area needs to occur in order to verify this claim. Family support is evident for Latina leaders as they serve in leadership positions, but Latina educators also recall family support pushing for their achievement throughout childhood as well.

In a study of Latina teachers and educational assistants (Aguilar et al., 2003), the participants describe strong messages from their families growing up about getting an education and achieving beyond what their parents have achieved, some of whom worked jobs such as a janitor or gardener. This is not to assert that all Latina/o/xs come from households in which their parents work in blue collar jobs or that those who work in these types of jobs do not tremendously contribute to society, but rather a reflection of some Latina educators experience and cite as their motivations to achieve their current degrees and achievements.

Latinas report that part of their motivation is improving educational conditions of minority students (Méndez-Morse, 2000). Latina often focus their efforts in leadership to

improve their communities (Méndez-Morse, 2000). The multiracial background of Latinas may uniquely position them to foster community along lines of difference. Bordas (2001) offers that *confianza*, or trust, is one of the core values for Latina/o/xs and shares that Latinas/o/x leaders become de *confianzas*, or people whom you can confide in for community members. This is shared and supported by research studies where Latina leaders talk about how they establish community and become a trusted figure, especially for Latina/o/x families. In communities where Latina/o/xs comprise a majority of the community, Latina women can use their social capital to enhance their career mobility (Ortiz, 2001). Latina values include regularly considering not only how to improve conditions for themselves, but also for their family and society (Bonilla-Rodriguez & Karsten, 2016).

Mentorship is an important key to achieving the superintendency for Latinas. Research shows that Latinas who actively seek mentors are more likely to succeed in their goal to obtain the superintendency (Manuel & Slate, 2003). In a study of Hispanic women in 2003, over 75% of Hispanic Women who achieved the superintendency said that they had a mentor (Manuel & Slate, 2003). Of those women, six out of ten indicated that the mentors were male. This data connects with other research of both women and Superintendents of color who share that males have played a key role in their hiring (Avalos & Salgado, 2016; Brown, 2014; Ortiz, 2000).

In a study of seven female Superintendents in Texas (Allred et al., 2017) one Latina Superintendent recalls that she developed the aspiration after seeing and receiving mentorship from a White female Superintendent. She states:

Growing up as a kid it was always males, specifically White males. So I never thought that it was even an option for me. So it wasn't until I saw the first female Superintendent that I'm like, wow, there ARE some females out there. And you know, she was White, but she was FEMALE, and so I could identify with her. (p. 5).

While successful Latina Superintendents indicate mentors as a supporting factor, the lack of mentors can also serve as a barrier for many. Hispanic women who experience sponsorship are more likely to achieve the superintendency (Manuel & Slate, 2003). According to the American Superintendent 2020 Decennial Study (Tienken & Domenech, 2021), the most common response when asked about the most influential person in helping become a Superintendent was other Superintendents. If you are not in the dominant group, which Latinas who make up 1% of all Superintendents are not, it is difficult.

Barriers Experienced By Latina Superintendents

Like other leaders of color, Latinas in the United States experience bias, discrimination, and marginalization due to both their ethnicity and gender (Hernandez et al., 2014; Macias & Stephens, 2019; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Latina Superintendents are uniquely positioned with identities including race/ethnicity and gender, but some may experience other aspects of their identity such as language, perceived family citizenship status, ability, and other factors.

For some Latina Superintendents, gender is reported as causing a greater barrier than their ethnicity (Méndez-Morse, 2003). Participants in Avalos and Salgado's study (2016) indicated Latina Superintendents felt that their skin color or ethnic background was a source of negative encounters. On the contrary, participants in the Méndez-Morse study (2004) indicated that they did not feel like their racial/ethnic background was a barrier in any way and felt more barriers that they encountered were due to their gender. Furthermore, Quilantán & Menchaca-Ochoa (2004) participants indicated that both gender and race present an issue while the participants in Méndez-Morse's study (2015) indicated that neither their gender nor race do not create barriers.

In a study of Latina principals (Méndez-Morse et al., 2015), when asked explicitly, Latina leaders indicated that their gender did not create any barriers in their work. Upon further analysis of their open responses, however, many examples of how issues of gender manifested, for example with the good old boys network. When asked about how their race/ethnicity impacted their leadership, seventy-five percent indicated that it had no impact or limited impact. Again, however, the researchers found examples among the open response written remarks to the contrary (Méndez-Morse et al., 2015).

Research shows that it is not uncommon for study participants to indicate, when asked directly, that they do not experience barriers due to their race/ethnicity or gender (Méndez-Morse et al., 2015), and then share examples in their verbal or written statements that contrast that statement. Rodela et al. (2017) suggests that the critical consciousness of Latina Superintendents may need to be developed to bring awareness to the issues of bias/discrimination that Latina Superintendents describe, but are hesitant to name or attribute to their ethnicity and/or gender.

As described in qualitative responses of Latina leaders, Latina leaders struggle with forming networks and acquiring mentorship and sponsorship. Avalos and Salgado (2016) found that Latina Superintendents indicated significant challenges related to lack of network. Participants noted needing assistance learning the ‘unspoken rules’ that needed to be followed (p. 28). Navigating these spaces and ‘unspoken rules of leadership’ is difficult if you are not included to begin with (Rodela et al., 2019). Being excluded from important conversations and social activities can provide barriers for Latinas in the role.

Invisibility and hyper visibility are issues that Latina leaders face. A lack of Latina administrators serving in high positions such as Superintendent, leads to heightened awareness and Latina leaders are closely observed in their roles (Hernandez et al., 2014). When a leader’s

appearance and actions deviate from the traditional or expected model of leadership, their competence and ability to provide adequate leadership come into question. By serving in a position that is historically held by White men, Latina leaders have to continuously exude professionalism and competence in their position or risk fear of scrutinization (Quilantán & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004). Latina leaders are aware of the additional pressure and protect themselves by exuding professionalism in their actions.

Associate Superintendent Fabiola Bagula describes her experiences as a Latina leader and the repeated scenarios in which her credentials and credibility are questioned explicitly and in coded manners (Martinez et. al, 2021). Dr. Bagula shares stories about people regularly mistaking her as a parent or educational assistant, questioning her qualifications, and blatantly asking about her family's immigration status. Dr. Bagula notes that she is in "a perpetual state of having to prove [her] worth and my credibility" (Martinez et. al, 2021, p.10). Dr. Bagula describes how her physical appearance is not what people expect to see in the Superintendent position:

I had developed some coping mechanisms as prevention and understood I did not look like what people expected to see (Aguilar et al, 2003). I was not tall. I was not White. I was not male. I was not wearing a suit. I was wearing bright colors. My lips were crimson. I was often mistaken as a parent, or an aide, or anyone but the person with the highest authority in the room. "A direct research quote often sticks with me: 'If you look Mexican, short, heavysset, dark skinned, hair pulled back in a bun' (Rodriguez, 2014, p.43), you are nonexistent at the leadership table. Add hoop earrings and a designer dress and that describes me perfectly. I had grown accustomed to questions about where to park or the location of the bathrooms (Martinez et al., 2021, p. 2).

While she later describes the steps that she is forced to take to be more palatable to her White colleagues, for example, adding that she was born and raised in California when she introduces herself, while pushing back in other ways including her external appearance. She

intentionally wears bright colors, red lipstick, hoop earrings and refuses to wear black and blue suits as she redefines the narrative about what a Superintendent looks like.

Rodela et al. (2021) asserts that the fear of scrutiny and stereotype threat is very real for many Latina/o/x educational leaders who experience racism and discriminatory practices in their roles. The close observation comes from many angles including staff, board members, and community members. Even in communities that predominantly served Latina/o/x families, Latina Superintendents may still have an uphill battle to prove their credentials. One respondent in Avalos and Salgado's (2016) study of Latina Superintendents in Texas stated that it was a struggle to 'prove myself to my own people and to other women and parents- they seem to trust an Anglo (whether male or female) rather than a Latina woman (p. 28)."

Martinez et al. (2019) discusses the theme of hypervisibility and invisibility present in their participants testimonios. Due to the fact that Latinas are underrepresented in school leadership roles, it creates hypervisibility that makes Latina leaders tokenized, essentialized, and discriminated against while at the same time, the constant undervaluing of their skills, contributions, and development contributes to invisibility. Latina Superintendent's report feeling isolated in their roles (Rodriguez, 2019; Quilantán & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004). With so few in the profession serving in leadership positions, Latina Superintendents are often the only one or one of few among their colleagues.

Discussion

After reviewing the history of the superintendency, the literature review comprehensively discussed key research over the past twenty years that highlights the career pathways, supportive factors, and barriers of women Superintendents, Superintendents of color, Latina/o/x educational leaders, and Latina Superintendents. Based on this review, gaps in the research are evident. With

so few research studies and researchers dedicated to the topic of Latina Superintendents, magnified by the 1% of Latinas Superintendents across the nation, there is a gap in both knowledge and understanding on the topic.

Building on the knowledge and understanding presented by the handful of researchers who have dedicated their work to studying Latina Superintendents, I aim to present a qualitative research study that will uncover additional clarity, depth, and further information on the career pathways, supportive factors, and barriers reported by Latina Superintendents.

With so few Latinas appointed to the most powerful and influential role within a school district, the field of education has an untapped leadership potential. This study not only has implications to pave the way for Latinas aspiring to serve in the superintendency, but it has the potential to provide critical information for those who currently hold hiring power and influence in school districts across the nation.

CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Examining the career trajectories and experiences of Latina Superintendents requires an approach that considers the unique positionality of Latina leaders. Because of this, I draw upon the theoretical framework of Latina/o Critical Theory and apply a conceptual framework based on the body of research available on Latina Superintendents.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is Latina/o Critical Theory. Latina/o Critical Theory, or LatCrit, is “a scholarly movement responding to the long historical presence and enduring invisibility of Latinas/os in the lands now known as the United States (Valdes & Bender, 2021, p. 5).” Deriving from Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefanic, 2023), LatCrit is rooted in social justice, aimed at dismantling laws, policies, systems, and institutions that produce inequitable and unjust outcomes (Valdes & Bender, 2021). In addition to its theoretical underpinnings, LatCrit also includes a call to action, seeking change to oppressive systems and structures.

Over the last two decades, a growing number of researchers have applied the LatCrit framework to address the inequities in K-12 education for Latina/o/x students and educators (Fernández, 2002; Osorio, 2016). LatCrit’s emphasis on dismantling systems of inequity aligns with the proposed research study, as Latina Superintendents represent an inequitable portion of Superintendent positions. In order to secure the role of Superintendent, Latina educators are required to navigate a historically and predominantly White, male dominated role. Representing only 1% of Superintendents (AASA: The School Superintendents Association, 2023), applying a LatCrit framework to the study of Latina Superintendents and their professional experiences will

shed light on the systemic barriers and inequities in the education system that produces inequitable outcomes for this group of education leaders.

The diversity within the Latina/o/x community is recognized through LatCrit's central focus on intersectionality, exploring how race, ethnicity, language, citizenship, gender, and other social factors impact people's experiences (Valdes & Bender, 2021). LatCrit accounts for the unique and complex identities of Latinas, identities that may include multiple layers of privilege and oppression (Valdes & Bender, 2021). Understanding intersectionality and the way that it presents unique challenges for Latinas in K-12 leadership is a key component of this study.

LatCrit uses counter narratives and storytelling as a tool to challenge dominant narratives and amplify the voices of those who are traditionally unheard or whose perspectives are not widely shared (Valdes & Bender, 2005). Using interviews in the research design will be a valuable approach to this study. Grounding this research study in the LatCrit theoretical framework, will allow a study design that invites Latina Superintendents to share their truth and provide a platform that will elevate their voices.

As the theoretical framework for this study, LatCrit serves as a strong foundation to help understand the factors that influence Latina Superintendents, their career trajectories, and experiences. The theory's inclusion of intersectionality, social justice, and emphasis on country-narratives and storytelling as key tenets provides a framework to learn more about Latina Superintendents and their experiences acquiring the superintendency. Designed to uniquely describe the complexity of Latina/o/x identity and interaction with social structures, the LatCrit theoretical framework provides a solid foundation to build upon for this study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in research that shows how Latinas navigate the path to superintendency and factors that support career trajectory along with those that serve as a barrier.

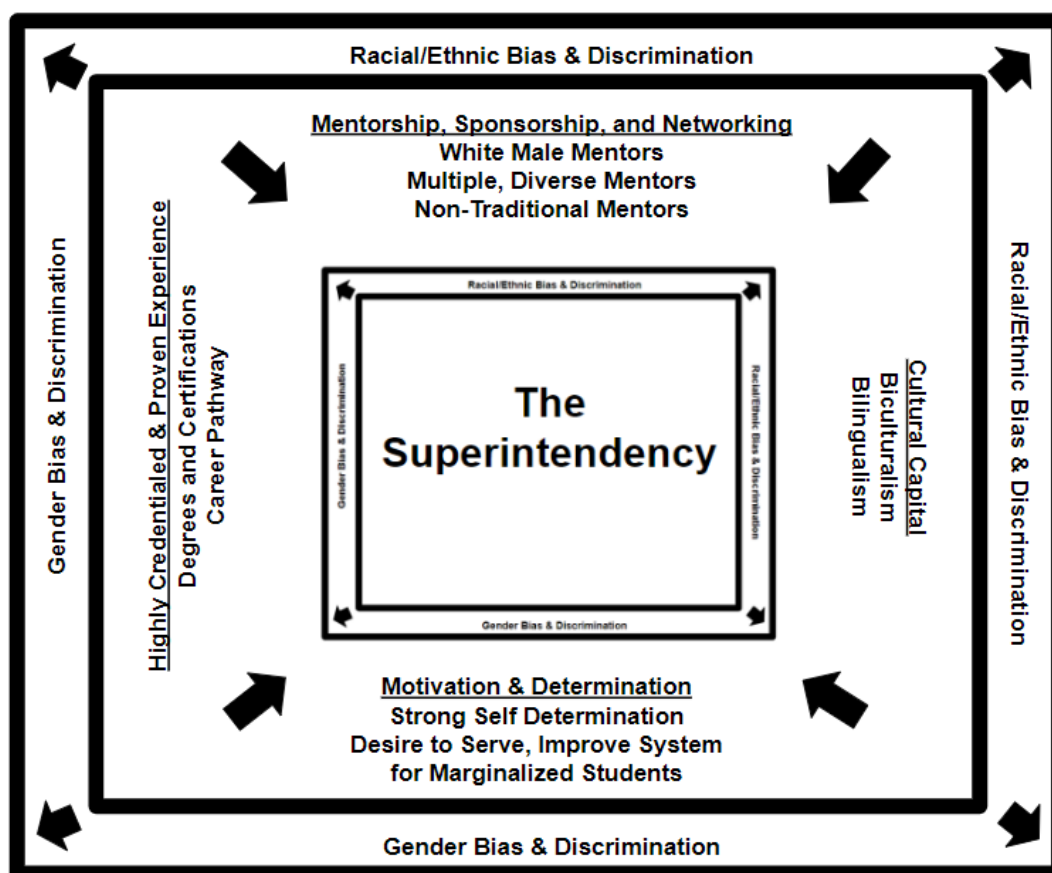


Figure 1. Factors that Influence the Career Trajectory of Latina Superintendents

Figure 1 depicts the factors that influence the career trajectory of Latina Superintendents. Supportive factors include strong self-determination, obtaining credentials, having a wide range of professional experience, utilizing cultural capital, and the importance of mentorship, sponsorship and networking. Barriers that deter Latina leaders from the superintendency include gender and racial/ethnic bias and discrimination.

This framework was designed by drawing from an existing body of research describing the career trajectories and experiences of female Superintendents, Superintendents of color, and the limited body of research available on Latina Superintendents. Supportive factors, or those that have been documented as a benefit to acquiring the Superintendent, illustrated in Figure 1, include:

Strong Self-Determination and Motivation:

Latina Superintendents and other Superintendents of color identify that their personal desire to be successful was a key contributing factor to their success (Avalos & Salgado, 2016; Manuel & Slate, 2003; Rodriguez, 2019). One component of the conceptual framework acknowledges the self-determination that Latina Superintendents and other leaders of color have indicated as a driving force in their success (Alston, 2005; Hernandez et al., 2014). Latina Superintendents attribute their career achievements to their hard work and perseverance (Avalos & Salgado, 2016; Manuel & Slate, 2003; Rodriguez, 2019). Additionally, their motivation to serve their community is a driving force for Latina leaders (Méndez-Morse, 2000). The strong self-determination and motivation is a supportive factor that propels Latinas towards the superintendency.

Credentials, Expertise, and Experience:

Another component of the conceptual framework acknowledges the practice of obtaining credentials and building expertise as a form of preparation for the role. Research shows that obtaining credentials in the form of education, certifications, and diverse experiences is one way that leaders of color prepare to serve in leadership roles (Berry & Reardon, 2022; Quilantán & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004). Some studies show that Superintendents of color have more credentials than their White counterparts (Berry & Reardon, 2022). While, at times, Latina Superintendents

and other leaders of color have their credentials questioned (Martinez et. al, 2021), armoring up with the credentials helps gain entry into the superintendency.

Cultural Capital:

Cultural capital (Yosso, 2005), is another component that supports Latinas in their journey to the superintendency. Cultural capital includes the knowledge and skills to navigate complex systems including diverse communities or linguistic capital if a leader is bilingual (Yosso, 2005). Latina Superintendents often serve in communities with Latina/o/x student populations (Martinez et al., 2016) and in school districts with higher numbers of multilingual learners (AASA: The School Superintendents Association, 2023). Latina Superintendents bring cultural capital to their roles that they can call upon when working with diverse students and communities.

Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Networking:

The next supportive factor highlighted in the conceptual framework is mentorship, sponsorship, and networking. Mentorship, sponsorship, and networking has shown to be key factors of success for Superintendents who are women, Superintendents of color, and Latina Superintendents (Berry & Reardon, 2022; Manuel & Slate, 2003; Méndez-Morse, 2004; Rodela et al., 2019). Furthermore, particular support and mentorship from White men has documented positive outcomes for marginalized groups seeking the superintendency (Allred et al., 2017; Brown, 2014; Enomoto et al., 2000; Ortiz, 2000).

These factors have been identified as supportive factors that have aided female Superintendents, Superintendents of color, and Latina Superintendents on their career path and while serving in the superintendency. Another key component of the conceptual framework

includes the experiences that provide obstacles and barriers to success. Illustrated in Figure 1, gender and racial/ethnic bias and discrimination are deterring factors that create obstacles.

Gender Bias and Racial Discrimination

Research on gender and racial discrimination has helped shed light on the challenges that women and educators of color face as they pursue and serve in leadership roles (Bañuelos, 2008; Björk, 2000; Brunner, 2003; Connell et al., 2015; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015; Muñoz et al., 2014; Tallerico, 2000; Wallace, 2015). Superintendents of color report bias and discrimination, uncertain of whether it is due to their race, gender, or other identity factors (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Women of color experience unique and distinct barriers as they navigate through obstacles in their professional careers (Brown, 2014; Enomoto et al., 2000; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015).

The conceptual framework outlined for this study, built upon the body of available research, demonstrates the complexity of the topic and provides multiple factors from which to provide a greater understanding of career trajectories of Latina Superintendents along with the supports and barriers that they face along the journey. Gender bias and discrimination are noted as prevalent factors deterring Latina from the superintendency while supportive factors including self-determination, cultural capital, mentorship, and credentials support Latina Superintendents' achievement. The conceptual framework serves as a lens to understand the complexity of Latina Superintendents and their journey and will provide a roadmap for understanding the findings from the research study. To capture the insights of Latina Superintendents, the *testimonio* approach will be used.

Testimonio

The research study utilizes *testimonio* as an approach to explore the experiences of Latina Superintendent. *Testimonio* is a methodology that has been growing in popularity in the field of education. “The growth of *testimonio* into the field of education is a challenge to the status quo—a reclamation of intellect that would have otherwise been dismissed by power structures in academia (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p.370).” *Testimonio* is a method that has origins in Latina/o/x culture and is a tool used to allow those who have been marginalized to share their stories, with particular emphasis on giving voice to those in oppressive systems (Beverley, 2004). There is not a standard agreed upon definition of *testimonio*. Huber (2009) defines *testimonio* as “a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future (p.644).” This approach is aligned with the LatCrit framework and the intention of the study to elevate voices of Latina Superintendents.

Testimonio emphasizes the importance of storytelling as a form of knowledge-sharing (Beverley, 2004). Knowledge from the lived experiences of Latina superintendents is an evident gap in the research. Through the use of *testimonios*, the intention was to position Latina Superintendents as experts in their own experience, sharing truths that need to be known (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). The approach provided a platform and amplified the voices of participants. As the researcher, I outlined *testimonio* as the method of the research study, intentionally summarizing its purpose. In order to collect the *testimonios* of Latina Superintendents, I used a semi-structured interview format. This approach couples well with *testimonio* as it allows for open-ended conversation that shares stories.

Research Design

Qualitative Research Design

To best capture the experience of Latina Superintendents, a qualitative research approach was utilized in this study. Qualitative research is an approach that allows researchers to gain insight into complex human experiences and phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Unlike the rigidity of quantitative methods, a qualitative research design helps capture the nuanced details that derive from storytelling and participants sharing their experiences and perspectives.

In order to learn more about the unique experiences of participants, it was important to allow Latina Superintendents to tell their story. Qualitative research methods allow the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge and allows research study participants to share their perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Historically underrepresented in the superintendency, it is imperative Latina Superintendents have the opportunity to recount and share their experiences. The complexity of the topic information sought in this study could not have fully been captured through quantitative methods.

Creswell and Poth (2018) cite many reasons that a researcher may choose a qualitative research approach, including when an issue needs to be explored and when a complex, detailed understanding of the issue is needed. Additionally, the researchers cite that qualitative research may also be used when a literary, flexible style of reporting is appropriate.

A qualitative research study was selected because it allows for me, as the researcher, to be flexible and adaptable throughout the research process (Creswell, 2013). The flexibility of a qualitative design provides particular benefit for topics that are understudied (Creswell, 2013). This flexibility and adaptability that a qualitative study allows fits the goals of the research study, considering the understudied group and topic that are the central focus of the research.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Participants' testimonios were prompted through a set of semi-structured interview questions. Semi-structured interviews give researchers the opportunity to capture the depth and the complexity of participant experiences (Patton, 2015). Semi-structured interviews allow participants to share their experiences and express their viewpoints in their own words (Patton, 2015). This method offers a structure through the form of an interview guide, while also allowing flexibility (Patton, 2015). This interview style allowed for the ability to account for unanticipated topics and follow-up questions that emerged through storytelling, while also providing a framework to ensure that the research questions are addressed in a holistic manner. The interview guide is outlined in Appendix A.

The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to play an active and equal role in shaping the interview experience (Patton, 2015). Since little information is known about the experiences of Latina Superintendents, a more flexible interview method that allows participants to share and drive portions of the interview may lead to deeper and more insightful outcomes. Using LatCrit theory as a foundation for this study, storytelling and counter-narratives can be drawn out through the flexibility of a semi-structured interview process.

Patton (2015) emphasizes that the success of semi-structured interviews is dependent on the interviewer's ability to build rapport, ask probing questions, and navigate the interview well. In understanding the role that rapport and comfort plays in the interview process, I was intentional about building rapport before, during, and after the interview process. In order to build my skills and increase the comfort for participants, I intentionally intended to complete a pilot study to practice and strengthen my approach.

Through initial data collection methods, I recognized the small number of Midwestern Latina Superintendents. With the realization and the initial recommendations of my committee, I shifted away from a pilot interview so that all participants identified could be a part of the research study. Instead, I utilized the expertise of researcher Dr. Melissa Martinez, to review my interview guide and provide recommendations on how to effectively elicit *testimonio* using my semi-structured interview approach. Her guidance prompted me to be more explicit and intentional with my study with participants in introducing my methodology and purpose.

Research Study Participants

This research study included Latina Superintendents from the Midwest. Midwest states include: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. I will not identify which states the participants live in, due to the small number of Latina superintendents across the Midwest. I identified four research participants who meet the outlined criteria and were willing to participate in the study.

In collaboration with relevant state Superintendent organizations and the state departments of instruction, participants for this study were initially intended to be selected using purposeful sampling based on available demographic data. Purposeful sampling is a method of participant selection that is utilized to select participants who can provide deep and relevant information about the research topic (Patton, 2015). In this study, purposeful sampling was indeed to be used to achieve a targeted, in-depth exploration of the research topic by narrowing the study participants to those who belong to the identified group: Latina Superintendents. Purposeful sampling is a strategic approach that allows researchers to make intentional decisions about participants to include in the study (Patton, 2015). Considering the limited number of

studies that are available on the experiences of Latina Superintendents, purposeful sampling will allow specificity in targeting the research question.

While exploring the feasibility of the research topic, it became evident that the data on Latina Superintendents in Midwestern states may be difficult to obtain. Available data from the state departments of education and Superintendent organizations did not provide enough information to reach the desired number of participants who met the research criteria. In place, I applied a snowball sampling method (Patton, 2015) to recruit the remaining participants utilizing AASA mentors, local superintendent organizations, and identified Latina superintendents. A snowball sampling method is typically utilized when it is challenging to reach a specific population. The snowball method involves receiving referrals from study participants in order to identify additional participants who meet the criteria of the study (Patton, 2015).

Specific criteria was established for participation in this study. Criterion sampling was used in the study to allow participants to be selected based on specific criteria related to the research question (Patton, 2015). For the purpose of this study, participants must:

- Self-identify as Latina
- Serve in the role of Superintendent
- Work in a public school district in the United States

While the experiences of Latina Superintendents have been studied in limited manner, additional criteria of geographic location have been added creating an even closer look at Superintendents whose stories have not been told. Thus, the candidate must also:

- Work in a school district located in the Midwest

By selecting participants using this criteria, the study was able to dive deeper into the experience of those who fit the demographic group identified in the study. Since a specific

group, Latina Superintendents in the Midwest, is the topic of the research study, this method of sampling is the most logical selection to address the stated research questions.

This method proved effective, I was able to identify seven Superintendents to invite to participate in my study. From there, one Superintendent informed me of a misperception in the recommendation- she was not Latino, but rather she was married to a Latino. She wished me good luck in my study and reiterated its importance. Two superintendents did not respond to my attempts to contact them at all. I was successfully able to reach and receive confirmation from the remaining four Latina Superintendents. The four participants were given the Participant Consent Form (Appendix B) upon invitation to participate in the study. All participants signed the consent form in-person or scanned and emailed the signed consent form to me prior to the interview. Although this study includes only four Latina Superintendents across the Midwest, it is important to remember that within the *testimonio* approach, “in listening to the story of one, we learn about the conditions of many (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p.368).” The experiences of these women, despite a small sample size, offers knowledge and insights that are not well understood. Their stories should not be discounted. The *testimonios* of the participants offer a look into the lived experiences of many.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted using a combination of in-person and virtual meetings, deferring to the Superintendents' preference. Zoom, a popular video conferencing platform, was utilized to facilitate virtual meetings. Alternatively, I planned for a phone conference option in the event that I was participating in a virtual conferencing and either myself or the participant is experiencing technical difficulties with the internet or their computer device. There was a

moment in which I thought I might have to utilize this method, but it was rectified by the Superintendent moving offices within her workspace.

Once a date and time for the interview was established, participants received a virtual Google Calendar invite, although two of the Superintendents generated their own calendar invite immediately upon invitation of participation in the study. Each Superintendent participated in two rounds of interviews. Of the eight interviews, two were conducted in person and six were conducted virtually. Overall, virtual participation appeared to be the preference of the Superintendents, even after emphasizing my willingness to travel.

Data Analysis

All interviews conducted as a part of this study were recorded using a hand-held recording device. I used Turboscribe, a transcription software to do an initial transcription of interviews. After each interview and transcription, I listened to the interview and manually corrected any errors in the transcription and stored the audio and transcripts in appropriate two-factor authentication folders on my device for security purposes.

The transcriptions produced a written record of the interviews that can be further analyzed using coding methods. Each interview and transcript was systematically coded and analyzed in order to identify key themes and patterns that emerge from the data. A combination of inductive and deductive coding was used to analyze the data.

Inductive coding is a method of coding that allows themes and patterns to emerge from the data without predetermined categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach allows for themes and patterns to emerge from the data without preconceived notions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I chose to implore this method of coding first, as it allows me to capture details from the

narratives shared. Since the voices of Latina Superintendents have been so infrequently captured, an inductive coding method may result in greater insights and richer findings.

The first round of coding included line by line open coding methods. Open coding allows for the researcher to identify key themes and patterns (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During this process, more specifically, I used descriptive coding (Saldana, 2021) to create labels using words and phrases to summarize the content. From there, I created and revised a codebook to organize and manage the codes that emerged from this process. This allowed me to establish broad categories and establish a foundation for my themes. As recommended by Saldana (2021), the descriptive coding was used as an initial round of coding, followed up by deductive coding methods.

Deductive coding is a method of coding that is derived from pre-determined categories built from existing frameworks and structures (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the second layer of coding, I used deductive coding in order to address the research questions and selected frameworks more specifically. Deductive coding may be used to test or confirm theories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This method served as an important approach confirming or defying the structure of the conceptual framework that was built from existing literature. Deductive coding categories included the categories outlined in my conceptual framework including: bias and discrimination, mentorship, sponsorship, networking, cultural capital, motivation/determination, desire to serve, and highly credentialed/proven experience. These categories were key in organizing the data and applying the findings to the framework.

Combining inductive and deductive coding methods allowed me to explore the details of the research questions in a structured manner, while also remaining open to findings that emerge from the narratives of participants that were unanticipated.

Limitations of the Study

It is important to recognize the limitations of this study based on the research design including the small sample size, and resource limitations. While the sample size of four is a small number, the findings are still significant. In a study of Latina leaders accounting for the limited number of participants, Sylvia Méndez-Morse (2004) states:

Insignificant numbers do not equal inconsequential findings. Quite the contrary, the so few in number deserve attention because they may or may not be similar to others, but until they are studied, the contributions of their presence will remain unknown (p. 566).

The small sample size and multiple case study methods allow for in-depth information, which will provide important insights on the little known topic. While snowball sampling is not a randomized method of participant selection, the benefits obtained from the specificity of Latina Superintendents outweigh the limitations as this research study adds to an extremely limited body of research.

Another limitation that I anticipated was the potential barriers that virtual interviews may cause. Since most people have extensive experience using virtual platforms due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the familiarity of the platform for meetings and other personal business was likely a benefit to the study format and added a layer of convenience to the study participants. All of the participants leaned towards a virtual interview preference. Once participants began sharing their *testimonios* and engaging with me, as the researcher, whether we were in-person or virtual became almost insignificant. Some of the most powerful stories, for instance, were shared virtually.

Reliability and Validity

Given the qualitative research design, it is important to attend to the trustworthiness and validity of the study. Especially given the *testimonio* approach to the work, where participants may be sharing stories of oppression connected to their school district while simultaneously serving in that role. I used several intentional methods intended to strengthen reliability and validity, including member checking, keeping detailed research records, and implementing reflexivity journaling to ensure the integrity of the study.

Member Checking

Member checking is the practice of sharing research findings with participants for the purpose of confirmation; this practice enhances the validity and reliability of qualitative research findings (Patton, 2015). Member checking was utilized in this study with all interview participants as a form of data triangulation. Confirming responses and insights with participants allows for a more accurate interpretation and minimizes bias in the data analysis process. I used member checking methods during the second interview including verifying thought processes and asking participants to expand upon statements that were made. As an additional form of verification, participants were able to review and recommend edits for their transcript. Most of these edits were minor, for example correcting a word here and there or changing a number that was recorded. Participants also reviewed and provided feedback on their participant profile and visual representation of their career trajectory. Once all data analysis was complete, I shared a preliminary list of the emergent theme titles with all of the participants and gave participants the opportunity to send me any additional information that they felt empowered to share via email or let them know that they could arrange a call with me. One member shared an additional story that was incorporated into the findings and another member requested a call where she confirmed

all but one of the themes resonated with her. Member checking and the use of various strategies, including reviewing profiles, reviewing transcripts, and offering participants the opportunity to provide additional input are important to qualitative research and especially important with a *testimonio* approach. Within the *testimonio* approach, the participant or *testimonialista*, works closely with the interviewer to share their experience (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). This collaborative process is not complete once the interview is over, it involves a more continuous dialogue between interviewer and participant. This was evidenced in this study by the follow-up emails and phone calls that occurred during member checking processes. Member checking and keeping open lines of communication were put in place to ensure that all participants in the study feel that they are represented and that they were co-creators of this study.

Detailed Research Records

Yin (2018) emphasizes the importance of transparency and systematic documentation in a qualitative research design. Yin (2018) offers that keeping clear records increases the reliability of the research study. From the research design through data analysis and reflection phases, I documented each step of the research process. Documentation from the study included details about decisions made throughout the study, changes to the research design, and key decisions regarding coding and data analysis. The journal served as a record of the study but also as a reflective tool throughout the process. I kept detailed records about decisions made throughout the study including selection and coding decisions. This document serves as an additional tool of record for the study and enhances its reliability.

Reflexivity Journal

In order to enhance study validity and minimize bias, I engaged in reflexivity activities throughout the research study. Creswell and Poth (2018) stress the importance of reflective work

based on the social, cultural, and historical context that affects the research process. Recognizing the potential for bias due to my own positionality and closeness to the study subjects, I intentionally engaged in reflective journaling. The process of journaling allowed me to process as well as address and reflect on my biases, preconceptions, and thoughts throughout the process. Engaging in regular written reflection increased self-awareness and recognition of my own biases, while increasing the accountability in my practice.

Positionality Statement

I am a 36 year old monolingual Latina living in the United States. I was born and raised on the South Side of Chicago. I come from a multiracial and multicultural family. I was raised in a large extended family; my mother is one of six children and my father is one of nine children.

I am a first generation college graduate. I hold a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology and Sociology, a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership, and I am currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy. I live and work in the state of Wisconsin in the field of K-12 school district administration.

Benefits of my positionality and insider status as a Latina administrator lead to more honest, open responses from participants and allowed me to establish a greater sense of rapport in comparison to a researcher who may share less commonalities with the study participants.

Limitations of my positionality status may include the potential for bias and preconceived notions. Recognizing my closeness to the research topic and shared characteristics, it was important to engage in reflexivity work. This monitoring and reflection, outlined in the data and reliability section, allows me to capitalize on my positionality while guarding against and minimizing the impact of bias.

Conclusion

This study uses a qualitative research design that combines testimonio alongside semi-structured interviews. This approach allowed for new insights in the narrowly studied topic of Latina Superintendents, their career trajectories and their experiences. The outlined methodology and research design decisions were created and implemented with the goal of amplifying voices of the participants of this study while aiming to identify recommendations that can be shared with school boards, policymakers, and other groups who resonate with or play a role in the Superintendent career pipeline.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This chapter provides an overview of the findings from the research study. The purpose of the study was to better understand the experiences of Latina Superintendents in the Midwest by exploring the career trajectories, supportive factors, and barriers faced by these K-12 leaders. The guiding questions informing this study were:

- (1) What are the professional backgrounds of Latina Superintendents?
- (2) To what or whom do Latina Superintendents attribute their success?
- (3) What challenges have Latinas faced while ascending and serving in the superintendency?

The findings in this chapter are organized under each of the research questions. Cross-cutting themes from the interviews are highlighted with quotes to illuminate the *testimonios* of the superintendents interviewed. The use of ellipses (...) throughout a participant's response indicates that parts of the *testimonio* were expressed at various points in the interview rather than sequentially. Related statements have been compiled through the participants' responses to multiple questions and across both sets of interviews. This approach aligns with circular storytelling, a method that some Latinos and other people of color use circular narrative style where ideas are interconnected and revisited several times throughout the story. This method of compiling statements was recommended by Dr. Melissa Martinez, a leading researcher who uses *testimonio* as an approach in her research involving Latina school leaders (M. Martinez, personal communication, May 28, 2024).

I will begin by addressing the themes that emerged related to the first research question, which centers the participants' background and experiences.

Professional Backgrounds and Career Trajectories

The four participants in this study come from diverse backgrounds and lead in diverse contexts across the Midwest. To begin this section, I include a brief profile of each Superintendent along with the district demographic information that was gathered through the participants' *testimonios* and verified using state-provided school and student demographic data.

All four participants are Latino, however they all have different cultural backgrounds and experiences. Two participants in this study are of Mexican heritage, one of biracial background with Mexican and Caucasian heritage, and one of Bolivian-Cuban heritage. Three are first-generation Americans while one is second-generation. All participants in the study are fluent in English and Spanish, though the point in which they learned both languages vary.

The four Superintendents lead schools of various sizes, ranging from districts that serve a few hundred students to nearly 7,000 students. Three of the Superintendents who participated in this study work in suburban districts, while one serves in a rural district. Two of the Superintendents lead school districts in which a majority of the students served are White, while the other two lead school districts where a majority of students served are students of color. Each Latina Superintendent is at a different point in their career, ranging from an entering Superintendent with interim experience to one who is approaching retirement.

The profiles below provide an overview of the Superintendents' backgrounds along with a brief description of the educational context in which they lead. Some information is intentionally vague to protect the anonymity of the participant due to the limited number of Latina Superintendents in the Midwest - which is the scope of this study. Participants were given the opportunity to review and give feedback on their profile and school district demographic information to ensure information was captured accurately.

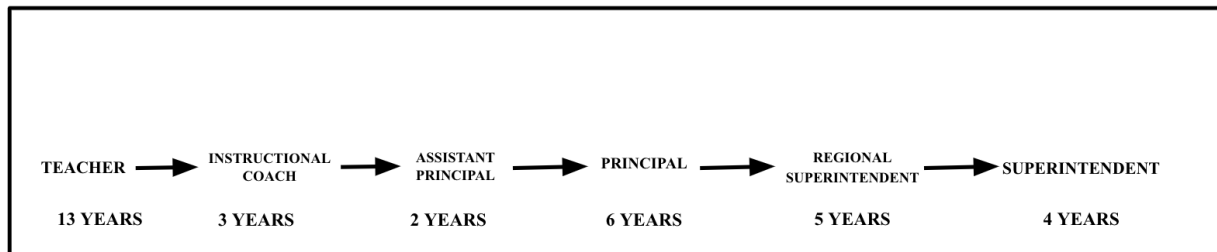
Penelope Luna

Penelope Luna is the District Administrator for a small, suburban K-8 district in the Midwest. She is currently serving her fourth year in this role. Penelope Luna grew up in a nearby city. She is a first-generation American whose parents immigrated from Mexico. Throughout her childhood, Penelope Luna lived in predominantly White neighborhoods. As a student, she attended private religious schools throughout her K-12 education. Penelope Luna is fluent in both English and Spanish.

The school district where she serves has over 700 students. Over 75% of the students identify as a race other than White. Among the diverse student body, African-American or Black students represent the largest demographic group followed by Hispanic or Latino students who represent about a quarter of the student population. Less than 10% of the students who attend the school district are identified as English Learners. Half of the students are labeled as economically disadvantaged or low-income. Socioeconomic data of the students remained fairly consistent, however the district has seen a decrease in African American students and an increase of Latino students over the last five years.

Prior to serving as the Superintendent of this district, Penelope Luna held various positions including teacher, instructional coach, assistant principal, principal, and regional superintendent. Most of her career has been spent in working in a nearby large urban school district. Penelope Luna is the district's first Latina Superintendent. Figure 2 outlines the career pathway of Penelope Luna.

Figure 2
Career Trajectory, Penelope Luna



Note: Figure 2 outlines the career trajectory of Penelope Luna

Raquel Rivera

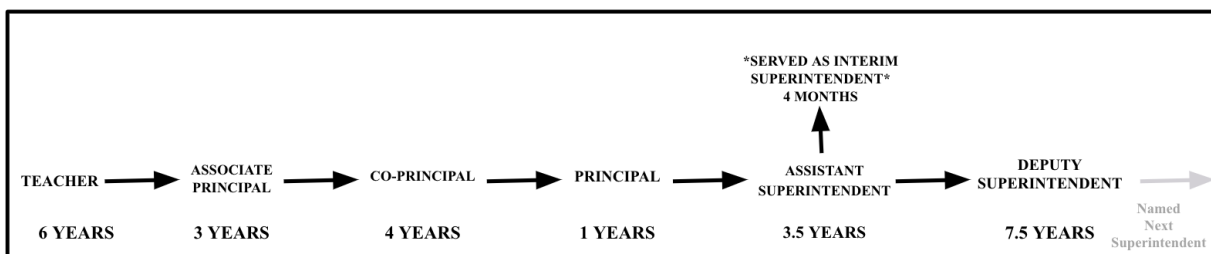
Raquel Rivera is currently the Deputy Superintendent for a medium-sized, suburban K-8 district in the Midwest. She has also served as the district's Interim Superintendent during a Superintendent transition. Raquel Rivera has been announced as the district's next Superintendent. Raquel Rivera is first-generation American, with Bolivian-Cuban heritage. Raquel Rivera grew up in a nearby city and also spent time living and going to school in both the United States and Mexico as a child. Raquel Rivera is bilingual and she entered school as an English Learner.

The school district where she serves enrolls nearly 4,000 students. Nearly 70% of the students enrolled in this district identify as White. The next largest racial group is Hispanic or Latino, which is nearly a quarter of the students. Nearly 15% of students are identified as English Learners. The district has a dual language program. A quarter of the students are labeled as economically disadvantaged or low-income. The student demographics have remained somewhat consistent over the last five years, though the organization is starting to see a decrease in the Latino population.

Prior to serving as the Superintendent of this district, Raquel Rivera held various positions including teacher, co-principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and deputy Superintendent. She has been promoted internally numerous times. Most of her career has been

spent in working in her current suburban school district. Raquel Rivera is the district's first Latina Superintendent. Figure 3 outlines the career pathway for Raquel Rivera.

Figure 3
Career Trajectory, Raquel Rivera



Note: Figure 3 outlines the career trajectory of Raquel Rivera

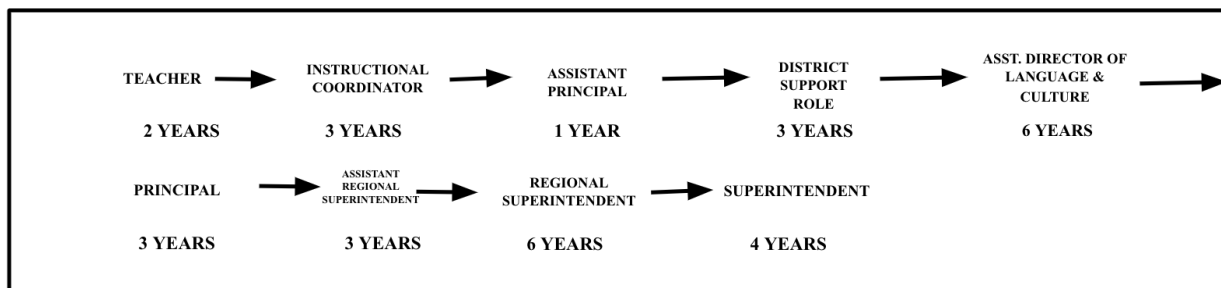
Juana I. Cruz

Juana I. Cruz is the District Administrator for a medium, suburban K-12 district in the Midwest. Juana I. Cruz is currently serving her 4th year as Superintendent. She is a first-generation Mexican-American. She is also bilingual, with fluency in both English and Spanish. She and her mother learned English by watching television shows.

The school district serves nearly 7,000 students. Over 50% of the students are students of color, with over 30% identifying as Hispanic or Latino followed by nearly 30% of students identifying as African American or Black. Nearly 20% of students are identified as English Learners. The school district has a growing percentage of students of color, with the percentage of White students decreasing by 50% over the last five years. Over 60% of students are labeled as economically disadvantaged. This number has grown nearly 10% over the last five years.

Prior to serving as the Superintendent of this district, Juana I. Cruz held various positions including teacher, technology coordinator, assistant principal, principal, district administrator for language, and regional Superintendent. Most of her career has been spent in working in a nearby urban school district. Juana I. Cruz is the district's first Latina Superintendent and first female Superintendent. Figure 4 outlines the career pathway for Juana I. Cruz.

Figure 4
Career Trajectory, Juana I. Cruz



Note: Figure 4 outlines the career trajectory of Juana I. Cruz

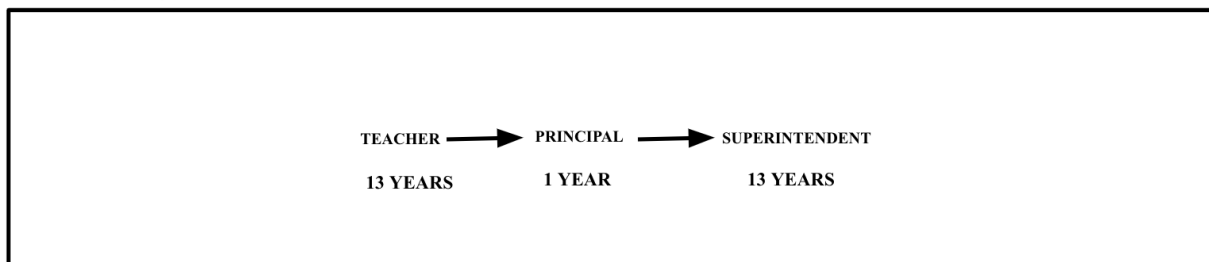
Lara Carranza

Lara Carranza is the District Administrator for a small, rural K-12 school district in the Midwest. Lara Carranza is currently serving her 13th year as Superintendent. She is biracial, identifying as both Mexican-American and Caucasian. Growing up, she attended public school in her rural community. She is also bilingual, fluent in both English and Spanish. She learned to speak Spanish in college.

The school district in which she serves has significantly increased in size over the last two decades. At one point, the district faced closure dwindling down to about 50 students; the school district now serves approximately 300 students. Approximately 90% of students in the district identify as White and 10% of students are students of color. This includes a 5% Hispanic and Latino student population, which also includes a small percentage of migrant students. A quarter of the students in the school district are labeled as economically disadvantaged or low-income.

Prior to serving as the Superintendent of this district, Lara Carranza was a Spanish teacher and elementary principal. Lara Carranza returned to a school where she taught, a school within 30 miles of where she grew up, to become the district administrator. She is the district's first Latina Superintendent. Figure 4 outlines the career pathway for Lara Carranza.

Figure 5
Career Trajectory, Lara Carranza



Note: Figure 5 outlines the career trajectory of Lara Carranza

This section provided a brief profile of study participants, their career journey, and the educational contexts in which they lead. All Superintendents have been identified as the first Latina Superintendent in the history of their district. Being the first Latina superintendent was not part of the criteria of participation in this study, though all four share this experience. The participants share some similarities in their paths as well as distinct differences in both their paths and districts where they choose to serve as Superintendent.

Among the similarities, the first theme that emerges from the *testimonios*, “Significant Early Experiences Navigating Predominantly White Spaces.” This theme helps shed light on the early experiences in participants’ lives that helped shape their career and journey to the Superintendency.

Early Experiences Navigating Predominantly White Spaces

The first cross-cutting theme that emerged from the data is the significance of early school experiences while navigating predominantly White spaces. All four Superintendents attended elementary schools and/or lived in neighborhoods where they were one of few Latina/o/xs. Being “one of few” in their elementary years mirrors their current reality where they remain among a small group of Latina Superintendents in a predominantly White field. While some of the Latina Superintendents in this study consciously reflected on how these early experiences may have impacted their journey to the superintendency, others did not explicitly

make this connection. The theme of being “one of few” Latinas and navigating those spaces emerged across all of their stories.

Raquel Rivera shares her *testimonio* as an English Learner entering school and navigating a predominantly White space early in her education journey. She highlighted how this experience created formative memories that has had a conscious impact on her career choice. These early experiences were a motivator which ultimately led her to pursue education, educational leadership, and the Superintendency. In her *testimonio*, she shares:

I really do believe that my journey into the superintendency started when I was in kindergarten. I am a first generation, first born to immigrant parents. My mom is from Havana, Cuba. My dad is from La Paz, Bolivia. So being the first born, you know, my parents really didn't understand the school system here in the United States, in particular [city].

So, they enrolled me in a private school where I was the only Latinas in my class. There was only one other family that was in like third grade. Sometimes they would use, they were from Venezuela, they would use them to try to translate for me because none of the teachers spoke any Spanish. I had a really rough first experience in school. And I will share, part of the reason I'm in education is because of that experience. I always say this, while kids might not understand the language, you know, they're learning the language, they know how you make them feel.

And I didn't feel like I belonged with that kindergarten teacher in particular. It was more like I was being punished because I didn't speak English. I was held in during recess. And you can only imagine that as a kindergarten, regardless of if we speak English or Spanish, we want to play with kids, right? So I think it was a punishment that I was, you know, held during recess to learn more with her, which didn't really go far.

Raquel Rivera's reflection and story of her early education experiences highlights the challenge of being one of the few Latinas in her school. Being one of the only Latinas is a stark memory for Raquel. In addition to a cultural barrier, Raquel describes a language barrier that further stood out in her school. The combination of isolation, language barriers, and exclusion by being made to stay in during recess had a lasting impact on her. The experience, for her, stands out as a

primary influence in her decision to pursue a career in education where she can make an impact for others.

Lara Carranza shares a different perspective on being one of few Latinas in her school and community. While her recollection of the early years were generally positive, she recounts being one of few Latinas in her school and having some issues as a child. This moment, while different from Raquel Rivera's story, also shows a lasting impact from navigating predominantly White spaces as a child being one of few Latinas. Lara Carranza shares a critical moment:

My principal in elementary brought me and my parents in to tell them that I was starting a gang because my girlfriends and I all wanted to dress the same and that he's not going to deal with this Mexican gang...Unfortunately, that same principal actually brought my brother and my parents in and then told my mom and dad that my brother would end up in jail. I mean, he was just a jerk. I mean, he was just a prejudiced jerk. But yeah, so it's who he was...So growing up, I mean it was harder for my brother, I'd say that, more than it was for us girls as far as any kind of that. ...And I really didn't, I mean, I really didn't have a rough childhood. If I was going to be called a name, they used the n-word, Right?

She goes on to share how being one of few Latinas in her small rural school had an impact on her, especially when another Latino family moved out of the school district.

You know, it was me and my siblings and maybe a handful of other kids that were of any color- Caucasian 100%. I remember the first African-American family that moved in and they only lasted about six months and then they left. So just kind of give you a general idea...My one Hispanic friend in the first grade moved, in the third grade, and I bawled forever. Because she was the only other Brown person in my class, so you know, I mean, I'm talking about 150 kids. It's not huge. That was my class. Those are my classmates, but being the only one was very - It was normal, at times. So when she moved I lost a big thing and I missed her forever.

The feelings of being isolated and the emotional loss that Lara Carranza experienced when her close Latina friend, the only other "brown person" in her class moved away shows the psychological impact of being the only one or "one of few." Lara did not have many others in her school that shared her cultural background. While Lara notes having a generally positive childhood, being the only Latina in instances like this clearly left its mark during key moments in

her elementary years. While different from the experience of Raquel Rivera, the two *testimonios* share the theme and impact of navigating predominantly White spaces in their early years and the key moments related to it.

Juana I. Cruz was the only Latina in her school. While she did not share specific examples of significant early elementary experiences as a part of her journey, she does explicitly recall the lack of other Latinos in her school, noting: “Going through the school as an elementary school student, in kindergarten, I remember being the only child of color.” She recognizes being the only one and the memory of that experience is long lasting. Being one of few in a predominately White school and space is a theme that resonates across all of the Latina Superintendents interviewed for this study.

Penelope Luna also speaks about being one of few. She spoke passionately about her elementary school experience and how she did not feel a sense of belonging at her school. Her childhood and early school memories had a significant impact on her since she was one of the first Latinos in the neighborhood. She felt unwelcomed in her early school years, which further supports the thread of isolation that continues to weave through the participants. In her *testimonio*, she discusses how her experience in elementary school dimmed her spirit and had a lasting negative impression:

As I look for a journey of belonging, I did not have that in my elementary years. We were the first Latinos in this neighborhood and not accepted so...Basically [the school administrators] were not educational leaders. They did management, they made sure you knew your religious sacraments and beliefs and prayers that go with it. But when it came to caring and nurturing, they were not about that. They were really about subtractive schooling. They were about demeaning, ridiculing. And so my journey in the beginning was- I really wanted to shine when I was five-and then little by little my spirit was being killed.

The emotional weight of her elementary school experience coupled with being one of the first Latinos in her neighborhood had an impact on Penelope Luna. Not only was Penelope one

of the only Latinas, she also talked about not being accepted. These significant childhood memories for Penelope Luna, and the other Superintendents, are memories that they recall to this day- currently in their 40s and 50s.

The Superintendents in this study shared their significant early experiences while navigating predominately White spaces in their elementary years. While their stories are diverse and reflect different contexts, there are common threads. Each of the participants navigated environments where they were the only one or one of few. Their memories and reflections demonstrate how formative these experiences are. As Latina Superintendents, these women find themselves in similar positions in their current leadership roles. As Latina Superintendents they represent only 1% of Superintendents across the country. All are the only or one of few Latina Superintendents in their region and/or state.

Supportive Factors

The next section of this chapter moves to the key supportive factors that contribute to the success of Latina Superintendents. There are numerous factors that Superintendents explicitly identified as sources of support and those that emerged from stories about their journeys. The first theme highlights how other people, especially family, have had a significant impact on Latina Superintendents' careers.

The Role of Family, Faith, and Collective Support

Through the interviews with Latina Superintendents, it became clear that their success is rooted in personal and professional support systems. The success of Latina Superintendents is due to the presence of a supportive network. When asked what they attribute their success to, family was a resounding theme across all of the Superintendents. In response to the question at

least two of the four mention faith, key mentors, and the collective work of the staff where they serve.

Growing up in a rural area and being one of few Mexicans in her school, Lara Carranza emphasizes family and faith as her center. She responds:

My family. Family and faith. I feel like I could step out and do brave things. Because if I follow my faith, my family is still there, I've always said that. So yeah, and you know. I'm also gonna say that growing up in a 99% Caucasian environment as the Brown girl in the class. I mean, that's how I always - I'll just look for the brown girl in the picture, right? You just had two people - even when you're scared.

For Lara, her parents were a sense of safety, she knew that they would be there for her. Lara's description of looking for the "brown girl in the picture" further highlights being one of the only Latinas in her school and how important it was to lean on her family for a sense of belonging and security.

Juana I. Cruz shares similar responses, but also adds the significance of a female Latina mentor who she worked closely with in her previous school district:

So I thank God for everything. But I would say my parents for giving me the grit. I don't know what other word to use. Like, you know, and the grit that you have to have. You know, it's like, kind of like my mother has a saying for everything. And, you know, my dad was always about, you're not above anything. You're not better than anybody else. You better get this done. There was a lot of humbleness. As much as we didn't have growing up, eventually we had a lot more when we were older. But we behaved the same way. And that was their expectation. And it still is. There's a lot of humbleness there. So I think that the way that I feel about my parents, and when I talk to them, I see it in that way, right? Professionally, it would be [female Latina mentor from former school district], because she taught me how to control my inner Virgo.

Juana's recollection of the lessons that her parents taught her stay with her to this day. She was influenced not only by her parents, but also by a key mentor who had an impact in her career.

Superintendent 2 concurs with the other two Superintendents on the support of her family in her response and adds another layer of support- the collective work of her staff:

There's many, many people, and I feel like professional and personal, like, there's no, it's

all intertwined. Like, for me, it's like I don't feel like there's, like, a difference. Like, I am who I am at work and at home. I could share.... my success...and I get a little bit emotional. I grew up with my abuela, and she was a homemaker her entire life. She was a homemaker. And I remember, like, the power that she had in me. Like, she always supported me, and she really believed in me.

And, you know, when I think about my mother, like, my mother, she has a high school degree, and she never went to college, and my mom always felt a little bit less than in the workplace. And, it bothered me so much, because I thought, my mom is so bright, and she worked in health care, and she worked in the medical director's office, doing, like, credentialing, different things. And I remember saying to my mom, because my mom ended up becoming the director of a medical staff, and I remember saying to her, why do you feel this way? And she's like, all the directors around the table have college degrees. I'm like, Mom, that doesn't matter. Look at you. You've got hustle. You have, like, that follow through. I'm like, you speak two languages. I'm like, you relate to people. You connect. And, like, and then looking at my dad. Like, my dad and his, like, you know, strong work ethic. I mean, this is a man who, you know, he works at a gas station to support, you know, his family. And he, you know, like, part of it is, like, my dad to this day still changes his oil, still works on his cars. And he's a multimillionaire. He's in mergers and acquisitions. And to my dad, it's, like, that power of really making sure that you show up and that you put your whole self in there and that you can really, like, put your mind to anything and you could do anything. And so my family is really important to me.

My husband, having that, he was a teacher as well, and then he was an administrator. And having that support, having someone who, I'm going to tell you, is really important to me. Having someone who could say, I'm okay with my wife out-earning me. Not all spouses are comfortable with that. He is. He's also very comfortable stepping in and supporting me when we've been confronted with bias or, you know, comments of, like, you know, even, like, neighbors, you know, like, oh, what do you do all summer? And they'll say, she's a 10-month employee, he says, well, I'm off, but she's working. And they're like, you work? And my husband will step in because I just don't, and he'll say, he's like, you don't understand what she does, and he'll, like, step in.

I really appreciate that I've got that network. I told you about my mother-in-law, my father-in-law, (name omitted) parents are retired superintendents, so they get it. Like, they know, like right before winter break, they know the two of us. While he is a team director, he's a dean of students at a high school. You know, I joke that I'm the dean of the adults. Like, they come and they bring, like food in our refrigerator and drinks in our refrigerator and be like, we know, we know what you're dealing with. But, like, professionally, like, these staff members, I will tell you, like, I am so fortunate that we have really great relationships and we could roll up our sleeves and we could be vulnerable and we could be honest and we could say, like, I don't get this or I need help, and I have a very good connection with our teacher's union.

And so I feel like my success is not on my own. I've got my family, but I also have the staff and leaders. And I feel like when you could really connect with people and when you could say, like, I need your help, we could do this together, I feel like people do. And I feel like that's primarily the reason why I'm able to be successful is through a lot of the work that we do together.

Raquel reiterates that her success is not her own, relying on her family and the collective work of her staff, she demonstrates the importance of not working alone.

Penelope Luna reiterates many of the same messages as the previous leaders, and emphasizes that we cannot do it alone - her success does not just belong to her. She states:

There's just so many people. I know the cliché is to talk about your own parents. My father was a huge component about your education and pushing for an education. My aunts have been very strong Latina women that I, I'm grateful to have them in my life. Um, I look at even my grandparents and how they were like the support system. I mean, like you could do no wrong, like any little thing they applauded you. And then, you know, my brothers and sisters, but then when you think of the other realm, like I saw some really wonderful Latina principals. Um, there were a lot of particularly White men that believed in me and kind of showed me the way. And I appreciate them.

I talk about [name omitted] who really taught me further about storytelling and understanding your heritage and my indigenoussness, um, performance and how we perform all the time because of systemic racism. So he was huge in my life.

But honestly, when you think about current success now, like I'm only one person and this district doesn't run on one person. And so the success that's happening right now is really everyone involved here, like the ensemble I have now. Um, I'm indebted to them. Like, we've worked long hours, a lot of brain power that was put into it. So that success is not, it doesn't belong to me. It belongs to all of them. It belongs to our, you know, our leaders, our principals. You can't do this alone. And so when you think about success, it's, I mean, obviously there's a fire in me, you know, that there's no doubt of that. Um, but that doesn't go, that can only go so far. So there's just a lot of people, you know.

Penelope, like the others, acknowledges the importance of her family and the collective impact of others on her success. With her words she reiterates that her success does not belong to her, alone.

The Latina Superintendents in this study identify several reasons for success in their roles. As a resounding theme of family echoes across all four Superintendents, it is followed by

at least two participants identifying faith, other mentors, and the collective collaboration of staff. These Superintendents share that their success does not belong to them alone, but rather the collective impact of others.

Adding to the finding that the success of Latina Superintendents is a group effort, the next theme emphasizes another group that has shaped the career trajectories of Latina Superintendents.

The Role of White Men Along the Career Path

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the role that White men have played in the career advancement of Latina Superintendents. This was uncovered through the testimonios of three of the study participants. Each of these Latina Superintendents recalled key moments in their professional careers where White male mentors and leaders helped open doors or provided support that moved them along in their journey. While the success of their careers should not be exclusively attributed to the support of White men, White men have played a crucial part in the story for Latina Superintendents. White men are the largest group that hold the Superintendencies, and if they choose to, their influence can make an impact.

Penelope Luna discussed her experience with White men as she shared her leadership journey. In recollection of her journey into administration and her experience with White men, Penelope Luna states:

There were a lot of, particularly, White men that believed in me and kind of showed me the way. And I appreciate them...[My principal] always advocated for me. I will say that. He did it in a weird way, I think because he just had so much faith in me, but he literally left me alone a lot...When I first got hired by him, the first thing he told me was, you got to get on the principal list... And so he said, the reason I want you to do this is because it always looks like when both the principal and assistant principal are ready at any moment to take charge in the school. And I don't want you to be without that. So he really insisted on this...I feel it's because they don't see us as competition. So they're like, we'll support you. We'll help you out. I also believe in the superintendency-it's not like if you're in a firm with lawyers or with doctors where there could be some competition for that position. Here it's like, I'll help you out because you're in your own district. You know, I

have my district. I'm the boss here. So there isn't - there is no competition. I feel that that's why they're so welcoming, that, I mean, even when I was becoming principal, like, yeah, you want that school. I have nothing to do with that school. We'll help you out.

Her reflection not only shares how White men have supported her in her journey, but also describes a rationale for why that may be. She notes that White Superintendents and leaders in education are not threatened by Latina leaders, because there is enough room for them to take roles in other districts or schools. The support of White men, though not the only source of support, has played a significant role for Penelope Luna.

Lara Carranza's experience is similar to Penelope Luna as they were both encouraged by White males to pursue leadership roles. As she shares her story, Lara Carranza shares how she was tapped by a White male administrator who encouraged her to move up the career ladder. In her role as a Spanish teacher, she worked across the state in various schools, she says:

I never would have even thought to go into administration If it wasn't for my White Male Caucasian superintendent who said, 'You would be a great administrator. Have you ever considered it?' What! Never would have thought of it. But it was that moment that... and then he's like, "you know, they're starting a class. You can go ITV, you only have to travel to (nearby town omitted)." and I began to explore...I had the advantage of working for 29 schools. So I also worked for 29 admin. One of those admin, it was actually the former superintendent, maybe three past of [the district I'm in] right now who said to me, you know, you make a really good principal.

This encouragement, by her White male Superintendent, helped Lara Carranza explore the path of administration. Both Penelope Luna and Lara Carranza propelled their careers forward with their guidance and advice. Raquel Rivera also received encouragement from a White male superintendent to explore going into her career path. Raquel Rivera shares how he not only provided guidance, but actively opened up the space for her. She explains:

[White men] have opened the space to allow me to be in that same room. And my current superintendent, I mean I will say like part of the reason I was in HR was because he heard me say I had an interest in HR and he brought me to the first HR conference through [state organization] that I had ever been to. At that point I was an associate

principal and he exposed me to that world and introduced me to people and that's when I realized oh gosh, like this is something I could do. But had he not done that I wouldn't have known that existed.

Later becoming the Assistant Superintendent of HR, the influence of her White male superintendent is obvious. Her journey, along with those of Penelope and Lara, were influenced by White men who offered guidance and support throughout their journey.

The influence of the impact White men have had in the career of these Latina Superintendents is evident. As the largest group to hold Superintendent seats, White men can serve as gatekeepers and advocates. While these Latina leaders attribute their success to a variety of actors and people, these White men, many who were Superintendents, have been an important factor in opening doors, providing encouragement, and offering exposure.

Latina Identity as an Asset in Diverse and Changing Communities

As the superintendents in this study reflected on their career trajectory, several shared that their identity as Latinas or people of color benefitted them in their school context. While all of the Latina Superintendents who participated in this study are clearly credentialed and experienced, they also share stories which show how their identity as a Latina was seen as an asset in the context of their school district. In particular, these districts, which have a significant percentage of students of color or are experiencing demographic changes, viewed their cultural background as a strength. This dynamic was evident in the hiring process for several of the participants, with some even being explicitly told that being Latina played a role in their selection.

Penelope Luna shares a story about her identity being an asset as she applied to her first administrative role early in her career. She applied to serve as an Associate Principal in a school in the district where she lived, which was a predominantly White neighborhood even though the

school had a large Latino population as well. She recalls applying to the school and how the intentionality in hiring a Spanish speaking administration played a part in her hiring. She recalls:

...And I'm like there's no way they're going to hire a Latina. There's just no way. And the principal was a male and he was intentional. He wanted someone of color. He wanted someone who spoke Spanish particularly. And I got hired. ...At the time, the school was like 60, 40. So 60% White and 40% Latinos. But the Latinos who were there were second, third generation. So just to give you a picture of it. So not knowing Spanish. Or rejecting the Latinidad. Yeah, like whitewashed, all of that. Anglicized. So it was just a different feel and I just really didn't think I was going to get it. ...And then eventually I became principal of that school...there were a lot of issues with the economy and the market and everything. And so people started doubling up and moving in. And my school flipped 60, 40. Yeah, like Latinos and then White.

Later in her career, as Penelope Luna applied to the job in her current district, she recalls how her identity as a person of color was likely a factor in her hiring, even though it wasn't explicitly shared in the interview process. Penelope Luna heard rumors, though she didn't think the interview highlighted that preference. She says:

I heard rumors from others that the former superintendent was really pushing for a Black candidate, which makes a lot of sense to me because of our demographics here. So, part of me felt like I may not get it because they may want a Black leader. And that would have been fine with me, honestly...I never felt that way that they were like, it never came out in a question or in any feeling like we're looking for a person of color... I do believe that my board wanted a person of color. That's all. I do believe that, wholeheartedly...So I've been blessed in getting the positions I'm in. And I do attribute that to being- because I'm qualified for it.

Penelope Luna acknowledges that, serving as Superintendent in a district with a large African American and Latino student population, her identity as a person of color was likely an asset. She, however, emphasizes that her qualifications, credentials, and experience were more important factors that contributed to her getting the role.

While Penelope Luna believes that her background may have been a benefit in the hiring process, Lara Carranza was explicitly told that her identity was a factor. In her *testimonio*, Lara Carranza recounts a conversation with the President of the School Board. In this conversation,

she asks about why she was hired for the role - a role in which at the time she did not have the license for:

You know, I asked my Board President once I was hired, I was a total rookie, what made you choose me? He had two reasons. One, I cared because I had taught here. I cared about the town; I knew the town. And two, they were starting to get a lot of Hispanic students and they needed that cultural diversity and leadership. There was an unknown, more of a fear, of Spanish-speaking kids coming in. You know, what are we going to do?

I love the fact that my board president said, well part of it is because you're Hispanic. We needed you. I needed to know that that was a quality in me rather than- right? So I think that to me you have to be so careful because you can't say hey, we're hiring you because you're a female. That will get you in trouble. You can't say that right? Oh, the same thing, but yeah, I guess just understanding.

This candid conversation helps us understand that cultural background can be a factor in hiring. Juana I. Cruz acknowledges that being Latina, but also being woman may have helped open the doors in her diverse school community, while her credentials provided the other missing piece to the puzzle. All superintendents who participated in this study were their district's first Latina Superintendent. Juana I. Cruz is also her district's first female superintendent.

I think that being Latina, speaking Spanish and understanding a part of my community, about a third of my community, their language, and they feel like a sense of belonging. Being a woman definitely helped of course. So, and that's across regardless of, regardless of ethnic background, it helped everybody because finally a woman, you know, kind of a thing... I'll say that perhaps it might've opened the door for me, but really what got me through the door was my experiences, the work that I've done. So I would say that the cultural climate that I've built in the past was really what I believe got me through the door very solidly. Right. Because it was something that they, that at that time, that board wanted to happen.

Juana acknowledges that her identity as a Latina may have helped open doors in her diverse school district, though she is clear that it was her experience and proven track record that truly secured the position for her. She recognizes the power she brings, however, because her background resonates with the community she serves.

While being Latina may have been an additional factor for some of the Latina superintendents in this study in securing their role, it is not the only factor. The role of a Superintendent, the highest position in a school district, requires more than just sharing a cultural background with students. Being Latina is not enough to secure a Superintendency nor should it be reduced to that factor. All of the superintendents who participated in this study are highly credentialed professionals who each bring extensive experience and leadership. This distinction is important to understand.

Armoring Up with Academic and Professional Qualifications

Through their testimonios, you will find their achievements interspersed throughout the findings including their awards and credentials. It is important to note that all of the Latina Superintendents hold Superintendent licenses. Three of the Superintendents hold a Ph.D. while the fourth has earned their Ed.S. degree. Between them, they hold numerous degrees and certifications in the field of education.

The importance of earning these credentials was emphasized in the *testimonio* of Raquel Rivera for not only Latinas, but women, who aim to secure the Superintendent role. Her statements emphasize how these credentials are essential for women and Latinas to advance in their leadership journeys. She shares:

I went to lunch with the superintendent who actually created this district, so when it was three districts and it consolidated, I had lunch with her. She was the first female superintendent of the district and she's amazing and she actually brought a friend who was a local, also retired like 20 years. A Superintendent, White man from like the [Midwestern suburban] area and he said to me he said I have never seen a candidate...and he's done search firms with as many experiences degrees and leadership roles as I have. He's like I've never seen someone as a first year superintendent and have all this. And what I didn't say, because again I was being polite, because I was thinking "because I had to." I had to. They wouldn't have appointed me had I not. I think that's it and I had to prove myself...

So if you want to learn how to understand, how to navigate, you know, these leadership positions, and you're telling me that they're all males, then you better get in the room with those males and understand what they're doing. And that's why I got my [business manager license]. You know, I looked around. My colleagues were getting it. And I heard other males say to me, oh, you don't need that to be a superintendent. Well, guess what? All these other guys have it. So why wouldn't I get it? Because I don't want them to say, well, [Raquel Rivera] doesn't have it. These guys do. Same with the doctorate. There were people like, oh, you don't need your doctorate to be a superintendent. Okay, well, when I started looking at who was getting their doctorates, it was males, White males.

...And then once I got my doctorate, I thought, I am done. D-o-n-e. Done, done, done! And then I was at this meeting and I'm hearing these guys talking about getting their [business manager license] and I'm like, do you have it? They're like, yeah. Like do you have it? They're like, yeah. I literally started asking these guys and I'm like, oh my god, they all have it. None of the women had it. None -none, none, none, and I'll never forget this, one of my former male superintendents. I asked him if he had it. He's like, "no, you don't need it." My current superintendent, I asked him. He's like, no, you don't need it, I teach those classes. You don't need it, but I'm like that's really funny....That I'm hearing from males I don't need it yet all these other young guys who are going to be what I assumed like my competition when I go for a job, they have it.

...So you know, I'm sure you're understanding I'm not the quiet one, so I kind of stood up and I said "well, that's funny because you have it and so here you are you have it" and he's my age. I listed all the women in the room and I'm like, I think there's a case here to say that you should probably be looking into this if you don't want one excuse for a board to select a male over a female. In the [Midwestern state] 70 percent of superintendents are White males. I've had three people reach out to me that they enrolled in programs literally this summer... And while I would love to say that it doesn't matter. it does matter.

Raquel Rivera's example highlights the fact that for women, including Latinas, earning credentials and certifications is not only helpful to professional development, but a necessity in acquiring leadership roles. She recognizes that without these credentials, she might be overlooked for a position. Her story emphasizes that being Latina is not enough on its own to secure a Superintendency, the combination of cultural capital along with credentials is a key to open the door.

This finding shows how Latina Superintendents' identities as Latina women and people of color may play a role in the hiring process, especially in districts with diverse populations or those experiencing shifts in population. While being Latina was an asset in the communities

where these Latina leaders applied, it is not the only factor in hiring. The superintendents were clear that their qualifications, experience, and leadership abilities were the primary reason they earned their roles. Further evidence of qualifications are discussed in the next, related theme.

Leadership Roles and Recognition Beyond the District

Another key finding in this study is that Latina Superintendents actively join and engage in professional networks where they not only participate as members, but take on leadership roles and win awards. Through their *testimonios*, all four Superintendents shared examples that included engaging in these networks. These networks are connected to leadership and education, some with an emphasis on supporting women and/or Latina/o/x leaders. These networks allow Latina superintendents to meet other people who are passionate about the same topics, engage in important work such as policy change, and are spaces where the participants have been recognized for their work in various ways. The participants are not only involved in professional organizations on the local, state, and national level but they have all received significant recognition and awards for their contributions to the field of education and leadership.

In order to protect the anonymity of participants, many of the specific organization names and details are redacted and replaced with a broad description of the organization and its mission.

Penelope Luna is involved in a wide variety of professional networks. In the portion of her testimonio below, Penelope Luna overviews some of the organizations that she is involved in and some of the awards she has won for her work. Penelope states:

The biggest one is [national Latino-centered organization]. Obviously, that's a place where we do discuss policy a lot and other issues that are around supporting our Latino children, particularly... What I won from [national Latino-centered organization] when I was president. We won the award for, actually I have it here- [state based achievement award]. So this was awarded when I was President. So super excited about that. And that was through [national Latino-centered organization]. We were doing a lot of great stuff.

Another organization that I got involved in, mainly because of women, was [national

women-centered organization for leadership]. And [the founder] is just absolutely inspiring. And I won [an equity award]...I'm a board member right now for [national women's leadership organization].

And then there's the [another national Latino organization]. But there's really business involved in it. But I won an award for philanthropy. As a matter of fact, [my colleague] just got the award this year. So she was on LinkedIn. I saw it, but it was for the Latina Leader of the Year. So I received that. And that's another organization as well.

And then I'm a board member right now for [early childhood organization]. I'm involved with the [state policy organization], leading a group for policy for principal mentorship. Through [national Latino-centered organization] as well, I was part of the policy. I was co-chairing that. Policy is something that I became really interested in from the beginning, I guess, when I became a superintendent, realizing the inequities that were in it. So I wanted to be part of it. So that's why I'm with [state policy organization] as well, too. And the advocacy groups that do a lot of things with policy.

Penelope Luna's involvement in these networks show her contribution to not only education, but also her passion for supporting women and the Latino community. The numerous organizations along with awards and leadership roles show her commitment to this work.

Similar to Penelope, Juana I. Cruz is also involved in a number of organizations including those with a center on women and Latina/o/xs. She has also received numerous awards and has a long list of active involvement:

So then, with the [Mexican-centered organization], my first year here, it was really intended for me to get it when I was still at [Midwestern urban school district], but because of COVID, I didn't get it. The [Latina feminist icon award]. That's a major award from the [Mexican-centered organization]. Women that have done things for the community and supported the community in different ways that have led to the development of a lot of community-based items and supported the leadership of that. I got that award with five other ladies. I'm very proud of that. And I brought it to [Midwestern suburb], and I'm like, I don't care if I won any [Midwestern city] award, I'm showing it off here. Let's see. For the [Midwestern state], I was selected to be on the advisory for a couple of committees under the former state superintendent around setting, developing standards for bilingual education, dual language, and then literacy, especially at the primary grades. Specifically at the primary grades. And those have been published and have been shared statewide. Let's see. I'm also a member of (state education organization). There's about 15 to 16 superintendents across the state of (state) that work with (state organization) to bring more funding and to do a lot of litigation with the governor, the governor's office, and [technology organization]. So we're currently working on moving from 350 to 550. And then also talking about unfunded mandates and

things like that. So I'm the only Latina in that group. So, yeah. Then let's go to, you know, I'm a member of (state and national Latino-centered organization).

I'm a member of a lot of things, right?...I'm also, locally, I am involved in the [Midwestern suburb] Chamber of Commerce's Leadership Academy, which is really building individuals or leaders in town to be more civic minded and understanding the budget and economics of town. So that as a superintendent, I'm cognizant of how to support [Midwestern suburb] in a different kind of way, especially when it comes to like tax levies and all of that kind of stuff...[National women's equity-based organization] is a female only organization, national organization, that's run by [a colleague who is] Puerto Rican born and raised in the Bronx who was a superintendent.... And she started this group, which I'm a part of. I was one of the very first winners of the [equity award]. And I was bestowed that. And then I was asked to become the chairperson for [national women's equity-based organization] and [women's leadership organization] chairperson.

Juana I. Cruz's involvement in professional organizations, similar to Penelope Luna, showcases her leadership and commitment to education, supporting women and others in the Latina community. Her numerous awards including the Latina Feminist Icon award serve as evidence of her work.

While Lara Carranza initially downplays the extent of her involvement in professional networks and organizations, as she lists her involvement, she recognizes how groups she is a part of, including leadership roles. She also has, like Juana and Penelope, earned many awards for her work. She starts by saying:

I do not belong to anything- I mean I belong to the AASA nationally, but I don't sit on any of those national boards at this time. I am what's called the [regional] school leader so monthly all you know, there's about 30 some of us in the [region] of [Midwest State], we get together monthly and I've been the chairperson for the last four years. It's a job nobody wants so I continue (laughs).

I sit on the [Midwestern State organization for administrators and superintendents]. I sit on that board. I sit on what's called [Midwestern state industry-centered organization]. I'm the board president for the [Midwestern state industry-centered organization]. That represents, you know, all the [industry] production and [industry] production in the [Midwestern State]. Lobbyists, you know, they do quite a bit for schools, they lobby for schools as well. And so, I'm not a registered lobbyist, of course, but during legislative sessions, I do participate a lot not only for the school side, but then for the [Midwestern state industry-centered organization]. Anything has to do with the [region] because we're unique with our [industry] production here.

I was the [regional] superintendent of the year in 2022 and then from that, you're voted in by your region. So you're voted in by your region and then I was the [Midwestern state] superintendent of the year...as well. So then I won that award. So yeah, I do a lot of boards.

Lara Carranza's recognition as Superintendent of the Year and her roles, including Board President, show how involved she is and the work that she does. As a Superintendent, her legislative work and connection with the industry-focused organization shows how she works not only in education, but the fields that are adjacent to education in order to improve all systems.

Like the other participants, Raquel Rivera has also demonstrated significant involvement in her field. As she shares her involvement, she not only highlights her work and achievements, but also the importance of school boards supporting Superintendents to be involved in these professional organizations. She shares:

My formal roles and then through [state education organization] for right now I am the chair of the legislative committee. So (name omitted), you know, I've been the President, I'm the Past president and now I serve on the board... From [Midwestern State], I have received administrator of the year. I've also received a Mentor of the Year. So those are two awards that I've received. I'm also part of the [state education organization]...I was inducted last year...I didn't even know existed and part of the reason why is that women weren't allowed to join it.

I also won an award for [education-based company]. It's like a company that we use for culture surveys and we use it also for our screeners And we also use it for our coaching. I won the [organization] exemplary leader award. Then in terms of like the [national education association], I'm The President-elect. I've also been the regional rep as well. I've been heavily involved in both of those because those are the two in my field, but I've presented at the (stated principal association). I think they're an amazing organization. I've also served as a mentor for that organization. I've also presented at the [state Latino-centered organization] conference, I've presented there...

One of the things I shared with [the school board] is like I am the President-Elect of the (national education organization) and I'm not interested in going to all the conferences across the country. I want to lead this school district, but I think there's really something important about being a part of certain organizations. One of the things is like as I leave (national association), I do want to be a part of [national Latino-centered organization]. I think it's important for boards to support not only the membership, but also superintendents being away from their district to attend those kind of opportunities. And

again, you've got to balance it, right because you're leading and you like, you have to make sure that you're not always out of the office, but like I think it's important to put that out there. They definitely, I think in my particular standpoint, they understand the power of like me being able to network and then leveraging those networks. I think that's really important that I told them it's not just about me getting to know people like I need to be able to leverage that and they do understand that.

Raquel Rivera, like the other participants, is involved in multiple professional networks and holds leadership roles. Being recognized as administrator of the year and mentor of the year show not only her participation, but her impact.

Through participation and leadership in professional networks, these four Superintendents deeply invest not only in their work, but the growth of others. These Latina leaders actively shape legislation, education, leadership, and collectively reach thousands of people through their work. This theme shows Latina Superintendents as active finders and builders of community in their fields - all while focusing on elevating others and furthering positive work.

Finding Solidarity and Support Through Superintendent Networks

Another theme that emerged from the data is the value that participating in Superintendent networks, at the regional and state level, adds to their job. These networks give Superintendents the opportunity to learn, collaborate, and network. These networks are often not diverse, with Latina Superintendents being the only one or one of few. These networks are dominated by White male Superintendents who make up a majority of Superintendents in the region, state, and country. While the lack of diversity in these spaces can be challenges, the solidarity that Latina Superintendents find within the network overpowers that isolation. Being a Superintendent is an isolating job and their participation and connection through these networks helps them navigate the intensity and loneliness of their role. These networks serve as a unique space to be with, and engage with, others who relate to the challenges of the profession. Three of

the participants discussed the importance of these networks and how they find solidarity among their fellow Superintendents- even if they are the only woman, person of color, and/or Latina in the room.

Lara Carranza, who is the only Latina Superintendent in her state and one of a small percentage of women superintendents in the state, shares a perspective on her Superintendent network. She is candid and she shares the challenges of being both a woman and person of color in the profession and says there is no space for separating yourself from the group. She believes survival in the role depends on collaboration, mutual respect, and is centered in solidarity on the shared experience they hold as Superintendents.

I do separate myself, I am unique and I know it and I'm proud of that; You hold onto your pride and hold on to your uniqueness. But you can't separate yourself to where you're so unique that you're not just one of them, too... You have to stay together in order to survive and the moment you separate yourself too far out and don't meet them at 'Hey, here's our commonality,' even if we don't like the same thing, I'm still going to-I have to join the group. I may not say anything, but I'm gonna stand there and listen and talk about the sports. Right? And be as engaged as I potentially can. Because not only, I mean, well, you know, I'm the only Latina superintendent in the [Midwestern State] right? But I'm also one of [a small percentage] of female superintendents, so we have to engage.

My only thing - I can really relate to in my own experience is female so I take the Latina out because I'm it... You have to suck it up. And even if you're nervous, and even if you don't really understand what they're saying. you can't. Otherwise you've lost. Because you've lost that support of one another, and there's a time in every superintendent's life where you're a hundred percent alone in that district. You can't talk to your principals. They're mad at you too, right? Okay, and you need each other. ...it's very isolating and it can be - Especially in those times where you're in the hot seat and we're in the hot seat a lot. So you need to have your fellow superintendents.

...So the female sups, when they say 'all my colleagues, they don't even try to find out what I might have in common with them or what I like. They only talk about sports, they talk about this and I don't really know anything about it.' Too bad sister, this is what it is, Right? You have to go in, you can't expect them to meet you where you are. Right, that's just it. And so don't expect them to understand who you are without sharing who you are. Or them coming to you just be you and allow them to see your professionalism. Meet them halfway as well, meet them at where they are And allow them to get to know you...

But I need them, and they need me, just to survive. I'm sorry, that's the - new sups' come on and we do. We try to very much embrace them. Don't, don't be afraid to call me and say I don't know what to do in this situation. no, I mean you have to be able to and women have a tendency to separate themselves out and not be as... Because they're nervous. Because they're nervous to go up because they can't talk the shit like the good old boys. Excuse me, but right? So that's what I mean by that. You can't-we separate ourselves for whatever reason being female or [a person of color], you'll lose out. Okay? And you never allow them to see that we're really not all that different. We're school leaders. That's how you have to relate to them. We're school leaders and the more I allow them - the relationships that I've made with Caucasian male school leaders allow them, I think, allows them to have more respect for female or Latina or culturally diverse female leaders of not being different. I'm just saying I'm different. We're all unique, but I'm a school leader just like you.

Involvement in Superintendent networks is critical for Lara Carranza. In her context, where she is the only Latina, the only person of color in the room, and one of few women, she finds common ground in the role. She emphasizes how isolating the role is because you do not have peers within your district, saying “You can't talk to your principals. They're mad at you too, right?” Her involvement is essential for professional survival. Leaning on the Superintendent network is a way that Lara finds solidarity and connection.

Juana I. Cruz also shares her journey navigating these networks, as she is the only woman and person of color in her region. Like Lara Carranza, Juana finds ways to connect, using humor. She shares her experience at one of her first meetings:

I was the only woman when I got here in the county for superintendents. So there's nine of us and I'm the only female and the only person of color... So, you know, I get a lot of like, and I was very uncomfortable, but I grew up with a bunch of guys. I was the only girl for 16 years. Right. So when I got here, there was at that day, like a couple of days before, six tornadoes had landed in the county. And we were sitting around the table and the guy said something. They're like, well, welcome.

And I said, yeah, I really appreciate the six tornadoes you guys sent out my way to welcome me to the county. You know, gosh darn it. If I'd have known that it'd come sooner. And they cracked up, right? Because they saw that I was, you know, that I wasn't going to be a whole hundred person, right? That I was willing to engage and to be funny.

And so now my relationship with them is like, so what do you think [Juana I. Cruz]? You know, like, let's see, let's, [Juana I. Cruz] what do you, what does [Juana I. Cruz] say? You know, kind of thing. It's become that more frequently. And that's because they've learned to engage with me and it wasn't so much about like, well, because she's Brown person, a woman, we're not going to know how.

Juana I. Cruz's story describes pushing past the initial feelings of discomfort being the only one. She used humor to build the relationship and describes how their relationships grew strong over time. This helped her become one of the group, someone the group relies on. Both Lara Carranza and Juana I. Cruz value the professional collaboration engaging with their peers.

Raquel Rivera discusses how these networks have led to important collaboration and relationships. She shares a story about building a meaningful partnership based on commonality. She discusses how learning from others helps navigate the role of the Superintendency. She shares:

So I have a colleague right next door...And I love [him]. [He] is an introvert. But at work, he's an extrovert. So I didn't know this about him. He's an introvert, though. He'd sit in these meetings, and he wouldn't say anything when I first met him, these local [organization] meetings. And I remember he presented on something. And it was when we were, unfortunately, closing buildings. And we had to transfer staff. We also had to do a reduction in force. And there was a new law in [Midwestern state] that was very convoluted as to how you actually have to reduce staff. It was no longer based on seniority. It had to do with the evaluation process. And I was trying to wrap my head around, like, how does this look like for [certified staff and teachers]. What does this look like?

And [my colleague] presented this spreadsheet and was sharing how he basically culminated all the information into this. And then he was able to shoot off letters to have people confirm their status based on something called Autocrat. And I remember thinking, this man's a genius. Yeah. And I don't know what I'm doing. So, I walked up to him and said, I would love for you to come to my office. I will buy you lunch. Can we sit down, and can you show me this? And he's like, absolutely. The reason I shared he's an introvert. We were so close. We're opposites.

[He] told me, he's like, '[Raquel Rivera], I wanted to crawl in the hole when you came up to me. But I was like, nope. She's coming with good intentions. She wants to learn from me. And I learned so much that day. And we started not just a friendship, an effective partnership of, I'm going to share with you this, you're going to share with me that.'

These networks with colleagues help to foster collaboration and play an important role to success as a leader. While these networks may not be representative, Raquel Rivera and others share how taking steps to join the group can turn into a shared understanding more than different. Raquel shares how she leveraged the relationship to have an impact in her own district and without those resources, how the role would have been more difficult alone.

It is evident, through these stories, that superintendent organizations and other professional organizations play a critical role in supporting Latina Superintendents. The participants reflected on how they navigated both gender and racial challenges that could have created more isolation and division among the peers. They share that they understand how important it is to be a part of the group in these situations. These organizations, coupled with participation in other networks as described earlier/later in this chapters provide a more holistic picture of how Superintendents leverage their networks in this isolating role. Many of the other organizations that Latina superintendents participate in center women and/or Latinos as a central part of the organization. The combination of identity-based and career-based organizations appear to provide wraparound support for Latina superintendents. Superintendent networks allow leaders to collaborate, share advice, and encouragement which builds commonality and creates solidarity in the work.

While this section highlighted sources of support, Latina Superintendents also face challenges and barriers in their role and along the journey. The next section highlights the themes that emerged related to the difficulties the participants experienced along the way.

Challenges and Barriers

The next section of this chapter discusses the challenges and barriers that Latina Superintendents face in the Superintendent journey. Two key themes emerged from the findings:

experiencing bias and discrimination at key career milestones and bias based on physical appearance. Additionally, this section includes a related finding and responses to the challenge related to physical appearance. Though bias related to physical appearance is a barrier for Latina leaders, I also describe how Latina Superintendents push back and demonstrate resistance by reclaiming their identity through physical appearance.

Experiencing Bias and Discrimination at Key Career Milestones

Another finding that emerged from the study was all four Latina Superintendents experienced bias and discrimination at key turning points, or milestones, in their careers. These experiences range significantly, from choosing a college major to the Superintendent interview. These biases were recognized and explicitly shared by some of the Superintendents while others hinted at the bias more subtly through their stories even if they, themselves, did not see the experience as particularly negative. Each moment was different and experienced in different contexts. At each stage, the bias manifests differently, yet collectively the story of bias and discrimination impacting the careers of Latina Superintendents run through all *testimonios*.

Lara Carranza experienced bias at the beginning of her journey into the field of education. As Lara entered college with the goal to become a Social Studies teacher, a subject that inspired her to become a teacher, she was advised by a college professor that her identity as a Mexican woman would become a barrier to securing a teaching job. Lara Carranza shares this experience in her *testimonio*, stating:

I'm gonna just say, it was the calling in the seventh grade. I was in the seventh grade or eighth grade. I knew in the seventh grade I wanted to be a teacher... in an eighth grade in US history class. And that this is what I wanted to teach. So yeah, just kind of my calling. I guess I always knew since I was a junior high kid, even though I wasn't a very... neither was I a studious student or a well-behaved student. Let's say that I wasn't naughty, I was just protective of others... In college, my Professor, advisor, brought me in and sat me down and said "I'm gonna have an honest conversation with you, [Lara Carranza]." You're not gonna get a job as a social studies Mexican woman. As a Mexican woman,

you're not gonna get a job as a social studies teacher. You don't coach anything - You're Mexican.” and that's what he called me, Mexican, “and you're female. You need to add something else, take on a second major.” That’s when I went back to [majoring in] Spanish....I never did teach social studies. He was right, I couldn't find a job, but as a Spanish teacher, I definitely would be able to find a job.

As a Latina woman with a Spanish major, Lara Carranza easily found a teaching job teaching Spanish across the state both in K-12 and higher education. In her reflection, Lara acknowledges that “he was right” with his advice, which highlights her understanding of the existence of systemic bias.

Raquel Rivera experienced bias as she aimed to secure her first administrative role, out of the classroom. As she interviewed for an Associate Principal position, she knew from the nonverbal cues and body language of the White male interviewers that the job would be given to a White man. She later confirmed this was indeed what happened. She shares:

I applied for an associate principal position in another district. And, you know...sometimes when, and I walked in the room and there were two males. And one of them was the superintendent. And, you know. It was a different interview. And I'll just, I'll leave it at that. But I noticed that by the body language and the nonverbals, I knew that position was not going to be mine. By the time I walked out of that room, I'm like, they are not going to select me. And I, in the bottom of my heart, I just knew they were going to select a White male. I knew it. Interestingly enough, years later, I found out who they did select. And it was exactly that demographic. And actually, that person and I became friends. Like, we met and we were comparing stories. And he's like, ‘I can't believe you didn't get the job’. And I was like, ‘yeah, I can believe you got the job.’ And, you know, I'm not surprised.

Raquel picked up on the subtle cues including body language and nonverbals in the interview. She highlights how bias and discrimination, is not always as visible as it was in the case of Lara Carranza’s candid advisor. Raquel’s feeling that the role would go to a White male was based on a feeling that she later confirmed was correct.

Penelope Luna also recalls a negative job interview experience as she sought a new district-level position in her former school district. She indicates that she believes bias was

present in the interview process and knew they were not going to hire a Latina for the role. This experience propelled her to search and ultimately secure a Superintendent role in another district.

I kind of knew it was time to take the next step because I was applying for a position higher up. And there were a couple of us, we were applying for that position and we were all at the same level. And the person-and so interesting enough, so I'm going to get [Midwestern school district] in trouble, but [Midwestern school district] had said, if you don't want that position, we're looking for people to be part of the interview panel. And if you do want that position, we're going to have to remove you to not be part of the interview panel. It makes sense. But the person who interviewed me, and there were four people, one of the people that interviewed me... she ended up getting the position.

And she interviewed me, she interviewed some other people, and you're just like, what? And then when it was announced that she got the position, we were all like (pause).... So I was upset, to say the least. I was really upset. I went to HR, I went to my boss, my supervisor. I was loud. And I also know when I get loud like that, when I get that passion, I may say things later on that I may not.... I think back about it, I don't know if there was anything really I regret. I probably could have toned down my temper. That's the biggest thing. But I was fired up. And at that moment, I'm like, I'm done. I'm like, if this is how you're going to do promotions, and I literally felt it was because I was Latina, I wasn't getting it. ...But I honestly felt that the Latinas there were, we weren't appreciated enough.

Although I will say [the district] called me up to do a lot of different things, but I was always the token Latina. And so that's not fair either. You know, you're at the table, and you look around, and you're just like, okay soy la unica, de versas? I can't speak for all. You know, and I'm Mexican American. I'm not Dominican. I'm not, you knew Venezuelan, you know, from Ecuador, whatever. There's just so many of us. And so that's not fair either. But I will give her that. I mean, she would at least always call on me. But I honestly believe- there were two Latinas at the time. We were not going to be given that opportunity at all. And then the other [Latina] had applied for another higher up position, and she did not get it. And the woman they hired was White, and she's still there. A very smart woman, let me just put it that way. And I'm all for women getting higher positions. I was just more upset about how that situation happened.

Penelope shares how as Latinas climb the ladder of career success, they can expect to feel more bias, discrimination, and racism. She states:

The higher up you get in your education or in your role, the more pushback and racism you're going to feel. And I say this because I have family members who decided, and I think it's, it's a wonderful blessing for the family that decided just to stay home and in their communities, where it's safe. And they will tell me like, I've never felt racism.

I've never felt unwanted. And of course you haven't, when you have sheltered yourself and nestled yourself there. But when you put yourself in a vulnerable position to continue to be in a spot where you're, you're not the norm.

And then right now I'm like...White bald men. You're going to experience the pushback, the barriers, and the racism. And that is really hard. And it takes a toll on you and it's exhausting and it ages you and you want to give up. And that's the reason why there's 1% too. There's also that 1% too, because I think there's the stereotypes of the, like Latinas go into certain things, but not necessarily higher up. So you'll see us in the teaching field, in the paraprofessional field. You might even see us in like, nursing. But then when it's like you being the boss, it's very rare, there's a rarity of it.

In her statements and examples, Penelope describes the bias that she experienced in the interview and promotion process, but also points and shares examples of the ongoing bias that leaders of color feel as they move up the ranks in educational leadership. After the 2024 Presidential election, Penelope Luna reached out by email to share that one of her staff members told her that she has nothing to worry about because she has a “White job.” This comment is yet another example of how bias is pervasive and the Superintendency is associated with Whiteness.

Like other Latina Superintendents, Juana I. Cruz also discusses bias in the interview process and beyond. She shares about bias tied to physical appearance and how that played a role in the Superintendent interview process and in her career as a leader. These experiences will be discussed later in the chapter along with the testimonio from superintendents who share that experience.

Through each of these stories, the rising Superintendents experienced bias during critical points and milestones in their careers. The challenges highlight that bias and discrimination can be roadblocks for Latina leaders at major points in their careers. From more explicit forms of bias and discrimination to the more implicit forms Latina Superintendent stories are filled with examples of how bias manifests in different ways.

While not the center of this theme, Raquel Rivera also shares a powerful story about how bias manifests not only impacts Latina/o/x leaders, but also Latina/o/x students. The story showcases discriminatory thinking which may not have been expressed if the parent knew Raquel was Latina. She shares:

I'm thinking back to when I first came to this district 19 years ago. I don't want to embarrass the past administration, but I literally found a folder in my desk and it was called Latino Math and I remember being like 'what the heck is Latino math?' Do you know what I mean? I literally was like And I think I even asked the admin assistant. I'm like, 'what is this?' When her face fell, I'm like 'what' ...she's shared it was like an at-risk program. It was a math intervention. And I asked, 'was it really called Latino math?' She looked embarrassed. She's like, 'yeah.' I said, 'Okay, so that's not gonna happen. We're not gonna do that' and so we changed the name of it. But you know like it was really based on test scores, right? So guess what? There were kids of all different backgrounds that qualified for an intervention. Sometimes when I made those phone calls to parents personally inviting students, I would get responses of 'I don't want my kid in class with those kids.' And so they didn't know who I was. They knew I was the associate principal and I was just the other person on the other line. I'm like, 'who are those kids?', 'you know, like those Latino kids' and I literally would like take a deep breath and say 'I don't know if you know, I am Latina.' And they'd get really really really quiet. And I'm like, 'so I'm not understanding what the issue would be to have class with other children who are Latino.' Then they would backpedal and it would get uncomfortable. I would hear like a million of excuses as to that's not what they meant, that's not what they said.

Over the phone, the parent knew they were speaking to the Associate Principal. Biases emerge with the assumption that the Associate Principal would be White in the predominantly White school district. Raquel had the unique opportunity to hear this parent share what they thought about Latino students while they thought they were speaking to someone who shared their racial background. This story begins to introduce another issue discussed between the participants, bias related to physical appearance, which is discussed in the next theme.

Bias Related to Physical Appearance

Another theme that emerged among the interviews was an emphasis and focus on Latina Superintendents' physical appearance. Latina leaders in this study found themselves under observation or judgment for their looks. The focus on appearance distracts from the ideas and

abilities of Latina Superintendents. This bias of appearance is a challenge that Latina Superintendents face throughout their careers.

Penelope Luna discussed the constant monitoring and critiquing of physical appearance that occurs for Latina leaders. She mentions how her appearance is scrutinized.

But there are challenges that once you're in that position, how people view you. You're viewed for everything, your movement, how you look, what shoes you wear, you know, earrings you wear, how you wear your hair, your attire, all of it. And I know this because people have brought it to my attention and it's just so crazy.

Like one person particularly said, you don't dress like a [superintendent]. When I was a [regional superintendent]. What does that mean? How do you dress like a [superintendent]? It's like-It wasn't like I was wearing torn up jeans or any, anything of that sort. And is it because I'm wearing more color? Is it what, what, and the person couldn't answer that.

This experience shows how attire can be used as a form of bias and how this idea undermines the professional qualifications of Penelope Luna. The comment about not dressing like a superintendent leads to discussion about preconceived notions of who superintendents are and what they traditionally wear. When Penelope questioned the person who shared this comment, they were unable to come up with a response. The person knew that Superintendents look a certain way and Penelope did not fit that description.

Early in her administrative career, Raquel Rivera was highly conscious of the clothes that administrators typically wear; she used her clothing as her “armor” to combat imposter syndrome. As a young leader, she used clothing more as a costume and facade. She states:

And I'll just share, being a 28-year-old, an associate principal at that time was mind-blowing. And I had deep, deep, deep imposter syndrome. At the time, the staff, there was a huge group that was retiring within the first two years. You know, like 13 of them. And they, quite frankly, were older than my mom, you know, some of them.

And my stepmother retired as a superintendent that summer. And I remember she gave me all of her old suits, like, the old Tahari suits with, like, the long jackets and things. I took those suits and I wore them for the first six months... like, literally. And all, like, the up-to-date retirees were like, ‘oh, my gosh, you dress so nice. Oh, I love your suits.’ And

it was like, because I literally, like, would wear a costume because I'm like, gosh, I hope they don't realize how young I am and that I really don't know anything.

...But before it was more like my armor, you know? When I was younger. Now, it's more like this is what I'm more comfortable with. It's like this is my sense of safety. I feel just more comfortable in it.

Early in her career, Raquel used her attire to combat the imposter syndrome. The evolution of Raquel's clothing shows how clothing and appearances for Latina leaders are not just about clothing, but also conformity to traditional expectations of leaders and professionalism. Working in a predominantly White space and, with the intersection of age, attire was an important consideration for feeling credentialed in the role.

Juana I. Cruz expressed frustration with the underemphasis of ideas and overemphasis on appearance in her career. She recalls key experiences while navigating her journey including interviews for the Superintendency. She expresses disappointment with the focus on appearance. She discusses aligning her appearance to other people's expectations and how she believes that should not be necessary, but as a Latina female leader she finds herself in this position. She exclaims:

Our nails were too long. The bright color was too this. My hair was too curly. It was this, it was that. My perfume was too strong. I didn't have on the right clothes. You know, you're not what we're looking for. Tell me what it is that you're looking for. Well, you know, maybe you need to get some assistance with your wardrobe next time. And I'm like, really? Did you hear anything coming out of my mouth? ...Recruiters told me. After interviews, I was told.

My hair is what it is, right? And I am who I am. But what comes out of my mouth isn't what you're paying attention to. Right. So what do I do? My nails are fine. They're long. They're clean. Right. I don't wear any jewelry. Right. I'm very simple in the way that I dress. Now, what are you going to say? This is how, this is how I come now, right?

...So now above everything else, I have to figure out what the mentality of my interviewer is going to be. And sometimes I'll even take things in a purse and a bag to see like when I walk in Oh, I see. Let me get in my bag and I'll do something. Right. Oh, my earring fell out or, you know, something like that. Can I step away to the restroom real quick? And I'll come back and I'll whatever. To that point. Right. I should not have to do

that as a woman, as a human being. I shouldn't have to do that. Too much cleavage. Not enough cleavage.

Juana's reflections show her awareness about the bias that exists related to physical appearance. She describes how some of that may be out of her control, such as having frizzy hair, but acknowledges how she has had to make adjustments to her appearance in order to be hired for a role. As an accomplished leader, Juana's frustration with the overemphasis on appearance, "did you hear anything coming out of my mouth," exemplifies a struggle for Latina leaders.

Juana's story, along with the other participants, shows how appearance can be a challenge for Latina Superintendents and leaders due to bias. *The testimonios* of these women articulate a pattern and articulate the intersection of race, gender, age, and professional identity in a White male-dominated profession. The emphasis and focus on appearance rather than ideas, qualifications, and leadership skills creates a barrier for Latina leaders to navigate.

Reclaiming Identity Through Physical Appearance

While the previous theme showcased how Latina Superintendents face bias due to appearance, including attire. The next theme that emerged from two of the leaders was how Latina Superintendents found ways to reclaim their power and use physical appearance as a form of resistance, empowerment, and self-expression. Two superintendents, Juana and Penelope, discuss their intentional usage of jewelry, clothing, and hairstyles to express their identity. They wear these styles in their roles as Superintendents.

Referencing the title of this research study, "Add Hoop Earrings," Juana I. Cruz uses a moment in the interview to point out that she is wearing hoop earrings and the significance of that jewelry to Latinas. She states:

So it's cute because you said the hoop earring. So as Latinas, right? All about the hoop. The bigger the hoop, right? Let me take my hoops off. The hoop is a, you know, it's a standard for Latinas. Right. Even though it doesn't look like it - I got a hoop on. But

here's the thing is that we as Latinas, you say "you got your hoops" and you know what that means. Nobody else. But other people don't know that.

And here's the thing. If you take the time to know us and stop looking at the fact that my hair is frizzy and listen, you know, we have to teach them to listen to us. I was the only, just real quick. I was the only woman when I got here in the county for superintendents. So there's nine of us and I'm the only female and the only person of color.

Hoop earrings have cultural significance in the Latina community and wearing hoop earrings in her role is a form of resistance. Penelope Luna also references her hoop earrings in her response, discussing explicitly how she pushes back through her appearance in various ways. She says:

So- I have a bracelet that are handcuffs and I'll wear them when I'm feeling like I'm being trapped or confined or not being able to speak my mind. Red tape or something. And it just gives me strength. If I put that on. I remember my daughter saying, that's weird. Don't do that. And then her friend said, I really appreciate the fact that your mom does that because at least that's her way of speaking out.

So that's one of them. Frida Kahlo earrings are another. Obviously, I mean, I have my love - love and confusion with Frida because there's a lot of stuff that she did, but I also feel like she's a powerful woman. So she can provide that to you spiritually.

These are my hoop earrings that I wear. These are my go to ones. They're not as big as some other ones, but I really like these ones because my daughter and my goddaughter purchased them for me. And I wear these a lot to work. They give me comfort because they allow me to get through the day with it not being so big and so overwhelming for some people and not so small at all. And knowing that whoever gave it to me. So I do like hoops a lot. I appreciate the hoops. And I'm not the only one. I know that there are other Latinas that appreciate the hoops.

I have my ollas that I wear in particular times, usually in September. There are these little ollas that I wear that obviously they're made out of clay. But what I like about them, it's about filling your cup. So there's significance in a lot of my earrings. And I'm feeling at the moment, I'm like, I got to wear these earrings at this moment.

Sometimes they're my jade earrings as well. But that's where my jewelry comes in, my bracelets right now that I'm wearing. There's a phase, the phases of the moon that I have. It is very significant to me. I made a bracelet. I don't know if you could see it. This one I made a bracelet...I also have my birthstone. And then a bracelet that a friend of mine gave me that I wear as a reminder of her. So jewelry just means a lot to me.

...And you will understand... even my attire, what I wear, how I wear my hair. If I, you know, I've done that several times, you know, I put my, and you know, honestly, those

space buns, you know where they came from, right? So Princess Leia's. They came because of our, um, our Mexican warriors in the Mexican revolution because they put their hairs up like this. If you look back, their hair was put this way because the long hair was getting in the way of battle. And so, there's a specific name for them, but they wore their hair that way. And so when they were trying to build up Princess Leia and build her as this warrior and dominant figure, they found it through our Mexican ancestors, those women warriors who were fighting.

There's a picture of Princess Leia next to, what are they called? And she's wearing like, um, the bullets across like this and she has her buns on the side of her head. Um, and Princess Leia's is right next to her. I said, no wonder I was so drawn to Princess Leia. But yeah, I mean, that in itself, I wear them a lot. Not, I mean, obviously I like Princess Leia, but I wear them a lot because now that I know where it came from, I'm more embedded to it. And las trenzas, you know, all of that. I'll wear my braids. I don't care if I wear my braids here and then I'll get people like, oh, you're wearing braids. Yep. I'm wearing my braids. You know, I'm okay. Or if I want to wear my hair naturally and the waviness that comes out of it, I will wear it that way as well too. So anyway, those are the kinds of things that I think at first people are questioning.

Like, I mean, honestly, like shoes are the biggest thing. I don't know what it is with shoes. Like they're always commenting on the shoes, complimenting or not about shoes. And I'm just like, they're just shoes... I do like to wear heels. I'm short, I'm a short Mexican woman. So my heels give me a little lift. And when I take them off, people are always shocked how short I am. They're like, Oh my God, I forgot how short you were. I'm like, yes.

I mean, I had everything against me, right? So I'm dark-skinned. I'm a woman. I'm short. I'm Latina, you know, like I had everything against me. And if you look at it, like the odds of me becoming a superintendent would just never have, would have happened.

Penelope's intentionality with her appearance and the meaning behind some of the jewelry shows her resistance to the biases around physical appearance. Wearing the handcuff bracelet, for example, is a powerful form of quiet resistance that manifests through physical appearance.

While navigating their roles, these Latina Superintendents share how they assert their identities and, despite receiving scrutiny and focus on their appearance, use their appearance as a form of communication. The cultural significance of hoop earrings was shared by both Superintendents while Penelope Luna extended the conversation to shoes and other jewelry.

These women use physical appearance as a form of self-expression and resistance to the bias they encounter.

It is powerful to see the pushback of Latina Superintendents and reclaiming of appearance. Latina Superintendents have to be prepared for the impact of bias and discrimination in their roles in the district. The bias and discrimination that Latina Superintendents face, however, extends well beyond the school district. The next section discusses how these Superintendents navigate bias and discrimination outside of the district walls.

Navigating Bias and Discrimination Beyond the District Walls

A potential theme that emerged, which would need more exploration, is experiencing bias in the broader community. Independent of one another, two of the Latina superintendents offhandedly mentioned having a negative experience when they started their roles with the banks that their school district used. While the role of a Superintendent is to lead the school district, the role extends into the community with political and social implications that go far beyond the walls of the school district. Superintendents regularly interact with parents, community organizations, local government, and influential people. These interactions provide an opportunity for bias and discrimination to emerge in ways that are similar and different to those that emerge within the education setting alone. Superintendents have a unique role because their presence in the community not only represents themselves, but also the district.

Lara Carranza shares an example of navigating local organizations beyond the school district. Her experience with the local bank, the bank that her school district uses, shows how bias and discrimination manifests beyond the school walls. After being appointed Superintendent, she went to the local bank to open up an account. When she arrives, she finds herself in a unique situation. She shares:

When I went to open up the bank account, my bank account here, the woman at the bank said, ‘Well do you at least have a green card?’ ‘No, I don't but I do have a United States birth certificate. and oh, hi I’m the new sup’. So inside, that's what I was doing. On the outside, it was my superintendent face.

‘No, I don't ma’am. I do have a United States birthday certificate if you’d like to see that but otherwise I have a driver's license.’ You know. And then bringing in that forgiveness and don't judge somebody who doesn't know anything and going back the next day or whatever...

Years down the road I mean, we're a very small area, Keep this in mind. So you know my fourth year, fifth year- my son actually started dating the bank president's daughter. Her mom and I were visiting just at the lake, you know, not as superintendent and president, but as moms, right. I told her that story and she was just mortified. She actually brought in professional development on being culturally sensitive. She's like thank you so much for telling that because, if it was different person, we could have lost a lot.

Despite being named the Superintendent, a position of status in a community, she faced this experience when she was simply trying to open a bank account in the community she served. It was assumed that she, a Latina, would not be a citizen. Despite being the Superintendent of the local school district and being an accomplished leader, she still experiences these issues due to racial bias. In this experience she had to maintain professionalism, being conscious of her role, and she handles the situation with grace in her response. She later, in sharing her story, helped enact change in the organization. This experience shows how Superintendents need to navigate bias in the community.

Penelope Luna also has an unpleasant experience at the bank where the person she engaged with had disbelief that she was the Superintendent. This experience, despite the fact that the bank published an announcement of her hire, shows how bias and discrimination can manifest in different ways. Being a credentialed individual, having to prove her identity and authority, is exhausting. Penelope Luna has had this experience of assumption that she is not the Superintendent both inside and outside of the school district. Penelope Luna shares:

If I go and do some work at a bank, I've been questioned like, are you really the superintendent?...They wanted to see my I.D. So I was being questioned a lot and

eventually they started working with me. But it was irritating to try to have to prove who you are and what you do instead of just believing you. And like saying, look at your own newspaper. They announced me.

Penelope Luna and Lara Carranza's experiences at the bank, being questioned about their identity, is a small example of the challenges that Latina Superintendents face in their communities. This instance, however, is not the only instance that Penelope Luna shares in her *testimonio*. She also shares an incident that occurred several years into her Superintendency with local law enforcement. In a related point in the conversation, Penelope Luna describes a challenging situation where there was a disagreement between two students, one of whom was White and one who was Black. She explains how the police became involved and were overly focused on the Black student. When the police entered school and began reviewing the security footage without the proper protocol, Penelope Luna confronted them and insisted they follow protocol which meant going through her. This disagreement escalated quickly and as the situation unfolded, Penelope Luna, a woman and leader of color in a predominantly White community, found herself disrespected and her authority unmined. She shares:

We had a spring fling. And then a child was like causing, like calling names to another child, just kept taunting them. And then eventually the child called the other child the N word. And the other child pushed him and he fell to the ground. Well, the police were called stating that my black student attacked the other student. The police were told it was a big fight and the police came into my school and that's not where the incident happened. And then they were going straight into the cameras. And I was called and when I got there I told them I said you have no right to be in my school and you have no right to be looking at the cameras. And we got into some type of shouting match.

And then one police officer said next time you call the police we're not coming. And then the VP of the board said what is that? You made an oath. You're supposed to show up. It got really heated to the point where the mayor got involved and the administrator, the (community omitted) administrator got involved and they called me to their office and just reprimanded me. Just yelled at me for disrespecting their police. And then I basically told them I'm tired of the police coming and trying to grab my children and the police being called on my Black children particularly. And the chief of police told me that's not true. And basically they were just saying all we know is that the superintendent is being disrespectful to the police and you hate the police blah blah blah. I said no that's not true.

But there has to be an agreement. You can see the cameras but you have to go through me and ask permission. You can't just be touching things. And then they said our partnership has dwindled since you got here and I'm like that is absolutely not true either. The police department is all White.

And so it really caused a rift between me and the police department and the [Midwestern suburb]. And next you know it was in the newspaper that there was a huge fight and that the other person caused it which she didn't and that the superintendent doesn't like the police. It got really ugly. And that was [a few months ago] and I was miserable [that time period] because it was really a race issue that happened. And the police started showing up to my school like all the time. And then when you called them they were never there. They were three squad cars. They were there for just push. Three squad cars. We had a murder happen right here (location omitted) . I don't know if you remember somebody killed, some people sleeping on the hill. And there was one squad car. But I get three for a push.

100%, it was [intimidation]. And so my relationship with them has still not mended. But I'm at the point where like I got to do my job and they have no jurisdiction over me. None whatsoever. So the hard part is everyone's connected. So the [Midwestern suburb] administrator is best friends with my board president. Board members are good friends with the mayor. They're all connected.

...My response, I remember, was I don't call you. I didn't call you now. That was my response to them. I remember. And just the screaming, like no one has the right to scream at anyone like that. And to bring me to your office to try to humiliate me was low.

The disregard for Penelope Luna's authority by the police along with the instances at the bank show the reality that even while being in a role of authority and status, where they are community leaders, Latina Superintendents still face biases and discrimination in community spaces.

The experiences shared by Latina Superintendents across different Midwestern states in rural and suburban contexts, start to shed light on a pattern of discrimination and bias that Superintendents face in the larger community -beyond the school walls. Through *testimonios*, with no particular prompt that addressed experiences in the broader community, these two stories parallel. There are likely more stories Latina superintendents have related to banks, community institutions, and other district partners that need to be understood and explicitly asked about to

gain a full understanding. Ultimately, for Latina Superintendents recognizing and navigating the bias that exists in the school district and community is a challenge that needs awareness and understanding.

Other Findings

In addition to the findings related to career pathways, supportive factors, and barriers faced by Latina Superintendents, other key themes emerged from the data. This final section of this chapter explores two ways that Latina Superintendents are intentional in their leadership.

Building A Diverse Staff

Another theme that emerged in the intentional diversification of staff that has occurred in the school districts where Latina Superintendents serve. All four Superintendents have, in their own context and to their own extent, intentionally worked on diversifying the staff in the district. These decisions were made as a reflection of how important representation is in the communities in which they serve.

When I arrived for my in-person interview in School District 3 and waited in the main lobby, I took notice of the diverse representation from office staff to what I assumed to be other administrators walking through the hallways. During the interview, I mentioned that it appeared that there was a diverse staff, at least at the district office. Juana I. Cruz affirmed that there was indeed a diverse staff at the district and that has been a central goal over the last three years for her. She states:

That's what I've been working on. So I've done that. We've done a lot of changes. My principals and APs, you should see that too. And more and more the teachers, I hope too. But you know, how hard it is to find teachers and then, you know, all of that. So we are looking, we're always looking and we're always diversifying and, you know, trying to get people to come out.

In addition to Juana I. Cruz's evident actions to diversify the staff, she added a DEI

Director (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) to the staff which highlights her commitment to building the diversity among her staff and making the district more inclusive. She is intentionally building representation at all levels.

While Lara Carranza, in her small rural community, doesn't have the diversity in the area to create large-scale diversity hiring; she has made some intentional decisions within her predominantly White rural community. While it does not look like the moves such as hiring a DEI director like Juana, in her context, the changes Lara have made are more subtle, but still significant. Lara has increased representation by hiring a Latina office assistant who is bilingual. She highlights how this hire was the perfect fit for the community saying, “.. the fact that she's from [nearby state] and is bilingual. Perfect, yes. She's done amazing.” In addition to benefiting her school district, the Latina office assistant contracts out with supporting districts to provide translation services across the area. She joins Zoom calls and helps when necessary as the surrounding area is receiving more families who may speak only Spanish.

Lara Carranza's decisions and way to diversity staff is thoughtful and significant for the context in which she serves. Juana I. Cruz and 4 have the ability to operate differently, though both are committed to representation and giving their students and families the representation they deserve.

While Lara serves a predominantly White student population, Penelope serves a predominantly African American student population and has more of a range of diversity and population representation. Penelope approaches her work differently, however with the same intentionality. She highlights the value in bringing not only diversification, but also highlights how important it is for Black students to see Black leaders. As she states:

I do believe having a Black leader would also be beneficial. And so hiring Black leaders is important and seeing it at the district level too. So I think children start seeing

themselves in a different light as well. Because unfortunately, we question ourselves, we question our identity. And if you only start seeing one particular culture always in the leadership role, sometimes you can't see past that. And you wonder why is it that people of color are not reaching at those levels... So I hired a phenomenal, she's a phenomenal principal at the middle school. She's a phenomenal leader. This year, I hired a data strategist and she's doing great work. And then obviously, I have a Latina here who does my engagement work with parents. She's really great with that. I've hired for student services, Middle Eastern. So we're getting there little by little because the district office was all White before. And now it is not. So we're hiring.

As the leader of a diverse district, Penelope Luna keeps a conscious effort to hire staff that represent students in her district. She discusses the importance of students seeing themselves in the staff and leadership as important factors. This intentionality is also seen in the *testimonios* of other Latina Superintendents in this study.

Raquel Rivera is proud of the diverse team that she helped build while acknowledging the continued work to be done at all levels. She is proud of the work that has happened at the district office in adding gender and racial diversity. She shares her pride, but also the continued work that still needs to follow, saying:

In particular, I'm really proud that the entire business office, while we have a [business manager] who is a White male, everyone else in that department are females, and the vast majority are people of color. And it's a huge recruiting, big push for us. And I feel like we've come a long way... Our staff doesn't necessarily all represent our students and that's something that we've worked towards, but it's important to have those conversations. I think it's important for Boards to be open with it, but not every board is and not every board like, represents the women who are also like applying for these jobs and I think that there's still bias that exists out there.

All of the Superintendents in this study actively recognize the importance of representation and have taken steps to intentionally diversify their teams. While each of them operate in distinct contexts and communities, they have each taken steps within their power towards the goal of a

more diverse staff. The intentional work to build diverse staff, at all levels, is evident. While there are challenges or roadblocks, they are each making progress in their own way. Their intentionality coupled with their action around intentionally diversifying staff is a cross cutting theme.

Bilingualism As a Tool for Connection

Another theme that emerged across the testimonios of the Latina Superintendents in this study is the use of the Spanish language as a tool for creating connection with Latina/o/x students, staff, and community members. All of the Superintendents in this study shared the importance of speaking Spanish in their roles, not only to communicate, but as an intentional form of fostering belonging and building connectedness. Sharing a cultural background being Latina/o/x, coupled with the ability to speak Spanish, allows Latina Superintendents to connect with Latina/o/x students, staff, and families in a special way.

Raquel Rivera, for example, shares how she intentionally used Spanish during a critical moment to build connection. Raquel Rivera was recently appointed as the Superintendent in School District 2, a district in which she has a long history and has served as an associate principal, principal, assistant superintendent, interim superintendent, and deputy superintendent. She made an intentional decision to speak in Spanish during that speech, which resonated with a lot of Latina/o/xs who had the chance to hear her. She shares:

When I was appointed superintendent [in June], in my speech, I spoke directly to the students in Spanish because I felt like it was really important for them to hear from me in our language, and I know I had friends who contacted me. They said they were crying at night, you know, like, watching me from their home with that, and I thought that was really important. I'm the first Latina superintendent they've had, and I think that's really important for our kids and our families.

I had staff reach out to me, our Latina staff members to say, I'm so proud of you, and I get how you feel because I'm also first generation because I feel like there's a whole nother firstborn, first generation, there's a whole 'nother weight on our shoulders, I feel like. So I think that's really important that I made a point of that in that speech.

For many students and families, hearing their language spoken openly on a public platform, from the district leader, was powerful. Her speech created connections not just with students and families, but also staff members of the district who are Latina/o/x. Her story and decision shows how bilingual Latina Superintendents can leverage language as a tool to foster connection.

Penelope Luna also recognizes the power of language and connection. This connection, however, may not always be well received. As a Latina leader, she has faced resistance from other staff members when speaking Spanish, for example she shares, “I said something in Spanish and someone said, we speak English here.” Though at times, using Spanish may come with resistance, Penelope Luna believes in the power of language and sees her bilingualism as a strength. She does not let it deter her from being her authentic self, saying:

I just think you need to be your most authentic self and understand that being Latina is my superpower. And I think now that [Secretary of Education] Cardona says it now too, it's your superpower. I would say it a lot beforehand, like, you know, my hoop earrings are my, my superpower in a sense. But don't deny it. Don't pretend to be someone you're not. And so I, if I want to speak Spanish, and if there's someone here, I will bring it out.

Language is an authentic part of Penelope Luna’s culture and, despite pushback, she intentionally uses it when she chooses in her work. Similar to the other Superintendents, Lara Carranza also uses her bilingualism to build connections, especially since only a small percentage of students in the school are Latina/o/x. Lara Carranza finds that utilizing Spanish, especially in her context of a predominantly White, rural district, can be especially bonding, she says:

I grew up in (predominately White town, state name omitted), I think I explained that to you being one of the only, what we would say, one of the only Brown families. Just knowing what I can bring to those kids, knowing how unique it is. Yeah. So I do a lot of reaching out to them, even though they don't know... my students. Who haven't been here for a long time, especially new, Spanish-speaking and Hispanic. Just for somebody

to relate to. Where I can greet them in Espanol every morning or say something on the side that other people don't know...It's just kind of our code. Right? Because there's no other Spanish speaking people. It just kind of gives that relatability. And I'm very blessed to be in a small district so that every morning I'm not driving to another school. My office is in our school, so I can just go out and walk the halls in the morning and let them see leadership - that it's not just you.

Bilingualism, as the superintendents described, is not simply a tool for communicating, but it holds a lot of power and has the potential to create a deep connection with Latinos in the communities where they serve.

Finally, Juana I. Cruz also reiterates how important the Spanish language is to many people who are Latino. Her comments, however, go beyond language, because it's language combined with culture that really makes the connection. For Juana I. Cruz, speaking Spanish is a way to connect and show understanding with the community in which she serves.

She says:

Every time that I see a family walking in, especially one that doesn't speak English or English isn't their first language, I see my parents and I walking in. Whether they do or don't speak English, right? The thing is like the look on their faces and the feeling they have in walking in...I think that being Latina, speaking Spanish and understanding a part of my community, about a third of my community, their language, and they feel like a sense of belonging.

She emphasizes, however, that it is not just language that builds the connection and sense of belonging but rather the coupling of language and culture that creates the power. She says:

Something that irks me is that White people learn how to speak Spanish and all of a sudden our people will be okay with that and say, yeah, you can be the principal because you took the time to learn Spanish. So it's one thing for me to be able to communicate with a parent, but it's a whole other thing to be able to understand culture and a sense of belonging so that children can identify with who's running the school and say, if she did it, I can do it too. Right? So to me, that's the thing.

Juana I. Cruz discusses the power of language, but also the importance of cultural belonging and understanding. While people of all backgrounds have the opportunity to learn

Spanish if they choose, Latina Superintendents can bring the cultural connection and understanding in a way that others cannot. She intentionally uses language and culture as a tool for belonging. By intentionally using language and culture, Latina Superintendents are creating a sense of belonging and forming strong connections in their school districts.

Conclusion

The findings that emerged from the interviews provide some critical understandings about the experiences of Latina Superintendents and the factors that have shaped their careers. The *testimonios* share the realities of being a Latina Superintendent in the Midwest and part of only 1% of Superintendents in the country who identify as Latina. Findings include a.) early experiences navigating predominantly White spaces b.) the role of family, faith, and collective support c.) the role of White men along the career path d.) Latina identity as an asset in diverse and changing communities e.) armoring up with academic and professional qualifications f.) Leadership roles and recognition beyond the district e.) finding solidarity and support through Superintendent networks f.) experiencing bias and discrimination at key career milestones g.) bias related to physical appearance h.) reclaiming identity through physical appearance i.) navigating bias and discrimination beyond the district walls j.) intentionally building a diverse staff and k.) bilingualism as an intentional tool for connection. The next chapter will build upon these themes, draw connections to existing research, and discuss implications for the future.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This chapter highlights the key findings of the research study and offers recommendations with actionable next-steps for various groups including school boards, state superintendent organizations, and aspiring Latina Superintendents. The recommendations that are outlined in this chapter aim to chip away at the representation issues that exist in school leadership, particularly in the Superintendency. Additionally, this chapter outlines recommendations for future research and emphasizes the importance of further research on this topic. Finally, this chapter ends with concluding thoughts on the importance of this work and how the study has made a personal and professional impact on me, as the researcher.

Summary of the Study

This research study investigated the experiences of Latina Superintendents in the Midwest with a focus on their career trajectories, supportive factors, and barriers faced along their journey. Latina Superintendents represent only 1% of the nation's Superintendents (AASA, 2023), which makes their experiences important to understand. The topic of Latina Superintendents and their experiences is underrepresented in academic research, making this study even more significant. Using a qualitative research design, I conducted two rounds of semi-structured interviews with four Latina Superintendents in the Midwest. The interview guide, outlined in Appendix A, consisted of the following questions:

1. Describe your educational journey, starting from your experience as a student in school through your professional journey to your current role. Please include details about the schools/organizations you attended and worked in along with any positions that you have held.

2. As a Latina, what role has your identity played in your career trajectory?
3. How do you draw upon your cultural background and identity in your role as Superintendent?
4. To whom or what do you attribute your success, both personally and professionally?
5. Have there been any critical moments in your professional career that have been connected with your identity as a Latina female leader (including challenges and successes)? If so, what were some of the most significant experiences ?
6. Only 1% of Superintendents in the country are Latina, which does not reflect the Latino population in the United States. What truths or stories should be understood about this disproportionality? Please include insights from your own experience and perspective.
7. How has working in the Midwest, in [state name], [community], shaped your experience as a Latina Superintendent? Are there unique challenges or supportive factors associated with the region?
8. What suggestions or recommendations do you have for school boards, educational institutions, recruiting firms or other groups seeking to recruit and retain Latina leaders?
9. Based on your experience, what advice do you have for aspiring Latina Superintendents?
10. What should newly hired Latina superintendents know about navigating the job?
11. Given the goal of this research study to understand the career trajectories, supportive factors, and barriers experienced by Latina Superintendents, with attention to systemic challenges and how leaders demonstrate resistance in K-12, is there anything else that you think would be important to share?

As I gathered the *testimonios* of the participants through the semi-structured interview approach, I was intentional in my approach with participants. Both in written and verbal form, I shared the

purpose of the study and the goal to understand the systemic challenges they have encountered along with how they have demonstrated resistance as Latina leaders in K-12 education. I highlighted this in my interviews for the participants. I asked follow-up questions unique to each Superintendent. I also used member checking strategies to ensure accuracy and understanding. During the drafting stages, participants had the opportunity to review the emergent themes and add any additional information if they felt empowered to do so. Participants also had the opportunity to review both sets of transcripts along with profile information to ensure that they accurately reflected their words.

Summary of Findings

The next three sections of this chapter discuss the findings gathered from the *testimonios* of the four Latina Superintendents who participated in this study. The sections will be organized by the initial study research questions, providing analysis and connection to the conceptual framework along with existing literature. The three questions guiding this study were:

- (1) What are the professional backgrounds of Latina Superintendents?
- (2) To what or whom do Latina Superintendents attribute their success?
- (3) What challenges have Latinas faced while ascending and serving in the superintendency?

The Latina Superintendents who participated in this study came from diverse personal and professional contexts with experience in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Each of the Superintendents shared their stories of their career journey. Some similarities emerged while differences between them were also evident. The four participants attributed their success to a wide variety of factors, including support systems, which will be discussed further in that section. Finally, the Latina Superintendents faced numerous systemic issues related to bias and

discrimination along their journey. Evidence gathered through this research study on the career trajectories, supportive factors, and barriers experienced by Latina Superintendents aligns with existing research in many ways. Some of the findings offer an extension of the existing literature and understanding of the experiences of Latina Superintendents.

Key threads from the *testimonios* in this study include: a.) early experiences navigating predominantly White spaces b.) the role of family, faith, and collective support c.) the role of White men along the career path d.) Latina identity as an asset in diverse and changing communities e.) Armoring up with academic and professional qualifications f.) Leadership roles and recognition beyond the district e.) finding solidarity and support through Superintendent networks f.) experiencing bias and discrimination at key career milestones g.) bias related to physical appearance h.) reclaiming identity through physical appearance i.) navigating bias and discrimination beyond the district walls j.) intentionally building a diverse staff and k.) bilingualism as an intentional tool for connection. Using existing research and the conceptual framework, a summary and analysis of the findings will be presented throughout the section.

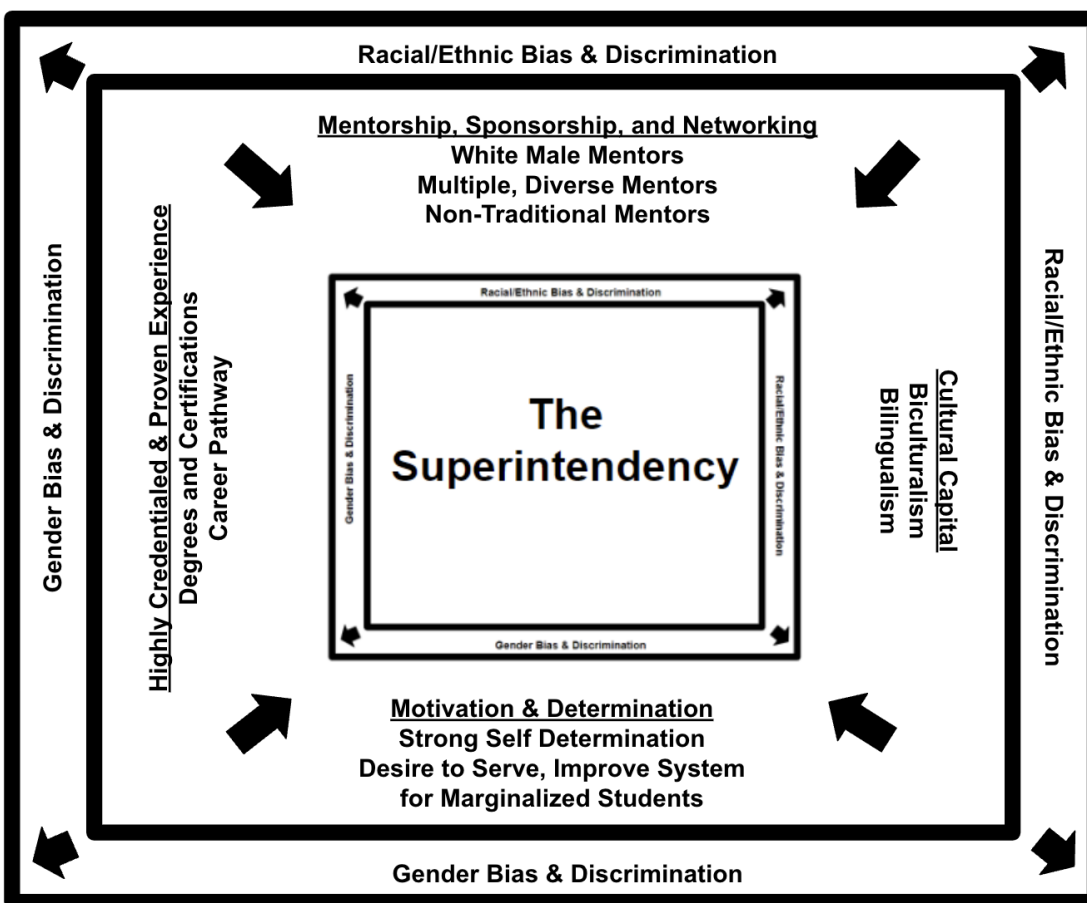


Figure 1. Factors that Influence the Career Trajectory of Latina Superintendents

Connection to the Conceptual Framework

The findings in this study align with and extend the existing literature on Latina Superintendents. The conceptual framework for this study was built from existing research that centered the experiences of Latina Superintendents, female superintendents, and superintendents of color. The framework provided a lens through which the findings of this study were examined. By connecting the findings to the conceptual framework, the analysis not only highlights how the themes align with the existing literature where they may vary, and new insights to consider. Additionally, the analysis also aims to build a more specific understanding about Latina Superintendents including affirming similarities to the experiences of other women

and other people of color while adding new unique findings to the literature, specifically for Latinas who serve in this role.

What are the Professional Backgrounds of Latina Superintendents?

This section provides an analysis of the career pathways and professional backgrounds of Latina Superintendents. Although there is limited information in existing literature that focuses on the typical career trajectory of Latina Superintendents, I will draw on the existing body of literature related to Latina educators, female Superintendents, and Superintendents of color to provide an analysis and connect the findings. The professional background of Latina Superintendents centers the career choices, decisions, experience and influencing factors that created a pathway to the Superintendency. The findings of this study suggest that career pathways for Latina Superintendents may be shaped in childhood. This section outlines ways that the findings align with existing research on career trajectories, how it differs in some aspects, and how the study extends the literature on this topic by introducing new ideas and areas of exploration. Within this research question is the analysis of two primary themes: early experiences navigating White spaces and an analysis of the career trajectories of study participants.

Navigating Predominantly White Spaces

A common experience shared among all four Latina Superintendent participants in this study was their experiences being one of the few Latinos in their neighborhoods and /or schools during their early elementary years. Their childhood experience parallels their experience in the Superintendent roles. As children, the participants describe being the only one or “one of few” in their schools and neighborhood and now, as Latina Superintendents, they are still the only one or “one of few,” in a predominantly White and male dominated leadership space. Data shows that

the Superintendentcy is significantly overrepresented by White males, which comprise the largest demographic group of Superintendents across the country (Tienken & Domenech, 2021). This shared experience extends the research and gives future ideas about areas that need exploration—how does having experiences being “one of few” in childhood and navigating predominantly White spaces early on impact the career trajectory of Latina Superintendents.

Existing research shows that Latina educational leaders feel isolated in their roles (Martinez et al., 2019; Rodela et al., 2019). This sentiment was shared through comments from the Latina Superintendents in this study. The stories shared through the *testimonio* of participants aligns with that research as they all made comments about being alone or the only one in many spaces. This is reflected in examples about feeling alone based on their gender, race / ethnicity, or explicitly being Latina. The ability to be successful and work in a White space is not a new challenge for those Latina leaders who ascend to the Superintendentcy. The Superintendents’ ability to navigate the predominately White space has been an evident theme in both their professional career and personal background. In addition to that commonality, three of the superintendents started their educational journey in private elementary schools.

This finding and parallel experience of being “one of few” extends the existing research on Latina Superintendents. It provides an opportunity for exploration in future research that centers not only Latina Superintendents in the Midwest, but also Latina Superintendents across the country.

Exploring the childhood and personal background of Latina Superintendents can provide insight to the experiences that may have shaped these leaders from early stages. While some existing research centers explore childhood experiences including family support and value of education (Méndez-Morse, 2000), there is little or no research that directly investigates and

connects patterns between the neighborhoods or schools these leaders grew up in, or how these experiences might influence or impact their career path.

In their *testimonios*, none of the Superintendents explicitly linked their childhood experience directly parallel to their Superintendent experience, there were a few comments that emphasized this idea. Penelope Luna, for example, briefly made a side comment in her story, which reflected the parallel between where she lived as a child and where she chooses to live now saying “because my neighborhood...and that's an interesting thing to talk about...like my choices I made, like I'm still living in White neighborhoods...” This shows some reflection about how childhood set patterns that are replicated in adulthood for Penelope Luna. Lara Carranza, in her interviews, also references living in a predominantly White area, though she doesn't explicitly connect it to her childhood and it may be more of a result of the population of the state where she lives.

Considering the limited scope of this study, further research is needed to determine whether the pattern of navigating predominantly White spaces in early childhood experiences is a shared experience among Latina Superintendents in other regions or perhaps a pattern on a national scale. An important question that is raised by this comparison is whether this is indicative of a larger pattern across Latina Superintendents in the Midwest who were not identified or did not participate in this study. In the future as more Latinas rise to the rank of Superintendents in the Midwest, continued research on whether the finding resonates with others would be a topic that could be explored further. The next section explores the career pathways of Latina Superintendents in the Midwest and examines how their career choices compare to other groups of Superintendents.

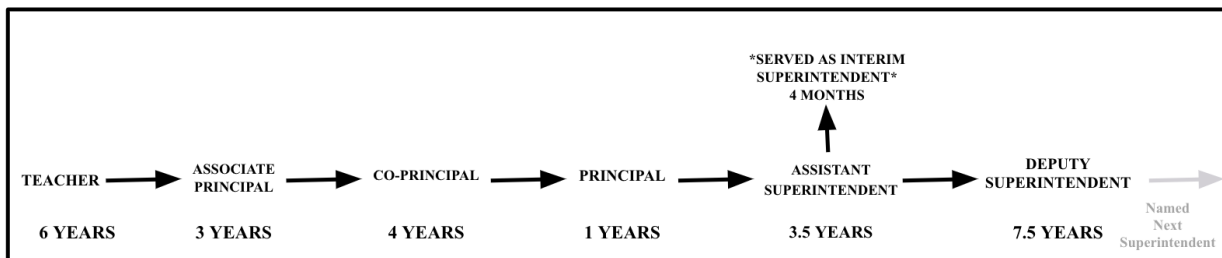
Career Pathways

The career pathway of Latina Superintendents and how it compares to the pathway of other Superintendents is not well-documented in the existing research. While studies that center female Superintendents and Superintendents of color share broad patterns of career pathways, few disaggregate data or have enough Latina participants to draw conclusions about the typical pathway of Latina Superintendents. Studies centered on female superintendents or superintendents of color have not disaggregated or do not include the data to pull out the unique experience of Latina Superintendents. Latino Critical (LatCrit) Theory includes focus on intersectionality and the lack of research for Latinas specifically highlights the importance of filling this gap in the literature. Latinas experience the world in a unique way that is shaped by their intersecting identities including ethnicity, gender, language, and other factors (Valdes & Bender, 2021). Building upon Creshaw's research on intersectionality (1991), understanding the career pathways is much more complex for a Latina Superintendent in comparison to the research centered on being a woman in leadership, which primarily centers White women's experiences. Exploring these complexities encountered by Latina Superintendents and understanding how their career journeys compare to the experiences of other Superintendents helps us understand, more specifically, the challenges that Latina leaders face on their career pathway.

The findings of this study align with existing research that points to a non-linear, "hoop-jumping" career pathway for both women and people in color in their Superintendent journey (Björk et al, 2003; Davis & Bowers, 2018; Kim & Brunner, 2009). Similar to the experiences of other women and leaders of color, the Midwestern Latina superintendents in this study took a longer path with multiple steps along the way which may include later positions and including

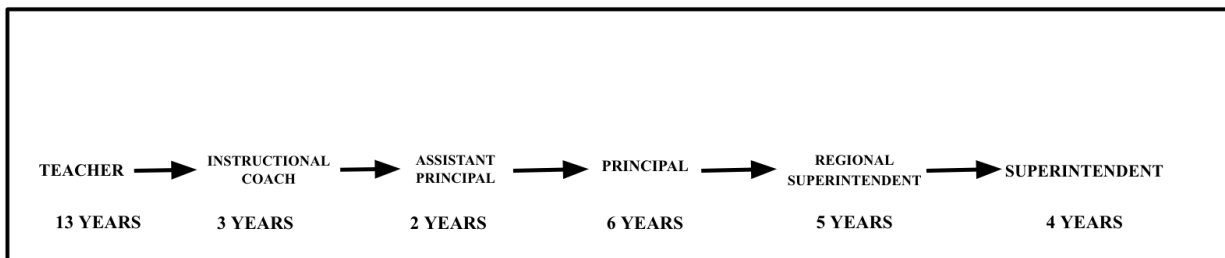
district office roles (Björk et al., 2003; Davis & Bowers, 2009; Kim & Brunner, 2009). This journey is longer compared to their male counterparts who take a more direct path to the superintendency, often getting promoted from the principalship directly into the Superintendency (Björk et al., 2003).

Figure 3
Career Trajectory, Raquel Rivera



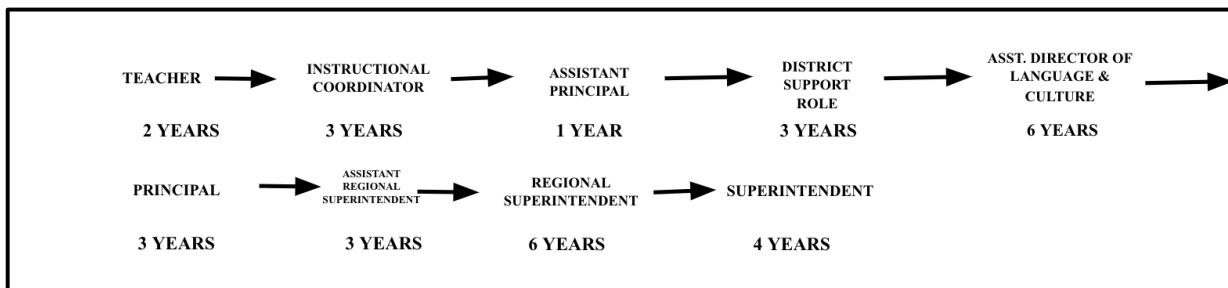
Note: Figure 3 outlines the career trajectory of Raquel Rivera

Figure 2
Career Trajectory, Penelope Luna



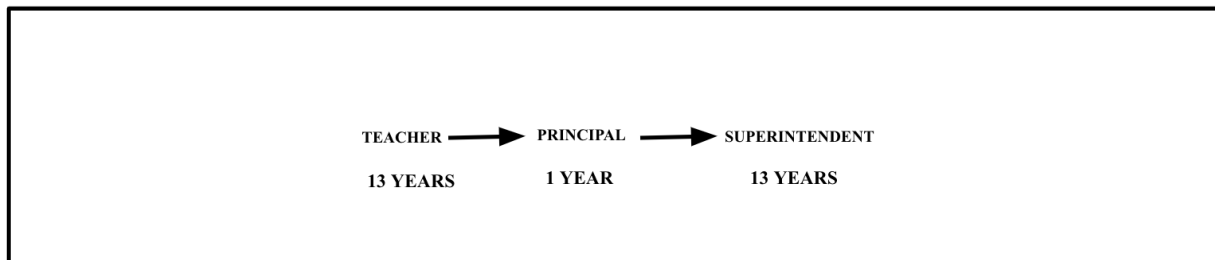
Note: Figure 2 outlines the career trajectory of Penelope Luna

Figure 4
Career Trajectory, Juana I. Cruz



Note: Figure 4 outlines the career trajectory of Juana I. Cruz

Figure 5
Career Trajectory, Lara Carranza



Note: Figure 5 outlines the career trajectory of Lara Carranza

The figures above show the career trajectory of the four Latina Superintendents who participated in this study. The trajectories of three Latina Superintendents show clear patterns in their professional journeys, which align with the multiple steps and longer career pathways of women and people of color in educational leadership (Björk et al., 2003; Davis & Bowers, 2018; Kim & Brunner, 2009). In particular, evidence of taking district roles and/or having more roles along the way is apparent. All three of the Latina Superintendents have extensive careers serving at the district level. All three have also served in an Assistant Superintendent or Deputy Superintendent type role before ultimately attaining the Superintendency. This trajectory is common for female Superintendents and Superintendents of color. Women often have to prove themselves and gain the experience, which is aligned to a study which shares it appears that women are hired for their experience while men are hired for their potential (Muñoz et al., 2014) According to AASA: The School Superintendent Organization (2023), most female superintendents serve in districts with 3,000 students or less. With the exception of Juana I. Cruz, all of the Superintendents lead districts with less than 3,000 students, which aligns with current research. Smaller districts may provide the opportunity for a greater sense of community (Rodriguez et al., 2019).

Miles Nash and Grogan (2022) noted that many Superintendents of color serve in a different district from the one that they worked in prior to attaining the Superintendency. In the study, we see this pattern with Penelope Luna and Juana I. Cruz, however it does not reflect the

pattern of Raquel Rivera who was internally promoted within the district multiple times and Lara Carranza who did not work in her district immediately prior to the Superintendency; however, she had taught in the district previously. Both Penelope Luna and Juana I. Cruz worked in an urban school district and moved to a suburban school district to secure the Superintendency. Raquel Rivera was internally promoted from a suburban context and Lara Carranza worked in a rural context. The variations between contexts and experiences leads to questions about whether the existing research fully captures the experiences of Latina Superintendents and if there is some difference based on region, context, or type of community.

Research shows that women and superintendents of color also serve in districts where at least a quarter of the students are students of color (AASA: The School Superintendents Association, 2023). This may speak to the motivation to work with and serve communities of color. This may be intentional and speak to the motivation of Latina Superintendents. Aligned with the research, Latina leaders seek administrative positions with the goal of making a difference, especially for students of color and those who are underserved (Méndez-Morse, 2004).

This sentiment is reflected in Penelope Luna's testimonio, where she says:

I'm fortunate enough to live in an urban city where I could work with Latino people and they get to see themselves as well with me and work with others here. And even here in (school district) I mean, working with my Black students and my Black community. I love it. I mean, I think it's just great. I want to be working with people of color...Our White people, they're going to be okay. They don't need a [Penelope Luna].

A Latina participant in one study, however, questioned whether or not it was indeed a choice or if she gravitates to her district for other reasons. She asks in the study "is this where I choose to work, or is this the only place where I'll be hired?" (Martinez & Méndez-Morse, 2021, p.5).

With the exception of Lara Carranza, the findings of my research study align with this existing research.

While the findings of this research study align with existing research about the longer journey that female Superintendents and Superintendents of color often face, there are some areas whereby the results deviate from what's known from the typical trajectories. For example, Brunner and Kim (2010) discuss women's overrepresentation in the area of Curriculum and Instruction and how entering female Superintendents bring that experience to their role. None of the participants in this research study served in the area of Curriculum and Instruction. Additionally, Méndez-Morse (2015) noticed a pattern about Latina Principals and the likelihood of serving in a paraprofessional role. Again, this pattern is not observed through the findings of this research study- none of the Superintendents in my study served as paraprofessionals.

Lara Carranza, the sole participant in this study serving in a rural district, is an outlier for a number of factors associated with the career trajectories of Latina Superintendents. Figure 5 depicts her career trajectory, a path that is an outlier in this study and provides some variance to the existing research. Lara Carranza works in a rural setting which is about 30 miles away from where she grew up. She is an outlier in the study because her career trajectory is different from the other Superintendents and also is more similar to a male Superintendent trajectory, with the promotion from a teacher to principal to the Superintendency (Björk et al., 2003). While her path is shorter and more direct, Lara Carranza has 13 years of teaching experience, which aligns with research that suggests that women and people of color stay in the classroom longer in comparison to their White male counterparts before stepping into an administrative role (Brunner, 2003; Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Maranto et al., 2019).

Though she has extensive teaching experience, Lara Carranza only served as an elementary principal for one year before securing the Superintendency in her current district. At the time of the interview, she did not hold a Superintendent license. There is some research on Latina Superintendents serving in rural school districts (Castillo et al, 2021; Rodriguez et al, 2019). The career pathways of Latinas serving in rural school districts, however, are minimal. Castillo et al. (2021) found that Latina leaders are attracted to small rural districts for the close-knit culture provided by smaller communities. Rodriguez et al. (2019) reported that Mexican-American leaders are being selected as Superintendents in small rural communities. In these studies, the rural school communities where Latinas serve have high percentages of low-income students and high Hispanic student populations. Lara Carranza is Mexican-American; however, only a quarter of the students are labeled as economically disadvantaged or low-income and only 5% are Hispanic or Latino. These studies, however, do not specifically address the career trajectory of Latina Superintendents who select rural school districts. This raises questions about the relationship between rural Superintendent leadership pathways in comparison to Latina rural Superintendent pathways and their career trajectories.

This research study contributes to filling this gap in the literature by both affirming a pattern for this group, aligned with what has been experienced for other women and for leaders of color. While three of the superintendents who participated in this study reflect these trends, the outlier of Lara Carranza's career path raises some questions. More research is needed to determine if Lara Carranza's trajectory may suggest that Latina Superintendents in rural districts

have different pathways. The findings in this study uncover some new questions about rural leaders in comparison to urban or suburban leaders.

Conclusion

For the women in this study, regardless of urban, suburban, or rural context, navigating predominantly White spaces has been a defining experience throughout not only their career, but also their childhoods. Growing up, all of them were among the few, if not the only, Latinas in their schools and/ or neighborhoods. Being “one of few” throughout their lives has positioned them as trailblazers in their professional journey. Among the 1% of Latina Superintendents in the country, they have broken through barriers. All four of the participants were the first Latina Superintendent in their Midwestern school district.

Overall, while this study contributes to a gap in the literature on the topic of career trajectories, further studies that explore these questions are needed. It is important to fully understand the experiences that Latina Superintendents have across all contexts including urban, suburban, and rural districts in order to understand and address the complexities associated with Latinas’ career pathways and securing the Superintendent role. It is also important to look back into their childhoods, which is an essential part of their career pathway.

To what or whom do Latina Superintendents attribute their success?

This section examines the supportive factors that contribute to the success of Latina Superintendents throughout their career. Using the themes that were outlined in the previous chapter and connecting it to the conceptual framework, I will analyze the findings and connect it to the existing research. Throughout the discussion, I will show how these findings align with, deviate from, and/or expand upon the conversations about the factors that support Latina Superintendents to, and through, the Superintendency.

The conceptual framework in this study was grounded in existing research on female Superintendents, Superintendents of color, Latina educational leaders (such as principals), and the limited literature on Latina Superintendents. The supportive factors identified in the conceptual framework fall within four categories: (1) mentorship, sponsorship, and networking, (2) credentials and proven experience, (3) cultural capital, and (4) motivation and determination. I will analyze the findings of this research study through this lens, adding discussion and offering new insights as they emerge.

Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Networking

Existing research emphasizes the important role that mentorship, sponsorship, and networking has for women, superintendents of color, and Latina leaders (Allred et al., 2017; Avalos & Salgado, 2016; Brown, 2014; Enomoto et al., 2000; Manuel & Slate, 2003; Ortiz, 2000). When these supportive factors are present, they can provide support; when they are missing, they can produce barriers. In this study, Latina Superintendents shared examples of mentorship, sponsorship, and networking through their *testimonios* and how they have played a critical role in their journey.

A theme that emerged across three of the participants was the role that White male Superintendents or leaders played and how they served as mentors and sponsors. The *testimonios* shared by three of the superintendents show how White male leaders, including Superintendents, have played an important part in their journey. Penelope Luna, who attributes her success to a lot of different people includes White men explicitly in her *testimonio*, stating “there were a lot of particularly White men that believed in me and kind of showed me the way. And I appreciate them.” Similar to Penelope Luna, Raquel and Lara resonate with the idea of White male mentors as important mentors and sponsors along the way.

White men represent the largest demographic group of Superintendents in the United States (AASA, 2023). As the largest group of Superintendents, they hold power in K-12 education and often serve as gatekeepers to the Superintendent role (Chase & Bell, 1990; Tallerico, 2000). With this power, White male Superintendents provide support or limit opportunities for Latinas as they navigate their career journey. The influence of White men is documented in the findings of this study and existing literature. It is important, however, in this discussion to acknowledge the complexity of this reality and the associated power dynamics in our discussion.

The relationship between Latinas educators and White male principals or Superintendents includes a power dynamic. As gatekeepers to higher level positions (Chase & Bell, 1990; Tallerico, 2000), White males have the opportunity to open or close doors for aspiring Latina leaders. Latcrit Theory, the theoretical framework for this study, describes power and its relationship to gender, race, language, and other factors (Valdes & Bender, 2021). While the support of White men has been helpful for individual Latina superintendents as evidenced by the stories shared by the study participants and existing research (Enomoto et al., 2000), using a LatCrit framework to explore this finding brings out some concerns to be addressed about systems change.

White men have clearly opened doors for Latina superintendents to walk through and have made some positive impact in encouraging Latinas to pursue this career, however individual mentorship alone will not produce systemic change. This approach may even maintain or perpetuate the power structures connected with race and gender. The positive influence of White men through tapping, mentorship and sponsorship is limited to an individual level. Even though the White males who have impacted the trajectories of these women have done so in a

supportive and positively intentioned manner, White male leaders are still positioned as gatekeepers to the Superintendentcy in these examples (Chase & Bell, 1990; Tallerico, 2000).

Tallerico and Blout (2004) discuss the control that White men have in sponsorship and providing informal networking opportunities.

Since mentors typically seek out their mentees, rather than the other way around, this also reinforces the power dynamic and imbalance of control (Enomoto et al., 2000). While supportive for individual Latinas, relying on White men to gain access to roles in the Superintendentcy continues to reinforce the power structures is not enough to disrupt power dynamics and ultimately change the system to be more representative.

In her affirmation of White male mentors, Penelope Luna shares, however, that White male Superintendents may not see Latina leaders as competition which helps explain why they are supportive. It is important to note that while three of the participants explicitly name White men as a supportive factor in their career, not all of the Superintendents who participated in this study resonate with this idea. Juana I. Cruz shared that her experience was different and that all of her mentors have been women.

Evidence of White men being a form of support is evident in the existing literature (Brown, 2014; Enomoto et al., 2000; Ortiz, 2000) and was reaffirmed through the findings of this study. These educational leaders, however, are not the only place where Latina Superintendents find mentorship, guidance, and support. Latina leaders, however, have numerous mentors, including non-traditional mentors. Méndez-Morse (2004), discusses the non-traditional mentors that Latina leaders can have which often includes their own parents. These findings are aligned with the findings in this study which includes all four participants noting family as a primary reason for success. Lara Carranza names her parents as a primary factor in her success, while

Raquel Rivera also mentions the role her abuela played in her life and the traits she carries from her relationship with her grandmother. Stories about the influence of family serving as not only the first mentors, but ongoing mentors.

Existing research presents mixed reviews of family as barriers and supportive factors. The impact of balancing family and household responsibilities is often discussed in the literature focused on female Superintendents. Some studies suggest that family responsibilities can be a barrier to career advancement, while other studies emphasize the support that families provide (Allred et al., 2017; Campbell and Campbell-Whatley, 2019; Connell et al., 2015). All of the Superintendents in this study identified their family as a key support and reason for their success. While the superintendents identified family as a support, Penelope Luna noted that it was difficult coming home late from her work. Raquel Rivera does not have children, but noted that a colleague of hers was waiting for her children to grow up before taking on the superintendency.

Penelope Luna and Juana I. Cruz both mentioned the humility that they have to approach their family with regarding their career success. Penelope Luna noted that she is unsure if her family understands that she is not a teacher, but the Superintendent of a school district. Uniquely, Penelope Luna adds a reflection stating:

I never want to come across that way. But you also know that you can't be celebrated in that way. You can be celebrated if you get married, you can get celebrated if you have children for, you know, anniversaries, birthdays. That's like, those kind of things in family are more important than your work life. Yeah, so you don't talk about it, and that's your whole different world.

Penelope Luna and 3 both discussed having select family members who share an understanding and being able to talk to more than others.

Unlike participants in other studies (Murakami et al, 2018; Quilantán & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2024), none of the Superintendents in this study shared stories of conflict related to

traditional gender roles in Latino culture. Méndez-Morse (2000) discusses how Latina leaders often receive support and encouragement from their families. Family dynamics can be complicated; anyone with a family can relate. While there is some complexity, every participant in this study attributes success, at least in part, to their family.

The experiences of Latina Superintendents in this study show the importance of mentorship and support, but that it is not limited to traditional education networks, but the inspiration, guidance, and strength of their families are also empowering. Along with the acquisition of mentors and sponsors, existing literature discusses the importance of networking (Isernhagen & Bulkin, 2013). While the literature discusses informal networking, many more examples of formal networking opportunities were shared in a more extensive manner. The participation of Latina Superintendents in professional networks emerged as a powerful finding and a place that extends the current literature.

Research shows that Latina Superintendents have strong feelings of isolation (Martinez et al., 2019; Rodela et al., 2019) and the professional networks help mitigate those feelings by providing connections. Lara Carranza reiterates on how the Superintendent network is critical for her survival. Even though she is the only Latina and one of few women, this is a group that needs to lean on and support each other due to the isolating job of the Superintendency. Juana I. Cruz shared stories about how she used humor to break down the walls of being the only Latina and only woman in her regional group. These Superintendent networks provide a sense of support.

Another critical finding was the engagement of participants with identity-based networks, for example Latino-centered or women centered networks. This is a place that extends the existing literature. While existing literature nods to informal relationships and mentors, it does not explicitly discuss the involvement in national, state, and local groups that center

Latinos, women, or Latinas specifically. The findings also connect to Latina/o Critical Theory which points to the importance of solidarity and collective action among people of color as a method to challenge systematic oppression. Many of the Superintendents are explicitly connected with groups that center Latina/o/x leadership and education. These findings show the importance of not only informal networks, but also formal networks and spaces for Latina Superintendents.

Latina Superintendents Are Highly Qualified and Experienced

The Latina Superintendents who participated in the study are all credentialed and experienced professionals. Research shows that educators of color, including Latinas, intentionally seek to gain degrees, licenses, and positions that will help them gain the necessary qualifications and experiences that they need to serve (Quilantán & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004; Berry & Reardon, 2022). This, in part, leads to the longer career trajectories observed for women, people of color, and Latinas as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Over the time of their career journey, they not only accumulate degrees and certifications, but also a wide range of experiences. Each of these experiences contributes to professional learning, skill-building, and enhancing their capacity. Their experience, coupled with their credentials, provides strength for Latina leaders. This aligns with research that shows that these credentials provide armor for Latina leaders to feel prepared and competitive (Björk et al., 2003).

The credentials are not simply representative of how qualified Latina leaders are, but also appears to be an intentional, strategic move as a response to the barriers of inequity that they face in their roles. LatCrit provides a framework for understanding how race, gender, and other facts intersect in ways that impact individuals' access to opportunities. Raquel Rivera's passionate *testimonio* on this topic emphasizes her conscious knowledge of this.

Raquel Rivera explicitly commented on this trend. She knew she had to obtain credentials in order to have a fighting chance at the same opportunities White males would have. Raquel Rivera's statements reflect an understanding of how her race/ethnicity, gender, and other intersecting identities make the journey to the top more complicated due to more barriers (Valdes & Bender, 2021). She uses her credentials to combat those barriers as a form of resistance. In her *testimonio*, she describes going back to school to get her business manager credential and encouraging all of the women in the room to do the same with the recognition that she would be held to a higher standard. In her experience and recommendation, she understands the importance of attaining these qualifications, despite being told by men that she did not need them. For women, credentials and experience are critical. Research suggests that men are hired for their potential while women are hired for their experience (Muñoz et al., 2014).

Beyond certifications and degrees, Latina Superintendents also gain qualifications through their numerous leadership positions. All four of the Latina Superintendents in the study held leadership roles outside of their district. These roles deepen their experiences and give them a platform to expand their work. Superintendents shared policy work, advocacy, community engagement, education reform, and other skills that they gained and used. Through these roles, they not only gain knowledge and experience but also increasing influence. They are a form of professional development along with networking. They make their work visible, which earns them recognition.

All four of the Latina Superintendents have earned numerous awards, with titles including "Superintendent of the Year," "Administrator of the Year," "Mentor of the Year," and "Latina Feminist Icon." These awards not only acknowledge the work, but also help add to their

resume and professional credibility. The awards are physical manifestations of the Latina leaders' knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Latina leaders are decorated with qualifications, credentials, and experiences. This is one way that they armor up and proactively resist against the known bias and discrimination that is a part of the system. You cannot deny their qualifications, which aids in their success.

Leveraging Cultural Capital

An important part of the success of Latina Superintendents in this study is in the way they leverage their Latina identity as a form of cultural capital (Yosso, 2005). This is exemplified through their bilingualism and biculturalism. Latina Superintendents use their backgrounds to connect with students, staff, families, and their communities in various ways including by using language.

The Latina Superintendents who participated in this study shared the ways that their cultural background was an asset in the contexts where they serve, which includes diverse and/or changing student populations. For some, being Latina was an asset that helped assist them in securing the Superintendent role. This finding is not surprising as it is aligned with existing research that shows that Latinas typically serve in diverse schools and those with higher percentages of poverty (Martinez et al, 2016). As the districts experienced change or tried to reach their diverse community, in addition to their professional qualifications, Latina Superintendents' identities were seen as an asset.

Lara Carranza works in a district that is predominantly White, though has an increasing Latino student population. When asked why she was hired, the school board offered her identity as one of the factors. Her school board President was extremely candid and explained how her Latina identity was a key factor in selecting her as the Superintendent for the district. In response

to the growing Latino population, the board saw her identity as an asset that could help the district move forward. Similarly, Penelope Luna and Juana I. Cruz also talked about how their identities played a role in their selection as they serve in diverse school districts. All of the Superintendents emphasize that their qualifications and experiences were primary factors in their hiring, though their cultural identity was also an asset. Another way that Latina Superintendents leverage cultural capital is by intentionally hiring and building a diverse staff.

In alignment with existing research, educators of color believe their presence allows them to serve as role models and see what is possible (Moorosi et al., 2018). By hiring diverse staff, Latina Superintendents aim to ensure that the leadership represents the students. Penelope Luna, for example, discusses the importance of diversity in leadership. She explains how, leading a district with a predominantly African American student population, she intentionally seeks to hire Black leaders. She also discussed how she has hired Latino, Middle Eastern, and other ethnic groups so that her students can see themselves in the staff, making the direct connection on the power of representation. Even in her predominantly White rural district, where there are fewer candidates of color, Lara Carranza was able to hire a bilingual Latina office assistant who, like her, bridges the cultural connection to the growing Latino population in the area. Juana I. Cruz was able to diversify her team at all levels and even hire a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Director to continue the work. Latina leaders recognize that, even if they don't share the same racial background, being a leader of color helps them connect. This aligns with the sentiments shared by a Latina principal in a related study who stated that families who are African American and Latino can connect with her because she is an administrator of color (Hernandez and Murakami, 2014). Similar statements were made by several superintendents in this research study as well.

Bilingualism emerged as a key theme in the participants' *testimonios*. All four of the Latina Superintendents spoke English and Spanish, however the point in which they learned either language varied. Lara Carranza learned Spanish in college, while Raquel Rivera learned English in elementary school. All of the Superintendents use Spanish as a part of their roles to connect with their students, staff, and community. In their case, bilingualism is not simply a skill that they have but a form of cultural capital that they can leverage in their roles in different ways.

In alignment with existing research, many Latina leaders note that their bilingualism serves as an asset and allows them to more deeply engage with their students and communities (Martinez et al., 2019). This is evident in the example shared by Raquel Rivera. Upon appointment to the superintendency, Raquel Rivera intentionally spoke directly to students and community members in Spanish. This inaugural speech was received positively by many Latino students, staff, and community members. It was a powerful example of using language to connect with the community. It also aligns with the research that shows Latina leaders not only serve as role models for students, but also for staff of color (Murakami et al., 2017).

Lara Carranza uses Spanish to connect with students and families who might feel marginalized or excluded. Being only 5% of the student population, Latinos may find themselves out of place in the community and school district. Lara Carranza intentionally walks her building and speaks in Spanish intentionally to connect with students in a way that is their "code" that others do not understand. These actions align with literature that shows how Latina leaders speaking Spanish builds trust and comfort (Murakami et al, 2018). Lara Carranza is fostering belonging for her small Latino population through her use of language.

In her *testimonio*, Juana I. Cruz reiterates that it's not only about language, but also about culture. She states "So it's one thing for me to be able to communicate with a parent, but it's a

whole other thing to be able to understand culture and a sense of belonging so that children can identify with who's running the school.” She cautions that learning Spanish alone does not bring the same cultural capital.

Bringing both their cultural and linguistic background to the Superintendent role, Latina Superintendents bring an unparalleled ability to reach and connect with diverse communities. Their bilingualism is not only a technical skill, but also a relationship builder and point of connection. The intentional diversification of staff shows the importance Latina leaders place on having representation and role models for students. Latina Superintendents and their ability to leverage their identities and background offers a powerful example of how cultural capital can serve as a support for leaders on their journey. This study highlights the importance of the cultural capital that Latinas bring and show how it serves as a supportive factor in their careers.

Motivation, Determination, and the Desire to Serve

In the participants’ *testimonios*, the theme of motivations and determination was not specifically addressed or sought out through semi-structured interview questions. These pieces, however, are an underlying theme that runs through all of the stories that they shared. Examples of resilience and self-determination emerge in many examples of their work and the idea of serving marginalized student populations are notes that are sprinkled throughout their stories.

Operating in the Superintendent role, a predominantly White, male-dominated position takes motivation, resilience, courage, and strong determination. While not shared in the results section of this study, there are some explicit quotes that speak to the determination, for example, Penelope Luna’s determination that she WILL win anyone over. She shares: “I confide in my vulnerability, my real want of belonging to conquer those challenges because I’m like, in the end, I’m like, I’m going to win you over. I will win you over no matter what.” Juana I. Cruz also

shares comments about how being Latina brings strength, saying “If a white man was in this role, he wouldn't have lasted as long as I had.” These statements show the resilience and motivation to continue the work even though Latina superintendents are facing systemic barriers and resistance in their work.

As a center for motivation and determination, the need to serve and improve conditions for marginalized students is another ever-present and underlying theme. This aligns with existing research that highlights the importance of service and social justice work for many Latina educational leaders (Méndez-Morse, 2000). Examples of this are seen throughout the *testimonios* of participants. Two examples that explicitly speak to this and were not included in the results section include notes from Lara Carranza and Juana I. Cruz.

Lara Carranza shares:

I just had a conversation with a new bus driver who is also an aid for us, a paraprofessional, for us. We have - So, you know the percentage of our cultural diversity compared to the Caucasian is very small, right? And so today I asked her because she is also African-american that she would help me reach out to our new one and only African-American students in the building. I mean the cultural shock from Arkansas to (state) alone- And then add on it where you're the ONLY student identified as African American, right? So knowing that, what I have to offer is the comfort to the parents knowing their kids are coming to a school with 80, I think it's 88 percent Caucasian - Okay, that at least the school leader is not Caucasian too, right? Just add that little bit of diversity there.

Another example of this is shared through Juana I. Cruz's statements:

I go out into the community and they give out tickets and I meet parents and I talk to them like I would talk to any other parents. So if they're from Jalisco, I use the Jalisco tone if they're from Michoacan, whatever. And we start talking about food, we talk about las fiestas and everything.

If I have a Black family, I talk about what's important to them and their culture, how they're going to get together, what they're going to be doing with their families. They're either into sororities or fraternities or they're into the barbecues or the reunions. There's always something, so I just get to know them, right?

Before me, none of my superintendents that were all Male and White ever went

out to the community to do any of that.

You also see this desire to serve and improve systems through Raquel Rivera's elimination of "Latino Math" and how she pushed to rename the course and ensure biases did not exist to only place Latino students, but any student who needed support- of which there were many of different backgrounds. These stories align with research that shows that there is evidence that Black and Latina/o/x Superintendents strive to make a difference (Alston, 2005; Hernandez et al., 2014). The Latina Superintendents show not only their resilience, self-determination, but also desire to serve and improve. These themes emerge over and over through the *testimonio* and are not isolated incidents but part of everything they do.

It is clear that there are many factors that contribute to the success of Latina Superintendents. The findings of this research study confirm and extend the supportive factors of the conceptual framework. Latina Superintendent success is built and protected by a combination of all four areas outlined in the conceptual framework including (1) mentorship, sponsorship, and networking, (2) highly credentialed and proven experience, (3) cultural capital, and (4) motivation and determination. Family is also a named supportive factor, though sometimes as a supportive factor, family can complicate it. This study offers further evidence and builds upon the existing research in this area. In combination, all of these supportive factors allow Latina Superintendents to rise in the ranks and thrive in the predominantly White, male dominated spaces. These supportive factors help guard and protect Latina leaders from the challenges that they face. The next section will outline some of these challenges and barriers that Latina Superintendents face in their roles.

What challenges have Latinas faced while ascending and serving in the superintendency?

This section addresses the challenges that Latina Superintendents face throughout their career and factors that create barriers to their work. Through this section, I will connect the findings outlined in Chapter 4 with the existing research, theoretical, and conceptual frameworks. In addition, I will show how these findings align with, deviate from, and expand the conversations about the factors that impede the work of Latina Superintendents.

Bias and Discrimination

The conceptual framework for this study is rooted in existing research. The words “race/ethnicity bias and discrimination” and “gender bias and discrimination” are framed around all other components of the conceptual framework to symbolize how bias and discrimination is systemic and an ongoing challenge that frames the journey of Latina Superintendents. Bias and discrimination are not isolated to particular events, though we can see examples through these events, but rather are ever-present. This frame was built on the existing literature shows that racial/ethnic bias, gender bias, and discrimination manifests in at various stages in the professional journeys of women and superintendents of color and how it creates barriers (Brown, 2014; Harris & Ogbonna, 2016; Tallerico, 2000). Furthermore, The intersectionality of race, ethnicity, gender, and other identity factors creates these unique challenges (Crenshaw, 1991). The findings of this study affirm these patterns and highlights how this bias and discrimination looks for Latina Superintendents at key stages of their professional journeys- from the early stages of selecting their career up to the superintendent interview process. Through their *testimonios*, all of the Superintendents in this study shared personal stories of bias and discrimination at key stages of their career advancement.

The overarching theme of bias and discrimination manifested in different forms through the participants' *testimonios*. The stories shared by the Latina Superintendent participants range from early decisions, such as selecting a college major, to the Superintendent interview process. Through their *testimonios*, all of the Superintendents in this study shared experiences and personal stories of bias and discrimination in their personal and professional life. Some of the Latina Superintendents explicitly discuss the challenges and identify them as forms of bias while for others the biases were not explicitly named or, at times, recognized as experiencing bias at all. This is similar to the experience outlined in a study of Latina administrators in which participants stated that gender and race did not impact their work, though their responses and examples showed clear examples of bias and discrimination (Méndez-Morse et al., 2015). In the study, the researchers point to evidence that shows the impact of racial and gender bias is often underidentified and reported (Méndez-Morse et al., 2015).

The findings in this research study align with existing academic research that shows the ongoing presence of bias and discrimination for female superintendents and superintendents of color. Looking through the lens of Latino Critical Theory which points to the systemic nature of bias and discrimination (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012), the stories are not simply individual experiences, but are a result of the systemic marginalization of Latina Superintendents who are living in the United States and operating the institution that is K-12 public education.

Latina Superintendents in this study faced this barrier both along their journey and in their roles. As an example of how bias can impact Latina leaders, Lara Carranza recalls a conversation that her college professor had with her, encouraging her to take on a second major because of the bias. He explicitly shared that Lara Carranza needed to select another major because she would not be hired as a Social Studies teacher. This advice, he pointed out, was

based on the fact that she was Mexican and a woman. The advice, pointing out the existing bias favoring White men, particularly White men with coaching backgrounds, was confirmed when Lara Carranza went to apply for jobs. Lara affirms that she could not find a job as a Social Studies teacher and had a lot more opportunity as a Spanish teacher. This example shows how bias and discrimination can have an impact on the specialty area, or major, even before their career officially begins.

Lara Carranza's initial interest in the field of education was inspired by childhood experience with her Social Studies teacher. While Lara Carranza took the advice of her professor and took on a second major and found success teaching Spanish, this type of discouragement may not have had the same outcome for others. This guidance, along with the confirmation of its truth, shows the small and powerful ways in which bias and discrimination can have an influence and redirects career decisions early on. Similarly, Raquel Rivera's experience during the interview process highlights bias and discrimination in her search for her first administrative role. Tallerico (2000) found that hiring often comes down to chemistry and gut feelings, which can put women and people of color at a disadvantage. Raquel Rivera recounts the feeling of knowing upon walking into the room, feeling body language and nonverbals. As a part of her recount, she states "and I, in the bottom of my heart, I just knew they were going to select a White male. I knew it." It was a gut feeling that turned out to be later confirmed as true. She sensed that the selection committee would select a White male and her intuition was later confirmed to be true. This experience speaks to the invisible, sometimes intangible nature of how bias manifests in the interview process. Gut feelings are manifestations of bias rather than fit (Tallerico, 2000).

Another form of bias in the interview process, though a different form, is shared through Juana I. Cruz's *testimonio*. She experiences bias in the form of physical appearance. Juana I. Cruz faces bias based on her physical appearance. While more specifics regarding physical appearance and bias are outlined in the next section, the experience highlights how bias impacts how Latina leaders are viewed with a lens that creates difficulties along the career path.

From the earlier stages of selecting a college major to the final stages of securing a superintendency, Latina Superintendents in this study shared stories of bias and discrimination at the key stages of their career advancement. The ongoing presence of bias at these critical stages may help shape the inequalities and create a breakdown in the leadership pipeline. Bias manifests in many ways during these key stages, including physical appearance, which stands out as another theme among the Latina Superintendents of this study.

The findings of this study align with the existing research surrounding the bias and excessive attention Latina women experience due to their physical appearance. This aligns with existing research that centers the heightened visibility Latina women experience due to underrepresentation of Latinas in the role of Superintendent and other leadership roles (Hernandez et al., 2014). The Superintendents in this study shared similar experiences in their testimonios of being scrutinized and judged based on their physical appearance.

Several of the Superintendents described how their hair styles, clothing, makeup, and accessories became areas of focus while serving or interviewing for their roles at different points in their careers, including in the Superintendency. Penelope Luna's reflection is an example that highlights the hyperfocus on Latina women:

But there are challenges that once you're in that position, how people view you. You're viewed for everything, your movement, how you look, what shoes you wear, you know, earrings you wear, how you wear your hair, your attire, all of it.

And I know this because people have brought it to my attention and it's just so crazy.

As outlined in her *testimonio*, Penelope Luna proceeds to discuss being judged for every detail. Along similar lines, Juana I. Cruz expressed frustration about the overemphasis on her appearance rather than her ideas. This mirrors the research findings of Martinez et al. (2019) who describe how Latina women are seen for superficial traits rather than their skills, contributions, and ideas.

Offhanded comments about not looking like a superintendent, excessive questions about appearance, and even direct comments about appearance are experienced by Latina Superintendents in this study. These stories reflect a pattern of bias that persists and is ever-present not only at key stages of career advancement, but while serving in the role. Scrutinization and hyperfocus on physical appearance is not something male counterparts are subjected to. The next section explores a related, but unexpected finding from this study - how Latina Superintendents are not just passively subjected to critiques and bias based on their appearance, but how the participants in this study are actively using their appearance to push back as a form of cultural expression and resistance. While there is some evidence of this in the literature, it was not prevalent enough to stand out upon a review of the literature. This adds a new layer of understanding to how Latina leaders navigate and push back on appearance norms.

An unexpected pattern that emerged related to bias and physical appearance was the use of physical appearance as a form of resistance and empowerment. While existing research includes evidence of bias directed at Latina leaders in relation to their appearance (Martinez et al., 2019; Hernandez et al., 2014) the participants in this study share examples of how they are intentionally using their appearance as way to push back against these biases and also stay true their Latina identity.

Juana I. Cruz shares an example of how she subtly, but intentionally uses hoop earrings as an act of resistance and identity empowerment. She shows her hoop, a smaller hoop that might be seen as more appropriate for the job setting and says:

“...Let me take my hoops off. The hoop is a, you know, it's a standard for Latinas. Right. Even though it doesn't look like it - I got a hoop on. But here's the thing is that we as Latinas, you say ‘you got your hoops?’ and you know what that means. Nobody else. But other people don't know that.

Her statement indicates that wearing hoop earrings is not simply a choice she made for fashion, but rather an intentional connection with cultural identity. The ‘you got your hoops?’ comment indicates that Juana is prepared and ready to fight, in this case references professional fights, for example to fight for her students and her values. They are a signal to others and herself that she brings her culture to her space. Her choice to wear hoop earrings, intentionally, sends a powerful message.

The theme of appearance as a form of physical resistance was also shared by the statements made by Penelope Luna as she shares her practice about wearing a bracelet in the shape of handcuffs, a choice she intentionally makes when she’s feeling silenced or oppressed in her role. Again, not simply choosing a bracelet for the purpose of fashion or accessorizing, this bracelet physically represents the constraints she faces and allows her to reclaim her agency and independence by doing so.

Physical appearance as a form of resistance and empowerment has been hinted at in the existing literature. The idea of using physical appearance as resistance and empowerment appears in some spaces and briefly in work related to K-12 educational leadership, for example the work of Martinez et al. (2021). In this article, a Latina Assistant Superintendent discusses her deliberate use of bold colors, red lipstick, and hoop earrings. She also discusses her intentional avoidance of traditional suits. Like Penelope and Juana, this Assistant Superintendent is actively

resisting the biases related to physical appearance and uses it to push back on traditional views of how educational leaders dress.

The findings of this study support and also extend known information about the bias and discrimination experienced by educational leaders who are women and leaders of color, including Latina Superintendents (Brown, 2014; Harris & Ogbonna, 2016; Martinez et al., 2019; Martinez et. al, 2021; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015; Tallerico, 2000). These findings confirm the impact of racial and gender bias as significant barriers, though they are not always recognized or acknowledged as such by those who experience it. While there are nods to how Latina Superintendents demonstrate resistance to this bias related to appearance, for example in the story of Assistant Superintendent, Fabiola Bagula (Martinez et. al, 2021), this is an unexpected finding that was uncovered in this study.

The way that Latina Superintendents navigate and use their appearance in their professional role is a form of identity expression, communication, and intentional pushback. This idea adds to the understanding of bias and discrimination that Latina Superintendents face and opens a new area of resistance to that bias and discrimination in the professional setting. Exploring physical appearance as a form of resistance and empowerment may be a valuable topic for further investigation.

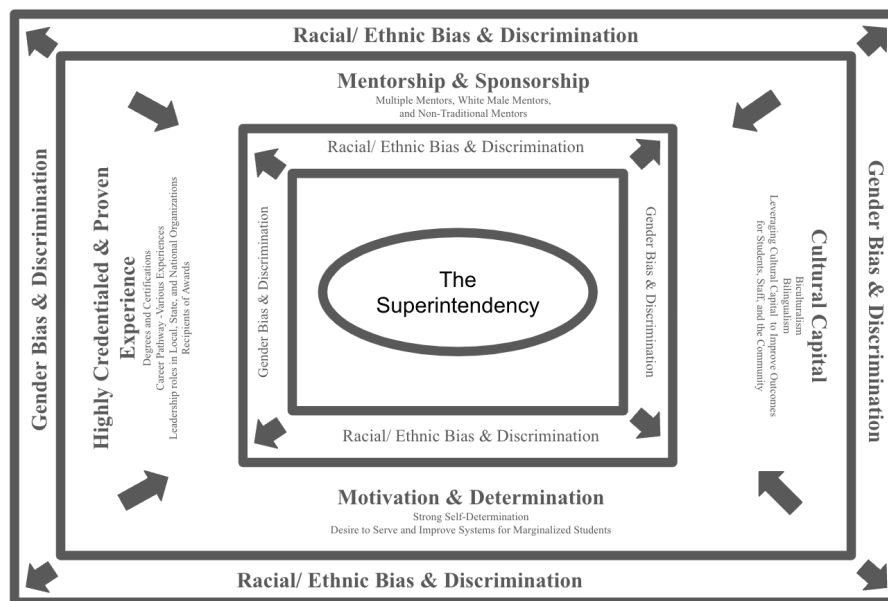
Refined Conceptual Framework: Supportive Factors and Barriers Experienced By Latina Superintendents in the Midwest

The conceptual framework for this study was grounded in the limited research available on Latina Superintendents along with insights from other research that highlighted Latina educational leaders, Superintendents of color, and female Superintendents. Since conducting my research study, I have refined my conceptual framework to align with the findings of my

research study to reflect the experiences of the study participants. The data gathered from this study led to new understandings that were not reflected in the initial conceptual framework. The initial framework also included some ideas that did not emerge as themes for the participants in my study. I offer this refined conceptual framework, Figure 6, as a new tool for understanding the supportive factors and barriers experienced by Latina Superintendents in the Midwest along their career path.

Figure 6

Refined Conceptual Framework: Supportive Factors and Barriers That Influence the Career Trajectories of Latina Superintendents in the Midwest



The refined conceptual framework, outlined in Figure 6, remains framed by the influence of racial, ethnic, and gender bias and discrimination. Bias and discrimination remains a key barrier for Latina Superintendents in the Midwest. Through the research study, evidence of pervasive bias and discrimination exists including experiences at key career milestones, ongoing bias related to appearance, and other examples were evident. This refined framework recognizes

that these barriers are not only present, but are ongoing challenges faced by Latina Superintendents along their journey and as they serve.

The supportive factors outlined by the conceptual framework remain largely the same, with slight modifications based on the data gathered from this research study. Mentorship and Sponsorship continues to be a key factor, including but not limited to the support of White male mentors. The theme “Networking,” which was intended to refer to informal networking in the community was removed from the final conceptual framework, not because of its unimportance, but rather data from this particular study did not point to it as a primary support for the participants. More research may reaffirm its position as a key supportive factor in the future. Cultural capital, which includes biculturalism and bilingualism, continue to be a supportive factor with a nuance that these do not only benefit students, but also staff and the community. The category “Motivation and Determination” remains unchanged as these qualities were evident in the participants’ experiences. One of the more significant changes was the expansion of the theme “Highly Credentialed and Proven Experience.” In the revised conceptual framework, the data reiterated the importance of qualifications, certifications, and the diverse experiences that Latina Superintendents serve along the way. The new framework also highlights the significant leadership experiences that Midwestern Latina Superintendents hold at the local, state, and national level. It also incorporates the recognition that they receive through awards, which adds to their credentials and experience.

Finally, I added a circle around the words “The Superintendency.” The circle visually represents the unique challenges that Latina Superintendents face as the only one, or one of very few, Latinas who serve in the Superintendent role. Being alone, or one of few, is an experience that Latina Superintendents in the Midwest have experienced repeatedly during their journey

including in their own childhoods, while engaging in networks with their peers, and sitting in the seat of the Superintendency. This research aims to support change in the underrepresentation of Latina Superintendents in the United States and eventually remove the circle of isolation that surrounds Latina Superintendents in the Midwest and beyond.

Implications for Future Research and Recommendations for Key Groups

While there is a growing interest in the study of Latina Superintendents, only a handful of academic researchers and research studies currently dedicate their work to this field. Due to this, there is a significant gap in academic literature and lack of understanding of the career pathways, supportive factors, and challenges experienced by Latina leaders in K-12 education. The limited number of research conducted on this topic is limited across all regions of the United States overall, however; as another area of emphasis, research centering Latina Superintendents who live outside of the Southwest region is even more challenging to find in the literature. It is important that future research continues to focus on the experiences of Latina Superintendents in order to address the barriers and promote equitable access to this role.

There is, however, a glimmer of hope for the future in this field. There is growing interest observed by the work of doctoral students over the last decade, Latina doctoral students in particular (Carrion-Méndez, 2009; Corona, 2022; Cortes, 2022; Hernandez, 2018; Olivarez, 2019). This group of new academic researchers are selecting the topic of Latina and/or Latino Superintendents through their dissertation work. This shows promise in the field and the potential of filling the existing literature gap in future years. Universities should continue to find ways to support these new researchers and ensure they have the resources in order to share their findings more widely, including publishing in academic journals and presenting at conferences.

Future research is needed on the career trajectories, supportive factors, and barriers experienced by Latina Superintendents in order to better understand their experiences.

Understanding the experiences of Latina Superintendents could lead to increased knowledge, the development of programs, the influence of policies, and other action items that could help create more equitable opportunities for leadership and ensure that leadership in K-12 public schools represent the diverse students they serve across our country.

Recommendations for School Boards and Superintendent Search Firms

School boards and search firms are the two primary groups that are on the front lines of Superintendent hiring. Based on the direct advice and related themes identified from the *testimonio* of the Latina superintendents involved in this study, there are two key recommendations that emerged for these groups: Address the diversity of the hiring team and provide support for Latina Superintendents once they are hired.

School Boards and Superintendent search firms should evaluate the diversity of their teams to determine areas of potential bias and gaps in the superintendent recruitment and selection process. While school boards have limited control of the group makeup, seeing that most board members are publicly elected, this process of auditing the demographics on the team may help the board determine where they may need to seek support or additional perspective in the hiring process.

Superintendent search firms have more control over their demographic makeup. Both school boards and superintendent search firms that do not have diverse representation should consider hiring or consulting with former superintendents of diverse backgrounds in the recruitment and selection process. Juana I. Cruz points out the importance of considering the

intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender while evaluating the composition of the recruiting team. Her experience points to gaps, noticing that:

The recruiting firms I'm really thinking about right now, all of them have male Latinos. They have Latinos, not Latinas, that work with them to recruit. A man recruiting a woman is very different than a woman recruiting a woman. Right?" Female recruiters, particularly those of color, may bring a different lens to the hiring and selection process. In a White male dominated field, the importance of diverse perspectives cannot be overlooked.

Auditing the diversity of the hiring team, including gender, is a first step that these groups can take to start making progress in the diversification of candidates.

With the understanding that Latina Superintendents (women superintendents, superintendents of color, etc.) are significantly underrepresented in educational leadership, school boards should be intentional in supporting newly hired superintendents by investing in them. Investing in leadership is critical, but especially important for those who are not well represented in the region, state, or nationally. These individuals may need additional layers of support. Raquel Rivera recommends not only investing in Latina superintendents based on what the board assumes they might need, but reminds school boards that "it's really important for school boards to ask candidates what they need." Asking this question explicitly and being intentional about providing targeted support for new Latina superintendents will help build leadership skills and may also help with retention long-term.

Recommendations for State Superintendent Organizations and Departments of Education

Through my experience gathering data for this research study, state-level superintendent organizations should prioritize the collection of demographic data of their superintendents. This data should be easily accessible on the organization's websites and provide the opportunity to disaggregate data by race, ethnicity, gender, and other demographic categories. By collecting this data and making it publicly available, it can help provide insight to the levels of representation

across the state. States collect demographic data of educators, however do not always disaggregate for the Superintendent role. Transparency in this data will not only inform the public, but also spark conversation around areas of potential strength and opportunities for growth in representation.

Additionally, state superintendent organizations and departments of education should create a plan to support Latina Superintendents, and other groups of superintendents that are underrepresented in their state and foster the development of leadership pipelines. The work of improving representation in education leadership begins well before the Superintendent level. It starts at earlier stages. Some organizations are exploring equity-based pipelines to build stronger school and district leadership. The Wallace Foundation (2023), for example, is a leader in these efforts. Their Equity-Centered Pipeline Initiatives highlights the underrepresentation of Hispanic and Latino leaders. The organization focuses on preparation, mentorships, and support to create effective leaders who can produce positive outcomes for students in public schools (Wallace Foundation, 2023).

On a national level, AASA (The School Superintendents Organization), developed an Aspiring Superintendents Academy specifically to meet the needs of Latina/o/x leaders (AASA, n.d.). The academy provides support and professional development specific to the context of Latina/o/x leadership. The issue lies that many states in the Midwest are not offering the same level of support and providing these affinity spaces for those in or aspiring to the Superintendent role.

These programs are important because they address aspects of intersectionality and the unique needs that Latina/o/x leaders may need to navigate their leadership journey. Midwestern states should look to models including the AASA: The National Superintendent Organization

and organizations like the Wallace Foundation for guidance in this area. By designing equity-centered programs and creating these dedicated affinity spaces, states can help promote a Latina/o/x leadership pipeline and improve representation across the region.

The findings shared by Latina Superintendents in this study show that these formal networking opportunities are incredibly important. States should consider the development of formal networking groups for current and aspiring Latina leaders.

Recommendations for Current Superintendents

Building a strong leadership pipeline is important for the future of K-12 education. As we found in the research, “tapping” is one of the ways that Latina leaders, women, and people of color enter the Superintendency and other administrative roles. While tapping alone does not address the root of systemic issues that exist, it does open doors and create pathways for some people who may not have previously had access. Superintendents should continue to actively identify Latina educators (and others from underrepresented groups in the Superintendency) and guide them in the leadership journey. They should continue to encourage educators, including teachers and principals, to pursue new opportunities. Districts should also consider creating programs that offer mentorship and support within their school district, including internal leadership pipelines.

The leadership pipeline begins with hiring practices within the school district, including entry level positions such as teachers or paraprofessionals. Like school boards and search firms, Superintendents are encouraged to audit their district’s hiring practices and current staff demographics to ensure that diverse candidates, including Latina educators, are being considered for open positions. In their work, Latina Superintendents have an intentional focus on diversifying staff that can be used as a model for other Superintendents of all backgrounds. Like

national and state organizations, school districts should take steps to design and implement their own leadership pipeline programs specifically designed with Latina/o/x educators in mind. These pipelines, like the organizations mentioned above, should focus on providing preparation, mentorship, support, and emphasize the unique identities of participants.

Recommendations for Aspiring Latina Superintendents and Latina Educators

One of the most powerful pieces of advice shared by Latina Superintendents in this study through their *testimonios* is the importance of bringing your most authentic self to the role and to remember that you are not alone. Latina Superintendents bring cultural capital, new ideas, and ways of being to the space. It is important to embrace who you are and your strengths.

The Superintendency can be an isolating space, especially when you are the only one or one of few. One of the most important and resounding pieces of advice offered by the Latina superintendent participants in this study for aspiring Latina Superintendents and newly hired Latina superintendents is recognizing- you are not alone. Penelope Luna tells aspiring and new Latina superintendents that they have support, but also the responsibility that they need to become a part of that support system for others. She states, “you're not alone. We're out there. You just have to find us, find your support system. And once you find your support system, utilize them to your benefit and then also become that support system. So it's twofold.” Lara Carranza reiterates this message by saying, “find a mentor, don't do it on your own, never be an alone island.” Raquel Rivera says to aspiring Latina Superintendents:

One, we can't do this alone. There needs to be a network. And you need to be able to find a network. You need to be able to find other leaders, both male and female. And I feel like it's really important to share what it is that you're seeking, name it, and see how people can help you. Sometimes I have people say, like, I need mentorship. Mentorship is so big and broad. But it's like mentorship in what, right? And I talk about this when I present. It's that specific networking.

All of the Superintendents in the study model this practice by not only participating in formal networks, but also leading them. As a final recommendation for Latina educators and aspiring Latina Superintendents, you can do it. As Juana I. Cruz stated: “We have to see ourselves as those strong individuals that say, *sin mi no se va a poder*...It's about knowing you can.” Having this self-confidence is important in the role, especially in a space where there are few Latina leaders. Bringing your authentic self, finding your networks, and knowing that you belong is the foundation to your success.

For aspiring Latina Superintendents and Latina educators in their leadership journey, remember that incredible women, like the four who participated in this study, are paving the road. Alongside other Latina leaders, find your networks, mentors, and allies to support you on your journey. Reviewing the findings of this study and leaning into the supportive factors, such as armoring up with credentials, that will help you along the journey. In a world where our nations’ public schools serve nearly a quarter of Latina/o/x students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022), but only 2% of its leaders are Latina/o/x and just 1% of its leaders are Latina (AASA: The School Superintendents Association, 2023), there is not only space for you, but an urgent gap to fill.

Conclusion

The findings in this study offer insight into the lived experiences of Latina Superintendents in the Midwest. Through the *testimonios* shared by participants, these findings help build greater understanding of the career pathways, supportive factors, and barriers faced by Latina Superintendents. The findings of this study reaffirmed the longer road that Latina leaders face on the road to the Superintendentcy. Key themes emerged from the four Latina leaders, each who serve in different contexts. These themes include a.) early experiences navigating

predominantly White spaces b.) the role of family, faith, and collective support c.) the role of White men along the career path d.) Latina identity as an asset in diverse and changing communities e.) armoring up with academic and professional qualifications f.) Leadership roles and recognition beyond the district e.) finding solidarity and support through Superintendent networks f.) experiencing bias and discrimination at key career milestones g.) bias related to physical appearance h.) reclaiming identity through physical appearance i.) navigating bias and discrimination beyond the district walls j.) intentionally building a diverse staff and k.) bilingualism as an intentional tool for connection. Their stories and the threads that string them together helps create a better understanding of the experiences and the journey of Latina Superintendents and their unique experiences.

As a Latina educator, leading this research study was incredibly impactful, personally and professionally. Sitting across the table and on the other side of the screen from powerful Latina women and hearing their stories was inspirational. Each of these women made it a point to go above and beyond to offer encouragement and speak life into me. I am tremendously grateful to the four phenomenal women who participated in this study. To the participants in this study- Your words, experiences, and your *testimonio* has added to a limited body of research on Latina Superintendents and the candidness of your stories has been invaluable to those hoping to follow in your footsteps. It is my hope that the findings of this study help to build greater understanding and pave the way for change across all levels.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Add Hoop Earrings: An Examination of the Career Pathways, Supportive Factors, and Barriers Experienced by Latina Superintendents

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude for your participation in this research study. The stories and *testimonio* shared from your experiences aim to inform and support current, aspiring, and future Latina Superintendents along with those who are in positions to prepare, support, and hire Latina leaders.

As outlined in the consent form, the purpose of the research is to understand the career pathways that Latina superintendents take along the journey to the superintendency, including roles and career decision-making. The study aims to examine factors that positively influence and support superintendents, as well as understand barriers that Latina superintendents encounter along their journey. Of particular interest is whether the participants have encountered systemic challenges and how they have demonstrated resistance as a Latina leader in K-12 educational institutions.

The guiding questions for our time together are listed below. These questions will be asked during the conversation. Follow up questions or topics may emerge as you share your *testimonio*. I encourage you to feel welcomed and empowered to share stories or truths beyond the limits of the asked questions.

1. Describe your educational journey, starting from your experience as a student in school through your professional journey to your current role. Please include details about the schools/organizations you attended and worked in along with any positions that you have held.
2. As a Latina, what role has your identity played in your career trajectory?
3. How do you draw upon your cultural background and identity in your role as Superintendent?
4. To whom or what do you attribute your success, both personally and professionally?
5. Have there been any critical moments in your professional career that have been connected with your identity as a Latina female leader (including challenges and successes)? If so, what were some of the most significant experiences ?
6. Only 1% of Superintendents in the country are Latina, which does not reflect the Latino population in the United States. What truths or stories should be understood about this disproportionality? Please include insights from your own experience and perspective.
7. How has working in the Midwest, in [state name], [community], shaped your experience as a Latina Superintendent? Are there unique challenges or supportive factors associated with the region?

8. What suggestions or recommendations do you have for school boards, educational institutions, recruiting firms or other groups seeking to recruit and retain Latina leaders?
9. Based on your experience, what advice do you have for aspiring Latina Superintendents?
10. What should newly hired Latina superintendents know about navigating the job?
11. Given the goal of this research study to understand the career trajectories, supportive factors, and barriers experienced by Latina Superintendents, with attention to systemic challenges and how leaders demonstrate resistance in K-12, is there anything else that you think would be important to share?

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

University of Wisconsin-Madison Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Study Title: “Add Hoop Earrings:” An Examination of the Career Pathways, Supportive Factors, and Barriers Experienced by Latina Superintendents

Primary Researcher: Mallory A. Umar

Phone: 773-934-9430

Email: maumar@wisc.edu

Description of the Research:

You are invited to participate in a research study that explores the career pathways, supportive factors, and barriers experienced by Latina Superintendents.

You have been asked to participate because you meet the selection criteria of the study including:

- Identify as Latina
- Hold a Superintendent position
- Work in a public school in the United States (K-12)
- Live in the Midwest

The purpose of the research is to understand the career pathways that Latina superintendents take along the journey to the superintendency, including roles and career decision making. Additionally, the study aims to examine factors that positively influence and support superintendents, as well as understand barriers that Latina superintendents encounter along their journey.

This study will include approximately three to four Latina superintendents who serve in K-12 public school districts in the Midwest region. The research will be conducted using the Zoom video conferencing platform.

What will my participation involve?

If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be interviewed using a semi-structured question format. You may choose to skip any question(s) you wish during the interview or decide to conclude the interview at any time.

Your participation will require one session lasting approximately 1 hour. You will also have the opportunity to review and confirm (member-check) your responses through email before publishing results of the study for accuracy.

Recording information

The interview will be audio/video recorded. The recordings will only be used by approved personnel involved with the research and will be securely stored. The recordings will be kept for the duration of the study before they are destroyed.

Are there any risks to me?

This study includes questions about your personal experiences including gender and race. Participants may reveal personal, sensitive, or identifiable information when responding to open-ended questions; therefore, there is always a risk of confidentiality breach.

Are there any benefits to me?

There are no direct benefits to study participants, however the study is an opportunity to add to the body of research on Latina superintendents. Conclusions will be published in the study for school boards and other consulting firms to consider as they aim to recruit and retain Latina superintendents.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

This study is confidential. Neither your name or other identifiable information will be published. Only approved university personnel will have access to the data. The use of pseudonyms, password protections, and secure storage of all data will be employed for the protection of participants.

Whom should I contact if I have questions ?

Participants are welcome to ask any questions about the research before, during, or after the interview. You can contact the Primary Researcher, Mallory Umar, at 773-934-9430 or the Principal Investigator (my advisor) Dr. Barb Sramek at barb.sramek@wisc.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or have complaints about the research study or study team, call the confidential research compliance line at 1-833-652-2506. Staff will work with you to address concerns about research participation and assist in resolving problems.

If you decide not to participate or would like to withdraw from the study, you may do so at any time without penalty.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in the research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of the Participant: _____

Check the box if you agree:

- Yes, I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications - without my name

Signature: _____ Date: _____