



2007 State of the Superintendency Mini-Survey: Aspiring to the Superintendency

**AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS
AASA CENTER FOR SYSTEM LEADERSHIP**

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INTRODUCTION

The American Association of School Administrators, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders across the United States. AASA members range from chief executive officers, superintendents and senior level school administrators to cabinet members, professors and aspiring school system leaders. AASA's mission is to support and develop effective school system leaders who are dedicated to the highest quality public education for all children.

Critical to the AASA mission is the ongoing study of the superintendency. AASA has published benchmarking studies of the American superintendency approximately every 10 years since 1923. In the fall of 2007, the AASA Center for System Leadership, the professional development arm of AASA, released *The State of the American School Superintendency: A Mid-Decade Study*, authored by Thomas E. Glass and Louis A. Franceschini. This important work, based on a representative sample of superintendents nationwide, elucidates many important facts and trends about the superintendency, including the future supply of professionals who desire to assume the role. Several pertinent findings of that study suggested a diminished supply of professionals ready to assume the position of superintendent. The findings were:

- The estimated mean age of superintendents in 2006 (the year the study was conducted) was 54.6 years, which Glass and Franceschini report as the oldest respondent group of any of the 10-year studies. In fact, 76.7 percent of the respondents reported their age as over 50.
- Linked with their additional research on this topic, Glass and Franceschini suggest that superintendents are entering the superintendency later in life than in previous studies and selecting to stay in schools or in central office positions longer before entering the superintendency.
- Women superintendents comprised 21.7 percent of the survey respondents, which represents an increase over previous studies.
- Citing the work of Market Data Retrieval, Glass and Franceschini found that in the 2005-2006 school year there were 2,244 new superintendents hired in the 13,251 school districts, denoting a turnover rate of 16.9 percent.
- Glass and Franceschini report that just over 39 percent of the superintendents included in their study plan to retire in the next five years.
- Glass and Franceschini further postulate that approximately 10,000 to 11,000 superintendent positions may turn over in the next five years.
- The authors found that just more than one-third of the superintendents reported not having been mentored prior to becoming superintendent.
- When asked about the stress that superintendents experience, slightly more than 44 percent of those responding indicated they were under *considerable stress* while that number rose to 59 percent when those under *very great stress* were included.

In an effort to expand on the findings of Glass and Franceschini, particularly related to the supply of future superintendents, the staff of the AASA Center for System Leadership conducted an additional survey of superintendents "Aspiring to the Superintendency." Once collected, the

data was analyzed by the Center for Education Policy Studies at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

METHODOLOGY

A 15-question survey (Appendix A) was constructed by the AASA Center for System Leadership staff and reviewed by the staff of Educational Research Service. During the last week in October 2007, a total of 7,552 AASA members were sent a Zoomerang® link to the survey. An e-mail reminder was sent to those failing to respond by the end of the second week in November. In addition, a survey announcement and link were published in e-newsletters sent to all AASA members and to the executive directors of AASA's 49 state affiliate organizations. At the close of the survey, 2,622 (35 percent) visits had been made to the web-based survey site with 2,204 (29 percent) usable responses received. Noteworthy was the fact that all but 20 percent of the responses received arrived within the first week of release, suggesting the topic of superintendent supply struck a resonant chord among respondents.

To ensure that responses were reflective only of superintendents, all responses self-reported to have been authored by staff other than the superintendent, including those difficult to discern, were eliminated from further analysis. The remaining 2,110 (28 percent) responses exclusively received from superintendents were used for the purposes of this analysis.

Data were downloaded to a spreadsheet and each data element was carefully reviewed to ensure that the statistical application ran without exception. After review of the data, analysis was limited to descriptive statistics. Certain disaggregation was conducted to identify important findings.

FINDINGS

For the purpose of reporting findings of the survey (hereafter referred to as the “Aspiring to the Superintendency”), this survey is divided into five subsections:

1. Demography of Respondent Superintendents
2. Aspiring to the Superintendency
3. Incentive/Disincentives
4. Mentoring/Coaching and
5. Development and Policy Implications.

Tables are presented with findings following in a bulleted format.

SUBSECTION 1: DEMOGRAPHY OF RESPONDENT SUPERINTENDENTS

The American school superintendency, like many other high-profile executive leadership positions in the public and private sector, is dominated by white males. This fact was reported in the 2000 *Study of the American School Superintendency* and still is true today, as reflected in the 2006 *State of the American School Superintendency*. The profession of the superintendency is an aging profession. In the “Aspiring to the Superintendency” survey, 77.7 percent of the respondents indicated that they were over the age of 50. Conversely, 80.9 percent of the respondents had fewer than 10 years of experience as a superintendent. Many of the demographic findings of the “Aspiring to the Superintendency” are similar to the 2006 *State of the American School Superintendency* study. Contained in Table 1 are data related to respondent gender, age and longevity in the position of superintendent.

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHICS OF SUPERINTENDENT RESPONDENTS (Q 2-7)

BY GENDER	#	%	AVERAGE AGE	AVERAGE YEARS IN CURRENT POSITION	AVERAGE YEARS AS SUPERINTENDENT
MALE	1681	79.7%	54.0	5.8	9.9
FEMALE	429	20.3%	54.1	4.6	6.3
TOTAL	2110	100%			
BY AGE					
<40	70	3.3%	36.8	2.5	3.1
40-49	400	19.0%	45.2	3.4	5.1
50-59	1237	58.6%	55.1	5.8	9.2
>59	403	19.1%	62.1	10.7	14.6
ALL	2110	100%	54.0	5.6	9.2

- A total of 2,622 surveys were returned. After removing those with incomplete responses or authored by staff other than the superintendent, a total of 2,110 surveys were tabulated.
- A total of 429 females and 1,681 males completed the survey; thus, 20 percent of the respondents were female and 80 percent were male.
- The mean age for all respondents was 54 years. The average age for both males and females was 54 years.
- Fifty-nine percent of the respondents were in the 50-to-59-year-old age range.
- On average, women superintendents had less experience in the superintendency than their male counterparts.

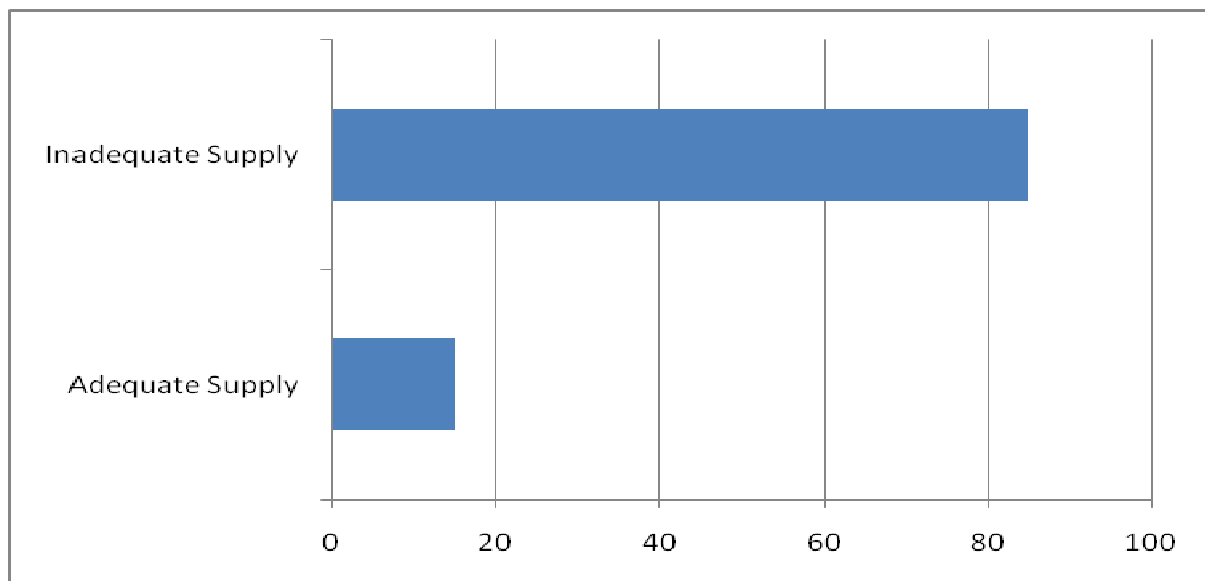
- The mean number of years in current superintendent positions was 5.6 years; the mean overall number of years in the superintendency was 9.2 years.
- With the exception of the District of Columbia and Hawaii (single superintendent entities), responses were received from all states, ranging from a low of three respondents (Delaware) to a high of 142 (Wisconsin).
- The district enrollment of respondent superintendents very closely mirrored that of the earlier Glass and Franceschini study in 2000.

SUBSECTION 2: ASPIRING TO THE SUPERINTENDENCY

When asked if there was an adequate supply of candidates for the superintendency, the respondents gave the following response:

- Only 15 percent of the superintendents responding thought there was an adequate supply of superintendents to fill the anticipated openings. A total of 85 percent believed there was an inadequate supply of superintendents in the pipeline.

TABLE 2: SUPERINTENDENT PIPELINE SUPPLY (Q 8)



SUBSECTION 3: INCENTIVES/DISINCENTIVES FOR BECOMING A SUPERINTENDENT

Respondents were asked to identify the three most important incentives and disincentives for those considering the superintendency as a career. In addition to the responses displayed in Tables 3 and 4, numerous anecdotal comments were offered. A content analysis of those comments is provided below.

TABLE 3: INCENTIVES AND DISINCENTIVES RANKED IN TOP THREE FOR THOSE CONSIDERING THE SUPERINTENDENCY AS A CAREER (Q 9-10)

INCENTIVES	#	%	DISINCENTIVES	#	%
MAKING A DIFFERENCE	1570	74.41%	FUNDING FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS	1137	53.89%
LEADING LEARNING	1093	51.80%	FAMILY SACRIFICES	971	46.02%
COMPENSATION	856	40.57%	SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS/CHALLENGES	922	43.70%
ADDRESSING CHALLENGES	747	35.40%	LOCAL POLITICS	814	38.58%
BUILDING A TEAM	638	30.24%	ACCOUNTABILITY PRESSURES	646	30.62%
MANAGING THE ORGANIZATION	479	22.70%	LOW SALARY VS. LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY	601	28.48%
WORKING WITH STUDENTS	221	10.52%	LABOR RELATIONS	422	20.00%
WORKING WITH STAFF	221	10.52%	PRESS & PUBLIC RELATIONS PROBLEMS	365	17.30%
PROMOTING ACCOUNTABILITY	203	9.62%	FINANCIAL SECURITY ISSUES	192	9.10%
PRESTIGE	184	8.72%	COMMUNITY RELATIONS	72	3.41%

TABLE 4: INCENTIVES AND DISINCENTIVES RANKED IN TOP THREE BY GENDER FOR THOSE CONSIDERING THE SUPERINTENDENCY AS A CAREER (Q 9-10)

INCENTIVES	MALE	FEMALE	DISINCENTIVES	MALE	FEMALE
MAKING A DIFFERENCE	75.6%	73.4%	FUNDING FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS	54.5%	54.3%
LEADING LEARNING	52.1%	52.7%	FAMILY SACRIFICES	46.0%	36.8%
COMPENSATION	40.7%	41.7%	SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONS/CHALLENGES	44.9%	52.2%
ADDRESSING CHALLENGES	37.5%	28.2%	LOCAL POLITICS	38.5%	39.9%
BUILDING A TEAM	29.6%	34.0%	ACCOUNTABILITY PRESSURES	30.2%	33.3%
MANAGING THE ORGANIZATION	22.4%	24.5%	LOW SALARY VS. LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY	27.5%	32.4%
WORKING WITH STUDENTS	10.2%	12.1%	LABOR RELATIONS	21.4%	16.1%
WORKING WITH STAFF	9.9%	13.3%	PRESS & PUBLIC RELATIONS PROBLEMS	17.8%	16.1%
PROMOTING ACCOUNTABILITY	9.6%	5.6%	FINANCIAL SECURITY ISSUES	9.5%	8.2%
PRESTIGE	9.5%	10.5%	COMMUNITY RELATIONS	3.3%	4.2%

- The top three incentives for considering the superintendency as a career were: being able to make a difference for public education (74 percent), leading learning (52 percent), and compensation (41 percent).
- The top three disincentives for considering the superintendency as a career were: the funding level for public education (54 percent), personal family sacrifices (46 percent), and school board relations and challenges (50 percent).
- There were no appreciable differences in the rankings for incentives between males and females. However, there were differences in men and women’s ranking of disincentives. Women ranked the top three disincentives as funding level for public education (54 percent), school board relations and challenges (52 percent), and local politics (40 percent). The top three disincentives identified by men were funding level for public education (54 percent), personal family sacrifices (46 percent), and school board relations and challenges (45 percent).
- While compensation was considered a top incentive, it appears that increased pressure for accountability and increased complexity of the job caused some concern regarding the level of compensation relative to the level of responsibility. Twenty-eight percent of

superintendents ranked “salary low in comparison to level of responsibility” in their top three disincentives. There was a slightly higher level of concern among females than among males. This may have something to do with the overall difference in level of compensation between male and female superintendents reported in the literature.

- Prestige was not seen as a top incentive for the job of superintendent.
- When the open-ended responses to the question dealing with *incentives* were analyzed, three prevailing themes emerged: leading learning/school improvement, leading change, and making a difference in the community. These responses serve to confirm the trends indicated in the more structured responses to this question.
- When the open-ended responses to the question dealing with *disincentives* were analyzed, a similar trend was evidenced with the more structured responses, save two items. Stress and pressure were identified as disincentive, along with diminished local control and support, some of which came from No Child Left Behind. These two items enjoyed significant support in the unrestricted comments from the superintendents.

SUBSECTION 4: MENTORING/COACHING

A recurring theme throughout recent discussions of the superintendent pipeline is the matter of mentoring/coaching of those considering the position of superintendent and those already in the position. In the 2000 *Study of the American Superintendency*, 80 percent of the superintendents surveyed considered themselves mentors to others who aspired to the superintendency. Mentors and mentoring are important aspects of any profession and an important link between the academic and the practical preparation for the job. In the “Aspiring to the Superintendency” survey, superintendents were asked if mentoring programs for aspiring superintendents exist in their school systems and the importance of mentoring programs to superintendent effectiveness. To bring clarity to the Likert scale response pattern, responses were clustered for analysis into three groups: not important (1-3), moderately important (4-7) and very important (8-10) (see Table 5). Here, too, the survey asked structured questions and also allowed respondents to offer their open-ended responses.

TABLE 5: EXISTENCE OF AND IMPORTANCE OF FORMAL MENTORING/COACHING PROGRAMS FOR ASPIRING AND EXPERIENCED SUPERINTENDENTS (Q 11-13)

PROGRAM EXISTS FOR ASPIRING SUPERINTENDENTS (Q11)	#	%	IMPORTANCE OF MENTORING/COACHING PROGRAMS	FOR ASPIRING SUPERINTENDENTS (Q12)		FOR PRESENT SUPERINTENDENTS (Q13)	
				#	%	#	%
Yes	422	20%	Not Important (Rank 1-3)	76	3.60%	64	3.03%
No	1,688	80%	Moderately Important (Rank 4-7)	796	37.73%	809	38.35%
Total	2,110	100%	Very Important (Rank 8-10)	1,238	58.67%	1,237	58.61%

- Eighty percent of superintendents reported that currently no programs exist in their districts to identify individuals aspiring to superintendent positions.
- Superintendents felt mentoring/coaching programs were very important for both aspiring and sitting superintendents.
- When asked to rank the importance of formal mentoring/coaching programs to aspiring superintendents’ eventual effectiveness, 59 percent of superintendents ranked these activities as very important, 38 percent ranked the activities as moderately important, and 4 percent ranked them as not important. The results were the same for superintendents, except that 3 percent ranked these activities as not important for superintendents.

TABLE 6: CURRENT PARTICIPATION RATES IN MENTORING/COACHING ACTIVITIES (Q 14)

ACTIVITY	# PARTICIPATING	% PARTICIPATING
MENTORING/COACHING SPONSORED BY NEIGHBORING SUPERINTENDENTS	1,292	61.23%
MENTORING/COACHING SPONSORED BY STATE ASSOCIATION/ORGANIZATION	814	38.58%
MENTORING/COACHING SPONSORED BY PRIVATE PROVIDER/CONSULTANT	257	12.18%
MENTORING/COACHING SPONSORED BY NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION	154	7.30%

- The most common mentoring/coaching activity in which superintendents participated was mentoring from neighboring superintendents. Sixty-one percent of respondents reported that they received assistance from neighboring colleagues over the last three years.
- The next most common source of mentoring/coaching activities in which superintendents engaged was state associations or organizations. Approximately 39 percent of the superintendents participated in these types of activities over the last three years.
- Twelve percent of superintendents availed themselves of assistance from a consultant and seven percent participated in activities provided by national-level professional organizations over the last three years.
- When the open-ended responses were analyzed, two interesting additions to the list of mentors were provided: previous superintendents and university staff. These responses were not offered in significant numbers.

SUBSECTION 5: DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Finally, the respondents to the survey were asked to opine on the role of AASA in addressing superintendent supply and development challenges. Through the AASA Center for System Leadership, the professional development arm of the association, AASA provides rich content and practical solutions to superintendents and those who support the work of the superintendents. The Center is comprised of five institutes that develop and implement programs and services to school leaders. The following priority listing provides guidance on the policy implications for the leadership of the association.

TABLE 7: TOP-RANKED INITIATIVES OR PROGRAMS AASA SHOULD BE DEVELOPING AND DELIVERING TO IMPROVE THE SUPPLY OF SUPERINTENDENT CANDIDATES, BY ALL RESPONDENTS AND BY MALE/FEMALE RESPONDENTS (Q 15)

INITIATIVES/PROGRAMS	# RANKED IN TOP 3	% RANKED IN TOP 3	% MALE RANKED IN TOP 3	% FEMALE RANKED IN TOP 3
IDENTIFYING/ENCOURAGING SUPERINTENDENT CANDIDATES	1,101	52.18%	53.18%	48.25%
CREATING MENTORING/ COACHING PROGRAMS/NETWORKS	1,031	48.86%	49.14%	47.79%
CREATING NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT PUBLIC EDUCATION	1,009	47.82%	47.40%	49.70%
CREATING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES	847	40.14%	39.98%	40.79%
ADVOCACY AT LEGISLATIVE LEVEL FOR PROMOTING SUPERINTENDENT CAREER PATH	806	38.20%	38.55%	36.83%
HOSTING MEETINGS DESIGNED FOR NEEDS OF ASPIRING SUPERINTENDENTS	675	31.99%	33.25%	27.04%
DEVELOPING PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO SUPERINTENDENCY	481	22.80%	21.06%	29.60%
IDENTIFYING/ENCOURAGING NONTRADITIONAL SUPERINTENDENT CANDIDATES	123	5.83%	5.70%	6.60%

TABLE 8: TOP-RANKED INITIATIVES OR PROGRAMS AASA SHOULD BE DEVELOPING AND DELIVERING TO IMPROVE THE SUPPLY OF SUPERINTENDENT CANDIDATES, BY AGE RANGE OF RESPONDENTS (Q 15)

INITIATIVES/PROGRAMS	AGE <40	AGE 40-49	AGE 50-59	AGE 60& OVER
IDENTIFYING/ENCOURAGING SUPERINTENDENT CANDIDATES	58.6%	48.0%	52.5%	54.1%
CREATING MENTORING/COACHING PROGRAMS/NETWORKS	34.3%	50.3%	49.2%	48.9%
CREATING NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT PUBLIC EDUCATION	50.0%	49.3%	47.5%	47.1%
CREATING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES	35.7%	41.3%	40.6%	38.5%
ADVOCACY AT LEGISLATIVE LEVEL FOR PROMOTING SUPERINTENDENT CAREER PATH	31.4%	39.5%	38.2%	38.0%
HOSTING MEETINGS DESIGNED FOR NEEDS OF ASPIRING SUPERINTENDENTS	30.0%	26.8%	32.9%	34.7%
DEVELOPING PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO SUPERINTENDENCY	32.9%	28.8%	21.8%	18.1%
IDENTIFYING/ENCOURAGING NON-TRADITIONAL SUPERINTENDENT CANDIDATES	8.6%	5.5%	5.3%	7.4%

- Superintendents ranked identifying and encouraging superintendent candidates, creating mentoring/coaching programs and networks, and creating a national campaign to support public education as the top initiatives on which AASA should focus.
- There was little support for programs that focus on identifying and encouraging non-traditional candidates to seek the superintendency.
- There were no appreciable differences among age groups or between male and female superintendents' selections of key initiatives on which AASA should focus.
- When the unrestricted responses were analyzed, two items surfaced that were not included in the structured responses. The first dealt with the role AASA should play in working with board/superintendent governance issues and the second issue dealt with the

need for improved financial stability through development of a retirement portability program for superintendents.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The supply of qualified individuals prepared to assume the superintendency is diminished. Public education faces a crisis unless the recruitment, development, and retention of school superintendents is addressed.

A total of 85 percent of the superintendents responding to this survey believe that an inadequate supply of educational leaders exists to assume the anticipated superintendent openings in the near future. Superintendents aspiring to the position see the biggest incentive in the job as improving teaching and learning for all students, while several disincentives of the job focus on lack of funding for the school system, family sacrifices and school board relationships. Finally, the data support the finding that a significant effort must be undertaken to provide mentoring and coaching of those aspiring to the superintendency or those newly appointed to the position. This is seen as essential elements for improving the supply and retention of well-qualified superintendents.

The American public education sector and AASA need to ensure that an adequate pipeline of school leaders is treated as a high priority during the coming years creating a need to immediately and aggressively address the shortfall of experienced and well-educated superintendents. AASA can do this by offering innovative programs and recruitment practices for our educational leaders.

AASA will provide professional development opportunities through the AASA Center for System Leadership™ and will work with school systems on the use of systems thinking to transform public schools.

Claudia Mansfield Sutton
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April 2008

APPENDIX A

2007 State of the Superintendency Mini-Survey: Filling the Pipeline

Introduction

Dear Superintendents and Other School System Leaders,

The mid-decade *State of the American School Superintendency* study that AASA published this fall clearly established the following facts:

- The mean age of superintendents in 2006 was 54.6 years, up from 51 in 2000.
- Only 23.3 percent of the superintendents responding to the study were under the age of 50.
- Just over 39 percent of the superintendents planned to retire or no longer be a superintendent in the next 5 years.
- Individuals are assuming the superintendency later in their careers.

These facts suggest that the “pipeline” for filling the large number of potential superintendent vacancies is at risk. As an initial step in its efforts to address this potential problem, AASA is soliciting information from education leaders such as you about related issues.

Please take just a few minutes to provide us with your perspective. Thank you for your participation in this important study.

Sincerely,

Paul D. Houston
Executive Director
American Association of School Administrators

Survey Questions

The following survey contains only 15 questions. The survey should take approximately five minutes to complete.

1. What is your current position? Choose one.

- Superintendent
- Associate/Deputy Superintendent
- Assistant Superintendent
- Director
- Principal
- Other: (please specify) _____

2. If you are a superintendent, how many years have you been a superintendent?

3. How many years have you been in your CURRENT position?

4. What is your age?

5. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

6. How many students were enrolled in your district as of January 2007?

- 1 – 999
- 1,000 – 2,999
- 3,000 – 4,999
- 5,000 – 9,999
- 10,000 – 24,000
- 25,000 – 49,999
- 50,000 – 99,999
- 100,000 or more

7. In which state is your school district located?

(Drop-down menu – All states and the District of Columbia listed)

8. Do you believe that there is an adequate supply of candidates for the superintendency?

- Yes
- No

