The School Superintendent: Roles, Challenges, and Issues

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Abstract
The purposes of this chapter are to detail the development of the office of school superintendent, to examine issues of gender and race, to identify contemporary issues affecting practice, and to identify future research topics. The first two sections provide historical perspectives summarizing how the position has evolved over the past 150 years at three different levels-state, intermediate district, and local district. A discussion of the position's history produces five role conceptualizations; having evolved over the past 150 years, these characterizations provide a mosaic of contemporary expectations. Next, considerable attention is given to the causes and implications of race and gender underrepresentation, and research on this topic is summarized. Contemporary challenges to practice are then presented in relation to education finance, school reform, social contexts of schooling, and school board relationships. Last, suggestions for conducting research on the normative and actual roles, underrepresentation, and contemporary challenges are provided.

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The role of the superintendent during the early years of districts and county systems was almost entirely instructional and tightly controlled by the school committees. Some education leaders, particularly Horace Mann and Henry Barnard, argued for even greater centralization, especially in the cities, partly to wrest control of schools away from ward politics. This was accomplished by the early 1900s. Centralized city school boards were run more like corporate boards of directors, with board members responsible for setting overall policy, and professional superintendents – resembling corporate managers and instructional leaders. The issues at the district level are more demanding than ever. District: Hiring Quality School Leaders. Challenges and Emerging Practices. A QUALITY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP Issue Brief | January 2012. Quality School Leadership. High-performing and dramatically improving schools are led by strong principals. The Quality School Leadership (QSL) services developed by American Institutes for Research give educators the tools they need to hire and assess their leaders. Get Board Agreement. The superintendent or human resources director should meet with the school board to discuss roles and responsibilities of the search committee chair and members, the search process, budget for the search, and criteria for selection. Search committee chairs, search committee members, and others should know how much time to dedicate to the search.