

REL Southwest Ask A REL Response

January 2021

Question:

What are supports for superintendent career pathways?

Response:

Thank you for the question you submitted to our REL Reference Desk. We have prepared the following memo with research references to help answer your question. For each reference, we provide an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the study's author or publisher. Following an established Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest research protocol, we conducted a search for research reports as well as descriptive study articles on career pathways for superintendents.

We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, we searched the references in the response from the most commonly used resources of research, but they are not comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References provided are listed in sections with sources in each section in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. We do not include sources that are not freely available to the requestor.

Research References

Alsbury, T. L., & Hackmann, D. G. (2006). Learning from experience: Initial findings of a mentoring/induction program for novice principals and superintendents. *Planning and Changing*, 37(3–4), 169–189. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ756222>

From the ERIC abstract: “This article reports findings from formative assessments of one state’s administrator mentoring and induction program during two years of program piloting in 2002/03 and 2003/04. The purpose of this evaluation research was to establish baseline data and to detect problem areas, so that changes could be made in subsequent years. More broadly, the study provides a window into successful components of an administrator mentoring program, according to these novice and experienced administrators. Theoretical perspectives on effective mentoring programs in educational administration are first presented. Quantitative and qualitative data from two surveys of principal and superintendent mentors and their proteges are then presented and analyzed, including trends that arose from the data. The study concludes by presenting

recommendations for the design and implementation of administrative mentoring programs of this type. The following are appended: (1) Iowa Administrator Mentoring and Induction Program Assessment: 2002/2003; and (2) Iowa Administrator Mentoring and Induction Program Assessment: 2003/2004.”

Augustine-Shaw, D. (2016). Developing leadership capacity in new rural school district leaders: The Kansas Educational Leadership Institute. *Rural Educator*, 37(1), 1–13.
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1225316>

From the ERIC abstract: “Understanding the context of rural school settings is critical to beginning school district leaders. Rural communities present multifaceted challenges that leaders must embrace as diverse community expectations unfold. The majority of Kansas school districts are in rural settings. Mentoring and induction shapes the experiences encountered during the first year of practice. The Kansas Educational Leadership Institute provides high quality mentoring and induction for new superintendents and principals in Kansas. Mentoring and induction provided by veteran superintendents familiar with leadership complexities in rural communities is offered through on-site visits. In addition, new superintendents participate in activities focused on building capacity through regional cohort networks, attendance at professional organization and state meetings, and in professional learning seminars. The rural superintendent wears many hats in serving their local district. Professional learning opportunities that provide leaders with strategies to focus on achievement, plan for change, and build leadership capacity in rural environments are critical for success.”

Davis, B. W., & Bowers, A. J. (2019). Examining the career pathways of educators with superintendent certification. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 55(1), 3–41.
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1201532>

From the ERIC abstract: “Purpose: We used gatekeeping theory to frame our examination of whether and when educators with superintendent certification become superintendents, and how their likelihood of making that transition is influenced by race, sex, and other characteristics. Furthermore, we sought to identify variation in career pathways to the superintendency. Data and Method: We analyzed 26,071 observations of 4,813 unique individuals, representing the entire population of Texas public school educators who obtained their first superintendent certificate between the 2000-2001 and 2014-2015 school years. We constructed alluvial diagrams to visualize these educators' career pathways. In addition to compiling a life table and visual displays of hazard, we used a discrete-time hazard model to control for individual and contextual characteristics associated with transitions into the superintendency. Findings: Educators are most likely to enter the superintendency in the academic year immediately following that in which they obtained the requisite certification. Furthermore, pathways to the superintendency differ greatly based on educator sex and race, as well as the level and locale employment setting. Finally, we determined that age, experience, education, level of employment, and sex all have statistically significant impacts on the likelihood of becoming a superintendent. Implications for Research and Practice: We discuss the role that researchers must play in coordinating with practitioners to ensure more equitable opportunity for aspiring superintendents. We also emphasize the important role that

preparation programs play in preparing candidates for the job market. Finally, we ponder further expansions of similar presuperintendency research, as well as more robust applications of alluvial diagrams.”

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- [(“school superintendents” OR “school district leaders”) AND (“career pathways” OR “leadership development” OR “superintendent pathway” OR “leadership support”)]
- access to the superintendency
- preparation for the superintendency
- school superintendent development
- [(“the superintendency”) AND ((“mentors”) OR (“occupational aspiration”))]
- superintendent induction

Databases and Resources

We searched [ERIC](#) for relevant, peer-reviewed research references. ERIC is a free online library of more than 1.8 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Additionally, we searched the [What Works Clearinghouse](#).

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

When we were searching and reviewing resources, we considered the following criteria:

- *Date of the publication:* References and resources published from 2006 to present were included in the search and review.
- *Search priorities of reference sources:* Search priority is given to study reports, briefs, and other documents that are published and/or reviewed by IES and other federal or federally funded organizations, academic databases, including ERIC, EBSCO databases, JSTOR database, PsychInfo, PsychArticle, and Google Scholar.
- *Methodology:* The following methodological priorities/considerations were given in the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized control trials, quasi-experiments, correlational studies, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, mixed methods analyses, and so forth; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected, and so forth), study duration, and so forth; and (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, and so forth.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by stakeholders in the Southwest Region (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest at AIR. This memorandum was prepared by REL Southwest under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-91990018C0002, administered by AIR. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.