Chapter 11

Contemporary Challenges

CASE STUDY	A LACK OF RESOURCES CAN LEAD TO EXTREME MEASURES

Dr. Rachel Watson became superintendent of the Washington Heights School District (WHSD) 2 years ago. An experienced educator, she was a classroom teacher for 16 years and an elementary school principal for 8 years. She came to Washington Heights from a neighboring district,

so she was aware of prevailing problems. The WHSD serves a small community on the fringe of a large metropolitan area. Originally developed by a steel company to house workers after World War II, Washington Heights has no appreciable commercial property. Most single-family dwellings

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have a market value of less than $100,000, and 23% of the residents live in government subsidized apartments.

The school district has had financial problems since the early 1970s when the steel mill closed resulting in a major loss of taxable property. Even prior to 1970, only a handful of businesses were located in the village. Now, approximately 90% of the local property tax revenue comes from residential buildings, almost all of which are more than 60 years old. Nearly 75% of the WHSD students qualify for free and reduced-price lunches; between 15% and 20% of the enrollment are special needs students; the drop-out rate is the fifth highest in the state; only 11% of the previous year's high school graduating class entered college; and 43% of the district's students scored below the acceptable standard on the previous year's state proficiency tests.

The district's five school buildings are in poor condition, and all five referenda for facility improvements over the past 12 years have failed. After the last referendum, a political action group, spearheaded by several local ministers, began waging a campaign to merge WHSD with the adjacent city school system, Jennings Park. The group's leaders argued that the merger was the only plausible solution to the district's financial and facility problems. The Jennings Park School District has lost 30% of its enrollment since 1970, and several of its school buildings have been "mothballed" even though they are in better condition than any of the schools in WHSD.

State law concerning school district mergers requires (a) that all involved school boards approve the merger; (b) that a plan for distributing school board membership in the new district is approved by the state board of education; and (c) that a plan stipulating the status of all personnel in the affected districts is approved by the state board of education. The Jennings Park superintendent and school board have indicated that they might support the proposed merger; however, the WHSD employees and school board were deeply divided on the merger issue. Leaders in the WHSD teachers' union also were divided; some argued that teacher salaries would likely increase after the merger, but others were concerned that a number of WHSD employees would lose their jobs. All WHSD administrators, except for Dr. Watson, have openly opposed the merger. Three of the seven school board members have declared support for the merger, three have declared opposition, and one remains uncommitted. The uncommitted member has indicated that she would not announce her position until Dr. Watson has made a formal recommendation.

As the merger debate intensified, the WHSD board members pressured Dr. Watson to make a recommendation. She was reluctant to do so in part because she wanted to examine more data and in part because she was unsure that the Jennings Park superintendent and school board would actually agree to the merger. She outlined a number of matters that needed to be scrutinized and estimated that she would make a recommendation in 6 months. The WHSD board members declared that her timeline was unacceptable. Even if both boards approved the merger, state-level approvals and necessary planning would likely take 1 to 2 years. In a surprise move, the WHSD board voted unanimously to approve the following motion: "Superintendent Watson must present a recommendation on the proposed merger with the Jennings Park School District within 45 days. Failure to do so will be considered insubordination."

INTRODUCTION

As open systems, school districts are not isolated from the surrounding community's social, political, economic, and legal problems. When these troubles extend to schools, they present serious challenges for superintendents. But unlike practitioners in other professions, superintendents must deal with the problems by applying their knowledge and skills in a manner that is concurrently effective, ethical, and politically acceptable (Wirt & Kirst, 2009). Analyzing this daunting dimension of public-sector administration, Cuban (1985) deduced that conflict was the DNA of the superintendency.

Studies of superintendents (e.g., Blumberg, 1985; Kowalski, 1995; Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011) confirm that identified problems of practice are related to an intricate mix of contextual variables and individual characteristics (see Figure 11.1). Context includes factors such as district climate, the local community, and resources. Individual characteristics are both personal (e.g., personality, health, and stress tolerance) and professional (e.g., knowledge, skills, and experiences). Contextual and individual variability explain why problems are not constant across districts. Nevertheless, superintendents who are politically sensitive, proactive (Björk & Gurley, 2005), and effective communicators (Chance, 1992; Kowalski, Petersen, & Fusarelli, 2007) typically are more capable of managing all types of problems.

Figure 11.1   Factors Influencing Problems of Practice
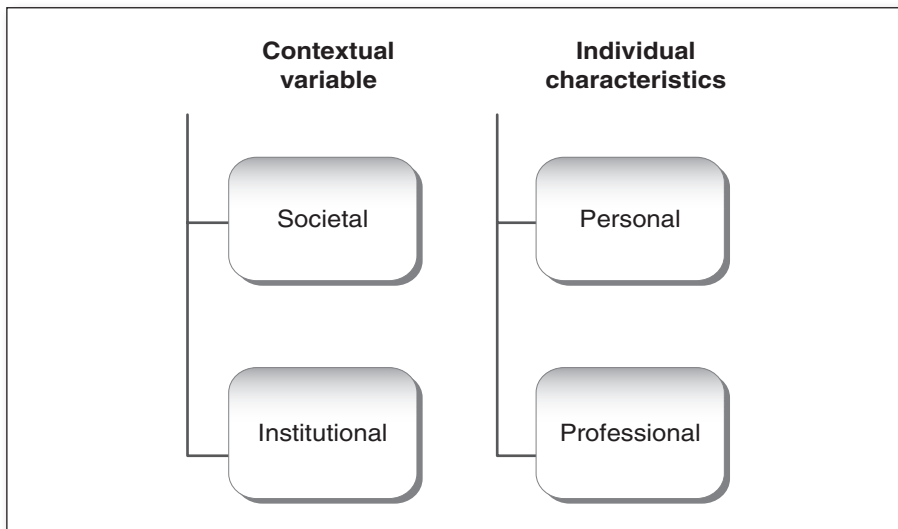
The purpose of this chapter is to identify and describe examples of pervasive problems. The quandaries are presented here in three categories: social, institutional, and professional. After reading the chapter, you should have a general idea of the nature and range of challenges facing district superintendents.

SOCIAL CHALLENGES

Social challenges include evolving conditions, such as a lack of citizen involvement and a lack of political support, and problems, such as poverty, violence, illegal drugs, and racism. The extent to which public schools, and hence, superintendents, have or should address social issues has long been debated. Tensions related to this topic are apparent in disagreements about (a) the purposes of schooling, (b) the extent to which citizens should be directly involved in school policy, and (c) the integration of social services in public schools (Cibulka, 1996). The two socially driven dilemmas examined here are *heightened political activity* and *inadequate funding*.

Heightened Political Activity

Although many view education as a sacred trust that should be held above the political fray (Blumberg, 1985) and professionals regard political activities as antithetical to professional behavior (Kowalski, 2005), politics are integral to democratic traditions. Local schools, like all other public institutions, are affected by ongoing competition among interest groups seeking to advance their interests through policies and resource decisions (Rowan & Miskel, 1999). Consequently, practice in the superintendency has been mired in political realities (Wirt & Kirst, 2009) and as communities became more ethnically and racially diverse, the intensity of conflict and political action escalated. As a result, superintendents have had to cope with diverse and often contradictory demands (Carter & Cunningham, 1997); yet, they have been reluctant to admit that their work occurs in highly political contexts. In a recent national study (Kowalski et al., 2011), only 5% of the superintendents said that they encountered overt political action often, and 8% said that they never encountered it. Such findings suggest that many superintendents either define political action narrowly or incorrectly or they suppress the political realities of their practice.

School reform provides a quintessential example of political action. Several decades of attempted reforms illuminate the extent to which policymakers and other stakeholders are divided. Darling-Hammond (1988), for example, described two very different streams of reform policy nested in dissimilar views of teaching and learning. One led policymakers to conclude that schools needed improved regulations, and the other led them to conclude that schools needed better teaching. Similarly, would-be reformers have disagreed on reform foci. Proponents of excellence and **efficiency** (e.g., Chubb & Moe, 1990; Finn, 1991) believe that forcing public schools to compete in the market place will make them better and less expensive institutions. Those promoting excellence and equity (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1988) believe that public schools will get better after more resources are dedicated to equalizing educational opportunities across districts and schools. Philosophical dissonance has been exacerbated by demographic changes (St. John & Clemens, 2004). Increasing levels of diversity, now found in most districts, has elevated political action because polarization is most overt and contentious at the local level and because political positions become even more fragmented as local issues are infused (Wirt & Kirst, 2009).

Working effectively with community and board power structures has always required political acuity and skills. Today, these assets are even more important. Unlike the 1980s when superintendents and other educators were primarily implementers of national and state mandates, current practice requires them to work collaboratively with stakeholders to determine what needs to be done to improve schools. The transition to local-level reform planning started circa 1990. Most states set broad guidelines for improvement, permitted local districts leeway to determine how they will meet these goals, and then held local district officials accountable for the outcomes (Weiler, 1990). In the aftermath, tasks such as **collaborative visioning** and goal setting have required superintendents to facilitate discussions involving members of the district's various publics; the intent was to encourage stakeholders to state and test their education values and beliefs (St. John & Clemens, 2004). This communicative perspective of school improvement obviously has generated substantial conflict, especially in politically polarized communities.

The political role of superintendents has been described by different terms over time. The three most common descriptors have been statesman, political strategist, and democratic leader. Noting that these labels are not synonymous, Björk and Gurley (2005) concluded that within the context of professionalism and politics, the role of democratic leader most accurately depicts normative practice in public administration.

Inadequate Funding

Inadequate funding for public schools has been, and remains, the most common problem identified by superintendents (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Kowalski et al., 2011). Recent trends in state funding suggest that this problem is worsening. In the past few years, for example, 22 states have reduced the percentage of funding to local schools, and 5 states have reduced the actual dollar amount (Picus & Odden, 2011). Thus, it is not surprising that 71% of superintendents in a recent national study identified state funding as a liability rather than an asset (Kowalski et al., 2011).

Generalizations about state financing can be precarious because laws and policies are not uniform across states (Crampton & Whitney, 1996; Thompson, 1990). Funding formulas and revenue distributions are shaped by state politics and shared values. Table 11.1 identifies the four most relevant values and finance concerns related to them.

Table 11.1   School Finance Policy Concerns From a Values Perspective

Value	*Finance Policy Concern*
Adequacy	Most school districts lack sufficient resources to deliver necessary services and to implement best practices. Consequently, superintendents consistently cite a lack of financial resources as a primary concern. Adequacy, however, has been defined in various ways, and cost estimates for achieving it differ substantially (Gronberg, Jansen, & Taylor, 2011; Guthrie & Springer, 2007).
Efficiency	Two different perspectives of the financial condition of public schools have been expressed by policymakers. One is predicated on the belief that outputs will not be increased appreciably without increased funding. The other is that outputs can be increased simply by forcing public schools to compete with each other and with private schools (Brimley & Garfield, 2005). More recently, efficiency has been associated with adequacy; for example, scholars have started to examine the extent to which efficiency affects adequacy (Gronberg et al., 2011).
Liberty	Local control remains a widely supported value in public education. Efforts to shift the burden of school funding away from local tax revenues (primarily an ad valorem property tax) are often resisted on the premise that doing so would attenuate community control and increase state government control. Yet the ability (i.e., taxable wealth) and willingness (i.e., tax effort) of school district residents to support public education is typically very uneven across districts. Liberty, and thus local control, has been protected largely by political forces (King, Swanson, & Sweetland, 2003).

Value	Finance Policy Concern
Equity	Reliance on district-generated tax revenues has contributed to substantial differences in education spending among local districts in virtually all states. Litigation in more than 40 states has forced state legislatures to revamp funding policy to achieve greater equity. Yet the courts have consistently ruled that some degree of inequality is necessary and acceptable to maintain liberty (Kowalski & Schmielau, 2001). As a result, litigation has shifted from equity to adequacy or a combination of adequacy and equity (Picus & Odden, 2011).

The causes underlying inadequate funding are often difficult to determine because they are an intricate mix of philosophical, political, and economic issues. As an example, public education has always tried to maintain a delicate balance between liberty and equity. This equilibrium is critical because the local school district is a point at which individual rights collide with societal interests (Levin, 1999). On the one hand, superintendents are to protect liberty by sustaining democratic discourse in the context of local control. On the other hand, they are to provide all students with reasonably equal education opportunities. Unfortunately, there is never enough money to satisfy both expectations. Clearly then, scarce resources have required superintendents to make some unpopular and painful decisions, such as closing schools, eliminating extracurricular activities and academic programs, increasing class sizes, reducing the district's workforce (including terminating teachers and administrators), and curtailing the acquisition of essential instructional equipment and materials. Even when they are able to sidestep these unpleasant decisions, they never escape the continuous conflict resulting from competition among special interest groups (Wirt & Kirst, 2009).

In the face of inadequate funding, superintendents have been forced to seek new revenue streams. The following are some of the alternatives that they have pursued:

- *Local education foundations.* These are not-for-profit, tax-exempt, community-based organizations functioning as third parties. They generate revenue primarily from private gifts, businesses, and other foundations. According to the Iowa School Boards Association (2004), nearly half the districts in that state have helped develop such an entity. Nationally, it is estimated that there are between 2,500 and 3,000 local **education foundations** facilitating the efforts of approximately 15% of all districts. Superintendents almost always are connected directly to these foundations,

typically as a member of the governing board. The primary foci of community education foundations have been reform planning and implementation of reform initiatives.

- *Solicitation of goods, services, and money.* Superintendents have pursued both direct and indirect donations. Most commonly, these donations have been tied to partnership programs and focused on special projects because they are not ongoing contributions (Addonizio, 2000).

- *Enterprise activities.* These include activities such as leasing buildings or space within buildings (Addonizio, 2000). Many districts, for example, have started charging user fees to community groups who use schools during the evenings and vacation periods (Kowalski, 2002). One of the most popular and controversial efforts is contracting with companies for exclusive vending rights in schools. A growing number of districts have entered into agreements with major soft drink companies giving the companies exclusive distribution and advertising rights.

The long-term merits of alternative funding are yet to be determined. Some enterprise ideas, such as contracts with soft drink companies, already have been heavily criticized, both because they preclude competition with other vendors and because the products in question raise student health concerns. Some superintendents also are concerned that alternative revenues will lead state policymakers to reduce funding to public schools even more.

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

Two of the main institutional challenges for superintendents are **strategic planning** and district culture change. These issues are interrelated and reflect a widely accepted assumption that underperforming schools will not improve sufficiently unless they have more positive institutional climates. The importance of institutional climate was previously explained in Chapter 3.

Strategic Planning and School Improvement

The notion that the primary purpose of schools is to serve the nation by preparing numerate and literate citizens and workers by institutionalizing prevailing cultural norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes was an enduring theme of public schooling throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The

nation embraced three philosophical tenets that reflected a relationship between schools and society:

1. ***Reproduction.*** This includes the conservation and transmission of knowledge and culture (norms, values, and beliefs), and traditions from one generation to the next.

2. *Readjustment.* This is the process of appropriately modifying pedagogy and curriculum in response to demographic, social, economic, and political changes experienced by society.

3. *Reconstruction.* Schools are viewed as agents of social change and are expected to anticipate and proactively position schools to continuously serve society well (Johnson, Collins, Dupuis, & Johnson, 1988).

During the formative years of American public education, the reproductive role largely determined how people viewed education. As the needs of society and individuals changed over time, the readjustment and reconstruction roles became increasingly prominent (Kowalski, 2003a). Although the importance of each philosophy waxes and wanes depending on social needs, all remain highly relevant to the intrinsic philosophy of public schools. The notion of reproduction (conservation, continuity and stability in society) inherently conflicts with the notion of reconstruction (proactive change). In other words, schools are expected to ensure stability and to adapt to a dynamic society simultaneously; hence, teachers, principals, and superintendents often believe that regardless of what they do, they may be wrong.

Despite the fact that philosophical disputes over the purposes of education have never been resolved fully, the contemporary superintendent has to engage in strategic planning. In simple terms, a strategic plan provides a proactive framework for fulfilling the mission (the district's designated purposes). The process is conceptualized in varying ways, but all approaches basically include the steps illustrated in Figure 11.2.

The first consideration is *inclusive participation*. This means that both district employees and other stakeholders should be invited to participate. The second step is *collaborative visioning*. A vision statement describes what the school is expected to look like in meeting its mission at a designated future date (Kowalski, 2011). To be effective, the vision statement should be clear, achievable, and collective—that is, it is an aggregate of visions articulated by various publics (Tomal, 1997).

Figure 11.2 Strategic Planning Stages

Evaluation

Inclusive participation

Collaborative visioning

Environmental scanning

Internal audit

Short-term goals
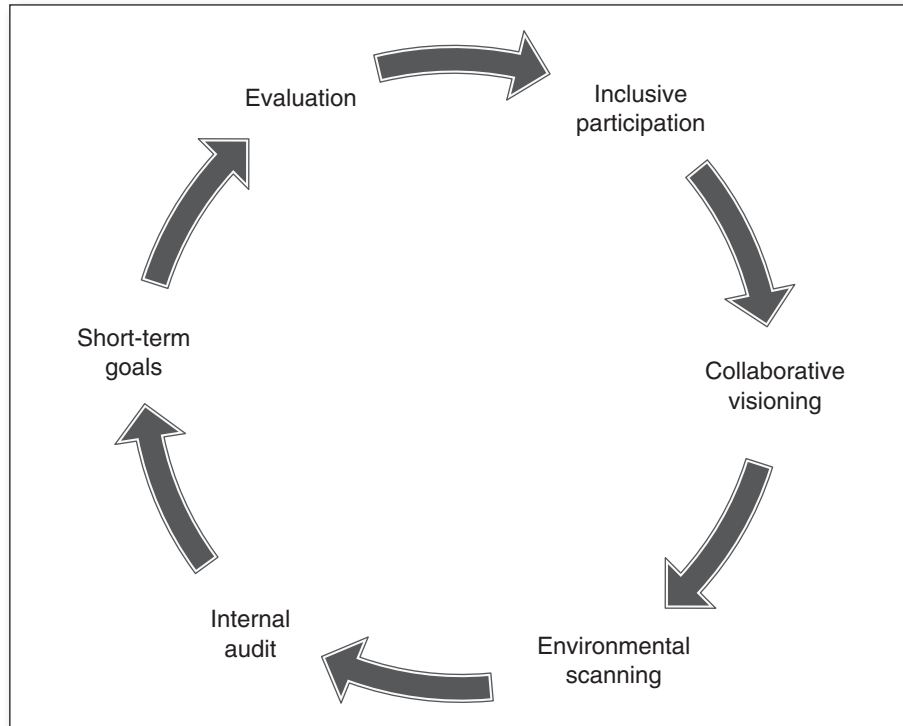
Another vital step is *environmental scanning*. The purpose is to identify external opportunities and challenges. As noted earlier, social, political, and economic trends change continuously, and public schools are expected to adapt to them. An *internal audit* is the next stage of planning. This process identifies district strengths, weaknesses, and limitations. To be effective, it must cover all aspects of operations, including governance (the school board), finance, curricular programs, extracurricular programs, facilities, and services (e.g., busing and food services).

Since strategic planning is a long-term process (spanning more than 2 years), *short-term goals* are essential. These objectives provide incremental bench-marks for reaching the vision. To determine if the district is moving in the right direction, the plan also requires an *evaluation* component. The purpose is to determine if short-term goals have been met. If they have not, or if internal and external conditions have changed appreciably, adjusting the goals is necessary.

Done properly, strategic planning has several notable benefits beyond being proactive. As examples, the activity engages participants in future thinking, it provides valuable lessons for problem solving and decision making, and it reinforces the value of teamwork, organizational learning, and mutual commitments. On the other hand, strategic planning can be expensive, time-consuming, and difficult to sustain (Barry, 1998).

Restructuring Institutional Culture

Advising organizational administrators about pursuing culture change, Connors and Smith (2011) are guided by a core belief: "Either you will manage your culture, or it will manage you" (p. 7). The topic of district and school culture was examined in Chapter 3. The need to restructure district and **school cultures** is rooted in empirical evidence showing that needed improvements in underperforming schools have often been derailed by change-resistant cultures (Fullan, 1999; Sarason, 1996). Schein (1992) posits that successful organizations replace a change-resistant culture with a *learning culture*—essentially a belief system built "on the assumption that communication and information are central to organizational well-being and must therefore create a multi-channel communication system that allows everyone to connect to everyone else" (p. 370). After analyzing inertia in public schools, Sarason (1996) concluded that most educators neither understood institutional culture nor possessed the knowledge, dispositions, and skills necessary to change it. In his studies, Fullan (1999) found that schools often tried to improve by emulating changes made in other schools, simply by providing staff development. Even when this strategy generated initial enthusiasm, changes were rarely institutionalized because district (or school) contextual variables, capacity for change, and institutional culture were ignored.

Sustaining new programs or processes is most improbable when the proposed changes are based on values, beliefs, and assumptions that are incongruent with the prevailing culture. For example, some schools have rejected the concept of **learning communities** because most employees believed that working individually and in seclusion was preferable (Gideon, 2002). In other schools, involving parents and other stakeholders was rejected because educators believed that community involvement was more likely to generate conflict than to generate improvements (Blase & Anderson, 1995). Such convictions, when shared by all or most school personnel, inform employees how they should address problems, threats, and other concerns (Schein, 1996; Trimble, 1996) and the extent to which they should support or oppose change (Duke, 2004; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Fernandez, 1994).

Diagnosing the existing district culture and changing it if necessary are difficult for at least two reasons. First, a superintendent and principals must identify underlying assumptions that employees are reluctant or unable to discuss (Firestone & Louis, 1999). Reluctance involves suppression; that is, employees are reluctant to discuss values, beliefs, and assumptions thought to be professionally invalid or politically incorrect. Inability involves repression; that is, employees unintentionally forget certain values, beliefs, and assumptions because of psychological discomfort (Schein, 1992). Second, culture change takes considerable time and resources. Fullan (2001), for example, believes that **restructuring** a culture may take 3 to 6 years depending on how quickly it is diagnosed. After underlying assumptions are accurately identified, administrators must (a) determine which are counterproductive, (b) convince employees why they need to be eliminated, and (c) build support for new assumptions.

PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES

Some relevant challenges are professional. Here we find both quantitative and qualitative issues related to recruiting and sustaining an adequate supply of competent practitioners. From a qualitative standpoint, preparation and licensing have emerged as pivotal issues. The qualitative dimension has focused not only on superintendent expertise but also on the degree to which superintendents are representative of society and the education profession. Frequently, practitioners pay less attention to challenges facing their profession because the consequences of indifference are not readily apparent. In truth, decisions made about the recruitment, preparation, and licensing are likely to shape practice directly in the coming decade, and in this vein, they have both career and societal implications. The two professional challenges discussed here are state licensing trends and the **underrepresentation** of females and persons of color.

Superintendent Licensing

In professions, a license informs society that a practitioner has requisite knowledge and skills to function autonomously (Tannenbaum, 1999), and therefore, a rational nexus between professional preparation and licensing is expected. Several studies of superintendent licensing (e.g., Anthes, 2004; Feistritzer, 2003; Kowalski, 2008), however, reveal dissimilar criteria across states. In addition, the trend has been toward **deregulating** licensing; for example, over half the states issue alternative licenses, and nine states either do not issue or do not require superintendent licenses (Anthes, 2004; Feistritzer, 2003).

Licensing policy for educators, including superintendents, has been promulgated by state legislatures and bureaucratic agencies rather than by the profession, primarily because the profession had failed to identify and validate uniform standards for entering practice (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). Unlike other professional schools, schools of education have lacked the civic capacity to acquire resources and political power necessary for them to be autonomous and influential (Brabeck & Shirley, 2003). Elmore (2007) believes that educational administration lacks social authority because the specialization does not have "a core set of practices that can be used to define a collective identity and to exclude practitioners from practice" (p. 2).

In the eyes of a growing number of policymakers, the traditional approach to preparing superintendents is uneven, irrelevant, and less than rigorous (Brabeck & Shirley, 2003). Recommended solutions to this concern, however, vary substantially as evidenced by the following three perspectives:

1. Scholars in school administration have argued that the profession should voluntarily engage in massive reforms. After analyzing this recommendation as presented by numerous authors (e.g., Clark, 1989; Griffiths, 1988; Kowalski, 2004; Murphy, 2002) and commissions (e.g., National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, 1987; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1989), Willower and Forsyth (1999) identified four pervasive calls for action: (1) the profession should develop and require a standardized curriculum integrating theory and practice; (2) preparation should be characterized by rigorous academic standards; (3) there should be fewer but higher quality preparation programs; and (4) state licensing criteria should be relatively uniform.

2. Critics from outside the profession argue that traditional superintendent preparation is an inefficient monopoly that fails to prepare a sufficient number of "qualified" practitioners. They urge state policymakers to rectify the situation by permitting or even encouraging **alternative forms of preparation and licensing** (e.g., issuing emergency licenses). In this mindset, academic preparation is seen as a marginally important, marginally effective, but inefficient process. Proponents argue that alternative preparation and competition will force all programs to improve and will provide a low-cost alternative to traditional preparation (Ingersoll, 2001; Kowalski, 2004).

3. Other external critics believe that state licensing does nothing more than protect the self-interests of administrators. They urge state policymakers to deregulate practice either by rescinding superintendent licensing requirements or by making it optional. They claim that such action is

warranted because practice need not be, and is not, guided by a valid knowledge base (e.g., Hess, 2003) and because required preparation and licensing simply prevents competent managers outside education from serving as superintendents (e.g., Broad Foundation & Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003).

Arguably, the most widely accepted rationale for eliminating or attenuating state licensing is an inadequate supply of superintendents. Authors making this claim have commonly cited two conditions: declining size of applicant pools and an increasing level of position instability (Kowalski, 2003b). Data supporting declining applicant pools have come primarily from survey research conducted with superintendents (e.g., Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000; Cunningham & Burdick, 1999), search consultants (e.g., Glass, 2001b; O'Connell, 2000; Rohn, 2001), state superintendents and association directors (e.g., Glass, 2001a), and school board members (e.g., Cox & Malone, 2001; Rohn, 2001). These studies, however, usually have been based on respondent opinions and perceptions, and not actual data. Even so, smaller applicant pools do not validate a critical occupational shortage (Kowalski & Sweetland, 2005). Historically, the supply of licensed administrators has exceeded the number of positions available; during the last half of the 20th century, applicant pools for superintendents and principals have been large. For example, a study in the late 1970s (McCarthy, Kuh, & Zent, 1981) reported an oversupply of administrators in all areas except special education directors and federal program directors. A national study of search consultants several decades later, conducted by Glass (2001b), found that the size of superintendent applicant pools averaged approximately 30. Based on this finding, the author concluded, "Applicant pools are not as small as depicted in media accounts" (p. 9).

Perceptions of occupational shortages are more likely when employers demand high quality but are unwilling to provide compensation and working conditions necessary to attract the caliber of candidates desired. In these instances, employers often settle for persons who do "not match their notion of the 'ideal'" (Veneri, 1999, p. 15) and contend that they were forced to do this because of market conditions. Historically, school boards have been able to set salary ceilings for superintendents based on community standards because applicant pools were large (Speer, 1996). As applicant pools diminish in size, boards lose their ability to set salaries politically; they may have to pay a salary that exceeds community restrictions to employ a highly qualified applicant. The oversupply of educators, historically, is one reason why superintendents have been compensated at levels well below their counterparts in private industry (Cunningham & Sperry, 2001).

Two variables that have affected applicant pools are negative perceptions of the superintendency as a career goal and revisions in state pension programs.

Often, the position is thought to be short-lived and unrewarding. In truth, the average tenure of superintendents with the same employer has been quite stable for more than 40 years. In 1971, it was 6 years (Knezevich, 1971); in 1982, it was 5.6 years (Cunningham & Hentges, 1982); in 1992, it was 6.4 years (Glass, 1992); in 2000, it was 6.7 years (Glass et al., 2000); and in 2007, it was 6 years (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). In a more recent national study (Kowalski et al., 2011), the most common reason superintendents gave for changing employers was neither dismissal nor dissatisfaction; it was career advancement. Moreover, the study's findings refute the notion that the position is unrewarding; 69% of superintendents said that they were very satisfied with their career choice, and another 28% said that they were moderately satisfied. Only 3.3% said that they were dissatisfied.

The second notable factor affecting the supply of superintendents is revisions to state pension programs. In 2010, 21% of superintendents identified themselves as "*double dippers*" (Kowalski et al., 2011); that is, they concurrently received a regular salary and a pension (Sostek, 2003). In 2005, only seven states did not permit retirees to be rehired in a covered position (i.e., a position covered by the same pension program that covered the previous position) without forfeiting pension benefits. Among the remaining 43 states, retire–rehire was permitted, albeit to different degrees (e.g., annual income ceilings, number of days worked, or percentage of full-time employment). In states like Ohio, a superintendent was allowed to retire one day and be reemployed by the same district the next day without incurring a reduction in his or her pension (Kowalski & Sweetland, 2005). Policymakers supporting retire–rehire policies almost always claim that they acted to offset labor shortages (Kowalski & Sweetland, 2002; Sostek, 2003)—and as previously explained, the validity of labor shortages is questionable.

In summary, state licensing decisions are related to questions about the quality and relevance of academic preparation and the supply of adequate superintendents. Throughout history, there has been a delicate balance between professionalism and democracy. If the trend toward deregulating licensing continues, that balance is likely to be destroyed and public schools and society may suffer. Thus, for all contemplating a career in the superintendency, current policy trends toward academic preparation and state licensing are indeed relevant challenges.

Underrepresentation of Women and Persons of Color

Since 1900, the percentage of female superintendents has varied considerably. For example, in 1910, 8.9% of school superintendents were women; this increased to 11% by 1930. Then, the percentage started to drop, in part because of district

consolidation. In 1950, it was 9%, but then it declined precipitously to 1.3% in 1971, hitting an historic low of 1.2% in 1982 (Blount, 1998). By 1992, however, it increased to 6.6%, climbed to 13.2% in 2000, and then nearly doubled to 24.6% in 2010 (Kowalski et al., 2011). The substantial increase in the percentage of women superintendents between 1982 and 2010 is attributable to several factors. Two are especially notable. Women have constituted a majority of doctoral students in educational administration since the early 1990s. Thus, it is logical to assume that the number of women eligible to be superintendents has been increasing. Second, school effectiveness has become a high priority and compared with male applicants, women in the past have had more teaching and instructional leadership experience (Kowalski & Stouder, 1999). In 2010, they were twice as likely as men to believe that they were employed as superintendents primarily because of their ability to be an instructional leader. Conversely, male superintendents were much more likely to believe that they were hired primarily because of their personal characteristics, such as honesty and tact (Kowalski et al., 2011).

In 2010, female superintendents were represented rather evenly across district categories for enrollment and location. They composed 30% of superintendents in districts with less than 300 students, 21% in districts with 300 to 2,999 students, 28% in districts with 3,000 to 24,999 students, and 20% in districts with 25,000 or more students. They composed 28% of the superintendents in urban districts, 24% in suburban districts, 26% in small town/city districts, and 23% in rural districts (Kowalski et al., 2011). Despite the gains, women remain underrepresented in the position, especially in relation to their representation in the education profession.

Contrary to popular belief, many female administrators aspire to be superintendents. In their study of women in central office positions, Brunner and Grogan (2007) found that 40% wanted to be superintendents eventually. Among the remaining 60%, the reasons for not aspiring to be superintendents (in descending order) included the following:

- They were happy in their current positions.
- They found politics unappealing.
- They thought the position involved too much stress.
- They thought the pay was too low.

Recent research (Kowalski et al., 2011) found that gender is not a factor with regard to certain aspects of the superintendency. As examples, women and men expressed nearly identical levels of satisfaction with their academic preparation and their jobs. They also reported nearly identical levels of involvement in local communities and in professional organizations. Yet there are other

areas where gender appears to be a factor. Perceptions of discrimination and career patterns are two of them. Extant literature on female superintendents has grown appreciably since 1980. Research on this topic has focused primarily on personal profiles, career patterns, and administrative behavior in the position (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

Although the representation of people of color in the superintendency remains shamefully small, it has increased steadily since 1980. For example, in 1980, 2.1% of those serving in the position were in this demographic group (Cunningham & Hentges, 1982). Representation increased to 3.9% in 1992, however, nearly half (46%) of these superintendents served in urban districts with more than 50,000 students (Glass, 1992). Table 11.2 includes a comparison of 2000 and 2010 data on superintendents of color.

Although the percentage of superintendents classified as racial and ethnic minorities increased by 31% between 1990 and 1999 (Glass et al., 2000), many practitioners in this demographic group are concerned that the rate may plateau or decline if their presence in preparation programs declines (Björk, 1996). Increasing the number of minority candidates for the superintendency becomes more likely if there are more minority teachers, principals, and central office staff (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). Increasing representation, however, has been affected by competition from other professions; during the 1980s, doors to more lucrative professions were opened to women and people of color (Björk, Keedy, & Gurley, 2003; Glass et al., 2000).

Table 11.2 Superintendents of Color: Comparison of 2000 and 2010 Data

	Percentage of All Superintendents	
Category	*2000*[a]	*2010*[b]
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.8	1.5
African American	2.2	2.0
Asian American	0.2	0.3
Hispanic or Latino	1.4	2.0
Other	0.5	0.2
Total	5.1	6.0

Notes:

a. Glass and associates (2000).

b. Kowalski and associates (2011).

Differences in career patterns for persons of color were not as great in 2010 as they were in 2000. Traditionally, the career starting point in administration has been at the level of the assistant principal or principal. In 2000, nearly 80% of White superintendents reported that their first administrative assignment was in one of these positions compared with only 65% of persons of color (Glass et al., 2000). In 2010, however, only 70.3% of White superintendents reported that their first administrative assignment was in one of these positions compared with 62.4% of persons of color. The declining percentages for both demographic categories are likely due to the increasing number of female superintendents; the most common entry-level administrative position reported by female superintendents (28.4%) was as a district-level coordinator or director (Kowalski et al., 2011).

Writing about superintendents of color, Simmons (2005) noted that they are challenged by the same problems confronting all superintendents—issues such as limited resources and implementing federal mandates. She pointed out, however, that superintendents of color are also confronted by "problems precipitated by race, the economic and social deterioration of districts where they are often employed, and difficulty accessing the necessary political and social power relationships needed to reform their districts" (p. 259).

After analyzing aspects of underrepresentation in the superintendency, Grogan and Brunner (2005) advised that the best course for preparing and developing the next generation of superintendents was "to actively *recruit* women and other aspirants of color, to provide the necessary *support* for them to succeed in a program, to *assist* them in networking to find a position, and then continue to *mentor* them in the field" (p. 245). They emphasized that all four activities had to be addressed if underrepresentation was to be eradicated.

For Further Reflection

This chapter examined examples of contemporary challenges for superintendents that span both contextual and personal issues. As you contemplate your administrative career, determine what your dispositions are toward these issues. Reflecting on the chapter's content, answer the following questions:

1. What factors have contributed to heightened political activity in public education?

2. Why is heightened political activity a challenge for superintendents?

3. In what ways do the conflicting values of liberty and equity affect issues of adequate financing for public education?

4. What political and professional challenges are created for superintendents as a result of inadequate financing?

5. What is strategic planning?

6. Why is culture change a time-consuming and difficult process?

7. Researchers have often found that mandated changes do not last in school districts where the prevailing culture remains intact. Why do the mandated changes usually fail to be institutionalized?

8. What are the advantages and disadvantages of generating alternative revenue streams for public schools?

9. Are efforts to deregulate licensing for educators generally and for superintendents specifically troubling to you? Why or why not?

10. Is the underrepresentation of women and people of color in the superintendency troubling to you? Why or why not?

Case Study Discussion Questions

A Lack of Resources Can Lead to Extreme Measures

1. What are the political elements of the case study?

2. What are the issues not discussed in the case study that the superintendent should consider carefully?

3. If you were Superintendent Watson, how would you respond to the ultimatum regarding a recommendation on the merger?

4. In light of the limited information provided in the case study, did the WHSD school board act responsibly? Why or why not?

5. How could a strategic plan have been beneficial in evaluating the merits of a merger?

Key Terms

Alternative preparation/
    licensing   323
Collaborative
    vision   315

Double dipping   325
Education foundation   317
Efficiency   315
Enterprise activities   318

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