
Preface

Widespread concern for the quality of public education during the past two decades has launched the most intense, comprehensive, and sustained effort to improve education in American history. During the past decade, the scope, complexity, and intensity of reforms have increased interest in large-scale, systemic reform. As a consequence, superintendents are being viewed as pivotal actors in the algorithm of school improvement and student success. Questions about the relevance and efficacy of superintendent preparation and professional development programs provided grist for widely divergent views of how the next generation of superintendents should be prepared. On the one hand, national commissions, task force reports, and nationwide studies of the superintendency have called for greater alignment of preparation with the changing realities of practice. On the other hand, some critics have called for deregulating the field and abandoning the notion of administrator licensure altogether. Over the past several decades, nearly one-third of the states have either rescinded licensing requirements for school district superintendents or have created loopholes allowing persons without a license to hold this important position.

This book provides a scholarly and objective analysis of issues surrounding the role of superintendents. Past, present, and future practices are examined; traditional preparation is critiqued from several perspectives; and recommendations grounded in the realities of present and emerging practice are recommended. The argument is made that both preparation and licensing standards need to be strengthened to ensure effective future leadership and to ensure that the steadily expanding body of knowledge about high-performing districts and educational excellence are infused. The book has been written at an especially propitious time given the dissimilar reform initiatives surrounding this pivotal position.



viii The Contemporary Superintendent

The content has been developed over a three-year period from a series of scholarly papers presented primarily at the annual meetings of the American Educational Research Association and the University Council for Educational Administration. All the papers were subjected to blind peer review.

