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Gatekeeping Experiences Latina Superintendents Encountered as
They Attained Their Superintendent Position

A Dissertation by

Julie Corona

University of Massachusetts Global

Irvine, California

School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

April 2022

Committee in charge:

Timothy McCarty, Ed.D., Committee Chair

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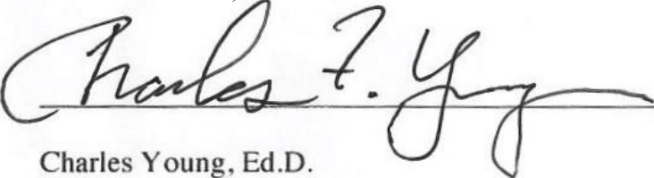
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A Private Nonprofit Affiliate of the University of Massachusetts
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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April 2022

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ABSTRACT

Gatekeeping Experiences Latina Superintendents Encountered as

They Attained Their Superintendent Position

by Julie Corona

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the career path progression and the gatekeeping experiences as Latinas advanced to a superintendent position. The second purpose of this study was to describe the gatekeeping experiences of Latina superintendents' application and interview process of their superintendency. Additionally, this study described Latina superintendents' gatekeeping experiences of gender and ethnicity. Last, this study examined the strategies that Latina superintendents used as they ascended to their superintendent positions.

Methodology: This phenomenological multicase study was conducted through interviews of five Latina superintendents of California public schools. The researcher selected a qualitative method because it described the gatekeeping experiences Latina superintendents encountered as well as the strategies they used to ascend to the superintendency position.

Findings: Numerous outcomes emerged from the analysis of interview data from five Latina superintendents. Participants attested that gatekeeping was opened due to mentorship and understanding the culture of the district's community. Speaking Spanish fluently attributed to the advancement in predominately Hispanic communities and was perceived to have made the strongest impact in the Latina superintendents' career path.

Conclusions: The researcher's initial motivation for writing about Latina superintendents stems from her experience as a Latina working in education and seeing few Latinas in

district level administrative positions. Even though Hispanics are the largest ethnic group in California, there continue to be very few Latinas in superintendent positions. The researcher's frustration in seeing this low number of Latina superintendents prompted her to look deeper into why Latinas are underrepresented in superintendent positions.

Recommendations: This study contributes results and conclusions to the literature on Latinas ascending to positions of superintendent in predominately Hispanic communities and school districts. Because the study provided a glimpse of Latina superintendents' lived gatekeeping experiences, it has the potential to inspire future studies to analyze Latina superintendents being hired in mixed-race districts with less than 50% Hispanic population. Additionally, it is recommended to examine whether beginning Latina superintendents are currently employed in bigger districts with mixed-race and low-Hispanic student population.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Women have struggled for centuries for equality. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the right to vote was a battle that many women like Susan B. Anthony fought for. Susan B. Anthony is known to be behind the 19th amendment, which gave women the right to vote. Her movement to give women the right to vote came when she was denied speaking at a temperance convention because of her gender; she understood that women would not be taken seriously in politics, and she realized something had to be done. She once wrote, “There never will be complete equality until women themselves help to make laws and elect lawmakers” (History.com, 2010, Early Life and Abolitionist Movement). Women have struggled to get equal opportunities to vote, serve in the military, have careers in professional occupations, and most importantly, to be leaders of organizations. Over the past decades, women have experienced gatekeeping to lead businesses, universities, military, and education.

American literature from the late 1800s on public school management explained that males dominated as teachers during that era until they found more profitable careers in banking, real estate, and law or left for the Civil War (Blount, 1998; Kowalski & Stouder; 1999; Wyland, 2016). With their abandonment of teaching, females then began to teach but received a reduced salary. At the time, superintendency positions held by women were rare, less than 1% (Schmuck, 1999; Wyland, 2016). Ella Flagg was the first female superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools. Today, this diminished trend of female superintendencies continues (Heffernan & Wasonga, 2017; McCabe & Dobberteen, 1998). In 2010, superintendent positions for women increased somewhat

3% nationwide. Literature is silent regarding the representation of minority women during those decades.

Over the past 100 years, women educational leaders have made small gains, but women in superintendent positions continue to be underrepresented, and women of color are even less represented. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA, 2015) surveyed their members, and based on the results, it determined that female superintendents continue to be substantially underrepresented, below 10%. Based on their survey findings, AASA concluded that minority superintendents continue to be hired at considerably lower rates than White females, which has reinforced the culture of minority women being chronically, severely underrepresented for the past 100 years.

Today, the largest and most rapidly growing minority group, Latinx, are disproportionally not hired for educational leadership positions. Valenzuela (2021) reported that the Latino population has significantly increased in comparison to other racial groups. Hispanics, as a minority group, have the highest overall population and student growth rates in California, yet their hiring for educational positions has not remotely kept pace with their population growth (Avila, 2018). Of importance for this study, few Latina superintendents have been hired. In spite of these increasing disproportionate demographic trends, very little is known about the barriers Latinas face, how they obtain their positions, and the strategies they use to overcome the challenges they face. In particular, there is a paucity of research about Latina superintendents and the career paths they need to achieve a superintendent position (Galiana, 2014). Research has explained how strategies and supports, including role models, networking, and sponsors, help primarily White educators achieve superintendent positions. It is

unknown how supports and strategies or lack thereof contribute to Latinas becoming superintendents.

Background

Women in Education

As women began to join the workforce, it appeared they had more opportunities but for lower level positions and limited opportunity for advancement to higher and more strategic positions. In education, similar changes over time have occurred for the roles women had available to them. As history has shown, men represented the majority of teachers in the early 1800s, then they became interested in more lucrative careers, which offered more opportunities for women who were able to become teachers even though their wages were much lower than those of men. Since then, women have dominated the teaching profession. Gándara (2013) noted that 72% of all K–12 educators in the United States were women. In addition, the California Department of Education (CDE, n.d.-d) reported in 2019 that 75% of K–12 educators were female, surpassing the national percentage of female educators. Women continue to be the predominant gender in education including minority teachers across the nation in which the percentage of female teachers exceeded the number of male teachers.

Women in Leadership

For the past 6 decades, there have been many societal changes in which professional opportunities have increased for women and minorities (StudyCorgi, 2021). Women have played an increasingly important role and have been employed in leadership roles that were once dominated almost exclusively by males (StudyCorgi, 2021).

Historically, women have been mostly invisible in the workforce with the one exception occurring during World War II (Blount, 1998; Heffernan & Wasonga, 2017). Traditionally, women have had to advocate, if not fight, for equal opportunity to higher level leadership positions. According to Avila (2018), “A little over 5% of American CEOs in the 500 biggest companies are women” (p. 5). Based on the literature, challenges continue to be faced by women’s career path to leadership positions. Various studies have outlined the sociocultural obstacles women encounter in their pursuit of leadership roles (Pianta, 2020; VanTuyle & Watkins, 2009). Even though the number of women in managerial positions has increased, the disparity has been observed in most occupations, including higher education, military, and government positions; women continue to face challenges when aspiring to these higher level leadership roles. Gender inequality can exist at both the individual and organizational levels and can manifest itself through overt or covert actions (Pianta, 2020).

Women have to prove themselves when it comes to attaining a higher leadership position. Avila (2018) stated, “As women leaders are still viewed differently from men in leadership positions, they are often held to different standards and falsely portrayed as either ‘soft and ineffective’ or ‘manipulative and overbearing’” (p. 7). Even though the frequency of women in leadership roles continues to increase, the inequality of women in higher positions remains an area of concern. One of the strategies that helps women’s career path to leadership positions is to have a higher education or graduate degree. In contrast, men can move to higher levels than female leaders who do not have access to this social network, thus hindering their ability to advance professionally within an organization (Kawaguchi, 2014). Researchers have concurred that women lack access to

sponsors and support networks (Avila, 2018; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Maes, 2012; Montas-Hunter, 2012; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; VanDerLinden, 2005). There is little research on how women use their limited social networking connections to advance in their professional careers.

School Leadership Trends

Women continue to face challenges when it comes to attaining a higher level leadership position, similar to the hiring limits for the position of a school superintendent. Research has shown that school districts have regularly hired male leaders even though females comprise a majority of teaching positions (Blount, 1998; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Grogan, 1996). While females held 72% of the teaching positions, men became more interested in positions of power, such as coaching, vocational education, and educational leadership, including district office positions (Blount, 2000). Shakeshaft (1989) found that more than 80% of elementary teachers and 50% of secondary teachers were female in 1985. Researchers have noted a significant underrepresentation of female administrators (Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2010). Historically, women represent the majority of teaching positions in schools but are underrepresented in administrative positions.

Women in Educational Leadership

School administration was known to be a top-down hierarchical organization in which leadership was classified as the authority. According to Lopez (2008), “The traditional bureaucratic model of schools was led by administrators who governed teachers, students, and staff through formalized goals and procedures” (p. 5). In this hierarchical model, men dominated as leaders. Men were preferred over women because

they were perceived to handle discipline, finances, facilities, sports, and budgeting better than women. Men were also better equipped to work closely with male boards of education (Lopez, 2008).

Female leaders were limited in access to many types of school leadership positions and were thought to be a good fit as teachers. Even though women dominated the teaching profession, the statistics of women who held an elementary principal position were less than 60% and less than 30% of secondary principal positions (Kowalski et al., 2010; Pianta, 2020). Furthermore, the percentage of women superintendents in public schools is a dismal 27%, which is less than the number of female superintendents in 1930 (AASA, 2015). Consequently, men continue to be considered more dependable administrators (Lopez, 2008). In a study conducted by Maienza (1986), it was noted that 80% of women in the study had been principals, and 80% of the men had been either an associate superintendent or assistant superintendent.

According to the research, women's career path to the superintendency appears to be different from that of a male superintendent. Tallerico (2000) stated women typically follow a career path from teacher to principal then from principal to central office, but some central office positions are faster paths to high leadership positions. Lopez (2008) concurred that "women remained segregated at lower levels of the teaching profession while men, perceived to be more reliable managers, moved into supervisor positions" (p. 14). However, little is known about Latinas' prior career path or educational experience.

History of Superintendency

The superintendency is known to be the highest leadership position in public education. The superintendent position was initiated in the mid-1800s with individuals assigned to oversee the day-to-day operations of a number of schoolhouses. By 1869, approximately 27 cities with school districts had developed a superintendent position (Glass et al., 2000; Heffernan et al., 2017). Before the superintendency existed, public education was operated by school boards. Volunteer committees oversaw the use of state funds and eventually formulated a state and local board of education to carry out this function. Eventually, in 1812, New York was the first state to appoint a superintendent, and then other states soon followed with a similar full-time position.

Research has shown that the vast majority of superintendents are male, which reflects a total of 87%. Additionally, literature is silent on whether or not females acted in the role of superintendent in 1812. Female superintendents have been underrepresented for decades, and the underrepresentation is more pronounced for minorities and even more so for minority females. The Decennial Study conducted by Kowalski et al. (2010) noted that by 1970, 8.9% of the superintendents in the country were women. However, by 1982, the female representation dropped to 1.2% (Glass, 1992; Kowalski et al., 2010).

The number of female superintendents in the 21st century continues to be behind that of the number of males, mostly White, in the superintendent position (Glass et al., 2000; Heffernan et al., 2017). Total representation of White males in school districts in 2018–2019 was 5,784 serving as school leaders (CDE, n.d.-d). According to Heffernan

et al. (2017) and Torres (2004), some females currently occupying a superintendent position were drafted (or assigned) as opposed to planning for the job.

Latina superintendents continue to be underrepresented as educational leaders despite the fact that education remains to be a female-dominated field. Avila (2018) and Madden (2011) asserted that women must work twice as hard as men to find nontraditional positions. Tallerico (2000) discovered that females were not considered for the application process because of gender stereotyping. According to her study, “A search consultant voiced his concern regarding affirmative action: ‘I won’t just put women or minorities into the finalist pool’” (Tallerico, 2000, p. 26). Furthermore, in a study conducted by Ortiz (1998), she found that if Latinas were to acquire a superintendent position, it would most likely be in districts with a high Hispanic student population, a high turnover of staff, financial trouble, and difficult relations with the Hispanic community and not many candidates to fill the superintendent position. Furthermore, Ortiz (1998) indicated that “an applicant with a Spanish surname in the interview process is perceived as the school district not being as desirable as others” (p. 98). Aceves (2013) stated that this is “a concern that supports the perception that Latinas(os) are typically hired in districts that need to be improved or are located within low socioeconomic communities” (p. 34). With that said, Latinas continue to be underrepresented in superintendent positions. Finally, by 2009, only 2% of superintendents were Latina. Overall, regardless of race, Figure 1 shows an increase of women superintendents over the past decades.

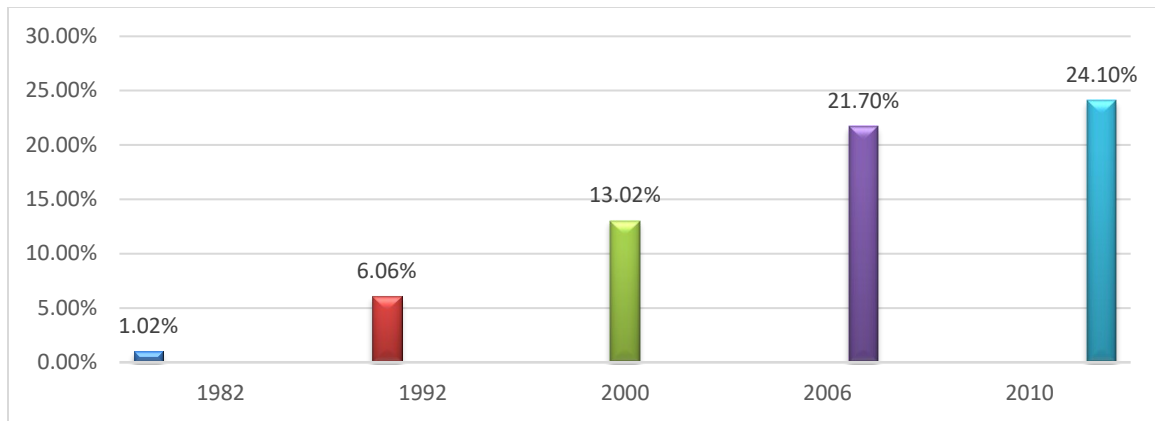


Figure 1. Percentage of female superintendents serving in the years 1982, 1990, 2000, 2006, 2010. Adapted from “Demographic Effects on Quality of Life Among Superintendents,” by D. J. Heffernan & T. A. Wasonga, 2017, *Athens Journal of Education*, 4(2), 149–168; *The American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study*, by T. J. Kowalski, R. S. McCord, G. J. Petersen, P. I. Young, & N. M. Ellerson, 2010, Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Theoretical Foundations

Gatekeeping theory was the theoretical framework used for this study. According to Lippman (1922, as quoted in Naveed, 2016), the selection process of what the press’s ability to report as having

every newspaper when it reaches the reader is the result of a whole series of selections as to what items shall be printed, in what position they shall be printed, how much space each shall occupy, what emphasis each shall have. (p. 63)

The concept of gatekeeping came from Kurt Lewin in which he compared decision making on decision-making filters to gates in which entry was either permitted or denied by gatekeepers (Fandom, n.d.). Lewin’s gatekeeping study indicated a relevant selection process. In 1949, David Manning White, a journalist and communication scholar, studied how American newsrooms practiced gatekeeping (Fandom, n.d.). Based on White’s study, he discovered that reporters and editors acted as gatekeepers who

shaped the nature of stories. It was noted that anyone who decides whether information should be shared with the public can be classified as a gatekeeper.

Psychological and Sociological Biases

Research has been conducted to explore the psychological and sociological theories leading to the glass ceiling that women and minorities face when aspiring the senior leadership positions. Evidence has shown that superintendents are chosen based on the similarity to their gender and ethnicity (Glass, 2000; Tallerico, 2000; Valverde, 1975).

Valverde (1975) noted that the pronouncements of equal opportunity hiring for promotions differ from the practices actually occurring. He termed this discrepancy as *succession socialization*. Valverde stated that succession socialization is a practice within an institution that identifies what “insiders” (p. 93) want, and equal opportunity is only used to comply with the procedural regulations and requirements to look at “outsiders” (p. 93). Valverde’s study identified White men as the predominant educational administrators while women administrators were scarce. Furthermore, his model advocated that succession to new positions would occur by candidates being sponsored by current administrators who were interested in finding future leaders in their own image. Sponsorship selection was based on preferences for the same qualities as the sponsor (Valverde, 1975). Consequently, because the vast majority of administrators were White males, and those same leaders promoted their own kind, future administrators were most likely to be White male leaders. Therefore, according to his model, it was not likely that women and racial minorities would be candidates for sponsorship, and thus

females and minorities had limited career path. This process led to the term *good old boys club*.

Superintendents' hiring was thought to operate under similar dynamics.

According to Glass (2000), over half of most superintendents claimed to believe the good old boys network assisted them to land a superintendent position. Even though some people do not want to accept that the good old boys network exists, White males usually leave their positions with the belief that someone with their same characteristics and ethnicity background will be their replacements. Hudson (1994) stated that discrimination is found in current job markets and two modes exist:

The first is organizational process discrimination, where the recruitment through “word of mouth” favors those who receive the information first via the “good old boys” network. Second, there is territorial discrimination, where African-Americans and women are allowed to use their informal job contacts almost exclusively in minority school districts. (p. 23)

Gatekeeping Elements

To gain greater insight into the phenomenon that females, in particular minority females, have been underrepresented in being hired into leadership positions, the researcher reviewed the psychological and sociological ecology of how Lewin (1951) described how communication flows between individuals and how it is filtered by people in power and influences positions, which leads to gatekeeping. Lewin explained that during gatekeeping, channels of information were filtered and directed to some persons and not to others. Lewin's theory has been applied to many situations including the superintendent hiring and selection process. With superintendent hiring, selected

information was thought to flow through channels directed by members of an executive search firm. Some applicants would be considered, and others would not depending on the choices of the people in power of the information passing between in and out gates, and ultimately, positive information about candidates would be passed to hiring decision makers. Other candidates would not have their information passed on to the decision makers based on the choices of the gatekeepers. Only candidates who passed through the selected gates would be considered by the school board for superintendent positions (Tallerico, 2000).

According to Tallerico (2000), there are two primary gates that candidates need to pass through to be considered for a superintendent position. In the first gate, career path, the candidates need to have sufficient career paths preparing them for the superintendency position. Glass (2000) found that the ideal candidate had a career path of teacher, principal, and district office position or assistant superintendent. In addition to the first gate, the candidates needed to navigate a second gate, the application and interview process, with the ultimate goal to be selected for the superintendent position by the school board. Candidates who made it through the two gates of having the needed experience and being successful during the application and interview gates were likely to attain a superintendent position. Consequently, when aligning the gatekeeping theory to this study, the research focused on the gates of the career paths and the application and interview gates. Lewin's gatekeeping theory is shown in Figure 2.

This diagram describes the advancement of information. The "N" is the source of the information. The "N" numbers represent the separate information originating from applicants. Once information is gathered, it begins to disseminate and tries to force its

way through the gates. The oval in the center is the gate. When the information is passed to those at the gate, the gatekeeper begins to disseminate, select, and determine what information will be allowed to go through and be selected for the position. The “A” signifies the applicant selected.

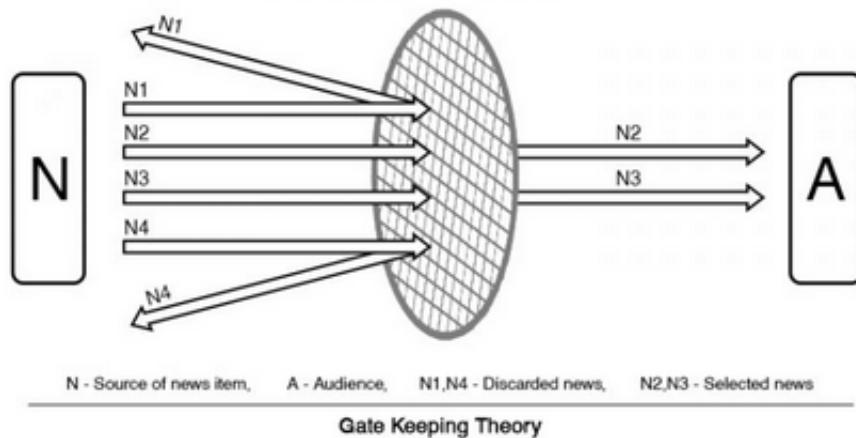


Figure 2. Gatekeeping theory. From “GateKeeping Theory,” by S. Bajracharya, 2018 (<https://www.businessstopia.net/mass-communication/gatekeeping-theory>).

The gatekeeper’s role is a highly important role in a school district. Gatekeepers control information, and this information can have positive or negative value to the school district. Positive value refers to the perfect match to the school district. Negative value refers to the applicant not meeting the gatekeeper’s characteristics, such as same gender, race, and/or career path.

Some findings from Tallerico (2000) and Riehl and Byrd (1997) added insight into the gatekeeping rules. Riehl and Byrd’s finding was that women needed a more established career path than men to become a superintendent. Riehl and Byrd also found that when women had equal experiences to men, they were less likely to be chosen for a superintendent position. For men, the personal preferences and socialization factors were

beneficial to their career path to the superintendent in spite of their undistinguishable qualifications and experience.

Gatekeeping research has been limited regarding female minority candidates. Sponsorship can be a direct link to board of education members, can influence upper level job opportunities, and is crucial to career path (Moody, 1971, 1983). Research, however, is silent about whether potential Latina superintendents receive sponsorship to prepare them to the superintendency role. Tallerico's seminal study from 2000 primarily focused on male candidates with no insight into female minority candidates. She examined ways that candidates could advance to become a superintendent and described various paths or specifically gates that successful candidates needed to navigate and pass through to become a superintendent. The first key gate that successful candidates needed to pass through was to advance to a series of higher level positions ending with district level executive positions. In addition, candidates advanced if they had mentors throughout their career and sponsors to help them with their specific steps to become a superintendent. In Tallerico's gatekeeping elements, the last gate to pass through was applying, interviewing, and being selected for the position.

Consequently, a research gap exists in that few studies have looked at the gatekeeping dynamics experienced by Latina candidates for superintendent. This study intended to further the work of Tallerico (2000) by conducting an in-depth examination of Latinas' gatekeeping experiences as they gain career paths and as they interview for a superintendent position. Research is needed to provide insight into the disproportionality that continues to exist in the representation of Latina women superintendents in California.

Statement of the Research Problem

According to history in educational administration, a gender gap exists because research has shown that educational administration has been dominated by White males for decades with the most disproportionality occurring with the superintendent position. According to Valenzuela (2021), “Females have historically experienced marginalization because of gender when considering the superintendency, and the inequity is still prevalent today” (p. 51). There are obstacles that prevent women from climbing the career ladder, despite the fact that decreasing the discrepancy gap for female superintendents appears to be to their advantage. Aspiring educational leaders who are female are frequently confronted with unique and difficult barriers (Pianta, 2020). Studies have been conducted to show that the majority of superintendents are White males in spite of dramatic changes to the student demographics (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski et al., 2010). The U.S. Census Bureau once described the post of superintendent as the most male-dominated executive position of any U.S. profession (Pianta 2020; Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2004). Valenzuela (2021) wrote, “Seminal authors have overwhelmingly and consistently found that bias, stereotyping, and discriminatory practices are embedded in organizations and institutions and significantly contribute to the lack of female superintendents” (p. 53).

Women aiming to senior positions confront a number of additional external obstacles, such as gatekeeping and exclusion from the good old boys’ network (Pianta 2020; Henderson, 2015; Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007; Wickham, 2007). The Latina superintendent representation is demographically one of the lowest. In California, a state where almost 55% of its students are Hispanic, few superintendent

positions are filled by Latinas (CDE, n.d.-d; Johnson, 2016). It may be that Latinas face a double burden, being Hispanic and female, to attain a leadership position. The superintendency might be the most difficult position for a Latina to obtain.

Literature is vague to nonexistent on the challenges Latinas face during their career path, application, and interview process when aspiring to a superintendent position. The few studies that exist have shown that underrepresentation of Latinas in superintendent roles is an area that needs to be studied because minorities in educational leadership continue to be underrepresented. Therefore, these particular areas need to be investigated. Some Latinas have overcome negative gatekeeping during the application and interview process, their past experiences, and their lack of sponsorship.

However, the number of Latina superintendents in California continues to be significantly lower compared to their White female counterparts and dramatically lower than White males. Llewellyn (2020) stated, “Women clearly possess the professional experiences and educational knowledge to lead school districts, however, are left to ask, why are they denied superintendent positions at a proportional rate when compared to their male counterparts” (p. 1). Most research that has been conducted on women has discussed women in general and the challenges they face. However, research is silent on what challenges Latinas face during their career path to a superintendent position. In addition, research has shown that Latinas and women of color face more difficulties than White women. Furthermore, women face challenges of racism and sexism (Avila, 2018; Brown, 2004; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Finally, the lack of Latinas in superintendent roles is problematic, and given that there is scant research on California superintendents overcoming gatekeeping, the researcher wanted to find out more about

the career path Latinas have and the gatekeeping experiences they face during their career path, application, and interview process.

Furthermore, there is limited research conducted about how Latina superintendents have surpassed the gatekeepers related to the application and interview process. Tallerico (1997) did not include Latinas in her study; therefore, these areas need to be investigated to identify the challenges Latina superintendents endure to the career path to a superintendent position. It is important for this study to help others better understand the dynamics of underrepresentation of Latinas and gatekeeping experiences they face during the application and interview process as well as to identify strategies they have used to a career path to the superintendent position.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the career path progression and the gatekeeping experiences of Latina superintendents as they advanced to a superintendent position. The second purpose of this study was to describe the gatekeeping experiences of Latina superintendents' application and interview process of their superintendency. Additionally, this study was for Latina superintendents to describe their gatekeeping experiences of gender and ethnicity. Finally, this study examined the strategies that Latina superintendents used as they ascended to their superintendent position.

Research Questions

1. How do Latina superintendents describe their career path progression?
2. How do Latina superintendents describe their gatekeeping experiences on their career path leading to their superintendency?

3. How do Latina superintendents describe their gatekeeping experiences on their application and interview process leading to their superintendency?
4. How do Latina school superintendents describe their gatekeeping experiences leading to their superintendency because of their gender and ethnicity?
5. How do Latina superintendents describe the strategies they used to gain their position and overcome any gatekeeping on their ascendancy to the superintendency?

Significance of the Problem

Research has spoken to how Latinas face a double burden to attain a leadership role because of gender and ethnicity. Avila (2018) and Madden (2011) asserted that women must work twice as hard as men to find nontraditional positions. Avila (2018) stated, “Studies show gender stereotypes and gender bias continue to impact the leadership development of women” (p. 2). According to Pianta (2020), “Women believed gender bias created a big barrier to obtaining a superintendency position” (p. 32). In addition, research has shown that Latinas and women of color face more difficulties than White women. Latinas also have to look at access to sponsorships and the application and interview process. Based on the gatekeeping elements, women face more challenges to go through certain gates compared to their male counterparts.

The small percentage of superintendents in the minority group in the nation is concerning especially when this percentage includes both men and women. According to Pianta (2020), “Wickham (2007) found that 47% of their study’s participants identified the good old boys’ network as a significant barrier” (p. 31). Research needs to be expanded to analyze and understand the barriers Latinas face when attaining a superintendent position.

Although various research has shown how Latinas appear to be absent from the study of leadership roles (Edson, 1988; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008), it is indicative that additional studies are needed to identify why few Latinas hold a superintendent position. Although research exists on the barriers women face when attaining top leadership positions, the literature is scarce when it comes to Latinas. This case study provided insight to the barriers Latinas face when attaining a superintendent position and identified strategies utilized to overcome those barriers. This study was conducted with existing Latina superintendents who have navigated the two gates and have gained necessary sponsorships. The results from this study will provide a better understanding of the underrepresentation of Latinas in superintendent roles. Therefore, the focus of this study was to provide insight to help future Latinas get through the two gates of career path and the application and interview process. Studies have not provided specific data on Latina superintendents. Therefore, examining the challenges Latinas face in attaining a higher level leadership role will add to the limited literature. Furthermore, this study provides insight on what strategies Latina superintendents used to surpass the two gates when attaining a superintendency position. In addition, it provides a better insight to the career path and the special assignments and seminars the sponsors provide to Latinas and how they navigated the first gate. Likewise, the study on Latinas provides data and evidence that would help to break the mold and glass ceiling. It provides information on how Latinas got through the gate of the application and interview process. This study can formulate strategies for Latinas aspiring a superintendency position and can change the mindset of educational institution leaders and board of education members when interviewing minority candidates for top leadership positions. Finally, this study fills the

gap in the research regarding the barriers Latinas face when attaining a superintendent position.

Definitions

In this section, key terms utilized in this study are defined for clarity. Terms are defined by their theoretical and operational definitions.

Theoretical Definitions

Gatekeeping. “Describes the powerful process through which events are covered by the mass media, explaining how and why certain information either passes through gates or is closed off from media attention” (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 31).

Glass ceiling. “Is the invisible barrier women encounter as they climb the corporate ladder” (Pianta, 2020, p. 30).

Mentorship. Mentorship “is a process in which a more experienced person supports a less experienced person in her professional growth” (Valenzuela, 2021, p. 20).

Sponsorship. It “is administrators, usually principals, providing services to favorites, teachers vying for promotion” (Valverde, 1975, p. 100).

Operational Definitions

Career paths. Career paths are the steps one takes from position to position such as from being a teacher to being a principal and from a principal to an office leadership position and then to an assistant superintendent and finally a superintendent (Tallerico, 2000).

Challenges. Challenges are any boundary, limitation, or obstruction that prevent the ascension of women toward their career path to a school superintendent (Lopez, 2008).

Ethnicity. “Is a grouping of people who identify with each other on the basis of shared attributes that distinguish them from other groups. Those attributes can include common sets of traditions, ancestry, language, history, society, culture, nation, religion, or social treatment within their residing area” (“Ethnic Group,” n.d., para. 1).

Gatekeeping. Gatekeeping is “when someone takes it upon themselves to decide who does or does not have access or rights to a community or identity” (Acenda Integrated Health, What is Gatekeeping? section). It is also someone who regulates access or denies access.

Gender. Gender is the characteristic assigned to an individual because of their sex.

Gender bias. Gender bias “is a perception an individual holds for a certain gender, the people do it unconsciously or sometimes consciously” (P. Sharma & Parika, 2020, p. 6146).

Glass ceiling. It is an invisible barrier to the career path of women who are otherwise qualified for the position. Though the term glass ceiling has often been used to refer to women and minorities, this study solely used the term in reference to women in educational leadership (MacArthur, 2010).

Headhunter. A headhunter “is a person who controls early paper-screening gates, whereas farther down the flow channel, school board members may exercise increased control over decisions among semifinalists for the position” (Tallerico, 2000, p. 20).

Latina. A Latina is a female who is of Mexican or Mexican American descent.

Minority. A minority is an individual not coming from a White ethnic background.

Negative gatekeeping. It is the process of controlling and denying access to an individual to advance to higher level positions. Barriers are set to impede advancement (Eve, 2014).

Positive gatekeeping. It is the process of controlling the rate at which an individual will be allowed access to more advanced levels of a position or study in an academic setting (“Kurt Lewin,” n.d.).

Psychosocial factors. Psychosocial factors, such as personality, motivation, social interaction skills, family structure, stress, physical health, self-concept, mental health, and environmental condition have been widely acknowledged as being pertinent to job performance of any teacher (Odebode, 2018).

Racial discrimination. Racial discrimination is the unjust treatment of a person on the basis of his or her skin color, race, or national origin (D. White, 2022).

Racial inequality. Racial inequality is the unequal outcomes of racial discrimination such as inadequacies in income, education, or health for some groups of people (D. White, 2022).

Sponsorship. Sponsorship is a proactive practice that involves serving as an advocate for someone. The sponsor is a well-known and established person. The sponsors have decision-making responsibilities, and they ensure that those they sponsor have their names included in discussions of job possibilities (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006).

Superintendent. A superintendent is an individual who has executive oversight and charge of a school district (Valenzuela, 2021).

Underrepresentation. It is the limited presence of racial and ethnic populations in various fields such as the medical profession.

Who is a gatekeeper. Gatekeepers are common in hierarchies such as bureaucracies, and their power is often greater than their formally recognized authority (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

Delimitations

This multicase study was delimited to five women who are Latinas serving in a superintendent role in California. The participants were delimited to meet the following criteria:

1. Latina, Mexican American, or Mexican descent
2. First-, second-, or third-generation immigrant
3. Superintendent in a California public school

Organization of the Study

This study was organized in five chapters. Chapter I provided an introduction on the limited number of women, especially Latinas, in superintendent roles in California. Chapter II provides an overview of the literature as it relates to the challenges Latinas face as they ascend to the superintendent position. Chapter II also examines pertinent information about Latina superintendents and the shortage in this position. Chapter III discusses the methodology of the study. Chapter IV describes the analysis conducted, the data collected, and the findings from the interviews conducted. Chapter V presents the conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the gatekeeping experiences of Latina superintendents. A second purpose of this study was to describe the gatekeeping experiences of Latina superintendents on their career path to the superintendency. Finally, this study examined the strategies that Latina superintendents used to overcome their gatekeeping as they ascended to their superintendent position.

This chapter is presented in five sections and reviews current literature about the superintendency position, the challenges Latinas face during their ascension to a superintendency role, and the strategies used to overcome those challenges. This chapter also provides an overview of the challenges Latina leaders face that hold them back from attaining a superintendent position. In addition, this chapter examines the historical context, modern-day school district/Hispanic growth, sociological and psychological dynamics of gatekeeping, the role of headhunters in the selection process, and gatekeeping experiences and mobility.

Historical Context

School District History

According to history, Manuel de Vargas opened the first recorded school in California in 1795. Manuel de Vargas was a retired sergeant in San Jose. Retired soldiers taught in small schools through 1821. In 1829, the total student population in 11 primary schools was 339 students. During 1847, California's population was 26,000, with a 2% literacy rate (The Museum of the City of San Francisco, 1925). It was 1846 when a one-room schoolhouse came under public control and became California's first school. This one-room schoolhouse was established in Santa Clara County by Mrs. Olive

M. Isbell. A few months later, Isbell moved and opened a school in Monterey, where it later became a historic location as the place where Sloat and Larkin raised the American flag for the first time to identify the initial American occupation in California (The Museum of the City of San Francisco, 1925). Following that, the first elementary school opened in Siskiyou County that operated in a two-room schoolhouse with approximately 30 students in Grades kindergarten to 6th. This two-room schoolhouse is still operating today.

Although there were small schools established in California in 1846, it was not until 1850 when the first adopted free public school came into existence, and in 1851, it was reorganized under an ordinance assigning a city board of education and a superintendent. The first superintendent was T. J. Nevins who became the head of the first city school system in the state. From that day forward, new superintendents were to take that position and make changes. History has shown that as the school system began to take shape, new superintendents began to take the position and make changes to public education. Those changes are still implemented in the 21st century in all school districts in California. New school districts began to open as the student population continued to grow and cities began to expand.

Currently, there are 1,036 school districts in California (CDE, n.d.-a). Each school district has its own superintendent and its own board of education. The school superintendent oversees the day-to-day activities of the school district. Each school district varies in size and student population. Currently, the largest school district in California is the Los Angeles School District, with a student population of 605,310 and 1,024 schools (CDE, n.d.-c).

California has a total student enrollment of 6,163,001 (CDE, n.d.-c). This consists of pre-K through 12th grade, including continuation schools, alternative schools, and community day schools. In 2021, California's population was 39,613,500, with a growth rate of 13%. California is home to one of the world's most diverse populations. The state is projected to surpass 50 million by 2050. The Hispanic race is the largest representation of population in California with the highest growth rate for all ethnicities.

Changing Demographics

One of the largest changes in California's education is the shift in student population. California has shown an increase in many ethnicities, especially Hispanic. During 2009–2010 school year, 50.4% of the student population was Hispanic. In 2017–2018, that percentage increased to 54.3% and then increased in 2018–2019 to 54.6% and in 2019–2020 to 54.9%. Of the ethnicities listed (i.e., White, Asian, Black, etc.) of public school students, the Hispanic population appears to be increasing by more than 2% each year (CDE, n.d.-c). Overall, the Hispanic student enrollment in K–12 schools continues to increase each year (CDE, n.d.-d).

In addition, in the 2009–2010 school year, the total Hispanic teacher population in school districts was 291,011.4 and slightly increased to 295,465.7 in 2017–2018. When it came to Hispanic female teachers, those numbers also increased from 46,124 in 2017–2018 to 47,148 in 2018–2019 (CDE, n.d.-c). Unfortunately, the number of Hispanic administrators in school districts did not reflect a significant increase with a total of 23,150.2 in 2009–2010 and then a slight increase in 2017–2018 to 25,398.1. This minor leap was over a 7 to 8 year jump.

Interweaving these issues discussed is California's changing student demographics. According to Johnson (2016), compared to the nation, California is one of the most populated and ethnically diverse states. More important, California currently has a 54% Latino student population compared to the United States, which has a low of 22%. In addition, California had a higher number of non-English speakers during 2017 at 45%; nationwide, this rate was 18%. Consequently, ELL students comprise 21% of California's student body, more than any other state (CDE, n.d.-b). ELLs require additional services to be academically successful, and the chronic underfunding reduces the services that are needed for the ever-increasing Hispanic student population to be college-level ready. These are just a few of the many issues school districts face in addition to student achievement.

Student Achievement

In California, compared nationally, more than half of the K–12 student population did not meet the state standards in both reading and math. Even though an achievement gap exists nationwide, it appears to be more prevalent in California (CDE, n.d.-d). California has shown progress in student achievement; however, in 2017 it continued to show lower scores when compared nationally.

An important but complex responsibility of the superintendent is to develop policies regarding student achievement, graduation, and measures to ensure that all students are academically and emotionally successful. To date, California's students have not fared well in comparison to other students across the country. In California, more than half of the K–12 student population did not meet the state standards in both reading and math when compared to national averages. Even though an achievement gap

exists nationwide, it appears to be more prevalent in California (CDE, n.d.-d). California has shown progress in student achievement; however, in 2017, it continued to show lower scores than that of other students nationally. Supports, such as smaller class sizes, numbers of counselors, and innovation programs, which take substantial resources, have languished for years in comparison to other states. Districts not only have to address student achievement, but they also must prepare students for college pathways as well as increase the district's graduation rate because this is an indicator monitored by CDE (n.d.-b).

According to Johnson (2016), compared to the nation, California is one of the most populated states. Compared to other states, the ethnic population groups in California vary significantly. California has an approximate 54% Latino population compared to the nationwide low of 22%. In addition, California also had a high number of non-English speakers in most households during 2017 at 45% but nationwide as low as 18%. Therefore, superintendents must ensure that equitable practices are implemented district wide. Equitable practices must address access to all ethnicities within the district regardless of social economic status (SES).

History of School Boards

The Massachusetts Bay Colony took credit for the creation of the first American public school organization. It delegated that every town create a public school within its jurisdiction (Kirst & Wirt, 2009). In the 1820s, Massachusetts established today's nationally practiced model for school boards with the intent that these committees would operate autonomously of their local city and county government. These school boards

now serve a variety of important tasks governing school districts, setting policy directives, and hiring and evaluating the district's superintendent (Kirst & Wirt, 2009).

During the 1820s, Massachusetts mandated school boards to direct public schools to be independent of local governments, resulting in the current model for self-governing school districts. The end of the 19th century marked the time when the National School Board Association experienced the most growth. States, such as New York and Pennsylvania, joined this new association of school boards. During the 1930s, over 100,000 school boards were formed nationwide. The 10th Amendment authorized most states to keep educational direction under local control by way of school boards. This growth continued to increase across American through the 1950s. Local control of educational institutions was growing at a feverish pace.

At the conclusion of the 20th century, school boards faced challenging and complex issues in their public school districts. California has experienced a demographic shift in which more underserved students and families have increased in population in school districts. Governance teams have been responsible for approving new policies to address student academic achievement and new disciplinary interventions. In addition, the improvement of school facilities, which involve community stakeholders before it can get to the voting ballot, require bond measures. These complex issues can challenge the entire governance team as it diligently works to close the achievement gap and improve school communities for students (Peterson & Fusarelli, 2001). Furthermore, in addition to being responsible for student achievement, discipline, and improvement of school facilities, governance teams are responsible to hire their superintendent. This is a major responsibility governance teams have because the superintendent must oversee the

districts' day-to-day responsibilities such as the districts funds and student achievement. In 1870, school boards began to hire superintendents without legal authority.

History of Superintendency

Given that governance teams were created in the 1820s, the superintendent position came to light years after public schools were created, and it is a position of wide influence (Houston, 2001). The superintendent position was initially run by the state boards; however, the responsibilities increased and help was not provided. According to the 10th Amendment of the United States Constitution, public education was the responsibility of the state because education was not mentioned in the Constitution; therefore, the states assumed responsibility (Houston, 2001). Because money was allocated to local communities to help with educational needs, lawmakers felt a need for an accounting system to manage such funds. It was during the 19th century when volunteer committees oversaw the management of state funds. From then on, state and local boards of education were formed to administer funds. Furthermore, this position began to increase its responsibilities, which led to New York creating and appointing its first full-time state superintendent in 1812 (Houston, 2001). That trend soon was followed by other states. However, the task of the daily operations increased and became difficult to fulfill by the superintendents, which resulted in the creation of county positions such as county superintendents to conduct such work (Houston 2001).

Challenges Superintendents Face to be Hired

According to a study conducted by Whitaker (2006), when nine women superintendents were surveyed, the results revealed that they all experienced gender bias as they attained the superintendent position. According to P. Sharma and Parika (2020),

“Gender bias can be defined as a perception one holds for a certain gender, the people do it unconsciously or sometimes consciously” (p. 6146). In addition to Whitaker’s (2006) findings, Banuelos (2008) surveyed 35 women superintendents in California and discovered that gender bias also affected them as they attained a superintendent position.

Although women leaders face various challenges when attaining a superintendent position, there are many barriers that prevent women from attaining higher level leadership roles with more authority. One of those barriers involves the hiring process, which involves school board members and their procedures. Leading a school requires the applicant to have strong school finance background. Muñoz et al. (2014) discovered that school board members viewed women as not having effective finance managerial skills, and as a result, board members tended to believe that women do not make good candidates to lead school districts. Other external barriers identified in the literature include discrimination, lack of role models and sponsors, place boundness, and gender bias.

Studies have implied that gender has not been considered an issue concerning equal opportunity for education professionals; however, the results of these studies imply that this might be an issue because only 27.7% of women serve as superintendents in the country (AASA, 2015). This percentage of female superintendents nationwide is twice that of the 13.2% reported in a national study 10 years earlier (Glass et al., 2000) and higher than the 24.1% (Heffernan & Wasonga, 2017; Kowalski et al., 2010). Even though improvement has been seen in the last 20 years, women continue to be underrepresented in school leadership considering the percentage of women (84%)

teaching in schools (Valenzuela, 2021). Studies have also pointed out that unlike men, women do not consider attaining a higher role in public education.

Even while attitudes are shifting and school boards increasingly consider women as superintendents, it appears that minority groups continue to be underrepresented among women superintendents (AASA, 2015). To comprehend the obstacles Latinas experience in obtaining a position as a superintendent, it is necessary to examine this topic in depth. Therefore, this is an area that needs to be analyzed closely to understand the barriers Latinas face when attaining a superintendent position. Yet it is evident that women are not equally represented in superintendent positions.

Superintendent's Responsibilities

Annually, the superintendent must present a school budget for the school board to review, comment on, and approve. The budget must be approved by the County Office of Education and must forecast a positive budget for the next 3 years. Currently, California school budgets are spent primarily on employee salaries, and superintendents must present employee compensation increase contracts to the board knowing that there is little margin for error in the proposed budget. More important, because there are so few dollars for educational programs, superintendents must plan carefully with their communities for the educational programs that meet the needs of the students. The McREL research team found a “statistically significant relationship (a positive correlation of .24) between district leadership and student achievement” (Waters & Marzano, 2006, p. 1).

Superintendents must navigate an intensive number of difficult political issues, which have to address state and local board priorities, parent expectations, and teachers’

and principals' needs to ensure this results in an increase of student achievement but with diminishing resources (Andreas-Bavel, 2021; Bjork, Kowalski, & Young, 2005; Petersen & Williams, 2005; P. White, Harvey, & Fox, 2016). Superintendents are responsible to develop and provide specific services to increase student outcome and close the achievement gap (Andreas-Bavel, 2021). Superintendents have faced the pressure from public education and its changes as well as the expectations to meet the needs of an increased diverse student population. Education is continually evolving and holds at its core the ethical responsibility to uphold equality, equity, and justice for all students (Andreas-Bavel, 2021). According to Andreas-Bavel (2021),

The current political climate places pressure on the school system to address changes in society, such as growing inequities due to social class, physical and mental health challenges, student disengagement, drugs, violence, racial tension, and the overall erosion of trust in the government. (p. 14)

Research has stated that the greatest political issues within a school district are funding, student assessment, the Common Core State Standards, bullying, safety, and teacher evaluation (Andreas-Bavel, 2021).

Superintendents' Complex School Issues

Superintendents are elected to make decisions on behalf of the community and the direction of the school board for the betterment of all students, staff, and parents. School board members are responsible to elect the right candidate as their superintendent. However, the selection of the superintendent may be biased, and gender discrimination may exist. According to Aceves (2013) and Tallerico (2000), some board members typically have specific characteristics in mind for superintendents such as being a married

man with children. Aceves (2013) indicated that the superintendency is a male-dominated position, and gender may negatively influence employers before and after a decision is made to allow a woman to be appointed to such a position. Superintendents must address and make decisions about complex school issues. However, research has revealed that it is not the same for female superintendents; research has reported that such characteristics as being married with children can cause conflict for women because women who have children would not be able to spend an average of 50 hr per week to the job, and children would become a barrier for female superintendents (Aceves, 2013; Glass et al., 2000; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000).

Additionally, superintendents engage in complex decision-making processes by asking for and listening to the board's input, by following all educational laws, and by consulting with the educational staff. The expectation is that the superintendent dedicates more time than the regular 40 hr per week to this position, and this can become difficult for many women. Most important, superintendents must maintain the confidence of the school board, communities, administrators, and staff. Some of the most common complex issues that superintendents must respond to are student educational needs results, facilities, union negotiations, and school finances.

Furthermore, superintendents must report to the board of education on the district's finances and how the funds are allocated. According to California School Boards Association (CSBA, n.d.), the most significant adjustment to California's school finance system was the adoption of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). This is used to determine how rates per student will be allocated to school districts and to allow districts to have more flexibility on the expenditures. The changes in fund allocation

have shifted in allowing all students to receive the same education. California schools have changed demographics because now schools are responsible to provide equitable access to all students, including those protected under the McKinney-Vento foster youth, those students eligible for free and reduced lunch, and second language learners. Funding formulas vary from state to state. In addition to the LCFF, districts receive local property revenues and \$120 per student in basic aid state funding for students in K–third grade (CDE, n.d.-d).

Currently, superintendents in California are feeling the increase in employee pensions. Superintendents must ensure that the school districts they are leading allocate funds accordingly because school districts' contribution is in the billions. This is a significant impact for school districts that are declining in student average daily attendance. During the 2020–2021 school year, the pension cost was expected to increase for districts to \$9.5 billion, which is over \$6.3 billion more in 2013–2014 school year (CDE, n.d.-d).

The LCFF was developed to equalize funding across all California schools, and either a supplemental or an even larger concentration funding boost was provided for school districts that had substantial numbers of underserved students. With the extra funds, school boards and superintendents were to create an inclusive community decision-making process to determine the best way to raise the achievement and the student-learning environment for underserved students.

A second law, which established the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), was passed as an accountability plan for how the extra money was to be spent to achieve eight state-recommended educational equity goals. School boards were to provide

direction and then to approve community supported plans to implement the LCAP and LCFF. A critical issue for school boards was to ensure that all key stakeholders, including those parents who previously were minimized or invisible, were part of the planning, implementation, and accountability process.

School Funding and Fiscal Solvency

One of the most challenging issues confronting superintendents is the constant underfunding of schools. California has ranked near the bottom of all states since the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978 in which school districts permanently lost one third of their funding. The net effect of Proposition 13 was that California dropped from the top 10 per pupil funding to somewhere in the mid-40s among all states (Gao & Lafortune, 2020). More recently, school financing methods have changed dramatically.

While the LCFF and LCAP school finance and accountability measures were starting to be part of the school funding and accountability processes, the state reduced its funding for employee pensions. School districts were forced to divert billions of instructional and employee compensation dollars to pay the new annual California pensions, putting severe strain on school district budgets. During the 2020–2021 school year, employee pension costs were expected to increase for districts to \$9.5 billion, which was \$6.3 billion over the costs spent in 2013–2014 school year (CDE, n.d.-d). Furthermore, for the many California school districts that had declining enrollments, the impact of fewer state dollars for having fewer students, and the increased pension costs put many districts in fiscal distress. The leadership of fiscal matters rests with the board providing district direction to the superintendent about ways to engage the school community to determine the best ways to spend scarce dollars while staying solvent and

to balance operational costs, employee compensation, and educational programs designed to provide equitable outcomes for all students. Although employees were able to keep their pension levels and not have to contribute additional funds, school districts were assessed these additional costs. Often, to pay for the additional pensions, school boards were challenged with frustrated employees who could not get raises and complex decisions about which educational programs to keep.

Facilities improvement and deferred maintenance. Another critical issue for which school superintendents are responsible are school facilities. According to Gao and Lafortune (2019), California school superintendents have a responsibility to annually report the conditions of their facilities. This becomes another major issue for superintendents because in 2007, this requirement was due to a settlement of the Williams lawsuit. Many school campuses were built during the post-World War II population growth of the 1950s and 1960s. These quickly built, 60-year-old schools' useful life span have been exceeded, and without major modernization and facilities upgrades, they contribute to a negative school learning environment. Recent facilities assessments revealed that more than two thirds of California's public school buildings are more than 30 years old. Because of the age of the buildings and, in some cases, poor maintenance, many schools need repair. Beyond basic functional conditions, schools need to be upgraded to accommodate computers and modern technology, science labs, performing arts centers, and in general to support 21st-century instructional program needs. In addition, the schools of 60 years ago were built with hazardous materials, and they were not built to support students with physical challenges; thus, they do not comply with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act. In summary, over 38% of students

attend schools that are far from meeting the minimum facility standards (Gao & Lafortune, 2020). School board members are tasked with improving school facilities with the caveat that they can ask the community to pass school bonds if they can keep the confidence of their parents and community members.

Superintendents must also deal with policies regarding student discipline and graduation rates. In California, ethnic differences are found in exclusionary policies such as suspension and expulsions. For example, Black students have the highest out-of-school suspension rates, are more likely than their White peers to be disciplined for similar behaviors, and are more likely to receive longer suspensions on average (Edwards, 2017). Some evidence shows that Latinos are disciplined at higher rates than their misbehavior would suggest (Wallace, 2014) and that this disproportionality increases as students move from elementary to secondary school. Superintendents must grapple with racial biases such as exclusionary discipline because students with a history of out-of-school suspension or expulsions are more likely to go to prison rather than to college. These student achievement and disciplinary issues are more prominent in urban school districts, moderate in rural districts, and less prominent in suburban districts. Over 38% of students attend schools that are far from meeting the minimum facility standards (Gao & Lafortune, 2020). What does this mean? Many students attend school districts with facilities that contain damaged walls, floors, ceilings, or malfunctioning electrical systems. According to Gao and Lafortune (2020), California had at least 60 districts that temporarily closed because of poor facility conditions.

COVID-19 and distance learning. Although some board responsibilities are predictable, such as school finances and facilities, other complex issues arise without

warning. The most recent unplanned challenge was the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated the funding and facilities issues previously mentioned. School facilities were already a problem for many districts, but with COVID-19, the pandemic worsened the educational environment and put additional pressure on the fiscal and facilities situation for many school districts. To safely reopen schools, CDC recommended that school districts make major changes, such as reducing class sizes, improving ventilation systems, and purchasing extra supplies for safety to reduce the risk of transmission in shared spaces (Gao & Lafortune, 2020). Although some of these reopening requirements may have been short term, improving school facilities such as ventilation required major modernization work. School board teams who have worked cooperatively have built community confidence and led to additional funds to improve school facilities. In addition, effective school boards can be better able to assess complex issues and to work with the superintendent, staff, and the community to bring forward solutions that are accepted by the school district.

Increasing equity wellness. During the COVID-19 pandemic, superintendents not only had to address the reopening of schools but also had to deal with the high levels of stress from the disruption of typical daily activities that students were used to. Superintendents had to worry about the physical health of students and how the pandemic impacted children's lives and the stress and trauma that came from not being in school. According to CDE (n.d.-b), each person will need additional supports and systems that will help to rebalance and refocus on the task of learning and being productive in a school community.

When reopening schools, superintendents had to consider addressing the mental health and wellness of all staff and students. They needed to prioritize these areas when planning to reopen schools. Mental health and supports resources were made available to all staff members, students, and families as they returned to school, continued distance learning, or participated in a hybrid model (CDE, n.d.-b).

Women in Educational Leadership

In 1980, only 2.1% of superintendents were women within the minority ethnicity group, increasing in 1992 to 3.9% and increasing again in 2000 to 5.1% (Cunningham & Hentges, 1982; Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski et al., 2010). Although there has been some growth, the gap between minority and majority females continues to be disproportional.

By the end of the 20th century, women comprised only 43% of principals (Kowalski et al., 2010; Shakeshaft, 1989), 57% of central-office administrators, and 33% of assistant and associate superintendents (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Kowalski et al., 2010). Menchaca, Mills, and Leo (2016) concurred that “the level of educational attainment for Latinas has risen in the past few years, yet it still sits at a level significantly lower than that of white women” (p. 97).

Even though women in top leadership positions have slowly increased from 9% to 11% between 1910 and 1950, then drastically decreased to 3% between 1950 and 1970, and then increased to 5% between 1970 and 1990, women made some progress in attaining superintendency roles (Blount, 1998; Wyland, 2016). In 1993, women in superintendent roles increased again to 7% and then inclined to 18% in 2003 (Schmuck, 1999; Wyland, 2016). According to Martin (2016), the representation of females is lacking in California superintendent positions, which raises a significant concern.

Gender Differences of Superintendents and Female Superintendents

Based on the history of the superintendency and the hiring of the first woman superintendent in 1909, it is assumed that White men dominated these superintendent positions. This position became the most powerful position in the school district (Houston, 2001). During that 1900s, women stayed home to care for the children and household. It was not until the mid-1800s when the teaching profession shifted from all men to opening the doors to women. This shift was a result of men leaving the teaching profession to find more lucrative jobs or go to war. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the superintendency position continued to be dominated by White males (Glass, 2000). Given that superintendents are responsible for so many complex responsibilities, it has been assumed by some board members that this is a job best suited for males, and given the history of superintendents hired being mainly men, this perception may be one of the reasons that boards are reluctant to hire females. Board members think that only males can manage money, negotiate, fix facilities, and lead school districts. As mentioned previously, Tallerico (2000) noted as part of her study that “a search consultant voiced his concern regarding affirmative action: ‘I won’t just put women or minorities into the finalist pool’” (p. 26). Research has also concluded that board members hire such search consultants when wanting to fill a superintendent position. Another body of research supports that the superintendent position typically requires knowledge in school budgeting, and females were considered to be lacking knowledge in the business and finance areas (Aceves, 2013; Glass, 2000; Glass et al., 2000).

Kawaguchi (2014) and Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) concurred that the representation of women in the superintendency continues to be negligible, and at the

average annual increase of 0.7%, it will take another 77 years for women to be proportionally represented in the top leadership position in public schools (Kawaguchi, 2014).

Ethnic Representation of Superintendencies

Previous research has focused on women as superintendents without referencing racial differences such as the number of Hispanic superintendents. Latinas are still within the minority representation in the superintendent position in comparison to White women. In California, approximately 7.7% of the superintendents are in the Latino ethnic group, which includes both men and women (Freedberg, 2016). In California, of more than 1,000 superintendents, only 43 are Latinas, which is less than 5%. Although there is no database confirming how many Latina superintendents are in California, Valenzuela (2021) and Martin Perez (2021) concurred with the total number of Latina superintendents in California being 43. However, when that number is “compared to the large number of Latinos students in the state’s schools, who make up 53 percent of student enrollment, Latino Superintendents are even less reflective of the state’s student population” (Freedberg, 2016, para. 13).

Despite the success women have had as leaders, literature shows that women in leadership roles continue to face challenges. Furthermore, additional studies have contended that gender and racial equality may be evident in leadership (Avila, 2018; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010); therefore, this may be an additional challenge women may face when aspiring for a superintendent position. Gupton (2009) and Kawaguchi (2014) discussed the challenges Latinas face when attaining a superintendent position because the superintendency is typically dominated by White males.

Not only are Latina women underrepresented, but research is also silent as to why Latinas are at the bottom of the women representation compared to White women. Of the 1,056 school districts in California, only 14 were Latinas superintendents (CDE, n.d.-a). Furthermore, in 2000 only 5.1% of superintendents were women who were in the minority demographics (a person of color; Kowalski et al., 2010). Women in the superintendent position continue to be greatly underrepresented in public school systems. According to Kawaguchi (2014) and Gupton (2009), the superintendency position is held mostly by men.

Latina superintendent representation has increased slightly from 2018 when it was reported that only 17 superintendents of school districts in California were Latinas (CDE, n.d.-c; Rodriguez, 2019). Similarly, the representation of Latina superintendents in other states such as Texas reflects the same underrepresentation of Latina superintendents. In Texas, of the 1,444 superintendents, only 14 were Latinas (Texas Education Agency, n.d.). This reflects that the change in superintendency in school districts is not keeping pace with the growing Hispanic population being served in schools.

Theoretical Foundations

The conceptual framework for this study was grounded in the gatekeeping theory, in particular, in the examination of how Latinas attain their superintendency. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) stated that the communication process was missing the theoretical focus until Kurt Lewin provided the metaphor of gatekeeper in 1943 and channel theory in a government report, but the gatekeeping process was not generalized until 1947 and then in 1950 by David Manning White. This metaphor provided scholars the framework for assessing how selection occurs and why sometimes items or, in the educational world,

candidates are rejected (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Furthermore, Shoemaker and Vos (2009) wrote how Gieber's critique of the seminal gatekeeping study by D. White (1950) stated that gatekeepers were centered more on gatekeeper's personal choices.

The seminal authors of gatekeeping theory were Lewin (1947) and D. White (1950) who described the entrance of items into the channel process and how the characteristics of those items and the nature of forces in front of and behind the gates are explored. Following these seminal authors came others writing about gatekeeping in the selection of school administrators.

Shoemaker (1991) extended Lewin's (1947) theory and pointed out that gatekeepers are decision makers. Tallerico (2000) noted that specific norms for selection to a superintendency position existed and were managed by gatekeepers. In addition, Jarmulowicz (2012) wrote that "gatekeeping was defined by Karen in 1990 as the process of developing and implementing criteria and practices that yields access to scarce resources" (p. 14). The conceptual framework guiding this study was based on gatekeeping theories. As explained by Lewin's (1951) model on gatekeeping, "There are people, events, or situations that control the gates and determine what may pass and/or what is blocked" (p. 147). Gatekeeping may result in social injustice for ethnic groups (Jarmulowicz, 2012; Karen, 1990; Kilgore, 2003).

Additionally, Valverde (1975) wrote, "Some veteran educators, had a concept of equal opportunity is quite unlike the practice that in fact does occur, what is described as succession socialization" (p. 93). He noted how succession socialization is an

institutional practice, and equal opportunity is a public assumption (Valverde, 1975).

The succession socialization is referred to as internally having a sponsor who will prepare

the next candidate to take the upcoming promotion. According to Valverde, “Since white males are predominantly the sponsors, the majority of those candidates included are white males” (p. 108).

Sociological and Psychological Dynamics of Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping

When a person who has been entrusted with the responsibility of selecting and sending forward reputational and experiential information to decision makers about candidates for a position, the person is referred to as a gatekeeper of information.

Gatekeepers can determine an individual’s future and whether the individual will advance to a higher level position or not. According to Lewin’s (1947) model on gatekeeping, it is implied that certain individuals and/or events regulate the gates determining who passes through and who does not have access to move to higher level positions. These gatekeepers can result in either working positively and/or negatively when determining who is allowed to go through the gates.

Kawaguchi (2014) reported that gates at times can sometimes open wider for some women, however, not for all. Shoemaker (1991) and Lewin (1951) confirmed what Kawaguchi (2014) stated regarding the work on the gatekeepers and how it sheds light on how gates and gatekeepers control the success levels of women aspiring to the superintendent position.

Gregory (2006) stated that because it is hardly ever acknowledged but known, a predominantly White school district will typically have its own “implicit rules and/or behaviors that are shared amongst Whites, which consequently gives this group (Whites) an advantage over minority groups in an effort to be hired as a superintendent” (p. 31) in

such a district. Chalmer (2012) concurred that the “role of consultants in the search process utilized for the superintendency” (p. 82) indicates the process of gatekeeping being problematic when it comes to selecting superintendents, especially when the educational institutions are the gatekeepers and make the rules (Chalmer, 2012; Shoemaker, 1991). According to Gregory (2006), the channels of gatekeeping in all White school districts affirm that women and minorities would have a lower chance in a superintendency position in a majority White district (Banks, 1995; Lewin, 1947; Shoemaker, 1991; Tallerico, 2000).

Glass Ceiling

According to Kawaguchi (2014), “This ‘invisible barrier,’ the glass ceiling, has been difficult to eradicate through legislation” (p. 25). Kawaguchi confirmed that an individual’s cultural attitudes, behaviors, and practices are consequences that the glass ceilings have been systematically constructed. In 1980, the glass ceiling was referred to as certain barriers preventing women from advancing. In 1991, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1965 was amended to reflect that discrimination in all employment matters was prohibited. Kawaguchi reported that in 1991,

The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission was created to run a study and prepare recommendations concerning (1) artificial barriers that were inhibiting the advancement of women; and (2) supporting the increase of opportunities and development experiences of women to foster their advancement to management and higher levels of authority in business. (p. 25)

Theoretical Framework: Gatekeeping Elements

Tallerico (2000) focused on the channels of how the superintendent selection process functions through the recruitment of a headhunter. According to Tallerico, three critical factors to Lewin's (1947) gatekeeping theory are how the channels correspond to "in" or "out" gates in the process. In addition, Tallerico's (2000) study summarized how accessing the superintendency is influenced by the (a) gatekeeping decisions based on the power holders' personal criteria, (b) routine practices that characterize headhunting for superintendents, (c) norms embedded in the educational administration profession, and (d) dominant ideologies and sociocultural values of American society. Furthermore, her study addressed how career mobility, sponsorship, and the application and interview process were factors that influence women to attain a superintendent position.

According to Shoemaker (1991), another way of "discrimination in the recruitment and hiring process for the superintendency takes the form of 'channels and gatekeeping'" (p. 33). The application process goes into the different channels of gatekeeping starting with self-nominating or nominating others starting with recruitment by headhunters (Gregory, 2006).

Career Paths and Experiences

Research has confirmed that career paths of women to the superintendency may face potential challenges to this highest position in education. Consequently, females face barriers as they aspire to the superintendency. A common path to a superintendent position is to go from teacher, to principal, and then to a position at the central office (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Kawaguchi, 2014).

Furthermore, Brunner and Grogan's (2007) study showed that 49% of respondents took a different path than the path previously mentioned, and 17% followed a slightly different path, but 16% of the participants did follow the most common path of teacher, principal, and then superintendent. According to researchers, having an administrative position at the secondary level may result in the number one position in which one ascends to superintendency position (Kawaguchi, 2014; Sharp et al., 2004). According to Kawaguchi (2014),

If women's career paths were to be compared to those of men's, the results would reflect that males' career paths were different before they got a superintendency position. Research shows that approximately 70% of male superintendents have had an administrative position at the secondary level and 29.8% of women. (p. 34)

Research has shown that women must work twice as hard to receive the same incentives as their male counterparts. Career paths for Latinas differ from their male counterparts. Research has confirmed that Latinas navigate through discrimination and feelings of isolation; however, many have broken the glass ceiling and prevailed (Menchaca, Mills, & Leo, 2017). Based on the research, it is clear to assume that Latinas tend to be overlooked regardless of past experiences. According to Menchaca et al. (2017), "Leadership preparation programs should provide experiences for developing Latina's leadership skills" (p. 12). Researchers have concurred that Latinas who have been overlooked for leadership positions may be a result of a lack of sponsors (Menchaca et al., 2017; Mendez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jimenez, & Hernandez, 2015; Mendoza-Morse, 2004). Nieves (2016) confirmed that "sponsors are important because they many times act as go-between among superintendent candidates and school boards (p. 30).

Research has revealed that Latinas pursued college degrees regardless of the many obstacles they confronted. Even though the college graduation rate for Latinas was a low 31.3% in 2008, many continued their education as they tasted success once earning a bachelor's degree; some were motivated and attained higher education such as a postgraduate degree (Menchaca et al., 2017). As more Latinas continued to attain a higher education than normal, many encountered few sponsors who had succeeded in their career paths that could relate to them. According to Menchaca et al. (2017) and Magdaleno (2006), sponsors for Latina school leaders were needed especially if the sponsorship was within the same culture, which meant that they would most likely thrive professionally. Menchaca et al. (2017) concurred and found "that Latina superintendents who received sponsorship and interacted with other professionals were successful in their career mobility" (p. 4).

Mentorship

Research has shown various definitions regarding mentoring. According to Pianta (2020), "Advancement in careers does not happen in isolation of talent and hard work and requires a mutual exchange of relationship benefits" (p. 64). George and Neale (2006) noted mentoring to be a collaboration between a person who has more experience and a person who does not have the kind of experience than the other. Finneran (2016) found that all-male and all-female mentor relationships were less effective than cross-gendered mentorship. Furthermore, Harris-McDonald (2009) concurred that mentoring is a learning process that may involve ongoing conversations, teaching of new skills, affirmation of a job well done, and moral support. When referring to mentors for superintendents, Pianta (2020) noted that a gap existed and that mentoring

allowed a bridge to be formed; qualifications and opportunities for a specific job were then acquired and obtained to ascend professionally. Mentoring allows future and new superintendents the opportunities to learn from those more experienced. Pianta (2020) discussed mentoring as having a positive effect on participants entering the leadership world and the development of programs .

Mentors can assist women in recognizing their strengths and skills (Pianta 2020). A mentor's good dose of realism can boost a woman's spirits, which in turn can make her more resilient. The value of the mentor is especially important for Latinas who face several barriers based on race and gender. In a study by Avila (2018), she noted, "Mentors continue to be lacking for women leaders. . . . For Latinas, mentoring opportunities are lacking even more" (p. 159).

Sponsorships

Valverde (1975) stated that employees tend to be shaped by the organization according to working environment and job activities. Employees are groomed to meet certain standards that meet the organization's vision. This forming of one's behavior can be referred to as a process in which socialization relies upon and is shaped by specific criteria of the organization. Valverde explained, "The concept of interpersonal interaction among individuals refers to the exchange between the individual and significant others" (p. 98). In fact, this common relationship between the individual and significant other is typically referred to as the "sponsor-protege practices" (Valverde, 1975, p. 98). In the education profession, teachers who are looking to advance within the school district must accept the norms from the administrative sector to be groomed and have a high probability for advancement. In addition, there are two means of

advancement: one is through succession socialization based on favoritism and the other is by competition. Succession socialization refers to sponsor–protégé relationship. The sponsor molds the protégé and prepares the protégé according to the same beliefs as the sponsor. Competition refers to those applicants having to go through the application and interview process and compete with that protégé who has been groomed for the position. These competitors tend not to have a chance because it is known that there are often more candidates within the district seeking administrative positions, so the district “need not scrutinize outside applicants, therefore, creating a ‘closed shop’” (Valverde, 1975, p. 99). Valverde referred to in-house selection as a closed shop, and administrators determine training and advancement of candidates. Furthermore, research has shown that the closed shops with in-house selection are controlled via sponsorship.

Valverde (1975) defined sponsorship as administrators providing services to favorites aspiring to promotion. For a sponsor to elicit his or her protégé is based on the sponsor’s role. The sponsor must hold an influential organizational position to be able to provide services to the protégé. Aspiring candidates wanting to advance rely on being identified, adopt the beliefs of their sponsor, train, and then advance. The identification comes when sponsors spot their potential candidate and endorse the candidate.

Research has confirmed that women have fewer sponsor systems, which can impact in-district mobility opportunities when they aspire a superintendent position (Kawaguchi, 2014; Sharp et al., 2004). To surpass the challenges of lack of sponsorship, aspiring female superintendents need to seek out sponsors from current and retired superintendents (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). As stated by Kawaguchi (2014), “Due to the

small number of female superintendents in the field, females need advocates, both while aspiring to the position and while serving in it” (p. 29).

According to Wiebe (2017) and Grogan (2000), a barrier women face is a lack of sponsorships. An important factor in a successful superintendency is having an appropriate sponsor to a successful female leader (Banuelos, 2008; Wiebe, 2017).

Female superintendents often end up with male sponsors because of the lack of female educational leaders. Typically, when a female superintendent is sponsored by a male, the female is compared to her predecessors, who approach the superintendency from a male perspective (Grogan, 2000; Wiebe, 2017).

Studies have indicated that gender stereotypes and gender biases continue to influence when it comes to women attaining a leadership position. Miranda (2019) stated, “The glass ceiling metaphor does not only signify the barriers that are in place for women, but are also applicable for minorities” (p. 12). Unlike men, women must face challenges because of their gender when looking at a career path to a superintendent position. This inequality between men and women in leadership roles also signified that women still face various disguised hurdles to reach upper level leadership positions (Milligan, Levine, Chen, & Edkin, 2014). Oftentimes, women must go through multiple gates to get to the superintendency. Not only do they have to face the gender bias, but they also have to face the application and interview process, which was the second area Tallerico (2000) studied.

Figure 3 shows how mentorship and sponsorship can at times overlap.

G. Sharma, Narula, Ansari-Ramandi, and Mouyis (2019) noted that “as mentorship is instrumental in developing skills set, sponsorship is an individual who can be influential

and promotional support, and can help secure career advancement opportunities” (p. 233). In this study, the researcher focused on sponsorship because it relates to the career advancement of Latina superintendents. Sponsorship in this study was utilized as the opportunity offered to those Latinas to grow in their career and provide access to networks and opportunities and how those opportunities provide Latinas with systems to attain a higher level leadership position in a school district such as a superintendency role.

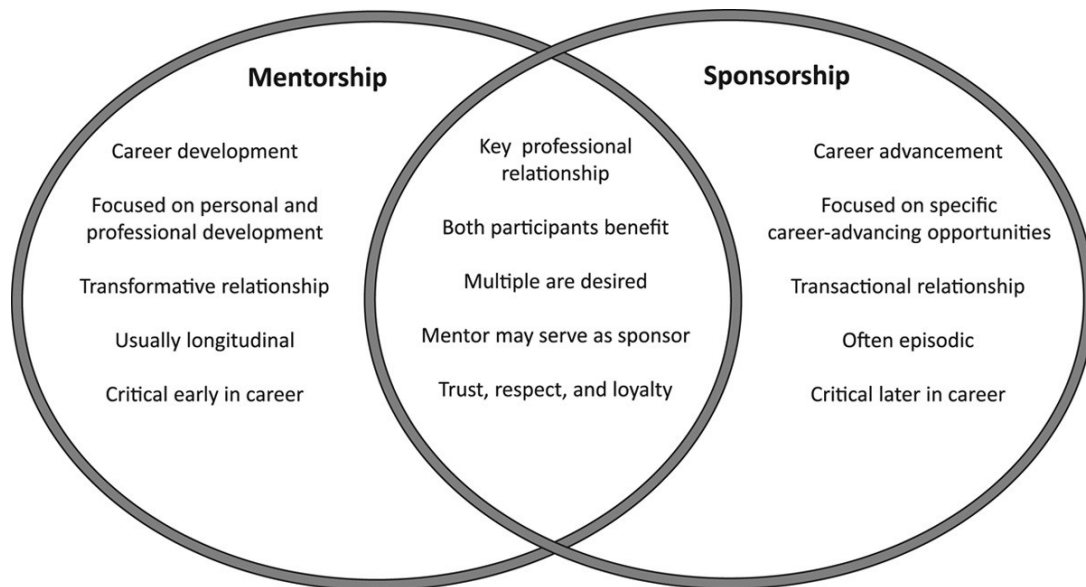


Figure 3. Mentorship and sponsorship in academic medicine and the similarities and differences in these two types of professional relationships. This figure incorporates information from the literature reviewed as well as findings from the analysis of semistructured, open-ended interviews with 23 faculty (12 sponsors and 11 protégés) at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in 2016.

Interview and Selection Process

According to Aceves (2013), women are not prepared for administrative roles, and men are structured to exclude women from administrative positions because of their recruitment and selections process. In addition, women are discriminated against and

confined to lower level positions in work, both inside and outside the home, due to male dominance (Riehl & Byrd, 1997). Researchers have noted that screening decisions for school leadership positions are influenced by specific factors, such as age, gender, and ethnicity (Aceves, 2013; Hernandez, 2018; Newton, 2006; Valverde, 1980). Tooms, Lugg, and Bogotch (2010) concurred that “within such a pool of candidates, an applicant can be deemed as the wrong, or the best, fit because of some nuance in his or her identify or image” (p. 114). Aceves (2013) stated that a leadership position’s criteria do not rely on degree or knowledge when it comes to equally qualified candidates.

The application and interview process has been noted to be a challenge for Latinas during their career path to the superintendent position. Research has been vague as to the strategies used to overcome such challenges. According to Nieves (2016), those in the authority to hire could make the decision to include Latinas. Cusick (2003) concurred by stating that this created an environment that is beneficial for Latinas to obtain a leadership position. Santiago (2008) indicated that school districts should consider the hiring of more Latina leaders given that a shortage exists in school leadership positions. Nieves (2016) concurred, especially because “demographics support the diversification of academic leadership and demonstrate the growing need for it” (p. 28).

Latinas also face the challenge of interviewing by the board. According to Wiebe (2017), Latinas faced challenges from board members and community members turning against them. However, research has shown that Latinas have demonstrated they can become exceptional district leaders because of their unique qualities despite the community and board member pushback (Wiebe, 2017).

Research Gap

Research on Latina superintendents is limited since Tallerico (1997) conducted her studies, which included research on Caucasian males, Caucasian females, and African American males; however, her research had no mention of Latina superintendents. Tallerico interviewed 20 Caucasian women and five African American men, which confirms that no Latinas were interviewed during this study. Tallerico's finding during her study reflected that Caucasian males successfully traversed the gates to administrative career advancement. Tallerico also found that more gates of access to the superintendency were made available for nonminority males than for many females and people of color in educational leadership. She noted that the highest ratio of women was found in administrative positions such as coordinator and director.

A study by Erin Elizabeth Wiebe in 2017 was conducted on how gender, culture, and experiences impacted Latina superintendents' careers as district leaders. In this study, Wiebe noted that only 50 Latinas were superintendents in California. Today, the number of Latina superintendents appeared to have decreased since 2017 from 50 to 43; therefore, the number of California Latina superintendents was underresearched.

According to Aceves (2013), the fastest growing population in the United States is the Latino population; however, the scarcity of Latinas leading school districts raises concerns of inclusion, equity, and representation. Méndez-Morse (2000) viewed this phenomenon as "exclusion and neglect and [as negating] the contributions of Latina leaders" (p. 584). Aceves (2013) noted,

Researchers rarely include minority women in their research. This shortcoming is attributed to two possible reasons, one of which is that there are so few

researchers studying Latinas, and the reality that there are few Latinas in the superintendency to study. (p. 3)

Although there is some research about psychological areas for this study, further insight is needed into the process for hiring and sponsorship for minority candidates.

Summary

The chapter detailed a review of literature pertaining to the study. The literature discussed superintendents' complex school issues, women in educational leadership, sociological and psychological dynamics of gatekeeping, and the theoretical framework of the gatekeeping elements. The gap in the literature has shown the scarcity of research conducted on Latinas in superintendent positions, the lack of sponsorships, and the application and interview process as well as the strategies Latinas implement when facing these challenges as they pursue a superintendent position. In the next chapter, a detailed explanation is provided of the methodology used for this study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the methodology used in this qualitative multicase study and describes the gatekeeping experiences by Latinas while ascending to a superintendent position in California school districts. The purpose statement and research questions are discussed in this chapter, along with the research design, population, target, and sample. Following that, this chapter discusses the research instruments, data collection, and analysis methods. Finally, this chapter discusses the study's limitations and concludes with a brief summary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the career path progression and the gatekeeping experiences of Latina superintendents as they advanced to a superintendent position. The second purpose of this study was to describe the gatekeeping experiences of Latina superintendents' application and interview process of their superintendency. Additionally, this study was for Latina superintendents to describe their gatekeeping experiences of gender and ethnicity. Finally, this study examines the strategies that Latina superintendents used as they ascended to their superintendent position.

Research Questions

1. How do Latina superintendents describe their career path progression?
2. How do Latina superintendents describe their gatekeeping experiences on their career path leading to their superintendency?
3. How do Latina superintendents describe their gatekeeping experiences on their application and interview process leading to their superintendency?

4. How do Latina school superintendents describe their gatekeeping experiences leading to their superintendency because of their gender and ethnicity?
5. How do Latina superintendents describe the strategies they used to gain their position and overcome any gatekeeping on their ascendency to the superintendency?

Research Design

For this study, the researcher was interested in in-depth responses from purposefully selected participants. Therefore, the qualitative research method was the best choice for this study. The researcher selected a qualitative method because it would describe the gatekeeping experiences of Latina superintendents and the strategies they used to ascendancy to the superintendent position. Roberts (2010) stated that a qualitative study is used to dig deeper and to better comprehend the background of any experience in which minimal information is known. More important, the topic being researched has not been examined sufficiently. The researcher had the opportunity to investigate information-rich cases to understand and to gain insight into each Latina superintendent's gatekeeping experiences on the ascendancy to the superintendent position (Patton, 2015).

This study includes the personal perspectives and experiences of Latinas and their career path to the superintendency and describes their gatekeeping experiences as they applied for and interviewed for the superintendent position. Research questions were developed to gain insight into the gatekeeping experiences Latina superintendents faced as they sought the superintendent position. To achieve the goal of this study, the researcher chose open-ended interview questions and artifacts as the primary data collected to address the research questions. The research methods of this study were

designed to understand and describe the gatekeeping experiences of Latinas (Patton, 2015). Last, this study examined the strategies that Latina superintendents used as they ascended to their superintendent position.

After determining that qualitative research was the best fit for this study, the researcher examined some major qualitative methods as identified by Creswell and Poth (2018), including case studies, narrative, ethnographical, grounded theory, and phenomenological methods. The researcher examined Creswell and Poth's stated rationale for the use of these qualitative methods and determined that the multicase study was the best fit for this investigation and the most effective method to capture and analyze the gatekeeping experiences of Latina superintendents as they ascended to the superintendent position. In this study, very little was known about the specific challenges Latina superintendents' experience when they aspire to a superintendent position. A multicase design has been shown to be the best way to gather in-depth information about a topic that is little known.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described a case study as "an in-depth analysis of a single entity . . . [or] a bounded system" (p. 344). In this multicase study, the researcher looked for a qualitative theoretical perspective of Latina superintendents to share their gatekeeping experiences and strategies used to attain a superintendent position. The researcher selected key participants to acquire Latina superintendents' perspectives while being interviewed within their natural settings. Furthermore, the researcher explored real-life bounded systems, which provided detailed data by collecting and analyzing resumes, superintendent advertisements, and application and interview processes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher explored patterns and themes of the

gatekeeping experiences of Latina superintendents on their ascendency to a superintendent position that addressed the research questions. In summary, the researcher examined in depth the background and experiences of five Latina superintendents from California to gain a better understanding of the strategies they implemented during their ascendency to superintendent position.

Population

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) described a population as a group of individuals having one characteristic that differentiates them from other groups. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined a population as “a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research” (p. 169). In this study, the researcher examined cases that provided more in-depth information and gave better insight about the topic researched. The population examined by the researcher was female school superintendents in California (AASA, 2015). According to the CDE (n.d.-d), there are 1,037 California public school districts, and for this study, 335 female superintendents were the population. A superintendent is a person who manages an organization; a superintendent of schools also means the person appointed to serve on a regular or acting basis in the school district.

Sampling Frame/Target Population

The target population is a portion of the population to be studied from which a sample is selected for a study. A target population is identified because of the limits of resources available to a researcher including a lack of time, money, and other barriers that

make it difficult to study every individual within the population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

For this study, a smaller population was selected for the target population. To assist the researcher to reduce the population, she identified Latina superintendents in California. The researcher used multiple search strategies to determine approximate numbers of Latina female superintendents in California who met the target selection criteria of this study.

The researcher examined the CDE's (n.d.-a) websites and found no data source for Latina superintendents. Next, she looked at EdData.org; however, this webpage did not include superintendents and ethnicity. The researcher then looked at the most recently conducted national decennial survey by the AASA (2015). Its study reported that 1% of California superintendents were of Latina ancestry. The 1% figure translates to under 15 positions statewide. However, this figure was considered a generalization.

The researcher concluded that there were no existing accurate data sources for the number of Latina superintendents in California. Consequently, the researcher spent approximately 20 hr searching each of the 58 county websites, including 1,036 school districts, for Latina superintendents. This analysis showed that of the 1,036 school districts in California, approximately 43 had Latina superintendents. Valenzuela (2021) and Martin Perez (2021) concurred with this finding. Therefore, data from this county office of education web page search suggest that there are approximately 43 Latina superintendents in California who then became the target population of this study.

Sample

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined the sample population of a study as “the group of subjects or participants from whom the data are collected” (p. 129). After examining multiple data sources, 43 Latina superintendents were selected as the target population. The most credible data source was public records on each California county office of education website that listed the superintendents for each district.

Forty-three participants were still too many to examine for this study, so the researcher used purposeful sampling to further refine the population. Patton (2015) described purposeful sampling as a strategy to identify specific, information-rich cases that enable the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of specific issues. For this study, purposeful sampling was used to find cases from which the researcher could learn a great deal of information and insight about issues that were central to the research questions and purpose of this study. In addition, the researcher decided on purposeful sampling criteria. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “The logic of criterion sampling is to review and analyze all cases that satisfy a predetermined criterion of significance” (p. 325). The researcher added the following additional purposeful criteria to the study:

1. Latina, Mexican American, or Mexican descent
2. First-, second-, or third-generation immigrant
3. Superintendent in a California public school

The rationale for adding purposeful criteria for this study is described next. First, this study was delimited to Latinas who were either Mexican American or Mexican of first-, second-, or third-generation immigrants. California Mexican American and

Mexican female superintendents were underrepresented in this position, especially in comparison to the percentage of the fast-growing Hispanic student population.

Sample Size

Patton (2015) stated, “There are no rules for a qualitative sample size” (p. 311). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) shared that “quantitative samples can range from 1 to 40 or more” (p. 328). Patton (2015) emphasized that “the validity, meaningfulness and insights gained from qualitative studies have more to do with the purposeful sample and information richness than the sample size” (p. 313). Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend that for multicase studies, “Not more than five cases should be studied” (p. 159). Their rationale was that the goal for multicase research designs was to intensively study a few individuals and collect details about each site or individual studied. In this multicase study, the context of the executive search and school board selection process, as well as the discovery of any artifacts that supported the research questions, was a main data search emphasis. Because the focus of qualitative research is not for generalization but to gain insight into the phenomenon of gatekeeping for this population, fewer participants were needed. Similarly, Stake (2006) recommended that the range of cases should be between four and 10, and then the interactivity between the variables of the study should be described. Therefore, five Latina superintendents were selected for this multicase study. These five participants were concluded to be satisfactory for the aim of this study.

Sampling Methods

To determine that the 43 Latina superintendents found through an extensive search of California county offices of education websites met the criteria, the researcher

examined social media information to gather sampling criteria about each candidate. For this study, purposeful sampling was used to identify cases from which the researcher could identify a wealth of information and insight regarding issues central to the research questions and purpose of this study. Purposeful sampling is when a researcher selects particular elements from the target population that will be representative or informative about the topic of interest (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). In addition, the researcher contacted the California Association for Latino School Administrators (CALSA) to discuss its knowledge of these 43 possible participants. Finally, the researcher obtained information from leading superintendent search firms about their knowledge of Latina superintendents who applied for positions throughout the state. From the triangulation of these data sources, the participants were determined. The following paragraphs detail the participant search.

The researcher began with the 43 identified from the target population data review of possible Latina females who were superintendents in California. First, the researcher looked at each of the 43 Latina superintendents' publicly posted online professional data profiles, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and their biography on the district's websites. The researcher noted any mention of a Hispanic or Latina background in their bibliography.

Also, the researcher reviewed each possible participant's web page and the communities' news sources that may have described the search process and any description of the newly hired candidate. Specifically, the researcher searched for information regarding the superintendents' biography that included important information regarding the participant criteria that could be included in this study.

Next, the researcher used a sponsor to find Latina superintendents who were first, second or third generation and who were recently hired into their position. Sponsors in this context are people or organizations who are knowledgeable about the possible participants and the population selection criteria used in this study. The researcher contacted sponsors from CALSA regarding the list of current Latina superintendent CALSA members. CALSA's purpose is to address the needs of Latino/a students, dedicate to increasing the number of highly effective Latino/a administrators, support a community of diverse educational leaders skilled to address the needs of Latino/a students, and increase the number of highly effective Latino/a administrators. One of its goals is to provide networking opportunities for all members of the association.

Based on CALSA's purpose and goals, the researcher contacted the current president and president elect. She shared the list of Latina superintendents with the two sponsors to see whether they were aware of these candidates' family background and the recency of their hiring. In addition, she asked the sponsors whether they were aware of any additional candidates who fit the purposeful sampling criteria. Based on the discussions with these two sponsors, the researcher discovered that such demographic information was not kept by the CALSA organization. The vice president of the CALSA organization was able to recommend Latina superintendents who could possibly meet the sample criteria from the list of 43 members.

The researcher used an additional search strategy when contacting four of the major superintendent executive search firms to help her identify Latina superintendents who met the criteria of this study. The search firms contacted were Leadership Associates, Hazard Young and Associates, Educational Leadership Services, and

California School Boards executive search. From these meetings with the search firms, the researcher found that the list of 43 candidates was valid and there was an additional possible candidate.

During the discussion with the search firms, approximately five of the superintendents on the list of 43 were verified as potential candidates for this study. None of the 43 candidates were eliminated based on the search firm discussions. No new names beyond the 43 candidates were found. Thus, the researcher's previous work to find possible candidates was validated by the search firm leaders. In summary, 43 candidates remained as potential candidates. None of the 43 candidates were excluded from the original list.

Contact Potential Candidates

Following the validation of the list of possible candidates, the researcher contacted, by email, each Latina superintendent. The possible candidates were given the criteria of the study and asked whether they would be interested in participating. The researcher followed up with a phone call if a possible participant did not respond to the written invitation sent via email. Once the possible participants confirmed that they felt they met the criteria of the study, they were then asked whether they were interested to participate in the study. The researcher sought five interested candidates to be part of this study, and if more than five were interested, participants were selected by random choice. The participants were identified and selected for this study as follows:

1. The researcher searched EdData.gov to identify each county in California.
2. After identifying each county, the researcher searched every school district's website to identify the district's superintendent.

3. The researcher noted the superintendent's name and biography to determine whether her name and/or biography identified her as a Latina.
4. The researcher then contacted CALSA members who could recommend Latina superintendents for this study to provide lived experiences about gatekeeping on their pathway to a superintendent position.
5. The researcher cross-referenced the names gathered from her own research of each school district website to the list of Latina superintendents made by the CALSA members.
6. The researcher also gained additional names of Latina superintendents after talking to the consultants of the search firms.
7. The researcher emailed the Latina superintendents identified to determine whether they would participate in the study (Appendix A).
8. Once the Latina superintendents confirmed their interest to participate in the study, the researcher ensured confidentiality and provided documents for signature consenting to participate (Appendix B).
9. When the researcher confirmed participation, she scheduled appointments and conducted interviews.

Figure 4 shows the study's population, target, and sample of female superintendents in California.

Instrumentation

Patton (2015) stated, "In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument" (p. 22). In this qualitative multicase study, the researcher was the primary instrument who conducted interviews by asking questions and collected artifacts to address the

research questions based on the key elements from Tallerico's (2000) gatekeeping elements. The researcher inquired about career path, sponsorship, and the application and interview process.

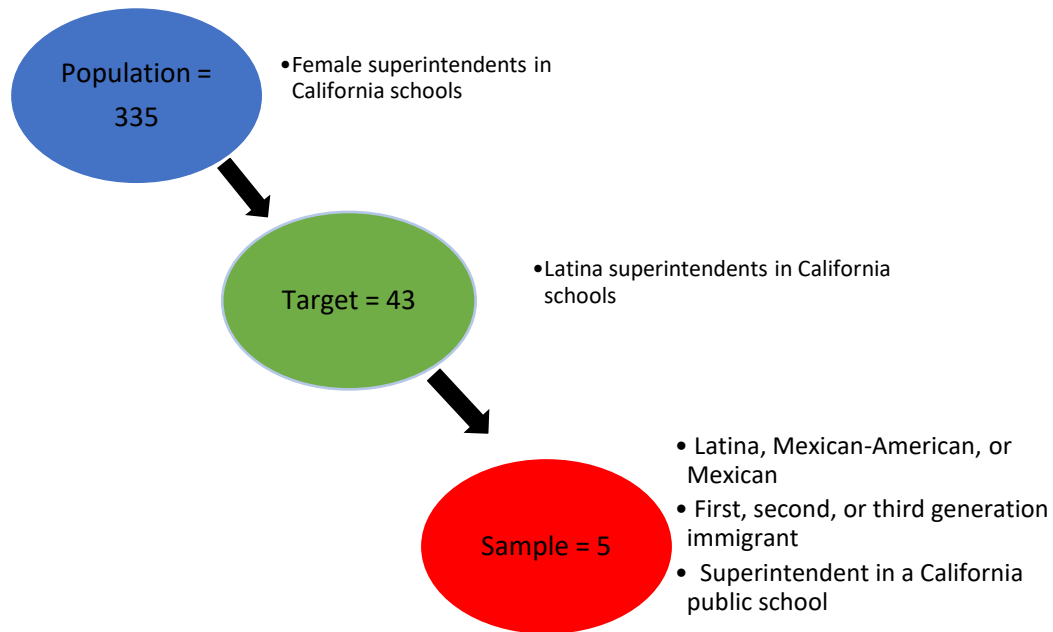


Figure 4. Representation of study population, target, and sample.

This qualitative multicasestudy design collected multiple types of data that helped determine the gatekeeping experiences and strategies of Latina superintendents seeking a superintendent position. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described three kinds of data when conducting fieldwork:

1. Observations
2. Interview
3. Artifact review (p. 349)

In this study, the researcher was not able to conduct observations because the participants had already experienced the phenomenon under study. Therefore, the researcher conducted interviews, which were supported by artifact review, as the primary

data source. According to McMillian and Schumacher (2010), “Qualitative interviews can be done in various ways such as informal conversation interview, interview guide approach, and open-ended questions” (p. 354). For this study, the researcher used informal conversation at the beginning of the interview to establish trust, allow a natural flow during the interview, and develop rapport with the participant. The researcher also developed specific questions in advance by creating an interview guide and open-ended interview questions to avoid major deviation among all participants. All participants were asked the same questions in the same sequential order.

The use of open-ended questions during the interview gives the participants an opportunity to respond to probing questions and allows the researcher to get clear understanding of their experiences based on Tollerico’s (2000) gatekeeping elements. In this study, the researcher used semistructured, open-ended interview questions to obtain the participant’s lived experiences of gatekeeping when attaining a superintendent position. The data from open-ended questions and artifact gathering were triangulated to create themes and patterns relative to the research questions. In addition, these findings were compared to the literature review conducted in this study. In-depth data were collected across five cases.

Interview Process

Interview questions provided the primary data source for this study to address the research questions based on Tollerico’s (2000) gatekeeping elements. The study was designed to determine the gatekeeping Latina superintendents encountered and the strategies they used to ascend to the superintendent position.

One of the primary goals of interviews is to establish mutual meanings. McMillian and Schumacher (2010) described qualitative research validity as “validity is the degree to which the interpretations have *mutual meanings* between the participants and the researcher” (p. 330). For the participants and the researcher to have a clear understanding of the composition and events and meanings of such events, both the participants and the researcher agreed to use valid common criteria for evidence-based inquiry in this qualitative research. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that the participants understood the key words from the research questions such as gatekeeping experiences and strategies they used to overcome challenges.

During this interview process, the researcher utilized interview best practices as outlined by Patton (2015), including the use of pauses after participant answers and the use of probing, follow-up questions. Patton explained that probes, skillfully used, could increase the depth of response to the question. The researcher was prepared to ask probing questions, such as “When did that happen?” and “Who else was involved?” Most important to the researcher was to develop an emotional connection with the interviewee so that trust was established. The researcher did her best to convey questions by using proper phrasing, cadence, and voice tone as well as by accepting all answers as advocated by Patton (2015).

Finally, this study used five semistructured, open-ended questions, which were based on Tallerico’s (2000) gatekeeping elements. By using open-ended questions, the participants were focused on the research questions yielding in-depth information about the purpose of the study. In summary, for this study, the interview structure focused on

the theoretical framework and the supportive research questions and ensured alignment to directly answer the purpose of this study.

Participant Interview Guide

The researcher began each virtual interview by describing the purpose of the study and asking the participant whether clarification was needed. Next, the researcher reviewed the UMass Global University Institutional Review Board (UMIRB) documentation with the participant, including the Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix C) and the participant consent form and a confidentiality agreement (Appendix B).

The researcher used an interview guide (see Appendix D) to pose open-ended questions during the online interviews between the researcher and the superintendents. The researcher was initially planning to conduct in-person, face-to-face interviews at each participant's location; however, in light of the many uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person interviews could not be done. Instead, all interviews were conducted via Zoom.

The researcher began by asking questions about participants' demographics and professional experiences, which were intended to create a comfortable relationship between the researcher and the participants. Once trust was built, the researcher confirmed the participant had a copy of the interview guide that was emailed before the virtual interview. The guide contained the purpose of the research study and a copy of the interview questions. Following two introductory questions asked to the participants, five open-ended questions were asked about gatekeeping experiences and the strategies they used to overcome the challenges during their ascendancy to a superintendent

position. These five open-ended interview questions were based on gatekeeping elements. The questions were designed to allow each participant to provide in-depth responses about their gatekeeping experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge (Patton, 2015). The open-ended interview questions were developed to allow participants to tell their stories and describe their lived experiences.

Artifacts

McMillian and Schumacher (2010) described three types of artifacts: “personal documents, official documents and external communications” (p. 361). For this study, resumes and official interview-related communications were the most important sources of information to support the research questions. The researcher looked for samples of resumes, minutes of board hiring agenda items, community reports, hiring processes procedures, and job advertisements that provided the organization’s hiring process. The researcher felt that analyzing such artifacts would give a better perspective whether the artifacts varied from the job descriptions and resumes of candidates in the districts. Superintendents were asked to provide documents and their resume that could inform the researcher about their gatekeeping experiences as they sought the superintendent position.

Researcher as Instrument of the Study

In this qualitative multicase study, the researcher served as the main instrument of data collection. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described researchers as the “primary instrument for gathering data because they rely on their skills and intuition to find, gather, and interpret data” (p. 175). In this study, the researcher was the primary instrument to examine websites for information about the executive search process and any

biographical information that was relevant to the research questions. In addition, the researcher was the sole agent to conduct the interview process.

One of the biases that the researcher was aware of was that she is a female and Hispanic. The researcher was not a superintendent but seeks such a position in future years. With these aspirations in mind, the researcher recognized her current position and future advancement interests throughout this study. As a Latina, the researcher wanted to investigate and understand the rationale behind the limited number of Latina superintendents in California and the gatekeeping experiences they faced during their ascendancy to a superintendent position. Knowing the limited number of Latina superintendents and the researcher being Latina herself, she was aware of possible personal bias and subjectivity in the collection of data and the interpretation of data.

With this issue in mind, the researcher used strategies to mitigate the possibility of bias. First, the researcher recognized that a substantial problem that arises in qualitative research is investigator bias (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2014; Patton, 2015). The issue of investigator bias creates challenges regarding the validity and reliability of the study (Patton, 2015). The researcher had to be mindful about her potential for bias given that she is Mexican American and was aspiring to be a superintendent and may have had subjective judgements about the data collection and analysis. To mitigate this subjective issue, Patton (2015) recommended that the researcher be mindful during the entire study and, in particular, during the interview process. According to Patton, mindfulness “creates the opening to empathy, and is intrinsically nonjudgmental” (p. 60). Furthermore, he stated that the researcher could

attain the desired state of empathic neutrality when conducting research. The researcher conducted the research with these values in mind throughout the entire study.

Furthermore, the researcher's behavior may influence participants' responses; therefore, the researcher must remain aware of such conduct (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher ensured the field-testing protocols were followed exactly so that minimal bias occurred during the collection of the data.

The researcher was careful to remain cognizant of her own bias. Therefore, the researcher conducted a pilot test prior to interviewing. The researcher used feedback from the pilot test to refine her interview procedures and techniques (Appendix E). The researcher was careful about her body language and comments made during the interviews that might have cued the participants about the answers that the researcher might have wanted.

Field Testing

One of the methods McMillan and Schumacher (2010) advised to increase validity of the interview is the use of pilot or field tests. A field test is defined as a pilot test practice interview of a person who shares the same characteristics as the sample population while an observer analyzes the interview process. The field test helped the researcher to examine and deal with any biases in the procedures. Practicing the interview under the same condition as the real interviews would lead to more valid and reliable data collection methods. Most important to this process was careful observation, note taking, and honest feedback to the researcher by a highly trained observer of the interview process. Specific observations regarding term and sentence clarity, pacing, and nonverbal behavior were all suggested observations and feedback content.

In this study, the researcher asked a Latina superintendent who was not in the study to answer the interview questions while a doctoral student observed the researcher conduct the interview using the interview guide. During this process, the interview was timed, and the language of the questions was critiqued in terms of whether it was user friendly. After the field-test session, both the interviewee and the observer were asked to provide feedback to the interviewer regarding the process and the questions that were designed specifically for the pilot test (see Appendix F). The feedback from this pilot test was used to help educate the researcher about using interview techniques that maximize the in-depth data the study sought from each participant. Equally important was that the feedback led to consistent and trustworthy results. Revisions were made to the interview instrument based on the observer's feedback.

Validity

Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that “research validity is based on whether the findings are agreed upon from the point of view of the researcher, the participants and the readers of the study” (p. 199). Creswell and Poth (2018) and McMillian and Schumacher (2010) concurred that researchers should use multiple approaches to enhance the believability of the study's findings and to convince readers of that accuracy.

For this study, the researcher strengthened validity through the use of interviews and review of artifacts, which provided triangulation of data across analysis of systems. The researcher looked at various factors regarding people ascending to superintendent positions in school districts. First, the researcher conducted an extensive literature review on Latina superintendents in California. Next, the researcher analyzed several elements of gatekeeping framework and selected the gatekeeping elements to construct research

questions to describe the gatekeeping experiences Latina superintendents face during their ascendency to a superintendent position.

In addition, for this validity section, the researcher used best-practice techniques for qualitative studies as explained by McMillan and Schumacher (2010), which were similar to those recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), there are recommended strategies for each study to enhance validity used by qualitative researchers. To enhance the validity or trustworthiness of the research findings, this study used the following strategies: prolonged and persistent fieldwork, multimethod strategies, participant language, low-inference descriptors, mechanically recorded data, member checking, and negative and/or discrepant data. These are listed and described as follows:

1. **Prolonged and persistent fieldwork:** In this multicase study, the researcher spent many hours studying five case studies about gatekeeping experiences and challenges of Latina superintendents during their ascendency to superintendent. Also, the researcher carefully analyzed artifacts that supported the research questions. Cross validation of analysis of the artifacts employed for this study provided validity to the outcomes of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).
2. **Multimethod strategies:** For this study, the researcher constructed five semistructured, open-ended questions and probes, which allowed the researcher to observe nonverbal and verbal behavior during the interview process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Furthermore, the researcher analyzed artifacts and dedicated an extensive amount of time with each participant to build a better understanding of their lived experiences and for the study to be conducted in natural surroundings to the

participant. The researcher cross-referenced the research questions with the interview questions about the challenges Latina superintendents face on their ascendency to superintendent and with any relevant documents to ensure that sufficient data were collected to achieve the purpose of the study (Appendix G).

3. **Participant language and verbatim accounts:** According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “Validity in qualitative research, refers to the degree of congruence between the explanations of the phenomena and the realities of the world” (p. 330). In qualitative design, the researcher and each participant achieve mutual shared meanings about the terminology of the research and interview questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2015). During the interviews, the researcher ensured that all participants were given the same semistructured, open-ended questions; thus, there was no variance in this important part of the study. The researcher aimed to describe specific lived experiences about gatekeeping Latina superintendents encountered and the strategies they used to respond to the challenges through their ascendency to a superintendent position. Through the interview questions, the researcher allowed participants to tell their stories and express their lived gatekeeping experiences when attaining a superintendent position.
4. **Low-inference descriptors:** Low-inference descriptors refer to having field notes and to ensuring that participants’ words were almost literally recorded (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher recorded all interviews via Zoom and took verbatim notes as the interview continued via Zoom. Themes and patterns were identified to determine the lived experiences of Latina superintendents. The development of semistructured, open-ended questions gave the researcher the

opportunity to identify and select the wording and sequence of the questions that would be covered beforehand. The researcher was able to ask follow-up questions for clarification or further information regarding the initial response. According to Patton (2015), the researcher asks the same questions to all interviewees and in the same order using open-ended format.

5. **Mechanically recorded data:** Data collection occurred during the five interviews conducted. The researcher developed semistructured, open-ended interviews and audio recorded the participants as they shared their rich lived experiences as Latinas and their ascendancy to a superintendent position.
6. **Member checking/participant review:** Once the researcher acquired responses from the participants, she checked for accuracy of the interview transcripts. The researcher then sent the transcript to each participant to check for accuracy. Each participant made corrections, deletions, and additions to the script to ensure clarity and validity. The transcriptions and interview notes comprised the data that were examined during the process of coding and analysis.
7. **Negative or discrepant data:** The researcher analyzed for any discrepancy in data after each interview. The researcher looked for exceptions in patterns found in the data that could suggest findings were not consistent with the emerging themes.

Triangulation of Data

Patton (2015) believed in triangulation to strengthen a study by using a combination of methods. This study's design was inherently set up to address method triangulation, which refers to the "use of multiple methods to study a single problem or program" (Patton, 2015, p. 216).

The researcher used different modes of data collection to enhance triangulation. Furthermore, the researcher used a qualitative method or interview to gather additional information. Patton (2015) noted that utilizing one method could make a study vulnerable to errors. Therefore, the researcher implemented various methods that provided multiple data types and enhanced cross-data validity checks. This cross-data validity check strengthens the research and provides verification and validity through the collection of comprehensive data.

Methodological triangulation was also used for this study because the researcher used multiple methods to study the challenges Latina superintendents face during their ascension to a superintendent position. The use of methodological triangulation was used through a combination of conducting interviews with semistructured, open-ended questions and analyzing documents such as job descriptions and postings. The researcher also included the resume of the Latina superintendents, the job descriptions, and hiring process within school districts as an additional method of triangulation. Patton (2015) noted, "Using multiple methods allows inquiry into a research question with an arsenal of methods that have non-overlapping weaknesses in addition to their complementary strengths" (p. 316).

Reliability

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) described qualitative reliability as two researchers studying the same phenomenon and coming up with the same observations and conclusions. Furthermore, they emphasized the trustworthiness of the data and analysis so that the researcher has provided evidence that his or her descriptions and analysis represent the reality of the situation and the persons studied. McMillan and Schumacher

(2010) defined reliability as follows: “Reliability . . . refers to the consistency of measurement—the extent to which the results are similar over different forms of the same instrument or occasions of data collection” (p. 179). Roberts (2010) noted, “Reliability is the degree to which your instrument consistently measures something from one time to another” (p. 151). In this study, the data were collected through document review and interviews, and by using and comparing these multiple data sources, the study’s trustworthiness and reliability was strengthened. The interview process was aligned and consistent. First, the researcher developed semistructured, open-ended interview questions aligned to answer the research questions. Next, the researcher structured the interview process in a way that each participant was given the same initial questions. Finally, those participant responses were compared and analyzed for more accuracy because each participant responded to the same questions in the same order.

Additional techniques to achieve high levels of validity were used, such as providing an audit trail by audio recording all interviews and by storing all data in a secure location available only to the interviewer. In addition, the researcher conducted a field test using the interview protocol on a Latina superintendent who was not part of the study. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), field-testing data collection instruments helped confirm that questions were clear and produced similar responses from respondents.

Intercoder reliability. The researcher used a peer review and examination process to confirm the data interpretations during data coding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2018) used the term “intercoder agreement” (p. 202) to describe the process of cross-checking data codes using multiple researchers. Intercoder

agreement occurs when two or more data analysts agree on the codes used for the same samples of text (i.e., interview transcriptions and artifact documents). To achieve intercoder reliability for this study, the researcher secured an external coder with a doctorate and experienced in social science research to examine the data from the data collection phase. The researcher established an 80% reliability level prior to coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994, as cited in Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher used the NVivo™ software to expose initial themes and codes during data analysis. Once the initial list of codes was determined, the researcher provided the raw data to the external coder for analysis. Codes that mutually revealed an 80% or higher level of reliability were used to establish the study's final patterns, themes, and codes (Creswell, 2015; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Before the researcher began any data collection, UMIRB needed to approve the collection of data. Before approval was requested, the researcher was required to be certified and qualified to conduct research on human participants (Appendix H). The five interview questions (Appendix D) were edited, finalized, and aligned with the research questions (Appendix F), and the UMIRB then consented to the researcher to proceed with the collection of data. The researcher provided each participant with a copy of the research Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix E). To guarantee confidentiality, consent was received from each participant acknowledging the understanding of the use of data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). During the interview process, participants were informed of the confidentiality, given a copy of the signed consent, and explained how a transcription of their interview would be provided to them to check for accuracy.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “Qualitative inquiry collects data from in-depth interviews, focus groups, open-ended questions on surveys, postings in social media, direct observations in the field, and analysis of documents” (p. 255). For this study, the researcher used standardized, semistructured questions during a formal interview conducted via Zoom. To document lived experiences related to the phenomenon being studied, five semistructured interviews were developed so that data could be appropriately analyzed. The researcher focused on the case study as the method of inquiry to obtain detailed and rich information about each participant and allow her to examine in depth the Latina superintendents’ experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The researcher began each Zoom interview with an attempt to have participants become comfortable during the process and establish a positive rapport with each participant. This was intended to help participants decrease apprehension in responding openly to questions in case this was a possibility. It also allowed participants to respond to each question in a natural way without hesitation. The researcher then began by asking demographic and global questions, which allowed the participants to share fewer complex experiences. As McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained, the purpose of “sharing this [demographic] data at the beginning of the interview was to establish rapport and focus attention” (p. 359). The researcher asked the demographic questions followed by questions related to the participants’ background experience in relation to their ascension to the superintendent role. The researcher then followed the interviews by asking noncontroversial questions, which allowed respondents to talk descriptively, and probing questions were used to elicit a better descriptive picture (McMillan &

Schumacher, 2010). According to McMillan and Schumacher, this method promotes respondents to bring out opinions and feelings, which would be more grounded and meaningful to the respondent, because she had verbally relived the experience.

The researcher spent approximately 45–60 min with participants during the interview process. During this time, the participant was able to respond to five open-ended interview questions that were aligned to the research questions and were structured in such a way to address the gatekeeping elements. Creswell (2015) referred to the process of verification of qualitative findings with interview subjects as “member checking” (p. 201). A method to enhance validity of qualitative findings is to have members check interview responses (Creswell, 2015). When interviews were concluded, the researcher thanked participants for their willingness to participate in the study and for sharing their lived experiences as a Latina superintendent.

Artifacts. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “Records, documents, artifacts, and archives, what has traditionally been called ‘material culture’ in anthropology, constitute a particularly rich source of information about many organizations and programs” (p. 376). For this study, prior to the interview, the researcher reviewed participants’ resumes to gather in-depth information about each of their job progression. The researcher was interested in the challenges that occurred during the participants’ career path, and by preparing ahead of time for each interview, the researcher was able to gather maximum information about the participants’ experiences. Similarly, the researcher gathered all available information about the hiring process for each participant. This artifact-gathering method was used by the researcher to help inform the interview process, and by using both artifacts and semistructured

interview questions, triangulation occurred (Creswell, 2015; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). By reviewing the participants' resume, the researcher identified what type of probing questions would follow the semistructured questions.

Interviews and Confidentiality

Interviews were conducted in July and August of 2021. The researcher invited participants to be part of the study by providing them with a participant request letter (Appendix B). Each participant was contacted via email and/or phone. The researcher was provided additional Latina superintendent names by sponsors from the CALSA organization. Participants were asked whether they were interested to participate in the study, and once interest was confirmed, an interview was scheduled. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted via Zoom platform and recorded using the recording option via Zoom. All participants agreed to be recorded and to participate via Zoom.

Data Analysis

The researcher conducted an analysis of the data at the completion of the interviews and the analysis of the relevant artifacts. The data analysis was guided by the five research questions, which were based on Tallerico's (2000) gatekeeping elements. The researcher looked for data themes that answered the five research questions. For each research question, the researcher identified responses and grouped them into codes, data segments, and themes. Selecting themes, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), represents the first level of induction in qualitative analysis because the researcher must use inferential reasoning to interpret meaning from data segments.

For this study, the researcher analyzed the interview data of the lived experiences of Latina superintendents in relation to gatekeeping experiences and strategies used to respond to the challenges. The researcher read the data numerous times to identify patterns and categories that were most apparent. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), the more the researcher interacts with the data, the more patterns and categories begin to jump out to the researcher. Qualitative researchers “start with data and develop theories based on the data” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 169). However, quantitative researchers do the opposite; they begin with theories and use deductive methods to test those theories.

In addition, the information used for this qualitative multicase study was to review documents and/or artifacts and in-depth interviews. Artifacts and documents were gathered by school districts’ executive search job requirements, interview processes, and participants’ resume. The researcher asked participants for artifacts and documents regarding their ascendancy to a superintendent position. For the researcher to provide insight into the context of hiring a Latina superintendent, she analyzed these documents. Relevant artifacts were gathered and compared and contrasted with the in-depth semistructured questions used during the interviews.

Coding Software

Qualitative analysis software was used during the coding process. The coding software used was NVivo to arrange the data segments and determine themes. To analyze the data, the researcher coded, retrieved, compared, and linked the data collection to identify and develop more complex insights of the participants’ responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “Categories

represent major ideas that are used to describe the meaning of similarly coded data” (p. 376).

Collecting and Documenting Data

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described one way of analysis of data as inductive analysis in which qualitative exploration happens as an inquiry with a small, purposeful sample and the use of open-ended questions. A refined process of data collection can occur in multiple stages. One of those stages is using inductive analysis by which a dimension of patterns can be found in cases under study and the researcher does not hypothesize what the important patterns will be. In this study, the understanding of the rich information from Latina superintendents arose from the inductive approach that included interviews with the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Data Display

The researcher developed a table for the highest frequency themes identified for each research question. Three to four of themes were included for each research question. Theme data were first displayed to represent highest numbers of participants who responded to that theme. Next, theme interview frequency counts were listed from highest frequency to lowest. In addition, artifact counts that supported each theme were listed in the next column. Last, the total number of interview comments and artifacts for each theme was listed.

Limitations

Limitations are defined as “particular features of your study that you know may negatively affect the results or your ability to generalize” (Roberts, 2010, p. 162). Also, Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) discussed limitations of the study as the “research design

and methods that influenced the interpretation of the findings of this study” (p. 207). The researcher analyzed her study for constraints regarding generalization and trustworthiness. Although the researcher employed several strategies to enhance the validity and engender trustworthiness, she acknowledged several factors that may have limited the transferability of the research findings. The following are potential limitations of the study:

1. The sample size was small and not having a big enough sample size could have reduced the possibility of generalizability of the findings (Patton 2015). Using a bigger sample size may have resulted in a greater range of findings.
2. Because the researcher was the instrument in this qualitative research, credibility grew from her skill and the rigor with which she approached the research task and ensured she remained nonbiased.
3. The number of Latina superintendents who reported gatekeeping experience and how much they were willing to share was low; therefore, it was difficult to know the target populations.
4. The skills and experience of the researcher were limited and included refraining from sharing personal stories that dealt with gatekeeping within her personal career and instead listening to what participants had to share. This was a potential limitation to this study; however, the researcher followed specific protocols to minimize bias that could have occurred during the interview process.
5. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face interviews were not possible. Consequently, the researcher identified another limitation of not having the opportunity to observe full body language during the interviews. The researcher

- acknowledged that this limitation to the study could be a possibility due to not getting a true representation from each participant during the interviews as when they are conducted in person.
6. Organization of time allotted to get the data needed to complete the study was a limitation. The responses may have been affected by the amount of time allotted to complete this study. The interviews needed to be conducted shortly after the collection and analysis of the surveys.
 7. Timing and availability were constraints of the participants, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, and superintendents worked diligently to reopen schools and/or plan some type of hybrid learning model.
 8. The research was limited by the semistructured interview format, which did not allow for adaptation and fluidity of process once the interviews commenced (Patton, 2015).

Summary

Chapter III provided a detailed description of the qualitative methodology used for this study. The opening of this chapter offered an overview of the case study. This chapter described the qualitative multicase study and how the design aligned to the purpose of the study and answered the research questions. Furthermore, this chapter described the population, target population, sample size, and selection process of the participants. An explanation of the qualitative instrument was included in this chapter as well as the acknowledged limitations of the study.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Chapter IV outlines the process for the study, including the data collection and the findings. The purpose statement and research questions are reviewed, followed by a discussion on the population, sample, and demographics. Presenting the data findings is the focus of this chapter, specifically qualitative data regarding the gatekeeping experiences, challenges, and strategies of Latinas to attain a superintendent position.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the career path progression and the gatekeeping experiences of Latina superintendents as they advanced to a superintendent position. The second purpose of this study was to describe the gatekeeping experiences of Latina superintendents' application and interview process of their superintendency. Additionally, this study was for Latina superintendents to describe their gatekeeping experiences of gender and ethnicity. Finally, this study examines the strategies that Latina superintendents used as they ascended to their superintendent position.

Research Questions

1. How do Latina superintendents describe their career path progression?
2. How do Latina superintendents describe their gatekeeping experiences on their career path leading to their superintendency?
3. How do Latina superintendents describe their gatekeeping experiences on their application and interview process leading to their superintendency?
4. How do Latina school superintendents describe their gatekeeping experiences leading to their superintendency because of their gender and ethnicity?

5. How do Latina superintendents describe the strategies they use to gain their position and overcome any gatekeeping on their ascendancy to the superintendency?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

A qualitative multicase study was used to describe the gatekeeping experiences, challenges, and strategies of Latinas as they ascended to a superintendent position. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with five Latina superintendents who were identified through specific criteria. The interviews were conducted via Zoom and were recorded with permission of the participants. The data obtained for the study were stored securely by the researcher.

Population

According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), a “population is the group of individuals having one of more characteristics that distinguishes them from other groups” (p. 390). For this study, the intended population to which the results of the study apply was California public school district superintendents. According to the CDE (n.d.-d), there are 1,036 California public school districts, and each of these school districts has a person who serves in the role of superintendent. From those 1,036 California public school districts, 43 had a Latina superintendent (Martin Perez, 2021; Valenzuela, 2021). A superintendent is a person who manages an organization; a superintendent of schools also means the person appointed to serve on a regular or acting basis in the school districts.

Target Population

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) stated that the target population “is the actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected” (p. 390). Consequently, a smaller

number of participants are selected, and these sampled participants are those to whom the results are generalized. For this study, the following criteria were established to identify the target population: California public school Latina superintendents from Hispanic, Mexican American descent and first-, second- or third-generation migrant.

Sample

According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), a sample is “a group of participants in a study selected from the target population from which the researcher generalizes to the target population” (p. 390). The study was limited to five participants from California school districts. Within California, there are 1,036 school districts in which only 43 Latina superintendents were identified. Using different data sources, 43 Latina superintendents were chosen as the target group. Public records on each California county office of education website, which included the superintendents for each district, were the most reliable data source. The researcher utilized purposeful sampling to further limit the group under examination because 43 people were still too many to investigate for this study. Purposeful sampling, according to Patton (2015), is an approach for identifying specific information-rich situations that allows the researcher to obtain a deeper understanding of certain topics. Purposeful sampling was employed in this study to discover cases from which the researcher could gain a lot of information and insight into issues that were important to the investigation.

Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability metrics were used in this study to ensure the accuracy of the data and to minimize errors. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), having two or more coders code the same data to assure agreement on how the data should be coded boosts

the data's dependability and reduces the danger of bias. As a result, two additional expert researchers shared and classified 20% of the current study's qualitative data. Intercoder reliability was greater than 82%, indicating that there was significant agreement in data coding. Creswell and Poth stipulated that "high qualitative reliability" (p. 202) requires at least 80% agreement. As a result, the intercoder reliability for this study was determined to be satisfactory, and the qualitative findings were regarded as valid.

Demographic Data

The researcher recruited five subjects who met the study's eligibility requirements and who completed the informed consent forms. Individuals were described using specific demographic data, including their race or ethnic origin, years as a superintendent, and immigration generation status. Table 1 contains demographic information on each participant who was assigned a number between 1 and 5.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Size of school district	Years in current position	Board member demographic Hispanic female put in ratios	Board member demographic Hispanic put in ratios	% of Hispanic student population
1	3,444	1	4 Latinas	2 Latinos	95.0
2	700	3	2 Latinas	3 Latinos	99.9
3	5,800	12	2 Latinas	1 Latino	90.0
4	2,500	2	3 Latinas	1 Latino	97.0
5	13,100	1	1 Latina	3 Latinos	98.0

School District Demographic Analysis

In this study, the five Latina superintendents led school districts with an average student population of 96% Hispanic. During the five interviews, participants shared the

districts' demographic and confirmed that their districts were above 90% Hispanic student population with low social economic status (SES). Table 1 shows the different districts' demographic and percentages of Hispanic population.

The superintendents in this study led school districts ranging from small size (700) to medium size (13,100). Five superintendents were interviewed, four of whom had been in their jobs from 1 to 3 years, and one of whom had served as a superintendent for more than a decade (12 years). All but two of the districts' boards were predominately comprised of Hispanic women. Students were predominately Hispanic with a mean of 96%. The lowest percentage of Hispanic students was 90%.

In summary, considering the demographics of the districts in which the study was conducted, most of the districts had over 90% Hispanic students, most of the board members were Hispanic, most of the districts had a majority of female board members, and most of the superintendents were recently in their positions.

Career Path Analysis

The five Latina superintendents profiled in this study described multiple career paths before they advanced to their superintendency role. For this study, all participants selected districts with predominately Hispanic student populations even when they moved to other districts. Five superintendents were interviewed, four of whom started in one district and advanced their career in another district. Four of five started their teaching career as a bilingual teacher, and one started as a classroom teacher. Four of the five superintendents advanced their career to teacher on a special assignment (TOSA) in the same district in which they started, and one stayed with the district her entire career. Four of five moved to another district to advance to district-level positions. Table 2

shows the multiple career paths the participants took as they ascended to a superintendent position.

Table 2

Career Path

Participant	Classroom	Bilingual	TOSA	VP	Principal	Director	Assistant superintendent	Retired	Superintendent
1		X	X	X	X	O	O		O
2		X	X	X	X	X	O		O
3		X	X	X	X	X	X	RR	O
4	X			X	X	O	O		O
5		X	X	X	X		X		X

Note. TOSA = teacher on a special assignment; X = same district; O = new district; RR = retired and returned.

Presentation and Analysis of Interview and Artifact Data

The researcher interviewed five Latina superintendents to inquire and understand their lived career path experiences and challenges as they attained a superintendent position and the strategies used to achieve their superintendency. The researcher conducted semistructured, open-ended interview questions guided by a framework developed from a synthesis of the gatekeeping literature regarding superintendents achieving their positions. The study questions were answered using qualitative data from in-depth interviews and artifacts. The major qualitative data were gathered through Zoom interviews with five superintendents and by the examination of artifacts that accompanied the interview data. The researcher interviewed five individuals for 5 hr and spent 48 additional hr equivalent amount of time analyzing artifacts.

Data Analysis for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, “How do Latina superintendents describe their career path progression?” The following section displays the qualitative data that were coded into themes from the five interviews with superintendents and outlines their responses. The data presented were collected from three of the five interview questions. Table 3 shows the theme and frequency counts for Research Question 1.

Table 3

Theme, Participants, Sources, and Frequency for Research Question 1—Highest to Lowest Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1. Multiple career paths were experienced on their way to becoming a superintendent	5	52	5	57

Theme 1: Multiple career paths were experienced on their way to becoming a superintendent. Of the participants, 100% had to advance through several positions and for some multiple districts to get to a superintendent position. An analysis of the qualitative data for the themes that address the first research question is outlined in the following paragraphs. This theme was evidenced from four of the five (80%) participant interviews conducted via Zoom, with a frequency of 57.

The data collected were analyzed, and Theme 1, multiple career paths were experienced on their way to becoming a superintendent, emerged as the most frequently mentioned theme for this research question, with a total frequency count of 57.

Five superintendents were interviewed, four of whom started their careers in one district before moving to another. Four of the five started their careers as bilingual educators, and the fifth began as a regular classroom teacher. Four of the five superintendents were promoted to TOSA in the district where they began their careers, and one proceeded to become a vice principal in the same district. Four of the five transferred to another district to advance to positions at the district level except Participant 5 who stayed in the same district throughout her tenure and superintendent position.

Participant 2 shared her story when she began teaching and stated, “I began as a bilingual teacher which was then changed to teacher on special assignment but focused on second language learners.” Participant 2 continued to share that her first job as a bilingual teacher led to her second position, as a TOSA: “TOSA was then called a bilingual research teacher at the time.” Participant 2 mentioned that being a bilingual teacher was the position in which she was needed the most: “I’ve interestingly, have only worked in Latino majority school districts with high Title 1 population and a high English learner population; and that is by choice.” From that position she continued her career as a vice principal and then a principal in the same district. Participant 2 moved to a smaller school district where she led the instruction and curriculum department as the director: “I then moved to a little district; it was the right move for me personally. Then I was hired as the superintendent there. So that was my first superintendent position.” This participant had multiple paths in her career starting from bilingual teacher, to TOSA, to vice principal, and then to principal before she got into the district office as a superintendent.

Participant 1, in describing her career path, noted that teaching as a bilingual teacher at the time was a new thing, and no one knew what needed to be done. She noted that being who she was and that she spoke Spanish was an advantage for her to advance to multiple paths in her career such as getting a district level position overseeing English language learners. Participant 1 stated, “It helped that I had a background in bilingual education, and I was able to speak Spanish, and I looked the way I did.” Participant 1 described that her ability to speak Spanish and look like most of the community helped her get to her next job, which was outside of the classroom. She went from a bilingual teacher to a TOSA, who trained teachers instructing second language learners.

Participant 1 noted,

I would say that all of the roles I’ve had have played into my experience and how I was being prepared for the next job. . . . If you look at my trajectory, I mean it goes, right the traditional way that it’s supposed to go, from teacher, assistant principal, principal, director, assistant superintendent, chief academic officer, and now superintendent.

Participant 3 echoed what Participant 1 shared and said, “Because of my experience as a bilingual teacher, I was able to pursue additional opportunities.”

Further, Participant 3 described her career path as a bilingual teacher being at the time a very important role because this was the start of her career advancement. She was promoted to the district level as a TOSA to start an English language program district wide. English language programs were also new, and this allowed her to shine in areas in which no one else had tried. Participant 3 mentioned that creating English language programs helped her show the community what she was able to do: “My opportunities

were actually better [being a bilingual teacher] since this side of town was all Hispanic.”

She continued in the same district and was then promoted to vice principal. She stated that a school was built, and she was asked to be the principal at that school. She was the principal for several years before moving to the district office in the same district.

Participant 3 shared,

I loved my community so I was very happy being the principal at [XYZ] school.

I went to the district office to be a director of special programs and then was promoted as the assistant superintendent, but it was a nightmare; my community trusted me and I loved my community.

Participant 3 continued,

There were some changes with the superintendent, and he was bringing his own people. So for me being the assistant superintendent was difficult for me. I knew that the superintendent at the time would basically be forced to take me because how was he going to explain to his board why he wouldn't take me, you know, why he wouldn't take me who has put in their time, so I became the assistant superintendent but decided to retire.

According to this participant's story, she was forced to retire for a couple of years and then applied as a superintendent in a different district. Participant 3 stated,

It was not until the former superintendent in my old district left the district that I was able to return to my former district. I was actually called by my former district and asked to apply for the superintendent position.

Participant 5 shared her story of how her career path began and echoed a similar description of her first job as a bilingual teacher, which was given to her because her last name was Hispanic and the assumption was that she spoke Spanish. Participant 5 stated,

I think what happened was that my teaching experience as a bilingual teacher prepared me to work with English language learners and for my next job assignment, which was teacher on a special assignment in developing professional development around English language learners.

Her job as a bilingual teacher opened doors to other jobs. Participant 5 was asked to lead the mentorship program and oversee a multimillion-dollar grant and to lead an English learner program. She was appointed as the assistant principal in a middle school for 1 year then moved to be the principal and went on to be the associate superintendent at the district office. She was then appointed to be the superintendent in the same district. Participant 5 noted, “I didn’t have to interview for that; I was just appointed as an associate superintendent.” All of her career was in the same district.

Several participants mentioned that starting as a bilingual teacher opened doors to other opportunities. For each participant, multiple career paths led them to a superintendent position, and one of those paths included beginning as a bilingual classroom teacher in a predominantly Hispanic district.

The majority of participants pursued multiple career paths, beginning as bilingual teachers and progressing from assistant principal, to principal, and finally to district level positions. Although not all participants held director positions prior to being promoted to assistant or associate superintendent, they all served in a comparable capacity at the district level. Participant 3 shared, “I worked hard as a principal for about 6 years and

then I went to an assistant superintendent position.” For current historical trends, four participants reported that their attainment of their superintendency was influenced by them being bilingual and the trajectory of their career path. Participant 4 explained that

It’s statistically founded that there are fewer Latina superintendents in the state of California than even our African American counterparts; part of that is a stereotype that’s applied towards Latinos, both from within the Latino culture as well as outside of it.

Participant 4 began her career path as a general classroom teacher and went on to be a vice principal, principal and director of special programs, and director of curriculum in the same district. Her career path was slightly different because she attained an assistant superintendent position at the county level. Participant 4 shared, “A superintendent position came open in one of the neighboring districts and was encouraged to apply. I have been here for the past 2 years.”

Data Analysis for Research Question 2

The study’s second research question asked, “How do Latina superintendents describe their gatekeeping experiences on their career path leading to their superintendency?” The following section presents the qualitative data from five superintendent interviews that were coded into themes. Five of the five interview questions were used to collect the data presented. Table 4 shows the theme and frequency counts.

Theme 2: Positive gatekeeping and career advancement occurred in predominately Hispanic communities. Of the participants, 100% shared their gatekeeping experiences as they advanced in predominantly Hispanic communities. The

following section analyzes the qualitative data for themes in response to the second research question. This theme was confirmed in five of five (100%) interviews conducted via Zoom at an average frequency of 18 times.

Table 4

Theme, Participants, Sources, and Frequency for Research Question 2

Theme	Participants	Frequency		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
2. Positive gatekeeping and career advancement occurred in predominately Hispanic communities	5	13	5	18

The data analysis is presented based on the responses to Interview Question 2. Throughout the five participant Zoom interviews, Theme 2 was evident, resulting in 13 responses from the participants. Three of the five participants experienced positive gatekeeping only as they were supported in their career advancement by the community and by their administrators. The participants took multiple career paths before advancing to a superintendent position (as shown in Table 2). The participants' school boards were overwhelmingly composed of Latinas, and the students were on average 96% Hispanic with the lowest percentage at 90% (as shown in Table 1).

Participant 1 stated, "I think in my case, he has helped me, but it's just what I've been seeking out, because I've had the options of being able to pick and choose the communities I wanted to work with." Participant 5 echoed how she experienced positive gatekeeping because she was supported in all her positions by the community and by important administrators and the board: "I had two different mentors, elementary principals, and they saw my leadership ability." Participant 4 stated, "I had a

superintendent that felt very much he knew what was in my best interest; he was influential on me.”

Participant 5 mentioned how being Latina and having a bilingual education credential placed her in the position of becoming a TOSA and then ascending to being the director of English language learners and categorical programs: “This really helped me in getting the director of curriculum position that opened up in my same district. My career path trajectory started because I was in an all Hispanic community, and I was bilingual.” Participant 5 shared that within her organization, she was groomed by her two principals because she had taught at two different schools. Both principals helped her continue her trajectory to a superintendent position. Participant 5 shared,

So my principals, I would consider them both mentors, as they saw leadership ability in me and because of that they would always ask me if I would be a mentor, usually student teachers would be placed in my classroom for me to train.

Data Analysis for Research Question 3:

Research Question 3 asked, “How do Latina superintendents describe their gatekeeping experiences on their application and interview process leading to their superintendency?” The following sections display the qualitative data that were coded into themes from the five interviews with superintendents and outlines their responses to Research Question 3. The data presented were collected from two of the four interview questions. Table 5 shows the theme and frequencies for a total count of 13.

Theme 3: Latinas had positive gatekeeping experiences during their application process. Of participants, 60% experienced positive gatekeeping experiences before attaining the position of superintendent. Participants’ responses analyzed the

qualitative data for themes to the first research question. Upon further examination of the data collected, one theme under the third research question emerged. Three of the five Zoom interviews yielded a total of 13 responses.

Table 5

Theme, Participants, Sources, and Frequency for Research Question 3

Theme	Participants	Frequency		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
3. Latinas had positive gatekeeping experiences during their application process	3	10	3	13

In three of the five Zoom interviews, participants referenced gatekeeping experiences as being positive. They stated that they were only interested in working in a predominately Hispanic community. Participants were quick to emphasize the critical nature of the increasing level of support they received along their career path, which aided in their advancement to their superintendent position. The majority of participants received support from former supervisors. One individual stated that she also received assistance from someone from the county office who opened the door for them to pursue working in a K–12 unified school district. Participants experienced positive gatekeeping during the applicant and interview process and using the strategy of only applying for superintendent positions within a predominately Hispanic community led to these positive gatekeeping experiences. Participant 1 stated,

I've actually searched for different things. I've just been blessed that at a time when I was ready, you know, and I always say, and I think we as women, say this a lot that that, at the right time, the right opportunity comes right. Um, but it's not

bad is that we underestimate the quality of our work. But I guess I in this case, I've been blessed that people have been able to see it.

Each participant acknowledged the significant benefit of knowing they were working with the right individuals along the way, which aided in their advancement to the position of superintendent.

Participant 4 described her positive gatekeeping experiences. She had people encourage her to apply for a superintendency position. Participant 4 said, "I was actually encouraged to apply because opportunities to apply to be a superintendent, especially, for a Latina are so few." Participant 3 confirmed how she was appointed to her first superintendent position because she had been in the district for some time. She indicated how her gatekeeping experiences differed from most because her position as the superintendent came to her. Participant 3 shared,

There were two White gentlemen thinking that one of them would get the superintendent position after the retirement of the current superintendent. I did not express any interest in the position since I was part of the hiring process, so I thought I wouldn't be considered but then the board said that I would be perfect for the job and I was then appointed.

Furthermore, Participant 5 mentioned, "I think the diversity of our board you know, has contributed to that they want diversity in leaders so like, you know, I'm Mexican American and all of my associate and assistant superintendents are Mexican." Participant 5 continued,

I was appointed associate superintendent for curriculum and instruction. So I didn't have to interview for that; I was just appointed as an associate

superintendent, and in our district, our district was one superintendent and two associates. So when that associate left, the superintendent appointed me as the associate superintendent.

Participant 5 worked in a district with a high-percentage Hispanic student population. The superintendent, a Hispanic male, was her mentor and the one responsible for her being appointed as the associate superintendent in the district, which later helped her attain the superintendent position in the same district.

Data Analysis for Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked, “How do Latina school superintendents describe their gatekeeping experiences leading to their superintendency because of their gender and ethnicity?” The data from the responses to the third interview question were analyzed and revealed two dominant themes as shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Theme, Participants, Sources, and Frequency for Research Question 4—Highest to Lowest Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
4. Gender did not seem to be a gatekeeping barrier	5	20	0	20
5. Ethnicity opened gates for career advancement within predominately Hispanic districts	5	18	0	18

Theme 4: Gender did not seem to be a gatekeeping barrier. In an analysis of the data of Interview Question 4, the most frequent responses were coded to this theme, which was noted in five sources from Zoom interviews, with a total response count of 20.

All five participants discussed gatekeeping challenges as they related to gender equity as not being difficult and/or important. Participants shared comments like “My supervisors looked at me as the go to person” and “I was the bilingual teacher and taken under their wing.” In sharing their experiences, they said that common threads led to them being where they were as superintendents.

Three of the five participants discussed conversations regarding gender and never felt it was a challenge when it related to them acquiring the superintendent position but that the job was going to be done and the community trusted them. Participant 3 stated, “I was a successful principal and worked day and night and me being a woman was never an issue.” Participant 1 echoed the sentiment of two other participants when she said,

You know, of course, certainly starting off, most teachers are females. So I think in that aspect, my gender helped out a bit but starting with being a principal—there were not many female principals. At the secondary, we had more female principals at the elementary, and I was a principal at the elementary level. So in that case, it kind of fit in there. Um, I really started seeing the number decrease as I got into cabinet level positions but never felt it was a factor in me acquiring a different position.

Gender did not seem to be an issue with participants. All shared positive feedback when it came to gender and the challenges they faced if any because of gender. In most cases it helped them be where they were because they began as bilingual teachers.

However, Participant 2 confirmed that there was a good old boy network:

It's a good old boy network, you know, and these guys golf together, and they have things in common; I don't golf. I go home after work and cook dinner and clean my house. You see that but I don't think it was a factor of me getting what I have now.

Participant 5 echoed to what Participant 2 had to share about gender experiences:

I will say that I feel I felt definitely more difference with my gender than I do with my ethnicity. Being in the area I'm in, there's a lot of Hispanics, so I didn't feel that different but being a woman, as a leader in a superintendent role, made it different. I witnessed the boys club, when I went to meetings; the joke would be I feel like I'm in junior high again, where all the men sit over here and the women sit over here. However, being female did not impede me to get where I'm at.

Participant 3 confirmed that her being a Latina helped her in her position:

I think that ethnicity and gender helped; the recruiter was also Latino. He was a Latino male and the previous two superintendents in the district I was applying for were White males, so the board was ready for a change.

Theme 5: Ethnicity opened gates for career advancement within predominately Hispanic districts. Further analysis of the data of Research Question 4 showed that the most frequent responses for challenges based on ethnicity were coded to this theme, which was noted in five Zoom interviews, with a total frequency count of 18 responses.

Five of the five participants referred to how the demographic of the district made a difference. Participant 2 shared how when she worked in a non-Hispanic community

and with a White board she was very unhappy. She shared the emotional aspect of working:

Going to work to a place where you're not wanted, and I knew it. I knew I was not wanted even though the community trusted me. When you keep putting up the olive branch and it keeps being pushed away.

She confirmed that ethnicity plays an important role in the type of school district one works in. Participant 2 shared that even though she would only prefer to be on a specific side of town, she would not apply elsewhere:

My opportunities were probably better on this side of town than they were on the rich side of town where it's all Anglo. There are certain districts if you're not blond hair and blue eyes, I don't apply. This is my comfort zone. It was a handful of districts on the rich side of town.

Participant 4 shared that her next job was in a poor community: "Everyone there was brown, like me, it is a brown world with a brown board and coming after somebody that they didn't trust, I had to build that trust." Participant 1 shared how she was lucky that she was in a predominantly Hispanic community: "When I looked for my current position, I purposely searched for a predominantly Hispanic community, high low SES, and high English language learner community because to me, I thought, who would want to work in such a community." Participant 5 echoed a similar demographic experience of her superintendency search. Emotions that some participants experienced in their search for a superintendent position were evidenced in that working in a predominantly Hispanic community made a difference in attaining that position as a Latina. Three participants experienced having a better opportunity to become a superintendent in a predominantly

Hispanic community. Participant 1 described her own experience: “I think in this case, all of them wanted my demographic in a person with my experience.”

Further, Participant 2 mentioned that she also felt that sometimes it is who you know within the community. Participant 2 stated, “It is basically who you know, more than what you know; who you get with, the social circles are different.” In addition, Participant 3 felt that ethnicity did not play a role because the recruiter was Latino. Participant 3 stated, “He was Latino and I think that helped me because I think the finalists was a White male and so in this particular district, mostly Hispanic, it gave me the upper hand.”

Data Analysis for Research Question 5

Research Question 5 asked, “How do Latina superintendents describe the strategies they used to gain their position and overcome any gatekeeping on their ascendancy to their superintendency?” The strategies the participants used were to choose a predominately Hispanic district, leave non-Hispanic districts, move to a new district when they were blocked, and respond to mentors and sponsors. The data from the responses to the fourth research question were analyzed and revealed two dominant themes as outlined in Table 7.

Theme 6: Latina success was due to mentors and sponsors. Of the participants, 80% shared that having a mentor was a key factor in their career as superintendents. Four of the five participants shared how their mentors throughout their career made a big difference with the encouragement they each received by their mentors. Two participants felt the mentor they had encouraged them to become administrators. The most frequent theme for Research Question 5 among all participants showed 26

frequencies. An analysis of the qualitative data for the theme in answering the last research question with individual responses is outlined in the following sections.

Table 7

Theme, Participants, Sources, and Frequency for Research Question 5—Highest to Lowest Frequency

Theme	Participants	Frequency		
		Interviews	Artifacts	Total
6. Latina success was due to mentors and sponsors	4	26	0	26
7. Intentionally selected predominately Hispanic communities	5	13	5	18

Further analysis of the data of Research Question 5 showed that the most frequent responses on suggested strategies were coded to Theme 6. This theme was noted in three Zoom interviews with a response count of 26 responses.

Four of the five participants shared that it was crucial for Latinas to have some type of mentor who would help and guide them to go through the right channels, and it was important to know someone who was occupying the job. Participant 1 stated,

If you're a principal, and you know that that's where you want to be, get to know someone, because opportunities for shadowing, you know, just having lunch to just talk and knowing that most people are busy, you need to be able to make the effort and go out of your way to be able to touch base.

Participant 5 and Participant 3 echoed what Participant 1 shared. Participant 5 stated, "I was at two different elementary school sites so my principals; I would consider them both mentors, as they saw leadership ability in me." Participant 5 mentioned being in the same district opened doors for her to get to the position where she was: "It is a strong

practice in the district to hire within; when the associate superintendent retired, I was appointed as the associate superintendent, and this was a way to say that I was going to be the next superintendent.” Participant 5 also stated,

This is where I don’t feel I really had any [negative] gatekeeping experiences, being in the same district. I was able to get out of the classroom and do different positions, which I think that actually opened up the doors for me.

Furthermore, Participant 1 referred to an example of how her principal, Hispanic male, was always pushing her to do better and try for new positions:

I had two White males and one Hispanic male throughout my teaching years that I can say pushed me to become an administrator. Because of one of these three leaders, the doors were opened for me to looking at a K–12 unified district county office experience. So I’d say they were probably the most significant.

Additionally, Participant 4 stated that a previous board member approached her and persuaded her to apply for a newly vacant superintendent position in a nearby school district. Her superintendent, too, offered support and encouragement. Participant 4 stated, “I received support from various individuals to take the leap of faith and apply for the post of superintendent.” Participant 4 discussed how her employment with the County Office of Education served as a springboard for gaining the fortitude to submit her application for the superintendent post and navigating the interview process: “I was chosen as interim superintendent and then awarded a contract to continue as superintendent at the conclusion of the first year.”

Theme 7: Intentionally selected predominately Hispanic communities.

Following further analysis of the data from Research Question 5, the most common

responses on suggested strategies were coded to this theme, which was identified in five Zoom interviews, with a total of 25 responses.

The data collected were subjected to further examination, which resulted in the identification of a second theme under Research Question 5. Participant 4 mentioned that working in an all-Hispanic community made a difference: “Superintendency was influenced by being in the valley, and having a lot of Hispanics, I was able to relate.” In other words, the way superintendents were selected was that there was a connection with the community, given their ethnicity and cultural background. For example, Participant 1 said, “I was hired by virtue of it being a Latina” and another mentioned the influence of the district being predominantly Hispanic and a low-SES community, which gave her more opportunities to attain a superintendent position. In addition to demographics and student populations, prior leadership influences and the broader culture of communities can also be considered in the context of attaining a superintendent position. Throughout the five participants’ Zoom interviews, this pattern was evident, resulting in 18 responses from the participants (Table 8). Although the continuum was vast, all of the participants referenced the fact that the school district being predominantly Hispanic, the community being mainly low SES, and being bilingual made a difference when attaining their superintendency position.

Summary

The objective statement, research questions, and methodology along with the data collection technique, population, and sample have been thoroughly discussed in this chapter. A detailed presentation and analysis of the findings were generated from the data, which comprised five interview participants as well as supporting evidence from an

artifact evaluation, were presented and discussed in the interviews. The purpose of this study was to learn about the experiences, challenges, and solutions of Latinas who were interested in pursuing a superintendent post. Seven themes emerged from the data regarding the superintendents' lived experiences, challenges, and strategies.

Table 8

Summary of Themes and Frequencies by Research Number

Research question	Theme	Participants	Frequency		
			Interviews	Artifacts	Total
1	1. Multiple career paths were experienced on their way to becoming a superintendent	4	48	5	53
2	2. Positive gatekeeping and career advancement occurred in predominately Hispanic communities	5	18	5	23
3	3. Latinas positive gatekeeping experiences during the application process	3	13	3	16
4	4. Gender did not seem to be a gatekeeping barrier	5	20	0	20
	5. Ethnicity opened gates for career advancement within predominately Hispanic districts	5	18	0	18
5	6. Latina success was due to mentors and sponsors	4	26	0	26
	7. Intentionally selected predominately Hispanic communities	5	20	5	25

As a final overview of the research study, Chapter V provides a list of important conclusions as well as any unexpected findings that were discovered as a result of the investigation. A discussion of the consequences for action, recommendations for more

research, and concluding remarks and thoughts on the topic follow the results and conclusions.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings, conclusions, and suggestions of this research study are reported in the final chapter of this study. The most important findings, as well as any unexpected findings, are presented followed by the conclusions taken from those findings, which are then presented. A review of the consequences for action highlights techniques that could be taken in the pursuit of a superintendent post as a Latina. Also included are ideas for future research that may contribute to the breadth and/or depth of knowledge regarding the topic of Latinas' gatekeeping experiences as they progressed through the ranks to their position of superintendent. The final section of this chapter closes with the researcher's reflections and observations.

Research Methods

A qualitative multicase study was used to describe the lived experiences, gatekeeping, and strategies that Latinas implemented to attain a superintendent position. The methodology was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Latina superintendents describe their career path progression?
2. How do Latina superintendents describe their gatekeeping experiences on their career path leading to their superintendency?
3. How do Latina superintendents describe their gatekeeping experiences on their application and interview process leading to their superintendency?
4. How do Latina school superintendents describe their gatekeeping experiences leading to their superintendency because of their gender and ethnicity?
5. How do Latina superintendents describe the strategies they used gain this position and over overcome any gatekeeping on their ascendancy to their superintendency?

A qualitative multicase study was conducted to explain the lived experiences, problems, and strategies Latinas employed to obtain a position as a school administrator. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with five superintendents regarding their gatekeeping experiences during their pursuit of their superintendent position in their district. The five qualitative interviews were conducted through Zoom and recorded with the participants' permission. The researcher took measures to ensure that the information acquired for the study was maintained in a secure location. The participants in the study were Latina superintendents in California. The researcher decided to employ purposeful sampling using specific criteria to choose participants from the pool of Latina superintendents in California. The criteria of being a first-, second-, or third-generation immigrant and being a superintendent in a California public school were used to limit the pool of superintendents who met the criteria to five from the total population of 43 California Latina superintendents.

Key Findings

The qualitative data were collated and organized into themes to address the research questions about the Latina superintendents' gatekeeping experiences when they pursued their superintendent position. The qualitative data consisted of participant responses from five Zoom in-depth interviews, with artifact review evidence supported from various district. Within the qualitative data, the researcher determined that 10 or more occurrences from at least three of the five participants were included as a theme for this study. Based on these themes that addressed the research questions, Chapter V organizes these themes into key findings as well as conclusions and implications for action. The conclusions were derived from the key themes found about the gatekeeping

experiences of Latinas' quest for their superintendent position. Seminal research from the literature review was shared in the relevant sections of this chapter to support the key findings and conclusions. The following are the key findings about how the Latina superintendents' gatekeeping experiences progressed and how they acquired their superintendent position.

Key Finding 1: Latinas Advanced Only in Predominately Hispanic Districts and Moved Through Progression of Positions

The first major finding from the study was that Latinas advanced only in predominately Hispanic districts and that they moved through a progression of positions, including bilingual teacher, teacher on special assignment (TOSA), vice principal, principal, director, and assistant superintendent culminating with the superintendent position. Four of the five participants advanced in other districts, but all candidates chose to remain in predominately Hispanic districts. This finding adds to the literature as this study found multiple career paths were available to Latina superintendents; however, they felt these career paths were limited to predominately Hispanic communities. Three of the five participants started their career path as an elementary bilingual teacher, and their second career path was found as TOSA training teachers on English language. In this study, it was found that if positive gatekeeping experiences are available for superintendents in a district, their career path can continue in that district. However, if there is a negative gatekeeper in that district, an alternative district will likely need to be found to advance to higher level positions.

Participant 2 said, "In [XYZ] county, it is basically who you know more than what you know, so sometimes you have to go to a different district to get a higher

position and then return to the district you developed relationships.”

Another factor that contributed to this key finding was that the Latinas’ careers might advance in the same district in which they started, but in some instances, they might advance their career in multiple districts. Based on this study, it was found that 80% of the participants started out as elementary bilingual teachers and all participants took the path of becoming a vice principal and then a principal before moving to a district-level position, which is consistent with research by Superville (2017) and Glass (2000) that found that women rarely follow the traditional (high school) path to the superintendency.

Two of the five superintendents interviewed went on to become superintendents in the districts where they began their lengthy and successful careers. These two participants began their bilingual teaching career in a predominately Hispanic district where they continued their career path in the same district and were able to ascend to vice principal, principal, and a district-level position in the same district. For these two participants, their continual career promotions and effective leadership experiences were well known throughout their district, which resulted in eventually getting promoted to the district’s superintendent. However, three of the five participants did not share a similar experience and moved to other districts. Of the participants, 60% left their first district to attain an assistant superintendent position. Consequently, Participant 3 had to gain experience and overcome a gatekeeper blocker. She had to move to another district, and not until that gatekeeper blocker was out of the district was she able to return as the district’s superintendent. The other two participants went on to different districts and gained experience, which later led them to attain a superintendent position. Participant 4

went on to work at a county level as an assistant superintendent to be able to get a superintendent position in a predominately Hispanic district.

Participants mentioned that they had clear and consistent messaging about choosing districts with a high proportion of Hispanic students and communities as a better opportunity for career advancement. This was confirmed by a high frequency count of 18 in Theme 7 in the interviews. Four of the five participants took multiple paths that shaped their careers. All participants stated that they purposefully sought out communities with a high English learning population because that was their background and area of expertise. These were primarily demonstrated in Theme 7. According to their responses during the interviews, participants mentioned this 18 times, indicating that they believed working with English learners influenced their promotions to leadership positions in districts with a high rate of English learners and a majority Hispanic student population. As the study notes, four of the five participants identified that gates opened with more feasibility when they worked in districts with high English learner student population. Participant 1 stated, “I mentored teachers who would work with English learners, then after that, I was asked to start a program at the central office for English learners.” This finding is similar to a study conducted by Valenzuela (2021) about the connection between leaders and students. Valenzuela’s study concluded that the quality of educators’ relationships with students can result in a positive school connection, which results in increased education of and interest in school by students, leading to academic improvement (Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, & Aupperlee, 2009). To have gates opened for Latinas as they attain a superintendent position, working in a high English learning district with a majority Hispanic student population was repeatedly mentioned by all five

participants (100%). Participant 1 stated, “I’ve always wanted to impact at a broader level and what better than to work with students who look like me and make that connection given my background is similar to my students.” Participant 3 echoed this and said, “Because of my ethnicity that made me have to learn how to do things well, quickly, because you need to help your own people.”

All participants reported that speaking fluent Spanish and coming from the same Hispanic roots provided a better opportunity to attain a superintendent position in a predominately Hispanic district. This finding was based on participants being employed in a predominately Hispanic community of 90% or more Hispanic and most likely a Hispanic school board. According to five of the five participants, the demographics of their school board showed that most of the members were female and Hispanic. In addition, all participants not only spoke Spanish, but they also looked Hispanic and were deemed to support Hispanic values.

Key Finding 2: Having Mentors and Sponsors Led to Gates Being Opened for Latinas to Advance Their Career

The second major key finding from this study was that having mentors and sponsors led to gates being opened for Latinas to advance their career and ultimately to become a superintendent. Four of the five participants confirmed that having mentors is critical when aspiring to a superintendent position. As evidenced in the data for Theme 6, when eliciting for mentorship that contributes to Latinas’ ability to attain a superintendent position, 80% of the participants provided light on the importance of the mentorship domain theme. Participant 1 shared that mentorship with her principal groomed her to expand on her leadership skills and to apply for the vice principal

position. Participant 5 shared her sponsorship with her principal who went on to become the superintendent and who was the person responsible to open gates for her to become the superintendent when he retired. In this scenario, her former superintendent was her sponsor to the superintendent position. As evidenced in the data from Theme 6, this category achieved a high frequency of 26 mentions during the interviews, showing that participants have a strong view that mentorship and sponsorship have an effect moving forward into a superintendent position.

Participant 5 stated, “So I have relationships with some of my board members because one of them was my previous principal who has helped me along the way.” Because the majority of superintendents are White men, the possibility that those White male superintendents will mentor other White men is significant, given the lack of minority superintendents already in place (Méndez-Morse, 2004). A mentor can navigate the path for a woman to become a superintendent. Sampson and Davenport’s (2010) study involved female superintendents in Texas who stated that it was very important to find mentors (Hernandez, 2018). Given the difficulty women have in advancing to senior administrative roles, having a mentor to provide guidance or encouragement can help them succeed. Of the participants, 80% shared how their mentors helped them look forward to an administrative position and helped their careers. Participant 1 shared that her first assistant principal encouraged her to seek a position outside of the classroom: “I’ve been blessed that people have been able to see how I hustled and worked hard.” The profession, particularly for women, may be extremely isolated. Female superintendents can gain the support they require in such a hard position by having a mentor. Tallerico (2000) addressed how career mobility, sponsorship, and the

application and interview process were factors that influenced women to attain a superintendent position.

Key Finding 3: By Applying in Predominately Hispanic Districts, Gates Were Easily Opened and Resulted in the Application and Interview Process to Land Them With a Superintendent Position

Participants referred to speaking Spanish and representing the Hispanic culture as an essential component to be considered as a superintendent in a predominately Hispanic district (90% or more). This key finding was validated by a high frequency count of 13 in Theme 2, and 6.8% of the participants stated that opportunities to advance were available to them due to these factors. Four participants expressed that starting as a bilingual teacher opened their path to high positions within a majority Hispanic community. This study outlined that fluently speaking Spanish and being familiar with the Hispanic culture opened gates for participants to the superintendent position. Participant 1 shared, “I wanted to work in a district with high number of English language learners, just because that has been the area that I’ve always worked with, and that I have enjoyed working with that particular community.” Three participants mentioned that speaking Spanish opened gates to transition to administrative positions. Having the same cultural identity and values as the Hispanic community opened gates for the participants as they transitioned from position to position both within and across predominately Hispanic districts. Participant 2 said, “Because of my experience as a bilingual teacher, I was able to pursue additional opportunities within majority Hispanic districts.” Two superintendents discussed how developing a bilingual program was a beginning point that led to more educational responsibilities at the district level.

Participant 2 stated, “I got tapped into mentoring teachers as this is part of a Title VII grant. My mentoring teachers working with English learners helped me get my master’s paid for.” It is evident that for four of the five Latina superintendents interviewed, fluently speaking Spanish and working in a predominately Hispanic district led to their career advancement within the district. Their career path began by teaching, fluently speaking Spanish, and understanding the community’s cultural background, and eventually they ascended to a district-level position that would finally result in a superintendent position.

Unexpected Findings

Unexpected Finding 1: Inspiration to Be a Superintendent Came Later in Their Career With the Encouragement From Sponsors and Mentors

Of the participants, 100% shared that in their early careers, they had no aspirations to become a superintendent. As evidenced in the data for Theme 3, consequently, all the participants shared how they did not want to become superintendents and went on to share that they loved their students. The category of Latinas who do not aspire to be school administrators was formed as a result of interview questions probing participants’ career paths. Based on the interviews conducted, it was evident that not all participants were interested in becoming a school superintendent. According to interview data, striving to be an administrator was not a factor in these Latinas’ decision to become a school superintendent. All participants clearly indicated that at no given point in their initiation of their career did they ever think of becoming an administrator, let alone a superintendent, until they were encouraged by a mentor or sponsor. Participant 1 clearly shared she was not interested to become an administrator:

“I loved every minute of being with my kids; I saw how hard my administrator worked and that was something I always told myself, forget it, never.” The frequency of Latina superintendents not aspiring to a high administrative position throughout their career path made a difference by having mentors and sponsors (as indicated in Table 8).

Based on the five interviews, the data analyzed showed that all five Latina superintendents never desired to become a superintendent until they were mentored.

According Tallerico (2000), her study summarized how

access to the superintendentship is influenced by (a) gatekeeping decisions based on power holders’ personal criteria, (b) routine practices associated with superintendent headhunting, (c) standards embedded in the educational administration profession, and (d) American society’s dominant ideologies and sociocultural values. (p. 21)

The interviewed participants unanimously endorsed the lack of inspiration to be a superintendent, making 22 references on how each did not want to become an administrator. All the respondents indicated their desire to remain in classroom with their students. It was noted that mentors and sponsors offer a plethora of opportunities for Latinas to advance in their careers. Yet, in this study about Latinas attaining a superintendent position, it was discovered through interview data that mentoring consistently occurred among Latina superintendents to advance in their career.

Unexpected Finding 2: Gender Was Not a Gatekeeping Factor for Latinas to Attain a Superintendent Position

An unexpected finding was that gender did not play a role in the gatekeeping experiences of Latinas when attaining a superintendent position. According to Martin

Perez (2021) and Valenzuela (2021), California has currently 43 Latina superintendents out of the 1,036 school districts. This number seems to be quite small in comparison to the number of superintendents currently in California. What was most surprising about this study's findings was how gender had the least impact to the career path of a Latina superintendent. For instance, while being a classroom teacher and enjoying that position, Latinas being encouraged by male administrators to apply for higher positions says that gender was not relevant in the selection and encouragement of moving forward in the Latinas' career path. Latina superintendents in this study showed a variety of insight on the insecurity Latinas might have about the career path leading to a superintendent position. Because of White males' lengthy dominance in the superintendent role (Brunner, 2003), it was not expected that Latina superintendents would aspire to the position.

Conclusions

The following conclusions on gatekeeping experiences for Latina superintendents were drawn based on the research findings and validated by the literature.

Conclusion 1: Latinas Advanced Through Multiple Positions and for the Most Part, Moved to Other Districts to Advance

It can be concluded that Latinas who choose to continue in predominately Hispanic districts advance through successively more responsible positions. Despite their frequent comments that they enjoyed their first job as a bilingual teacher and had no plans to advance beyond that position, Latinas continued to work at higher level positions throughout their careers until they became superintendents. Participant 3 stated, "I cried

buckets when I was asked to leave my classroom because of my promotion. It was never my plan to do something else aside from teaching.”

As a result of this study, it can be concluded that it is critical to have multilevel experiences prior to becoming a superintendent. Participants in this study confirmed the trajectory of taking multiple career paths before ascending to a superintendent position. Furthermore, it can be concluded that following multiple career paths is beneficial before taking a superintendent position. According to Kowalski et al. (2010), most superintendents have taken the traditional route of classroom instructor, site administrator, and central office administrator to achieve this position. All the participants stated that they chose to apply as a superintendent in a predominately Hispanic student population district.

Although all of the participants stated that their preferred place of employment was in a predominantly Hispanic district, they confirmed that it was easier for them to advance in their career in districts with students similar to them. It can also be concluded that having a Hispanic background, sharing similar roots, and having worked as a bilingual teacher at some point in their career provided a pathway to being culturally competent in a Hispanic community. Based on the findings of this study and supported by the literature, it is also concluded that a key factor for Latinas gaining superintendent positions is working in a predominantly Hispanic school district.

It can be concluded that Latinas’ bilingualism and biculturalism were praised as factors that helped the participants advance to a superintendent position by providing an unconventional lens of cultural competence that could easily be led to the incorporation and prioritization of the needs and issues of underserved groups. Consequently, for three

of the five participants, beginning as bilingual elementary teacher was a clear path to their career advancement and eventually a superintendency role regardless of advancing their career in one district or multiple districts.

As a result of all participants believing that starting in a high English-learning district with a majority Hispanic student population is essential, it is fair to state that Latina superintendents experienced positive gatekeeping experiences because of their ethnicity and choice of working in high English-learning districts with high Hispanic student population. It can be concluded that multiple paths for Latinas to advance depend on the opportunities presented if there is no gatekeeper blocker. However, if there is a gatekeeper blocker, Latinas may need to move to majority Hispanic communities where there is no gatekeeper blocker and then go back to a bigger nonmajority Hispanic districts when they acquire more experience. This conclusion is supported by the responses that all participants were currently working in a majority Hispanic school district. It is concluded that in the next 10 years, as more communities transition to an 80%–90% Hispanic population, many more Hispanic leaders will be employed. Specifically, because there are so many Latina teachers at the elementary level, there will very certainly be more Latina superintendents. Therefore, it can also be concluded that there is more likelihood for Latinas to be hired in a high Hispanic district with low social economic status (SES) and less likelihood not to be hired if this is not the demographic of the school district.

Conclusion 2: Positive Gatekeeping Through Mentors and Sponsors Occurred Throughout Their Careers and in Their Application and Interview Process

As a result of this study, it can be concluded that when Latinas apply in predominately Hispanic districts, the application and interview process results in a smooth advancement in their career. In this study, mentors were those leaders preparing participants to show their leadership skills outside of their classroom and be visible. Sponsorship refers to the extent to which an individual is represented in an organization by individuals who share similar characteristics. It can be concluded that teachers can attain higher level positions as long as a member of the “in” group is a person or group with a disproportionately large presence in an organization. Once Latinas are trained and if they possess the necessary academic and professional credentials, they have automatic access to management positions.

It can also be concluded that Latinas have a greater opportunity to attain an administrative position when they are encouraged by sponsors to apply for higher level administrative positions. Sponsor relationship is the most common type of relationship between the participant and her principal. Some participants in this study had been “tapped on the shoulder” by their principals to apply for administrative positions. Other participants were sponsored by informal coalitions of public education professionals, which appeared to have a sizable influence on their superintendency. Participant 1 and Participant 2 confirmed that their principal had influenced them to advance to an administrative position. It is safe to conclude that according to the interviewed participants in this study, having a mentor and sponsor opened paths leading to their career advancement. Consequently, Latinas are most likely to aspire to a superintendent

position when being guided by a mentor. It is safe to predict that more Latinx superintendents in predominately Hispanic districts will cover these positions because 55% of all students in California are Hispanic, and this is the fastest growing ethnicity. The Latinx population increased from 7.7% in 2010 to 10.5% in 2020, accounting for over half of the 30 million increase in the total U.S. population (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (Humes et al., 2011), between 2000 and 2010, the Latinx population grew by 43%, which was four times the growth of the total population. It is, therefore, expected for Latinas to train and apply for superintendent positions if the right mentorship and sponsorship occurs by current Latina superintendents.

Implications for Actions

This study shed light on five Latinas' lived experiences regarding gatekeeping and challenges in attaining a superintendent position. The study's findings revealed how these Latina superintendents overcame any gates, if any, as they ascended to a superintendent position.

Implication 1: Multiple Career Paths Were Available for Latinas

Based on the conclusion that multiple career paths are available for Latinas who eventually attain a superintendent position, Latinas who were in districts with predominately Hispanic students and community had a higher opportunity for their career advancement. The outcomes of this study shed light on the strategies Latina superintendents employ to overcome gatekeeping experiences on their path to becoming superintendents. The researcher's suggestions for action have the potential to improve Latinas' career paths to superintendent positions by increasing the mentorship required

for Latina superintendents. The issue of low representation of Latinas in superintendent positions is evident and can be overcome by having Latinas mentored and seeking superintendent positions in predominately Hispanic districts to attain superintendency experience before moving to a mixed-race district that is not predominately Hispanic. It is recommended that aspiring Latina superintendents should consider the following:

1. They should reach out to leaders from the California Association for Latino School Administrators (CALSA) for potential recruitment and training focusing on attaining a superintendent position at the district level or county level.
2. They should join in training at the university level and administrative organizations that prepare teachers to become superintendents. It is currently worthwhile for university education departments to join forces with other agents that provide professional development, in-service training, and support systems to focus on teacher recruitment and encourage higher level administrative positions.
3. They should improve their career paths by seeking employment in other positions aside from teaching in the classroom to open gates for them to the superintendency.
4. They should seek prior job success and use it as a springboard to other opportunities.
5. They should be motivated to serve communities with a high proportion of Latino students. It is critical for aspiring Latina superintendents to view their leadership abilities as transferable to any school district rather than limiting their applications to districts with a high Latino population.
6. They should understand fully the community's culture and fluently speak Spanish.
7. They should present in teaching credentialing programs to promote future teachers to advance to administrative credentialing programs.

8. They should present at conferences and colleges promoting advancement from teaching to administrative credentialing.
9. CDE and California Teacher Credentialing (CTC) should provide training for Latina teachers to explore career advancement through multiple career paths.

Implication 2: Mentorship/Sponsorship Was a Positive Gate to Becoming a Superintendent

Based on the conclusion that having mentors and sponsors is critical for Latinas to advance to a superintendent position, the following are recommendations for current Latina superintendents:

1. Superintendents should act as mentors and sponsors to other Latinas and assess the gatekeeping.
2. Superintendents should reach out to Latina teachers and actively recruit them; otherwise, the discrepancy will continue.
3. Superintendents should present at conferences, such as the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) and CALSA, and recruit Latina teachers to become administrators.
4. Superintendents should provide professional development to Latinas, specifically Latinas entering the field of education and those already in the field.
5. Superintendents should assist Latinas in locating mentors who will coach them along their career path.
6. Superintendents should network and mentor future Latina administrators.
7. Superintendents should provide ongoing leadership mentoring to female superintendents.

8. Professional organizations are tasked with cultivating coaches and mentors from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives to assist aspiring Latina superintendents in preparing themselves for their career advancement and contain steps to useful action. Furthermore, the findings from this study should be presented at conferences sponsored by ACSA, CALSA, and AASA. According to attendees, CALSA, which began in 2004, is beneficial in terms of networking and mentoring. CALSA's mentorship program participants have reported that they have recognized areas for growth and gained an advocate (Magdaleno, 2006). The mentoring program is intended to develop close bonds among Latino/a administrators. Receiving such assistance and coaching can surely add to the success of a Latina administrator. CALSA and other mentorship programs concentrate on interviewing and recruiting issues as well as providing ongoing leadership mentoring to female superintendents.

Implication 3: By Applying in Predominately Hispanic Districts, Gates Were Easily Opened, Resulting in the Application and Interview Process to Land Latinas a Superintendent Position

Based on the conclusion that having Latinas apply in predominately Hispanic districts, the application and interview process results as a smooth advancement in their career. Therefore, the following are recommendations:

1. When selecting a school superintendent, boards and administrators should evaluate their selection process and be aware of how the process works.
2. Professional organizations must develop and provide training to aspiring Latina superintendents on how to prepare for the application and interview process when applying for a superintendent position.

3. CALSA should provide training for aspiring Latina superintendents on how to prepare for the application and interview process when applying for a superintendent position.
4. ACSA should provide training for aspiring Latina superintendents on how to prepare for the application and interview process when applying for a superintendent position.
5. The California School Boards Association (CSBA) should provide training for aspiring Latina superintendents on how to prepare for the application and interview process when applying for a superintendent position.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study contributed results and conclusions to the literature on Latinas ascending to the position of superintendent in predominately Hispanic communities and school districts. The study is a snapshot of these superintendents' lived experiences in predominantly Hispanic communities, but it has the potential to inspire future researchers to delve deeper into the complexities of advancement for Latinas in education. Based on the findings of the study, the following areas of future research are recommended:

1. This study was conducted as a multicase study, gathering qualitative data from superintendents' lived experiences. It is recommended that a future qualitative multiple case study approach incorporating data from both superintendents and board members would broaden and deepen the data and a better narrative understanding of how Latinas overcome gatekeeping to reach the position of superintendent.
2. This study concentrated on Latinas working in predominantly Hispanic communities. It is recommended that extending this multiple case study to mixed-race school districts would strengthen and validate the study's conclusions and implications.

Superintendents serving in predominantly White, low-income communities or superintendents leading in predominantly non-Hispanic communities are two other populations to consider.

3. It is recommended that a qualitative phenomenological study approach be done incorporating data from Hispanic-dominated school boards and having them describe their recruiting and selection experience in selecting superintendents who are Hispanic and non-Hispanic.
4. It is recommended that a qualitative case study be conducted examining search firms and how they describe their experience of recruiting superintendents for Hispanic-dominated districts. While this study provided a glimpse of Latina superintendents' lived gatekeeping experiences, it has the potential to inspire future studies to analyze how Latina superintendents are being hired in mixed-race districts with less than 50% Hispanic population.
5. This study examined how Latinas' gatekeeping experiences were addressed. It is recommended to examine whether beginning Latina superintendents who are employed in bigger districts with a mixed-race and low-Hispanic student population would provide a deeper perspective.
6. It is recommended that a qualitative case study be done examining Latinx representation in search advisors so more opportunities for Latinas are made available. To establish depth to the current research, it is also recommended for more mentors and sponsors to reach out to Latinas and encourage them to apply for superintendent positions.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

My initial motivation for writing about Latina superintendents stems from my experience working in education as a Latina and observing few Latinas in district administrative positions. Even though Hispanics are the largest ethnic group in California, we continue to see a dearth of Latinas in administrative positions. My dissatisfaction with the low number of Latina superintendents prompted me to investigate why Latinas are underrepresented in superintendent roles. This prompted me to conduct additional research to determine whether Latinas who aspire to supervisory positions encounter gatekeeping. Given the disparity in the number of Latina superintendents and my personal interest in them, my initial goal was to conduct research to determine why the number of Latina superintendents was not comparable to the number of White male and female superintendents despite the fact that the majority of teachers are female.

After intensive hours of locating Latina superintendents to participate in this study, it saddens me to discover that the lack of participation from many Latina superintendents shows why they have very few to no sponsors leading them to higher level positions. During my time of digging deeper to find out why only 43 Latina superintendents exist in California, it was evident that many Latina superintendents did not have 60 min to spare out of their busy schedule to be interviewed and to share their experiences and strategies on how to become a superintendent, which could potentially shed some light on how to overcome gatekeeping to reach a superintendent position. I would like to see Latina superintendents look after other Latinas aspiring to be a superintendent and provide them with mentorship to overcome gatekeeping. I want to believe that current and future Latina superintendents will choose to take their Latina

teachers under their wing and coach, mentor, or sponsor them to become the next school superintendents. Sponsor relationship is the most common type of relationship between an administrator and a teacher aspiring to be a superintendent. Therefore, it is critical for Latina superintendents to focus on the training of their Latina teachers to open doors and prepare them for future superintendent positions.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Invitation Letter

RESEARCH STUDY FOR THE GATEKEEPING EXPERIENCES LATINA SUPERINTENDENTS ENCOUNTERED AS THEY ATTAINED THEIR SUPERINTENDENT POSITON

JULY, 2021

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a multicase study about the Gatekeeping Experiences and Challenges Latina Superintendents Encountered as They Attained Their Superintendent Position. The main investigator of this study is Julie Corona, Doctoral Candidate in Brandman University's Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate in this study because you are a Latina superintendent in a California school district, who met the criteria for this study because of your known expertise as a Latina superintendent.

Five Latina school district superintendents from California will participate in this study through an electronic interview. Participation in the interview should require about one hour of your time which is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the career path progression and the gatekeeping experiences as they advanced to a superintendent position. The second purpose of this study was to describe the gatekeeping experiences of Latina superintendent's application and interview process of their superintendency. Additionally, this study was for Latina superintendents to describe their gatekeeping experiences of gender and ethnicity. Lastly, this study will examine the strategies that Latina superintendents used as they ascended to their superintendent position.

PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate in the study, you will be sent an email link to meet via zoom. A face-to-face interview (via zoom) will be scheduled that will last approximately one hour. For the interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow you to share your experiences as a superintendent regarding the challenges you might have face to attain a superintendent position as well as the strategies you used to surpass those challenges to get to the superintendency. The interview session will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are minimal risks to your participation in this research study. It may be inconvenient for you to arrange time for the interview questions, so for that purpose enough time will be given to you to schedule the interview according to your availability.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to you for participation, but your feedback could help identify the gatekeeping challenges Latinas face as they ascend to a superintendent position and the strategies implemented to overcome those challenges. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators.

ANONYMITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study.

You are encouraged to ask questions, at any time, that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. You may contact me by email at jcorona1@mail.brandman.edu. You can also contact Dr. Keith Larick by email at larick@brandman.edu. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618,

(928) 246-5268.

Respectfully,

Julie Corona

Julie Corona
Doctoral Candidate, Brandman University

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent and Confidentiality Form

INFORMATION ABOUT: Gatekeeping Experiences Latina Superintendents Encountered as They Attained Their Superintendent Position.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Julie Corona, M.A., Doctoral Candidate

PURPOSE OF STUDY: The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the career path progression and the gatekeeping experiences as they advanced to a superintendent position. The second purpose of this study was to describe the gatekeeping experiences of Latina superintendent's application and interview process of their superintendency. Additionally, this study was for Latina superintendents to describe their gatekeeping experiences of gender and ethnicity. Lastly, this study will examine the strategies that Latina superintendents used as they ascended to their superintendent position

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: Your participation in this study may bring the potential benefits of contributing to aspiring Latina superintendents. It will provide insight to the challenges Latinas face when attaining a superintendent position and identify strategies utilized to overcome those challenges. This study will be conducted with existing Latina superintendents who have navigated the two gates and have gained necessary sponsorships. The results from this research will provide a better understanding of the underrepresentation of Latinas in superintendent roles. Therefore, the focus of this study is to provide insight to help future Latinas get through the two gates of career path and application and interview process.

POTENTIAL RISKS: There are no more than minimal risks associated with participating in this research. It is possible that some minimal discomfort will be experienced by participants in the sharing of information about their work with the stakeholders in their community and their interactions with colleagues.

ACTIVITIES: By participating in this study, occurring in July 2021, I agree to the following:

- 1.) Participate in an individual interview lasting approximately 60 minutes via zoom.
- 2.) Although not required of me as a participant in this study, the sharing of notes, texts, or email correspondence that document leading for the challenges of Latinas when attaining a superintendent position, with this researcher may provide greater depth. The researcher will also be gathering available documents, such as resumes, board meetings, and vision and mission statements. Please let the researcher know if you would like to voluntarily share any such correspondence or documents with her.

I understand that:

- a) There are no known major risks or discomforts associated with this research. The session will be held via zoom due to COVID-19 to take safety precautions. Some interview questions may cause me to reflect on barriers and support systems that are unique to my lived experience and sharing my experience in an interview setting may cause minor discomfort.
- b) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research.
- c) The researcher will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher.
- d) The interview will be recorded via zoom. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study all recordings will be destroyed.
- e) All other data and consents will be securely stored for three years after completion of data collection and confidentially shredded or fully deleted.
- f) The possible benefits of this study to me is that my input may help add to research on Latinas overcoming the challenges when attaining a superintendent role. Through my participation in this study, I may experience positive regard and complementary benefits from being identified as a superintendent leading initiatives that are known to be exemplary. Through the process of reflecting upon my work, including the potential impact on the students I serve, I may experience feelings of pride and happiness and enjoy increased connections with my colleagues who may also be participating in this study.
- g) The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and will provide new insights about the strategies used to surpass the gatekeeping challenges when attaining a superintendent position as a Latina.

- h) I will not be compensated for my participation.
- i) I understand that I may refuse to participate in or I may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time. I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed I will be so informed and my consent obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618 Telephone (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research participant's Bill of Rights.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, you are encouraged to contact Julie Corona at jcorona1@mail.umassglobal.edu or by phone at 928-246-5268; or Dr. Tim McCarty, Advisor, at tmccarty@umassglobal.edu

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the "Research Participant's Bill of Rights." I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

APPENDIX C

Research Participant's Bill of Rights



UMASS GLOBAL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the UMASS GLOBAL Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The UMass Global Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS GLOBAL, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

APPENDIX D

Interview Script

Interviewer: Julie Corona

First and foremost, I want to thank you for your time and agreement to participate in this research study.

Interview time planned: Approximately one hour

Interview place: Virtually Private Zoom meeting

Recording: Zoom Recording

Written: Field and observational notes

Interview Script

“My name is Julie Corona and I am a doctoral candidate at Brandman University in the area of Organizational Leadership. As part of my dissertation, I am interviewing Latina superintendents in California school districts. The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the gatekeeping experiences of Latina superintendents. A second purpose of this study was to describe the gatekeeping challenges Latina school superintendents experienced on their career path to the superintendency. Lastly, this study will examine the strategies that Latina superintendents employed to overcome their gatekeeping challenges as they ascended to their superintendent position.

The semi-structure open-ended questions are written to elicit this information. The interview will take approximately one hour and will include main questions with some follow up questions, as needed.

I am conducting approximately 5 interviews with Latina superintendents to understand their lived experiences. The information you provide, along with historical and archival data, will provide a better understanding of the challenges faced and strategies implemented by Latina superintendents to get to a superintendent position and will add to the body of research currently available, of which there is very little regarding Latinas in superintendency roles.

Furthermore, the questions I will be asking are the same for everyone participating in the study. I will be reading all of the questions. The reason being is to ensure and guarantee, as much as possible, that my interviews with all 5 participants will be conducted in a consistent manner.

Context for the purpose of this study:

This study is focusing on the challenges, if any, Latina superintendents face during their pathway to a superintendent position. Gatekeeping is referring to specific elements used to access a superintendency role. The gatekeeping elements discussed in this study are career path, application and interview process. Gatekeepers are those individuals who determine the applicant pool and select the flow process for each applicant. Gatekeeping is also referred as those “who decide what information should move to group or individual and what information should not.

Informed Consent (required for Dissertation Research)

Before we start, I want to make sure you do not have questions on the documents sent to you before this interview. Leading to this interview we emailed each other to determine your willingness to participate and whether you met the criteria to be a participant in this study. Once we confirmed you met the criteria to be a participant in this study, you then received an invite letter via email outlining the interview process. I understand that some of the responses might be sensitive, I assure you that your answers will be confidential for the purpose of this study. You also received via email a copy of the Interview Process, Informed Consent Form, Brandman University’s Participant’s Bill of Rights, and the Audio Release Form which you have signed and emailed to me. Since you have reviewed these forms previous to this zoom meeting, I will ask if you would like to proceed. Thank you for agreeing to be part of this study. Do you have any questions about the forms you received previous to our interview date or about this process? Once again, I want to thank you for your participation in this study. Before I begin the recording, I will ask you if you are ready for me to start the recording. I may take notes as the interview is being recorded. If you are uncomfortable with me taking notes, please let me know and I will only continue with the Zoom recording of the interview. Finally, I will stop the recording and conclude our interview session. After your interview is transcribed, you will receive a copy of the complete transcripts to ensure I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas prior to the data being analyzed. The digital recording will be erased following review and approval of the transcription. Please remember that anytime during this process you have the right to stop the interview. If at any time you do not understand the questions being asked, please do not hesitate to ask for clarification. Are there any questions or concerns before we begin with the questions?

I would like to remind you any information that is obtained in connection to this study will remain confidential. All of the data will be reported without reference to any individual(s) or any institution(s). If needed, pseudonyms will be used. After I record and transcribe the data, I will send it to you via email so that you can check to make sure that I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas.

Before we begin, I want to confirm that you have received all the documents pertaining to this interview. Is this still correct? Before we start, do you have any questions or need clarification about any of the documents? Thank you for returning the signed copies.

We have scheduled an hour for the interview. At any point during the interview, you may ask that I skip a particular question or stop the interview altogether. For ease of our discussion and accuracy I will record our conversation as indicated in the Informed Consent.

As I ask you these questions about the lived experiences of your gatekeeping challenges to the superintendent position, you can reflect upon the overall challenges you faced during your career path to get to the superintendent position.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Okay, let's get started, and once again, I thank you very much for your time.

Some items that might be helpful for this interview process is to get copies of your resume, advertisements, and/or any board documents you might have. In addition, I will ask you to share about the demographics of your school board.

Interview Questions:

Interview question 1: Please describe your gatekeeping experiences on your career path (positions and special assignments) leading to the superintendency?

Probe 1a: What gates were opened up to you for your career path? Please describe how mentors (if any) helped.

Interview question 2:

Please describe your gatekeeping experiences you experienced on your application and interview process leading to the superintendency?

Probe 2a: What gates were opened up to you for your interview? Please explain how sponsors (if any) helped.

Interview question 3: Please describe how gender impacted your career path?

Interview question 4: How did Ethnicity or gender impact your application and interview process?

Interview Question 5: Please describe the strategies you used to overcome the career path and interview challenges you experienced?

End of the Interview

Thank you very much for being a participant in this study. I appreciate you sharing your story. This concludes our interview. Do you have any other information that you would like to add or share regarding your ascension to the superintendency based on the gatekeeping concept? Before data is analyzed you will receive the transcription of our interview via email. After reviewing the transcription, if you see the need to correct or

add information, you can email that to me as soon as possible. Thank you very much for your time and support in completing my research!

APPENDIX E

Field Test Interviewee Feedback Questions

While conducting the interview, the interviewer should take notes of their clarification request or comments about not being clear about the question. After you complete the interview ask your field test interviewee the following clarifying questions. **Try not to make it another interview; just have a friendly conversation.** Either script or record their feedback so you can compare with the other two members of your team to develop your feedback report on how to improve the interview questions.

1. How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities to describe what you do as a leader when working with your team or staff?
2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok? Was the pace okay?
3. Were the questions by and large clear or were there places where you were uncertain what was being asked?
4. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that were confusing?
5. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview... (I'm pretty new at this)?

APPENDIX F

Interview Feedback Reflection Questions for Both the Interviewer and the Observer

Conducting interviews is a learned skill and research experience. Gaining valuable insight about your interview skills and affect with the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. Complete the form independently from each other, then discuss your responses. Sharing your thoughts will provide valuable insight into improving the interview process.

1. How long did the interview take? Did the time seem to be appropriate? Did the respondents have ample opportunities to respond to questions?
2. Were the questions clear or were there places where the interviewees were unclear?
3. Were there any words or terms used during the interview that were unclear or confusing to the interviewees?
4. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous? For the observer: How did the interviewer appear during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?
5. Did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared? For the observer: From your observation did the interviewer appear prepared to conduct the interview?
6. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?
7. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle and why do you think that was the case?
8. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?
9. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

APPENDIX G




Alignment of Interview Questions to Research Questions

Purpose	Research Question	Interview Questions	Artifacts to collect
		Add Demographic information- board members - # years supt.	
The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to describe the career path progression and the gatekeeping experiences as they advanced to a superintendent position.	<p>1. How do Latina superintendents describe their career path progression?</p> <p>2. How do Latina superintendents describe their gatekeeping experiences on their career path leading to their superintendency?</p> <p>3. How do Latina superintendents describe their gatekeeping experiences on their application and interview process leading to their superintendency?</p>	<p><u>Interview question 1:</u> Please describe your gatekeeping experiences on your career path (positions and special assignments) leading to the superintendency?</p> <p><u>Probe 1a:</u> What gates were opened up to you for your career path? Please describe how mentors (if any) helped.</p> <p><u>Interview question 2:</u> Please describe your gatekeeping experiences about your application and interview process leading to their superintendency?</p> <p><u>Probe 2a:</u> What gates were opened up to you for your interview? Please explain how sponsors (if any) helped.</p>	<p>Resume</p> <p>Advertisements, announcements, board documents; minutes</p>
The second purpose of this study was to describe the gatekeeping experiences of Latina superintendent's application and interview process of their superintendency.	<p>4. How do Latina school superintendents describe their gatekeeping experiences leading to their superintendency due to their gender and Ethnicity?</p>	<p><u>Interview question 3:</u> Please describe how gender impacted your career path?</p> <p><u>Interview question 4:</u> How did Ethnicity or gender impact your application and interview process?</p>	

<p>Additionally, this study was for Latina superintendents to describe their gatekeeping experiences of gender and ethnicity. Lastly, this study will examine the strategies that Latina superintendents used as they ascended to their superintendent position.</p>	<p>5. How do Latina superintendents describe the strategies they use to gain this position and overcome any gatekeeping on their ascendency to their superintendency?</p>	<p><u>Interview Question 5:</u> Please describe the strategies you used to overcome the career path and interview challenges you experienced ?</p>	
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APPENDIX H

Certificate

		Completion Date 22-May-2019 Expiration Date N/A Record ID 31666931
This is to certify that:		
Julie Corona		
Has completed the following CITI Program course:		
Human Subjects Research	(Curriculum Group)	 Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative
Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers	(Course Learner Group)	
1 - Basic	(Stage)	
Under requirements set by:		
Brandman University		
Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w979f2762-d413-46d0-8b69-c5fd5fcd091f-31666931		

APPENDIX I

Synthesis Matrix

Articles	Absent from family	Missing Children's Activities	Lack of Sponsorship	Career Path	Marriage/Divorce	Balance of family and career	Latina pursued non-administrative positions	Gender bias	Ethnicity	Higher Education Needed	History of Female Superintendent	Need of more comparable representation
Bjork & Kowalski, 2005			X									
Blount, J.M. (2000).										X		
Brunner, C. C. (1998).	X		X	X			X					
Brunner, C. C. (Ed.). (1999).			X						X			
Brunner, C. C. (2000a).			X					X				
Brunner, C. C. (2000b).					X		X					
Brunner, C. C., Grogan, M., & Björk, L. G. (2002)				X					X			
Burgess, Tonina, (2021)							X	X	X			
Crews, R., J. (2020).		X	X				X			X		
Dana, J. A., & Bourisaw, D.M. (2006).											X	
Glass, T. E. (2000).			X				X					
Glass, T. E. (2003).			X	X			X			X		
Glass, T. E., Björk, L., & Brunner, C. C. (2000).			X	X								
Glass, T. E., & Franceschini, L. A. (2007).				X						X		
Gonzalez, I. 2007			X	X		X	X			X	X	
Grogan, M., & Brunner, C. C. (2005).					X							
Kawaguchi, C. 2014.	X	X			X		X					
Martin, L., Jennifer, (2016).		X					X					
Magdaleno, K. R. (2006).	X				X		X			X	X	
Méndez-Morse, S. E. (2000).	X						X			X		
Méndez-Morse, S. E. (2004).	X									X		
Mendez-Morse, S., Murakami, E. T., Byrne-Jimenez, M., Hernandez, F. (2015).	X				X		X					
Mendez-Morse, S. (2004).						X				X		
Menchaca, D., V. & Mill, S., J., & Leo, F. 2016.	X	X	X	X	X	X						
Murray, C., D. 2014.				X				X				
Muñoz, A.J., Pankake, A., Ramalho, E.,						X		X				
Nieves, N., L. 2016.	X				X						X	
Ortiz, F., 1999.						X						
Regules, R. 1997.	X				X		X		X			
Santiago, M. 2008.	X						X					
Tallerico, M. (2000).			X	X			X	X				
Tallerico, M. (1999a).			X	X			X	X				
Tallerico, M., & Blount, J. M. (2004).			X	X			X	X				
Tallerico, M., & Burstyn, J. N. (1996).			X	X			X	X				
Tooms, A. K. (2007).			X	X				X				
Tooms, A. K., Lugg, C. A., & Bogotch, I. (2010).				X				X				
Wallin, D. C. (2005).			X					X				
Wiebe, E. E (2017).	X		X	X						X	X	