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## Perceptions of Black and Hispanic Superintendents in Texas Regarding Their Superintendency Pathways

Maria Faqier  
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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Maria Faqier

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University  
2026

Abstract

Perceptions of Black and Hispanic Superintendents in Texas Regarding Their  
Superintendency Pathways

by

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MA, Texas A&M University, San Antonio, 2013

BS, Our Lady of the Lake University, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education  
Educational Administration & Leadership

Walden University

May 2026

## Abstract

The lack of diversity in the superintendent workforce in Texas is a significant concern that affects the educational experiences and opportunities of Texas students, teachers, families, and their communities. The problem addressed through this study was the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas school districts. Guided by critical race theory and intersectionality theory, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore Black and Hispanic superintendents' perceptions of their successes, challenges, and recommendations to secure a superintendent position in Texas. Semistructured interviews were conducted with nine Black and Hispanic superintendents (two Black women, two Black men, two Hispanic women, and three Hispanic men) currently serving in Texas school districts. Thematic analysis using open and axial coding was conducted revealing 11 key themes. Findings indicated that superintendents' successes were characterized by authentic, values-based leadership practices leveraging mentorship and support networks. Challenges encountered included navigating bias and overcoming barriers to access and advancement. Participants recommended that aspiring Black and Hispanic superintendents leverage their cultural identity and community alignment as a powerful asset, not a barrier, in pursuing the superintendency. By highlighting successful pathways to the superintendency and offering practical recommendations for overcoming challenges, this research provides a roadmap for Black and Hispanic educators seeking to advance into superintendent positions to follow. Fostering greater diversity and equity in educational leadership at the superintendent level is imperative for generating positive social change in the education system over time.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my beloved sister, Jessica Germany, whose dream of earning a doctorate was cut short by her untimely passing. As a dedicated social worker and passionate child advocate, Jessica devoted her life to improving the lives of others. Her commitment to service, intellectual curiosity, determination, and passion for education continue to inspire me. I pursued this journey in your honor, carrying your spirit with me through every challenge and triumph. Your dream lives on through this achievement.

To my sons, Daniel, Matt, and Michael, and my bonus sons, Lawrence and Challis - I dedicate this work as a testament to the power of perseverance and the importance of pursuing your ultimate goals. May you always remember that with dedication, resilience, and hard work, you can overcome any obstacle to achieving your dreams. Let this accomplishment serve as inspiration for your own journeys, whatever paths you choose.

To my significant other, Nakia Parham, I dedicate this dissertation with profound gratitude and love. Your unwavering support, patience, and encouragement sustained me throughout this demanding process. You showed me the transformative power of true partnership and safe love. Thank you for creating the space for me to grow and for celebrating every milestone along the way.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents, who, despite never having had the opportunity to complete high school themselves, instilled in me an unwavering belief in the transformative power of education. You taught me that education is not merely a path to personal advancement but a precious gift that opens doors to possibilities beyond imagination.

To my father, whose story embodies the profound irony of being labeled an immigrant on ancestral lands that existed long before modern borders, your resilience and dignity in the face of this historical contradiction have shaped my understanding of the power of education. To my mother, whose experiences as an American migrant farm worker taught me about hard work, perseverance, and the dignity of labor, your strength continues to inspire me daily. During these troubling times in our nation's history, when conversations about immigration often lack historical context and humanity, I acknowledge the complex realities faced by families like ours. This achievement stands as a testament to what is possible when we honor both ancestral wisdom and new opportunities.

To the nine superintendents who generously shared their time and experiences with me, I extend my sincere gratitude. Your candor, wisdom, and resilience not only made this research possible but will inspire generations of educational leaders to come.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

To ensure all students feel seen, valued, and represented, school leadership ranks, including the superintendency, should reflect the demographics of the students they serve (DeMatthews et al., 2023; Gilmore, 2022). Because superintendents are at the forefront of leading, managing, and influencing our schools and communities, representative school leadership matters. This is not the case in Texas PK-12 public schools, where there is a clear underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic individuals in Texas superintendency positions.

In Texas's 1,200 school districts, there are approximately 5.5 million PK-12 public school students; of these PK-12 students, 66% are Black or Hispanic, and 26% are White (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2023). However, despite Blacks and Hispanics holding 39% of both teaching and principal positions in Texas, only 19% of superintendents are Black and Hispanic, while 80% are White (DeMatthews et al., 2023). The superintendency pathway often begins as a classroom teacher and a school-level principal, yet this pipeline dilutes in representation at the highest level.

Evidence suggests that Black and Hispanic superintendents bring valuable experiences and leadership qualities to the role, often navigating complex challenges in diverse and under-resourced districts (Miles Nash & Grogan, 2021). Studies also reveal a link between diverse representation in school leadership and improved student academic achievement (Gilmore, 2022; Perrone, 2022).

A significant disparity exists in Texas education's senior-most leadership. While the Texas superintendency shows signs of increasing diversity, the pace is lagging. Black

and Hispanic educators' pathways to the superintendency tend to be less direct and take longer compared to their White counterparts (DeMatthews et al., 2023). White principals (65%) are more likely to become superintendents directly from a principal role, compared to Black principals (24%) and Hispanic principals (40%). For instance, Black and Hispanic educators are more likely to serve in one to two additional administrative roles (e.g., associate superintendent) before serving as superintendent. Most Black (51%) and Hispanic (46%) educators in Texas take 7 to 10 years to reach superintendent positions (DeMatthews et al., 2023) compared to White educators who assume the superintendency in less time (70% in 1-6 years). These statistics highlight the need to investigate this under-representation.

This research study investigated the perceptions of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas regarding their successes and challenges in their pathway to obtaining a superintendent position, as well as recommendations for aspiring superintendents. Chapter 1 lays the groundwork for the study by exploring the background, problem statement, and overall research purpose. It also introduces critical race theory (CRT; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and intersectionality theory (Collins, 2020; Crenshaw, 1989) as the study's conceptual frameworks. Additionally, Chapter 1 outlines the three research questions guiding the investigation, specifies the nature of the study, defines key terms, and acknowledges any assumptions, scope limitations, and potential study constraints. Chapter 1 ends with the significance of the research and the summary.

## **Background**

In Texas, as well as across the United States, the significant underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic school leaders is a critical issue that continues to persist. Black and Hispanic individuals are underrepresented in educational leadership positions (Clement & Young, 2022; Grooms et al., 2024; Reyes-Guerra et al., 2022), especially at the superintendency level (Miles Nash & Grogan, 2022; Thomas et al., 2023). Thomas et al.'s (2023) study on U.S. superintendents for the school year 2022-2023 found that 89% of superintendents were White, 4% Black, and 3% Hispanic, despite the U.S. population of PK-12 students being 45% White, 15% Black, and 29% Hispanic (Irwin et al., 2024). In Texas, the situation is similar. The superintendent workforce is 79% White, 6% Black, and 13% Hispanic (DeMatthews et al., 2023), despite the Texas population of PK-12 students being 26% White, 13% Black, and 53% Hispanic (TEA, 2023).

Despite studies highlighting the benefits of diversity in school leadership, racial underrepresentation persists in Texas superintendents. Research suggests that a more representative superintendency can foster a more inclusive school environment for students of all backgrounds (Clement & Young, 2022; Gilmore, 2022; Reyes-Guerra et al., 2022; White, 2023). DeMatthews et al. (2023), Gilmore (2022), and Miles Nash and Grogan (2022) all argue that a balanced superintendent workforce that mirrors the communities they serve promotes better shared understanding, ensures greater support, enhances cultural competence, and improves academic achievement, as well as reduces race-based academic achievement gaps (Gilmore, 2022).

Prior research suggests that the reason behind this disparity is a troubling leaky pipeline along the teacher-to-superintendent pathway (Clement & Young, 2022; DeMatthews et al., 2023), resulting in a Whitening of the educator workforce along the workforce pipeline (Clement & Young, 2022). While there are some limited studies on the superintendent pipeline, these studies have primarily focused on the gender gap (ILO Group, 2022; White, 2023) and the experiences of a predominantly White superintendent workforce (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021; Schwartz et al., 2023).

While valuable insights have been gained from these studies, there's a need for research that specifically examines the lived experiences of diverse superintendents because existing research on superintendents often overlooks the experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents (Miles Nash & Grogan, 2022; White, 2023). Some studies have explored the barriers faced by aspiring Black and Hispanic superintendents, including the lack of mentors and workplace racism (Joseph, 2023; Kingsbury & Jean-Marie, 2021; Perrone, 2022; Rivas-Garza, 2023). Still, more research is needed to understand the significant underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas because Black and Hispanic leaders often face barriers that result in them taking longer and less direct routes to superintendent positions (DeMatthews et al., 2023, 2024a, 2024b).

Schwartz et al. (2023) argue that there is a gap in research that focuses on understanding superintendent pathways, how the paths shape the pool of potential candidates, and how these routes vary across demographics (i.e., race, gender) and district types (urban, suburban, town, rural). For instance, Schwartz et al. (2023) found

that superintendents of color have higher turnover rates when they are hired from outside the district. However, research has revealed little about why this is the case.

While research exists on the pathway of superintendents, there is a gap in understanding the specific experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the perceptions of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas regarding their superintendency pathways. By capturing the successes, challenges, and recommendations of aspiring Black and Hispanic superintendents, this research can inform actionable solutions for aspiring superintendents, inform Texas policy, and support leadership preparation programs in advancing Black and Hispanic leaders toward a more representative and diverse superintendency.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem that was addressed through this study was the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas school districts. The Texas public school leadership landscape lacks diversity, with Black and Hispanic superintendents significantly underrepresented, and White men constituting the majority of superintendent positions (White, 2023). A report by the Texas Education Leadership Lab revealed that only 19% of superintendents in Texas are Black or Hispanic (DeMatthews et al., 2023), despite these groups comprising over 66% of the state's student population (TEA, 2023a).

Studies from the last 5 years highlight the state's unique demographics, characterized by a rapidly growing Hispanic population (DeMatthews et al., 2023) and a

persistent achievement gap for students of color (TEA, 2023b). This trend emphasized the urgency of understanding the ascension experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas. Previous research had explored general barriers faced by Black and Hispanic leaders in education, such as racism in the workplace and limited access to mentors (Joseph, 2023; Kingsbury & Jean-Marie, 2021; Perrone, 2022; Rivas-Garza, 2023).

Research consistently demonstrates the positive impact of diverse school leadership on student outcomes, particularly for students of color who often benefit from role models who share their backgrounds and understand their unique needs within the educational system (Clement & Young, 2022; Gilmore, 2022; Reyes-Guerra et al., 2022; White, 2023). Miles Nash and Grogan (2021) found that superintendents of color bring valuable experiences and leadership qualities to the role, often navigating complex challenges in diverse and under-resourced districts. Despite this, research specific to the experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents navigating the pathway to leadership positions in Texas remains limited.

This study addressed a critical gap in practice by exploring the lived experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas. Understanding their perceptions of successes, challenges, and recommendations can support the leadership aspirations of future Black and Hispanic educators. By understanding their lived experiences, the research can potentially expose obvious gaps in current practices and inform targeted strategies to increase representation in the Texas superintendent ranks, thereby contributing to a more equitable leadership pipeline.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this basic qualitative design study was to explore Black and Hispanic superintendents' perceptions of their successes, challenges, and recommendations to secure a superintendent position in Texas. Specifically, Black men, Black women, Hispanic men, and Hispanic women school leaders currently serving as Texas superintendents were asked to discuss their successes and challenges in attaining their superintendent role and strategies they would recommend to Texas policymakers, leadership preparation programs, and aspiring Black and Hispanic superintendents.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions (RQs) guided this study:

RQ1: What are Black and Hispanic superintendents' perceptions of their successes in securing a superintendent position in Texas?

RQ2: What are Black and Hispanic superintendents' perceptions of their challenges in securing a superintendent position in Texas?

RQ3: What are Black and Hispanic superintendents' recommended strategies to secure a superintendent position in Texas?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual frameworks that supported this study were CRT (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and intersectionality theory (Collins, 2020; Crenshaw, 1989). CRT is an interdisciplinary framework that examines the relationship between race and racism, focusing on how race and racial power structures are embedded within legal systems and institutions. It provides the foundation for understanding systemic

racism (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Intersectionality builds on CRT. Intersectionality examines how various social identities, like race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability, intersect and overlap to create unique experiences of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2020).

CRT and intersectionality provide a lens to analyze how race and ethnicity (Black and Hispanic) might intersect with other factors (socioeconomic background, gender, etc.) to influence the experiences and perceptions of educators in securing leadership roles, which aligns with Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) call for centering the "authentic voices of people of color" in educational research (p. 58). CRT's emphasis on the systemic nature of racism within institutions like education (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) suggests that Black and Hispanic candidates might face explicit or implicit biases or discriminatory practices during the superintendent selection process. Intersectionality supports CRT by arguing that various social identities, like race, ethnicity, and gender, interact to create unique experiences (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2020). These frameworks enabled the exploration of how race, ethnicity, and other factors may shape the challenges and successes faced by Black and Hispanic educators in their ascent to the Texas superintendency. Chapter 2 will provide a deeper description of both of these contextual lenses.

CRT and intersectionality both facilitate an in-depth exploration of superintendents' lived experiences and how their identities shape their perceptions, aligning with the qualitative approach of using semistructured interviews in this study (Creswell, 2016; Patton, 2014). Both frameworks directly informed the research

questions and were used to analyze the perceived successes and challenges of Black and Hispanic superintendents (RQ1 and RQ2). Their recommended strategies (RQ3) also shared insights into how they navigated these challenges within the system.

The interview guide was designed to explore how participants' racial and ethnic backgrounds, along with other relevant factors, shaped their experience (Creswell, 2016; Patton, 2014) within the superintendency pathway. Questions were framed about perceived biases or challenges faced due to their race/ethnicity. CRT and intersectionality were employed in the thematic analysis of the interview data, enabling the identification of themes related to race, ethnicity, and other intersecting factors (Creswell, 2016; Patton, 2014). The CRT and intersectionality frameworks provided insights into how these factors shaped the superintendents' experiences and perceptions.

### **Nature of the Study**

This research study explored the subjective experiences and perceptions of Black and Hispanic superintendents that could not be captured through surveys or experiments. A qualitative approach, using semistructured interviews, was ideal for capturing these rich narratives and understanding the participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2014). The key phenomenon investigated was the perceptions of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas regarding their pathways to superintendency. This referred to how these superintendents viewed their own journeys to becoming superintendents, including their successes, challenges, and recommendations for future Black and Hispanic leaders seeking these positions.

Nine Black and Hispanic superintendents currently serving in Texas school

districts were recruited from a pool of 184 potential participants. The study recruited a purposeful sample with participants from the following categories: Black men, Black women, Hispanic men, and Hispanic women. Efforts were made to include participants from diverse regions (urban, suburban, rural). Semistructured interviews were conducted with each participant. These interviews used a predeveloped guide with open-ended questions (Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2014) to explore their perceptions of successes, challenges, and recommended strategies related to their superintendency pathways. The interview guide was developed based on the research questions and informed by the CRT and intersectionality frameworks. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes within the interview data. The analysis was guided by CRT and intersectionality to explore how race, ethnicity, and other intersecting factors shaped the unique experiences of the participants' superintendency journey.

### **Definitions**

The following defined terms and phrases were used throughout the study:

*Black*: Individuals having origins of African descent (TEA, 2023).

*Critical race theory (CRT)*: A framework examining how race and racism intersect with power, privilege, and social policy. It argues that race is a social construct that pervades legal systems and institutions, creating barriers for people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

*Hispanic*: Individuals, regardless of race, having origins of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish descent (DeMatthews et al., 2023; TEA, 2023).

*Intersectionality theory/intersectionality*: Developed by Black feminist scholars, this theory emphasizes how various social identities (such as race, gender, and class) interact and create unique experiences of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989).

*Superintendent*: A school district or charter organization's chief executive officer (DeMatthews et al., 2023).

*White*: Individuals having origins of European descent (TEA, 2023).

### **Assumptions**

Creswell (2013) argued that assumptions both guide our research and inform our selection of theories. It was assumed that the experiences of Black and Hispanic educators in securing superintendent roles likely differ from those of White educational leaders. Black men, Black women, Hispanic men, and Hispanic women participants were recruited with the expectation that their diverse backgrounds would provide unique perspectives on superintendent pathways. The study design presumed a level of honesty and accuracy in participants. This assumption was necessary because the study relied on self-reported lived experiences, which can be subjective, and these assumptions allowed the research to explore the lived experiences of these superintendents, which could reveal underlying factors that statistics may not (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2016).

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of a qualitative study balances depth and breadth, focusing on detailed exploration of specific issues while remaining flexible to capture rich contextual details (Patton, 2016). The scope of this study focused on perceptions of Black and Hispanic superintendents because it aimed to understand their lived experiences navigating the

path to superintendency in Texas. This specific focus allowed for an in-depth exploration of potential barriers and supports from the viewpoints of Black and Hispanic superintendents.

The participants in this study were limited to Black and Hispanic superintendents currently employed in Texas school districts during the time of this study and who were willing to participate. Creswell and Creswell (2017) stated that delimitations are specific boundaries within the research scope that further define the parameters of the study. White superintendents, non-Black and non-Hispanic minorities (Asian, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, and multiracial), aspiring superintendents, interim superintendents, and superintendents outside of Texas were not contacted to participate in this study.

The findings from this study could be transferable to other states with similar demographics or selection processes for superintendents; however, the specific context of Texas should be considered when applying the results to other settings. While CRT and intersectionality were explored in this study, other frameworks, like social network theory, could have also offered other perspectives. For example, social network theory examines the importance of social networks in career advancement. It could suggest that minorities (Blacks and Hispanics) may lack access to the same professional networks that can provide mentorship and opportunities for promotion (Liu et al., 2017).

### **Limitations**

Limitations are inherent constraints when conducting qualitative research (Patton, 2017). The primary limitation in this study is the sample size of nine participants.

Although nine is an appropriate number for a basic qualitative design study, it represents only a small number because the data pool itself is limited to approximately 184 Black and Hispanic superintendents identified in Texas. In light of this constrained pool, virtual interviews were employed, not only to address the vast geographical spread of Texas school districts, but also because interviews were the most effective method to capture the rich and nuanced lived experiences of these underrepresented leaders. To mitigate selection and participation bias, a comprehensive recruitment strategy was used (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This will involve contacting all identified Black and Hispanic superintendents listed by the state agency and service centers. The participants' honesty and willingness to openly share their experiences may have influenced the findings.

This study could contribute to practice and policy by raising awareness of the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas. The findings on the perceived challenges and strategies could inform leadership preparation and educational organizations that support aspiring Black and Hispanic superintendents. The recommendations from participants could guide policy changes in superintendent selection processes. Potential implications for positive social change from this study could highlight the need for diversity in educational leadership and inform strategies to create a more equitable path to superintendency for Black and Hispanic educators. There is the potential to motivate school boards and search firms to adopt inclusive practices in the superintendent selection and recruitment process. The study's findings could also contribute to efforts to create a more inclusive pipeline for future superintendents by

providing insights to aspiring Black and Hispanic educators and the programs that prepare them.

### **Significance**

This study is significant because it can potentially contribute to a deeper understanding of the experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents, who are currently underrepresented in Texas (DeMatthews et al., 2023). This is a critical gap in knowledge, as limited research exists on their lived experiences and their perceptions of successes and challenges (Joseph, 2023a; Reyes-Guerra et al., 2022; Schwartz et al., 2023). Schwartz et al. (2023) found that communities see superintendents as key contributors to the quality of school districts. Despite this, there is very little educational research on the superintendency, especially on how school systems attract, identify, recruit, and retain effective leaders of color. For example, little is known about school boards' preferences and policies regarding candidate preferences in creating candidate pools, although anecdotal evidence suggests the heavy use of search firms (Schwartz et al., 2023). This study could highlight how Black and Hispanic superintendents navigated barriers within the Texas education system and their unique strategies to overcome them.

The findings can inform leadership preparation programs by identifying specific needs and challenges faced by Black and Hispanic superintendents. The study can provide policymakers with valuable data to develop effective strategies for attracting and retaining diverse talent in school leadership positions. It may also highlight areas where policy changes could address systemic barriers that hinder the ascension of Black and Hispanic educators. By increasing awareness of the experiences of Black and Hispanic

superintendents, the study can contribute to a more inclusive educational leadership pipeline in Texas. Increasing diversity in leadership can bring a wider range of perspectives and experiences to school decision-making, leading to more culturally responsive educational policies and practices that benefit all students, teachers, families, and their communities (DeMatthews et al., 2023; Gilmore,2022).

### **Summary**

Chapter 1 established the significant need to explore the lived experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas, especially regarding their perceptions of successes, challenges, and recommended strategies. CRT and intersectionality served as the study's conceptual framework by providing a contextual lens to understand the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic educators in Texas superintendencies. CRT sheds light on the historical and current institutional racism that contributed to the challenges faced by Black and Hispanic leaders within the education system. Intersectionality added another layer by examining how race intersects with other factors like gender and shapes the experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents. In this study, a basic qualitative, semistructured interview approach was utilized to capture the lived experiences and perceptions of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas.

Chapter 1 also identified the potential contributions of the study in advancing and contributing to knowledge, practice, and positive social change. The limitations of the study were the sample size and the vast geographic landscape of Texas. This chapter also stated the research questions guiding the study, defined key terms, clarified any underlying assumptions, and outlined the scope and limitations of the study. Finally,

Chapter 1 discussed the potential significance of the research in contributing to a better understanding of the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic Superintendents in Texas.

The next chapter builds upon the identified research gap and potential contributions. Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature on the experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents, as well as the benefits of diverse leadership on educational equity for students, teachers, families, and the broader community. This review of the literature provided a solid foundation for analyzing the data collected in the study and interpreting the findings. Chapter 2 also discusses the literature search strategy, sources, and keywords used during the literature review process. Chapter 2 ends by synthesizing the key variables and concepts, the major themes, and explaining how the study fills a gap in the literature.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This qualitative study explored the perceptions of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas regarding their successes and challenges, as well as recommended strategies to secure a superintendent position. Given the persistent underrepresentation of these groups in educational leadership roles (Clement & Young, 2022; Grooms et al., 2024; Reyes-Guerra et al., 2022), this research sought to understand their lived experiences through the lenses of CRT and intersectionality. The unique experiences and perspectives of Black and Hispanic superintendents can positively impact educational equity that benefits students of color (Gilmore, 2022; Gilbert et al., 2022).

This chapter begins with an explanation of the strategies used for the literature review search. It details the specific databases and search engines consulted, outlines the key search terms and their combinations, and describes the iterative search process. Following the literature search strategy is a section on the conceptual framework, which focuses on intersectionality and CRT and its application in understanding the experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents. The majority of the chapter then reviews existing and current literature related to the key variables and concepts.

This section of Chapter 2, on key variables and concepts, reviews existing literature that highlights the national underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic superintendents, as well as the specific challenges faced by these superintendents in Texas. The literature review begins by examining the current representation of Black and Hispanic superintendents, both nationally and in Texas. Next, it explores the traditional

and alternative pathways to the superintendency, including the role of preparation programs, professional development, and personal networks. Afterward, it examines the current research on the lived experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents and the systemic barriers they face, such as microaggressions, isolation, and discrimination. Finally, the reviews of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and politics in the superintendency.

Chapter 2 concludes with a synthesis of the major themes in the existing literature on the experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents, which reveals a gap in understanding the intersectional nature of their experiences through the lens of intersectionality and CRT. Additionally, the conclusion of Chapter 2 connects this gap to the research methods described in Chapter 3.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The references used in this study were found through an iterative and comprehensive search of the literature on the experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents. The following trusted search engines, online academic research databases, government agencies, and university research institutions were used: Google Scholar, ERIC, Sage Journals, Taylor & Francis, ProQuest, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), TEA, Texas A&M University at Corpus Christi, University of Texas in Austin, and the School Superintendents Association (AASA). The following parameters were used to find articles: peer-reviewed, published in English, full-text available for free, and published within the last 5 years (2020-2024).

The search was conducted using the following key terms and phrases: *Black superintendents, African American superintendents, Hispanic superintendents, Latinx/o/a superintendents, Texas superintendency, Texas superintendents, US superintendency, US superintendents, superintendents of color, underrepresentation, leadership, equity, diversity, systemic barriers, condition of education, diverse school leadership, leadership preparation, Texas educator pathways, school leadership pipeline, school leadership pathway, superintendent preparation, superintendent pipeline or pathway, intersectionality, and critical race theory*. The iterative search yielded 51 final literature review articles.

### **Conceptual Framework**

CRT and intersectionality theory are the two conceptual frameworks used to ground this study. These two conceptual frameworks connect race and racism to institutions and examine how various social identities intersect and overlap to create unique experiences of oppression and privilege. For this reason, CRT and intersectionality are appropriate frameworks for examining the lived experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents as they navigated the superintendency pathway in Texas.

#### **Critical Race Theory**

CRT originated in legal studies in the 1970s and 1980s and is a framework that examines the ways in which race and racism are embedded in American institutions, social structures, and practices (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Since then, it has been applied to various fields, including education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT scholars argue that racism is not only an individual bias but also a systemic issue deeply

ingrained in institutions, including schools (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Systemic racism manifests in numerous ways, such as discriminatory policies, practices, and beliefs that perpetuate racial inequalities (Dixon & Anderson, 2018).

In this study, CRT was used to analyze how policies, practices, and norms might unintentionally perpetuate racial disparities in the attainment of the superintendency by Black and Hispanic educators in Texas. CRT has been used before to analyze racial disparities in educational leadership across the United States (Khalifa et al., 2013). Parker and Villalpando (2007) highlighted this disparity as a critical issue in educational leadership and advocate for using CRT as a framework to analyze and address racial inequities in education, including those related to representation in administrative leadership roles. By applying CRT, researchers can uncover the ways in which these systemic factors contribute to the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic superintendents.

One of the key tenets of CRT is the use of counter-storytelling as a methodological tool to challenge the dominant narratives about race (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Counter-storytelling is about centering the experiences and perspectives of marginalized groups, like Black and Hispanic superintendents, to expose and critique the ways in which racism operates in their lives. By amplifying these marginalized voices, CRT can be used to disrupt and challenge the dominant narratives that often perpetuate racial stereotypes and inequalities (Dixon & Anderson, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2013; Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Yossi, 2005). CRT also recognizes that Black and Hispanic communities possess unique forms of cultural

wealth that are often overlooked or devalued by White-dominant educational institutions (Yossi, 2005). This community cultural wealth (CCW) includes various forms of capital, including aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. These capitals are rooted in the experiences, knowledge, and skills that individuals from marginalized communities develop to navigate and resist systemic oppression.

Joseph (2023a) argued that CRT serves as a critical lens for understanding the unique lived experiences of Black superintendents by providing race-conscious narratives. These narratives challenge the dominant stories, highlight systemic racism, and surface the deeply ingrained inequities in education (Joseph, 2023a).

This study benefits from a CRT framework because it allows for a deeper understanding of the systemic barriers that Black and Hispanic educators face in attaining and succeeding in superintendent positions in Texas. CRT's emphasis on counter-storytelling and centering the experiences of marginalized groups (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) could be useful in understanding the unique experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents. By examining the narratives and lived experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents, this study could lead to ways in which systemic racism may manifest in hiring practices, mentorship opportunities, and district cultures. In addition, CRT's concept of CCW (Yosso, 2005) can help to identify the assets and resources that Black and Hispanic educators bring to their leadership roles, which may be overlooked or undervalued by the dominant White culture. CRT also centers the study of race and racism, as well as their

intersectionality with other marginalized identities, such as gender (Crenshaw et al., 1995), which is discussed in the next section.

### **Intersectionality**

Black and Hispanic experiences are not solely defined by race, but are shaped by the intersection of multiple identities, including race, gender, and class (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000). Crenshaw's (1989) work on intersectionality highlighted the importance of considering how race intersects with other identities (gender, class, and ethnicity) to create unique experiences of discrimination. Collins (2000) introduced the concept of the "matrix of domination", which helps us understand how interlocking systems of oppression (race, gender, class, etc.) create complex barriers for individuals. This "matrix of domination" is a framework that explains how different systems of oppression interact and intersect to create unique experiences of marginalization, highlighting how power operates on multiple levels to perpetuate inequality and social injustices (Collins, 2000).

Intersectionality has been used to examine the experiences of women of color in educational leadership (Agosto & Roland, 2018). This research has shown how the intersection of race and gender can create unique challenges for Black and Hispanic women in leadership positions. For example, Black women may face both racism and sexism in their careers, which can limit their opportunities for advancement (Crenshaw, 1989). By applying intersectionality, this study examines the unique challenges faced by Black and Hispanic women, as well as Black and Hispanic men, in navigating the superintendency pathway in Texas. This can lead to more nuanced recommendations for promoting equity in the educational leadership pathway to the superintendency.

Intersectionality also emphasizes the importance of recognizing the multiple identities that individuals hold (Crenshaw, 1989). People are not simply defined by their race or gender, but also by other various social identities. This concept is crucial for understanding the diverse experiences and perspectives within Black and Hispanic communities. By acknowledging the multiple identities that Black and Hispanic superintendents hold, this study captures the diversity of experiences within these groups and develops a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities they face.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables**

The iterative literature review process described earlier in this chapter identified 51 relevant sources, comprising peer-reviewed articles, studies, books, and book excerpts. An analysis of these 51 sources revealed four major themes across the key concepts and variables: (a) the current landscape of representation among Black and Hispanic superintendents, (b) pathways to the superintendency, (c) lived experiences and systemic barriers encountered by Black and Hispanic superintendents, and (d) DEI and politics in the superintendency.

### **Current Landscape of Representation Among Black and Hispanic Superintendents Across the United States**

The role of the school superintendent is complex and demanding. Their responsibilities include curriculum development, educational equity, policy implementation, and crisis management (Miles Nash & Grogan, 2022). Yet, the demographics of those who hold this powerful and important position do not reflect the

diversity of the U.S. student population that they serve. Mountford and Richardson's (2021) analysis of the American Superintendent 2020 Decennial Study (Tienken, 2021) emphasizes the persistent underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic superintendents. This lack of diversity deprives school districts of valuable perspectives and experiences, raising questions about equity within the educational leadership pipeline. Miles Nash and Grogan (2022) argued that this underrepresentation results in a missed opportunity to leverage the unique skills and insights of individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds.

### ***National Landscape of Superintendent Diversity***

A review of the literature shows a noticeable underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities among U.S. school superintendents. Miles Nash and Grogan (2022), Irwin et al. (2024), NCES (2024), and Thomas et al. (2023) revealed stark differences between the demographics of superintendents and those of students. Irwin et al. (2024) and NCES (2024) reported that the U.S. PK-12 public student population in the Fall of 2022 was 44.5% White, 28.9% Hispanic, 14.9% Black, with the remaining 11.7% composed of Asian, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Pacific Islanders, and two or more races. This contrasts with the demographics of U.S. superintendents, as tracked by Thomas et al. (2023), who found that 88.9% of superintendents were White, 2.9% were Hispanic, 3.9% were Black, and 4.3% were Asian, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Pacific Islanders, or two or more races.

Quantitative data from Thomas et al. (2023) also revealed further nuances and disparities. The majority of U.S. superintendents are men (73%), and a higher percentage

of men are younger (in the age range of 41-50) compared to women, who are older (in the 51-60 and 61-70 age ranges). Additionally, Black superintendents (57%) are more likely to hold doctorate degrees than their White counterparts (42%; Thomas et al., 2023). This highlights a potential disparity in educational attainment, suggesting that Black superintendents are held to higher standards than their White colleagues.

There are also some positive, promising trends. Thomas et al. (2023) found that the median base salary of Black (\$197.5K) and Hispanic (\$169.9K) superintendents across the United States was more than that of those who identified as White (\$143.5K). Black and Hispanic superintendents also hold roles in diverse settings, including suburban, town, and rural areas. This challenges the assumption that superintendents of color are only concentrated in urban districts with large minority populations (Miles Nash & Grogan, 2022).

While there are some positive signs, challenges and barriers continue to persist. Thomas et al. (2023) found that Black superintendents (70%) are more likely to lead urban and suburban districts, while Hispanic superintendents (53%) are more likely to lead rural districts (Thomas et al., 2023). These data highlight the underrepresentation and barriers of Black and Hispanic superintendents in ascending to leadership roles and suggest a skewed distribution, where Black and Hispanic superintendents are not proportionally represented across different types of school districts.

### ***Importance of Representation and Role Models***

The importance of representation and role models in the superintendency is a recurring theme in the literature, particularly concerning leaders of color. Reyes-Guerra

et al. (2022) found that public schools are becoming increasingly diverse; however, the number of leaders of color remains low. They argued that this mismatch between student demographics and leadership has a documented negative impact on the learning outcomes of minority students and underrepresented groups, including students of color, economically disadvantaged students, and English language learners (Reyes-Guerra et al., 2022). Reyes-Guerra et al. (2022) argued that this could be due to a cultural disconnect between students and educators, also referred to as a lack of cultural synchronization. While some argue for same-race role models, others see all educators as crucial for fostering diversity and understanding across racial lines. Reyes-Guerra et al. (2022) noted that a more diverse leadership pool can support both approaches.

Perrone (2022) and Woodson et al. (2022) all argued that aspiring school leaders of color historically faced barriers in educational leadership due to a lack of role models and mentors who share their backgrounds. For example, Perrone (2022) noted that the role models of Hispanic women school leaders were found outside of the education sector. Woodson et al. (2022) emphasized the significance of mentorship and affinity groups for superintendents of color, as these offer vital support and guidance in navigating the challenges of their roles.

Johnson (2021), Perrone (2022), and Smith and Gibbs-Roseboro (2023) noted that the presence of leaders of color can inspire and motivate aspiring educators from underrepresented groups, demonstrating that leadership positions are attainable. Smith and Gibbs-Roseboro (2023) focused on the underrepresentation of Black men in rural school leadership roles, arguing that this lack of representation can discourage Black men

from considering careers in education, thereby perpetuating the cycle of underrepresentation. Anderson and Gordon (2022) emphasized the importance of increasing the representation of Black men in educational leadership, as they serve as role models for Black students and challenge prevailing stereotypes. Johnson (2021) highlighted the significance of Black women superintendents as role models for aspiring women leaders of color, noting that seeing someone who looks like them in a position of power can inspire and motivate young women to pursue similar paths. This is the same for Hispanic women. Castillo et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of representation and role models for Hispanic women superintendents. In this study, participants discuss the need for more Hispanic women in leadership positions to inspire and empower young girls and women. Additionally, Castillo et al. (2021) also highlighted the significance of serving as role models for their communities by advocating for educational equity.

Joseph (2023a) explained that the research shows that Black superintendents, through their lived experiences, are more likely to understand the cultural needs of Black children, hire Black teachers, and lead with culturally responsive strategies that positively influence students' well-being and academic outcomes. Grease et al. (2023) found that Hispanic women superintendents use servant leadership and cultural capital to overcome barriers. They also found that the presence of Hispanic women superintendents has a positive impact on student success in rural communities because students benefit from role models who share their cultural backgrounds. Smith and Gibbs-Roseboro (2023) and White (2023) both argued that a more diverse leadership team can bring different perspectives and approaches to school leadership, thereby benefiting the entire school

community by improving the school climate, increasing family engagement, and enhancing the retention of diverse teachers.

### ***Variation in Representations Across U.S. States***

Studies in North Carolina, Massachusetts, and Oregon highlight that the representation of Black and Hispanic superintendents varies significantly across different states in the United States. Hart et al. (2021) focused on North Carolina and revealed a significant increase in the representation of Black superintendents, from 8% in 2000 to 22% in 2021. In contrast, the representation of Hispanic superintendents remained extremely low, with only one Hispanic superintendent identified in the entire state in 2021 (Hart et al., 2021).

The Massachusetts study by Jansen (2021) revealed a similar pattern of underrepresentation, with only 5% of superintendents of color in the state. The study found that Black and Hispanic individuals are present in lower leadership positions, such as principals and assistant superintendents, but the presence of a “glass ceiling” prevents their advancement to the top role of superintendent due to embedded conscious or unconscious racial bias. Woodson et al. (2022) focused on the lived experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents of color in Oregon. Their study found that Black and Hispanic superintendents experienced racism and microaggressions from various stakeholders, including colleagues, staff, board members, and community members. This research exemplifies the unique challenges leaders of color face despite their qualifications and experience.

### ***Texas-Specific Data on Superintendent Diversity***

The following section draws heavily on the research conducted by DeMatthews et al. (2023, 2024a, 2024b). Their work represents the first comprehensive longitudinal examination of the Texas superintendent workforce. Until recently, superintendent career pathways and demographics were not publicly available. DeMatthews et al. (2023, 2024a, 2024b) served as the preeminent source for understanding student and leadership demographics in Texas, providing an essential foundation for examining the experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents in the state.

Similar to the nationwide data, the Texas landscape also reveals a stark mismatch between the demographics of students and school leaders. Research by DeMatthews et al. (2023, 2024a, 2024b) and data from TEA (2023a) exposed these significant disparities. DeMatthews et al. (2023) conducted an 11-year analysis of the Texas Superintendent workforce, spanning from SY10-11 to SY20-21, using Texas Education Research Center (ERC) longitudinal data. The data showed that in Texas, there are approximately 1200 superintendents who, together with the community and school boards, make decisions that impact 5.4 million students and 400,000 teachers and staff (DeMatthews et al., 2023).

Until 2023, superintendent career pathways and demographics were not publicly available because they were not tracked by any national or state agency or organization. The Texas Education Leadership Lab has now begun tracking this critical data for Texas (DeMatthews et al., 2023). The study found that the demographics of Texas leaders and

teachers do not accurately reflect those of students (Table 1), which is concerning for the future superintendent pipeline (DeMatthews et al., 2023; TEA, 2023a).

**Table 1**

*Demographics of Texas Schools*

Texas group	White	Hispanic	Black	Other non-White
Students	25%	53%	13%	8%
Teachers	57%	28%	11%	4%
Principals	58%	25%	14%	3%
Superintendents	79%	13%	6%	2%

*Note.* Data compiled from DeMatthews et al., 2023, and TEA, 2023a.

There is a significant mismatch between the demographics of Texas students and the state's superintendents, particularly in terms of Hispanic representation (DeMatthews et al., 2023). DeMatthews et al. (2024b) found that there is a troubling race and gender gap in the superintendency, even though the Hispanic population is growing in Texas. While Hispanics make up 53% of the student population, only 4% of Texas superintendents were Hispanic women in the 2020-2021 school year, representing a 1% increase since the 2010-2011 school year. Hispanic men superintendents increased from 7% to 10%, and White women from 14% to 20% (DeMatthews et al., 2023).

White educators (65%) are more likely to go directly from principal to superintendent, compared to 40% of Hispanic principals and 24% of Black principals (DeMatthews et al., 2023). Black and Hispanic superintendents take a longer pathway to superintendency; 46% of Hispanics and 51% of Black educators take 7-10 years for the transition from principal to superintendent (DeMatthews et al., 2023). These gaps are even higher when taking gender and race into account (DeMatthews et al., 2023).

DeMatthews et al. (2023) argued that the current system may be denying qualified women of color access to superintendent positions and suggest a need to address potential bias in hiring practices. Women superintendents consistently earn less than their men counterparts, despite factors like location, district size, and experience (DeMatthews et al., 2023). While women dominate the ranks of teachers and principals, they hold a disproportionately small share of superintendent positions: Women: 76% of teachers, 66% of principals, and 27% of superintendents. Of this, only 7% are Black or Hispanic women, “which points to a clogged pipeline for women who are principals aspiring to be superintendents “(DeMatthews et al., 2023, p. 55).

Current trends suggest qualified aspiring superintendents who are not White men may be overlooked for leadership roles, raising concerns for policymakers and stakeholders. DeMatthews et al.’s (2024a) longitudinal study highlighted the significant disparities in gender and racial diversity within the state superintendent pipeline. These identified gaps were differences in promotion patterns, with suggestions to recruit superintendents from outside networks rather than within them.

DeMatthews et al. (2024b) also found that school boards often exhibit biases in favor of hiring White men who are not near retirement age for superintendent positions. DeMatthews et al. (2024b) acknowledged that diversifying the superintendency alone will not solve all the challenges facing public education. However, they argue that significant progress is unlikely without leadership that reflects the demographics it serves. DeMatthews et al. (2024b) also argued that diversifying the superintendency is crucial for addressing the complex challenges facing Texas public education today, such

as controversies surrounding LGBTQ+ rights, ethnic studies curricula, and discussions of racism and xenophobia.

This gap is troubling because research indicates that Black and Hispanic leaders of color often outnavigate their White peers in creating inclusive school environments by recruiting and retaining educators of color and adopting culturally responsive practices (DeMatthews et al., 2024b). By not promoting these qualified leaders to superintendent positions, Texas may be missing valuable perspectives and expertise that could benefit its diverse student population.

DeMatthews et al.'s (2023) research also revealed regional variables across Texas. While there has been some progress in diversifying the superintendency, the pace is too slow, especially in rural regions, where 90% of superintendents are White (DeMatthews et al., 2023). Black and Hispanic superintendents often lead high-poverty school districts, which often face the greatest challenges. Hispanic superintendents typically serve districts primarily along the U.S.-Mexico border, while Black superintendents primarily serve districts in the Central and Eastern parts of Texas. Black and Hispanic superintendents also predominantly serve districts with high numbers of economically disadvantaged students, and they rarely serve affluent and majority-White districts (DeMatthews et al., 2023). Menchaca and Estrada (2021) found that while superintendents in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) were mostly Hispanic, reflecting the local demographics, the majority of superintendents in rural Texas districts were White. Whether Black and Hispanic superintendents self-select into these regions was not studied.

Vilches et al.'s (2023) study examined the perceptions of stakeholders (principals, superintendents, and school board presidents) in rural South Texas school districts regarding the *grow your own* (GYO) approach to hiring superintendents. According to Vilches et al. (2023), the GYO hiring approach has both advantages and disadvantages. Participants reported that this method limited the number of qualified candidates and resulted in gender bias in the selection process. On the benefits side, the participants noted that the GYO approach helped to cultivate a leadership culture and decreased the learning curve for new hires.

### ***Role of Representative Bureaucracy***

Research shows that a balanced superintendent workforce should mirror the student body, teachers, and principals in Texas. This promotes better understanding and representation. While schools and teachers directly influence student learning, superintendents play an indirect role through leadership and district management (DeMatthews et al., 2023). In Texas, Black and Hispanic students lag behind their White counterparts in academic achievement, graduation rate, and college readiness (TEA, 2023b). Academic achievement based on the 2022-23 state assessment indicates that 32% of Black students and 42% of Hispanic students meet or exceed the state academic standards compared to 64% of White students. While 62% of White students are college-ready, in contrast, only 49% of Hispanic students and 36% of Black students are college-ready (TEA, 2023b).

Gilbert et al.'s (2022) research highlighted the persistent underrepresentation of leaders of color in U.S. schools despite the increasing diversity of the student population.

They argue that this lack of representation is a barrier to improving educational experiences and outcomes for students of color. Superintendents of color are more likely to hire principals of color, who in turn are more likely to hire and retain teachers of color. These teachers, in turn, have been shown to improve outcomes for students of color.

Bartanen and Grissom (2019) and Gilmore (2022) also agreed that increasing representation in school leadership positions can lead to greater representation throughout the school district, which in turn can positively impact the experiences and outcomes of Black and Hispanic students and teachers. Gilmore (2022) found that increased representation in leadership improves student academic achievement because minority school leaders are more likely to advocate for policies (such as hiring minority principals and teachers reflective of the school demographics) and programs (including increasing bilingual funding and implementing culturally responsive practices) that support minority students. Gilmore (2022) also argued that when analyzing diversity in school bureaucracies, CRT must be considered, as race significantly impacts the experiences and outcomes of students.

Bartanen and Grissom's (2019) findings supported this theory, showing that Black principals are more likely to hire and retain Black teachers, and that Black students tend to have higher math achievement under the leadership of Black principals. These findings suggest that increasing the representation of Black principals could be a viable strategy for improving educational equity for Black students and teachers (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019).

## **Pathways to Superintendency**

Clement and Young (2022) argued that, despite three decades of research demonstrating the advantages of diversity in leadership, the reality is that the school leadership workforce continues to be predominantly White and male. They argue that the reason behind this disparity is a troubling leaky pipeline. Clement and Young (2022) argued that the root cause of this disparity is a pipeline with points that disproportionately marginalize educators of color at each juncture. These juncture points include college access, graduation rates, teacher preparation placement pipeline, recruitment for leadership roles, leadership program completion, placement in leadership positions, and support for ongoing professional development. At each of these junctures, the pool of potential diverse leaders shrinks in size and representation, resulting in a Whitening of the educator workforce along the pipeline (Clement & Young, 2022).

Reyes-Guerra et al. (2022) found that public schools are becoming increasingly diverse, but that the number of leaders of color continues to remain low. This noted mismatch between student demographics and leadership has a documented negative impact on the learning outcomes of minority students, which creates a critical issue that school leadership and preparation programs must address. Reyes-Guerra et al. (2022) argued in their research that a critical gap remains, and that gap exists in the limited exploration of how educational leadership programs view and address this diversification challenge.

Yamashiro et al. (2022) argued that the pipeline to leadership positions is not the primary issue, as individuals of color are already present in lower-level leadership roles.

They state that the problem is the barriers that educators of color face in advancing to the superintendency. Yamashiro et al. (2022) suggested that leadership preparation programs need to actively recruit and support aspiring leaders of color, provide them with the necessary tools and resources, and address systemic barriers that hinder their advancement.

### ***National Context on Traditional and Alternative Pathways to Superintendency***

Understanding the pathways to the superintendency is important in understanding the experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas. This section examines the literature on traditional and alternative pathways to the superintendency. Research suggests that individuals from marginalized groups may face systemic barriers in accessing traditional pathways, leading them to pursue alternative routes to leadership (Kim & Smith, 2024; Miles Nash, & Grogan, 2022). Examining these pathways can shed light on the unique challenges and strategies used by Black and Hispanic superintendents in securing their superintendency.

Miles Nash and Grogan's (2022) analysis of the U.S. superintendency shed light on the underrepresentation of people of color and noted the pathways they took to ascend to the superintendency. Miles Nash and Grogan (2022) found that the pathways of women of color differed from the pathways of men of color. Women of color were more likely to take a nontraditional pathway compared to men of color. Women of color were also more likely to have had positions in higher education (6.5% of women compared to 5.9% of men) or non-educational jobs before becoming superintendents (10.1% of women compared to 3.8% of men) compared to men of color.

Kim and Smith (2024) found that education leaders of color often followed nontraditional pathways to leadership, such as through professional networks developed in graduate school or programs like Teach for America (TFA). In the study, participants of color mentioned the importance of being encouraged by mentors to pursue leadership roles. Kim and Smith (2024) argued that these alternative pathways can be crucial for individuals who may not have access to traditional leadership pathways due to systemic barriers.

Berry and Reardon (2022) studied the concept of “contest mobility,” which refers to career advancement based on individual merit and competition for positions, such as management experience and academic credentialing. This can be seen as an alternative pathway to the traditional “sponsored mobility” route, where individuals are tapped for leadership positions by their superiors. Sponsored mobility includes leadership training and administrative experience. Berry and Reardon (2022) noted that Black leaders may be more likely to rely on contest mobility due to a lack of sponsorship mobility opportunities.

### ***Texas-Specific Context on Superintendent (Leadership) Pathways***

Marder et al. (2022) conducted a 9-year study from 2011 to 2019 that followed the 2011 cohort of 14,825 Texas teachers from university-based and alternative programs. According to the Marder et al. (2022) study, Black (53.4%) and Hispanic (63.7%) teachers stayed longer in the classroom than their White peers (39.1%), and Black (9.1%) and Hispanic (5.8%) teachers advanced into leadership at higher rates than their White peers (4%). However, Marder et al. (2022) failed to acknowledge that these

numbers can be misleading, considering that the 2011 cohort consisted of 64% White educators, 22% Hispanic educators, and 8% Black educators. This means 376 White teachers became school leaders compared to 187 Hispanic teachers and 109 Black teachers. This means that 48% of the educators who became school leaders from the 2011 cohort were White, 24% Hispanic, and 14% Black.

DeMatthews et al. (2023), in an 11-year analysis of the Texas superintendent workforce, found that Black, Hispanic, and women school leaders aspiring to be superintendents face more indirect and longer pathways to superintendency. White school leaders (65%) are more likely to go directly from principal to superintendent compared to 40% of Hispanic principals and 24% of Black principals. The most common pathway for Black, Hispanic, and women principals was principal to assistant superintendent to superintendent. Black and Hispanic leaders also take a longer pathway to superintendency, with 46% of Hispanic principals and 51% of Black principals taking 7-10 years for the transition, compared to 69% of White principals who make the transition in under 6 years (DeMatthews et al., 2023).

### ***Impact of Other Pipelines on the Superintendent Pipeline***

Irwin et al. (2024) and the NCES (2024) report found that U.S. public school teachers were 77% women, with 80% of these women being White, 9% Hispanic, 6% Black, and the remaining 5% Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, Pacific Islander or two or more races. Even though women make up a majority of the educator workforce, Leo and Mao (2023) found that women and minority educators face challenges in attaining school leadership positions. They show that educators of color are at a

disadvantage compared to White educators when it comes to being chosen as principals and that this disadvantage is even greater for women of color.

Perrone's (2022) research revealed that the U.S. principal pipeline is lacking in diversity and that educators of color continue to face barriers and biases along the principalship pathway. They noted that the demographics of the principal workforce were not representative of the U.S. population. Perrone's (2022) analysis found that the intersectionality of race/ethnicity and sex/gender are crucial variables in the principalship pathway, especially for barriers faced by women of color, and that Black and Hispanic teachers were more likely to become assistant principals than principals. Perrone (2022) noted that both quantitative and qualitative research found evidence that there's bias against aspiring school leaders who are not White and male.

Perrone (2022) also noted inequities in the advancement of principals of color along the superintendency pathway and argued that increasing the pool of principals of color could lead to an increase in the diversity of the superintendency. This lack of equity in the school leadership pipeline affects K-12 education quality and suggests that discrimination is at play in the school leadership pipeline, which excludes and further marginalizes highly qualified educators of color (Perrone, 2022).

### ***Role of Preparation Programs and Professional Development***

Leadership preparation programs (LPPs) play a key role in shaping the future of educational leadership. Weiner et al. (2021) found that LPPs often fall short in addressing the unique experiences of Black women leaders. Conversations about race and gender within LPPs tend to be limited, focusing primarily on Whiteness and White privilege

while neglecting the intersectional identities and experiences of people of color, especially Black women. These omissions limit opportunities to challenge dominant narratives and explore leadership through an intersectional lens, further normalizing Whiteness and patriarchy in leadership and marginalizing people of color's experiences (Weiner et al., 2021).

New Leaders (2022) emphasized that investing in high-quality leadership development and principal preparation is crucial for building a diverse pool of talented school leaders. Reyes-Guerra et al. (2022) argued that because leadership preparation programs (LPPs) are the primary pathway for preparing school leaders, they must also bear the critical responsibility of actively diversifying the profession itself and ensuring that those leaders are prepared for the cultural diversity within their schools. Clement and Young (2022) agreed and emphasized that leadership preparation programs, in particular, need to go beyond just sustaining diversity and actively work towards increasing it by focusing on recruiting a wider range of applicants, providing tailored support for leaders of color, and integrating curriculum that acknowledges the unique experiences of educators of color.

Grooms et al. (2024) argued that because the U.S. school leadership workforce has not kept pace with the growing diversity in schools, there is a clear need for a diverse leadership pipeline, including principals and superintendents of color. Grooms et al. (2024) stated that holding a principalship position is the most common pathway to superintendency. They emphasize that it is not just about hiring leaders of color for representation purposes but also about student equity because students of color have

higher academic outcomes when diverse principals lead schools. Grooms et al. (2024) suggested that district leaders should reflect the school and community demographics and be prepared to advance equity in these diverse settings through culturally responsive practices.

DeMatthews et al. (2024a) argued that the leadership gaps among women and people of color may be caused by a lack of opportunities for superintendent leadership development. Weiner et al. (2021) agreed and identified a critical gap in the LPPs. They found that Black women leaders in LPPs were not provided opportunities to explore their intersectional identities or experiences with discrimination. Instead, leadership was presented as a universal skill set, neglecting the impact of race and gender. These omissions functioned as microaggressions, marginalizing the participants' unique experiences as Black women leaders and neglecting to equip them with strategies to navigate these challenges.

### ***Influence of Personal Networks and Mentors***

Lee and Mao (2023) found that applicants of color were less likely to apply for leadership positions because they did not receive the same encouragement and support as White applicants. Their research suggests that mentorship plays a crucial role in career advancement for school leaders. Lee and Mao (2023) also noted that there are few opportunities for women of color to get mentors. This lack of mentors is particularly pronounced for aspiring Black leaders, given the low numbers of Black superintendents in the school leadership workforce (Joseph, 2023a).

Mentorship, particularly from mentors of color, is crucial for the sustained success of school leaders, especially those in challenging schools or who are the first leader of color in their school or district (New Leaders, 2022). The report emphasized that mentorship programs should be intentionally designed and adequately funded to provide ongoing support and guidance to school leaders of color. Miles Nash and Grogan's (2022) study found that superintendents of color were less likely to be hired internally.

While both men and women of color faced challenges in getting promoted from within the same district, men of color relied more on various support networks, such as mentors, spouses, friends, supervising superintendents, colleagues, or relatives, to reach the superintendency. Meanwhile, women of color placed more importance on the help of former professors and principals (Miles Nash & Grogan, 2022).

### **Lived Experiences and Systemic Barriers Encountered by Black and Hispanic Superintendents**

Although Black and Hispanic educators hold more superintendencies today than in the past, little is known about their lived experiences (Miles Nash & Grogan, 2022). Gilbert et al. (2022), Jansen (2021), Weiner et al. (2021), and Yamashiro et al. (2022) all acknowledged that leaders of color face systemic barriers in attaining the superintendency.

Conscious or unconscious biases in hiring and promotion practices create a glass ceiling hindering the advancement of leaders of color (Jansen, 2021; Yamashiro et al., 2022). Specifically, unconscious biases can manifest in many ways, from subtle

microaggressions to outright racial discrimination. Jansen's (2021) research found that systemic and cultural biases within communities and school boards often discourage aspiring superintendents of color, and racial prejudices impede their progress further. Yamashiro et al. (2022) argued that standardized assessments for principal licensure, which is a common stepping stone to the superintendency, may inadvertently disadvantage candidates of color.

Yamashiro et al. (2022) found that the cost of leadership preparation programs and the lack of access to information and resources can be prohibitive for many aspiring leaders of color. Many potential leaders of color were unaware of the pathways to leadership or the resources available to support them along the pathway. Additionally, Gilbert et al. (2022) found that school leaders of color may feel pressure to represent their entire racial or ethnic group, leading to isolation and exhaustion.

This isolation is compounded by disparities in mentorship opportunities. Weiner et al. (2021) found that White men receive more mentoring than women and colleagues of color, leading to preferential treatment in leadership appointments. Gilbert et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of mentorship and affinity groups for leaders of color, highlighting their role in mitigating feelings of isolation and providing much-needed guidance. They especially emphasize the value of mentorship from leaders of the same racial or ethnic background, fostering a deeper understanding and connection.

### ***Intersection of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in Shaping Superintendency***

The experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents are not the same and are shaped by the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and gender. For example, Campbell and

Campbell-Whatley's (2020) findings suggested that women of color may face additional barriers, such as feeling more guilt about pursuing nontraditional career roles compared to White women.

While Gilbert et al. (2022) found that women of color may be perceived as less competent or less qualified than their White male counterparts, this could make it more difficult for them to advance in their careers. Superintendents of color, particularly women, reported feeling unsafe due to threats and harassment and reported experiencing racism and microaggressions from colleagues, staff, board members, and community members (Woodson et al., 2022).

The study by Reyes-Guerra et al. (2022) found that while Black educators were gaining leadership roles, there remained a critical need to increase the representation of Hispanic educators, both female and male, as well as Black male leaders. Smith and Gibbs-Roseboro (2023), whose study's primary focus was on the experiences of Black men, acknowledged that race and gender intersect to create unique challenges for Black men in education. These challenges include systemic barriers, limited opportunities, and negative perceptions (Smith & Gibbs-Roseboro, 2023). These experiences, shaped by the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and gender, extend to Black women as well. Kingsbury and Jean-Marie (2021) argued that despite their increasing presence in educational leadership, Black women continue to be overlooked, undervalued, and overworked due to the intersectional marginalization they face of being both Black and women.

These intersectionality barriers are also seen in the superintendent applicant pool, as highlighted by the ILO Group (2022). The ILO Group (2022) found that having a single candidate of color in the applicant pool reduces their chance of being selected. They advocate prioritizing gender and minority balance in recruitment and selection processes by ensuring search firms include at least two women and two leaders of color in the superintendent applicant pool. The ILO Group (2022) argues that having two females and two leaders of color significantly increases the likelihood of a female or a leader of color being hired at least 79 times. One of the primary factors contributing to a lack of diversity in superintendent applicant pools is the lack of transparency in superintendent hiring processes. There are no requirements for public reporting on applicant demographics, which allows this historical discrimination to persist (ILO Group, 2022). To address this, the ILO Group (2022) recommends that state agencies publicly report on this information to foster gender and racial equity.

### ***Women Superintendents of Color***

While this study focuses on the experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents, it is essential to acknowledge that the experiences of women within these groups are further influenced by the intersection of gender. The review of the literature reveals that the gender gap in the U.S. superintendency persists as an issue, despite women comprising the majority of the K-12 workforce at other levels. White's (2021) study could not examine race, age, experiences, or the pathway to the superintendency, but the study did gather the gender of the 13,000 superintendents across the United States. In the U.S. superintendency, women hold only 26% of these leadership

positions (White, 2021, 2023; Thomas et al., 2023). White (2021, 2023), ILO Group (2022), and Timmer and Woo (2023) revealed even more nuances. Although women are overall underrepresented, they are more likely to lead larger urban districts with higher percentages of marginalized students, including low-income, English language learners, and students with disabilities. (White, 2021, 2023). This suggests a potential preference for women leaders in challenging contexts but also raises questions about why they are not equally represented in other types of districts.

The same ILO Group (2022) study found that women are more likely to be selected as superintendents if they already serve in the district and that women who served as interim superintendents are more likely to be named as permanent superintendents. In this study, 51% of women (n = 43) were selected internally, and 56% of the 150 women-led districts followed the interim pathway. Gullo and Sperandio (2020) noted that this may reflect a preference for internal superintendent candidates or a strategy by women to navigate potential biases associated with being external candidates.

However, the internal pathways for women must be viewed through an intersectional lens, given that Timmer and Woo (2023) acknowledged that “the structures that privilege men in education leadership clearly also privilege whiteness” (p. 12). The lack of a national longitudinal superintendent data set further complicates the issue (DeMatthews et al., 2024a; White, 2023). White (2023) also recommended expanding superintendent data collection to include information on race and gender. This would enable researchers to investigate the relationship between diversity at the superintendent, principal, and teacher levels. This gap in data hinders policymakers, school boards, and

communities' ability to make informed decisions about diversifying the superintendent pipeline and addressing the unique challenges faced by women of color. White (2023) argued that this gap impacts research and keeps female students of color from the opportunity to see themselves reflected in their school leaders (White, 2023).

### ***Unique Lived Experiences of Black Superintendents***

Smith and Gibbs-Roseboro (2023) and Anderson and Gordon (2022) focused on the historical context of racial discrimination and its ongoing impact on Black men's experiences in education. Both studies name the impact of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision on the decline in Black educators across the United States. Anderson and Gordon (2022) also named how societal expectations and stereotypes about Black men can influence their career trajectories and leadership styles. They found that Black male educators often feel pressure to prove themselves and their competence due to racial stereotypes and biases. Lopez and Jean-Marie (2021) further emphasized that the lived experiences of Black educators, particularly their experiences of anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism, uniquely position them to form valuable insights into the complex racial and structural issues with education.

Smith and Gibbs-Roseboro (2023) found that Black men often face negative stereotypes and biases, which can hinder their career advancement in education. They stated that even within educational institutions, the media perpetuates these stereotypes and societal expectations. Smith and Gibbs-Roseboro (2023) argued that the lack of Black men's role models and mentors in educational leadership can discourage young Black men from pursuing careers in education. They also highlighted that this lack of

representation can perpetuate the cycle of underrepresentation and limit opportunities for mentorship and guidance. Anderson and Gordon (2022) found that Black men in predominantly White schools may feel isolated, excluded, and burdened by the feeling of being pressured to be token representatives of their race.

Anderson and Gordon (2022) noted the critical importance of representation and mentorship for Black educators and argue that these factors can help mitigate the negative impacts of isolation and tokenism faced by Black male educators. Lopez and Jean-Marie (2021) found that collaborative mentorship can be a valuable strategy for supporting Black educators who experience isolation and a lack of mentors. They defined collaborative mentorship as “...working with others in the area or who understand the work in order to deepen understanding or to co-labor about difficult issues” (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021, p. 10).

Joseph (2023b) argued that racism and bias are to blame for the lack of Black superintendents, stating that Black leaders often must conform to White norms to be accepted and face microaggressions. Anderson and Gordon (2022) also highlighted that Black men educators often face microaggressions and stereotypes, such as being perceived as disciplinarians rather than educators. Additionally, educational programs often do not prepare Black men for the challenges they may face (Joseph, 2023b). Horsford et al. (2021) argued that the experiences of Black men leaders are shaped by their racial identities, family backgrounds, leadership philosophies, and commitment to supporting students and their communities.

Baker and Gray (2020), Johnson (2021), and Kingsbury and Jean-Marie (2021) provided detailed insights into the lived experiences of Black women superintendents. The participants in all three studies described the challenges they faced in their careers, such as isolation, lack of mentorship, stereotypes, microaggressions, and the pressure of tokenism. Kingsbury and Jean-Marie (2021) found that the unique challenges Black women face stem from the intersection of race and gender, often referred to as a double bind or double whammy. Black women leaders also experience marginalization due to being in a position of power in a predominantly White environment and often experience sexism in the workplace. Baker and Gray (2020) used the term *double jeopardy* to describe the combined effects of racism and sexism that Black women face.

In Johnson's (2021) study, one superintendent recounted feeling like she had to use the "backdoor" to get things done, indicating a lack of recognition as an equal partner. Another superintendent shared an instance where a White male colleague made a significant decision without consulting her, suggesting that her authority was not automatically recognized due to her race and gender. Baker and Gray (2020), Johnson (2021), and Kingsbury and Jean-Marie (2021) argued that these experiences are not isolated incidents but are rooted in systemic issues that have historically marginalized women and minorities in educational leadership.

Kingsbury and Jean-Marie (2021) and Johnson (2021) stated that these lived experiences can be detrimental to their well-being and success, leading to additional stress and scrutiny. Baker and Gray (2020) also shared the strategies Black women used

to overcome these challenges, which include building strong support networks, developing resilience, and advocating for themselves and their students.

### ***Unique Lived Experiences of Hispanic Superintendents***

Rivera (2023) found that Hispanic women administrators felt that race and gender impacted their career advancement and reported feeling marginalized, tokenized, stereotyped, scrutinized, and left behind by colleagues. Rivera (2023) also noted that Hispanic women felt they had to work harder than their White male counterparts to prove themselves in response to the scrutiny they faced. Additionally, they had to adjust their communication style or dress depending on the audience. Also, Hispanic women were more likely to say that balancing family, culture, and career was a challenge (Rivera, 2023)

Castillo et al. (2021) highlighted that gender bias and stereotypes can be barriers for Hispanic women superintendents. In their study, Castillo et al. (2021) noted that these women face unique challenges due to their dual identities as both women and Hispanics. They argued that understanding these intersecting identities is crucial to fully grasping the experiences of Hispanic women leaders in education. In Castillo et al.'s (2021) study, participants shared experiences of gender bias and sexual harassment and mentioned the "good old boy network" as a potential challenge for Hispanic women superintendents (p. 16). One participant named the difficulties Hispanic women face in navigating male-dominated environments and the compromises they may have to make to succeed.

### ***Solutions From Lived Experiences***

Castillo et al. (2021) and Rivera (2023) highlighted the importance of mentorship and professional networks for Hispanic women leaders. In Castillo et al.'s (2021) study, participants mentioned benefiting from mentors who encouraged and guided them in their careers. They also emphasized the value of collaborative networks of Hispanic women leaders for sharing experiences and best practices.

Based on their studies, DeMatthews et al. (2024b) and Grease et al. (2023) recommended steps to increase the number of Hispanic women on the pathway to superintendency and steps to support them once they are in the superintendency. DeMatthews et al. (2024b) recommended establishing a national database to track superintendent demographics, developing leadership programs with built-in support, and mentoring for underrepresented groups, and encouraging universities to examine their admissions data and placement rates for superintendent programs. Grease et al. (2023) identified that support from family, professional relationships, and peers is crucial for the success of Hispanic women superintendents. Grease et al. (2023) argued that strong cultural and familial ties enable Hispanic women to navigate the challenges of rural superintendency, providing them with determination, fortitude, and a sense of cultural identity. Similar to Castillo et al. (2021) and Rivera (2023), they also found that mentorship programs and professional networks can be beneficial in supporting Hispanic women in educational leadership roles (Grease et al., 2023).

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Politics in Superintendency**

Coviello and DeMatthews (2021) highlighted the unique challenges faced by superintendents, particularly those of color, in navigating the complexities of promoting equity within systems that often mirror the broader U.S. systems of inequity. Superintendents who have significant power can address these inequities in schools. Unfortunately, when doing so, they must downplay their own views on equity to get policies passed, and they struggle with how to advocate for equity when there's not enough community support (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021). Coviello and DeMatthews (2021) noted that very few superintendents are people of color, despite research indicating that these identities can influence how leaders approach equity and navigate challenges.

Coviello and DeMatthews (2021), Joseph (2023a), and Woodson et al. (2022) noted that Black superintendents often face enormous pressure and are expected to solve complex racial inequities, potentially facing backlash if they are unsuccessful. This resistance can come from school board members, cabinet members, unions, and the community when trying to implement equitable policies and practices (Woodson et al., 2022). For example, Joseph (2023a) argued that diverse educational leadership, particularly Black superintendents, enhances leadership impact and student outcomes, but they often face additional challenges, such as financial constraints and racial resistance in urban districts. They must navigate a political climate of government bigotry and the power dynamics of race while striving to improve outcomes for all students, which they were hired to address.

A review of the literature also highlighted the significant challenges faced by superintendents, particularly those of color, in navigating the complex organizational politics of their roles. Schwartz and Diliberti (2023) found that superintendents of color reported higher stress levels than their White counterparts. The study found that superintendents of color stressed more about political issues and opinions, school board relations, community safety, and teacher union relations than did their White counterparts. Interestingly, Schwartz and Diliberti (2023) also found that superintendents of color reported coping *well* or *very well* with stress more frequently than White superintendents, suggesting that superintendents of color may have developed effective coping mechanisms to deal with the unique stressors they face.

### ***Impact of Gender on Leadership Styles and Perceptions***

Gender plays a significant role in shaping leadership styles and perceptions within the superintendency. Castillo et al. (2021), Gilbert et al. (2022), and Gullo and Sperandio (2020) all highlighted the unique challenges faced by women, particularly women of color, in navigating educational leadership.

Gullo and Sperandio (2020) argued that women may face different expectations and perceptions due to their gender. They may be perceived as less independent and needing guidance from men, indicating the potential influence of gender stereotypes on leadership perceptions (Castillo et al., 2021). Gilbert et al. (2022) found that women of color in leadership positions are perceived as aggressive or not assertive enough.

### ***Role of Community Cultural Wealth in Leadership***

Castillo et al. (2021), Horsford et al. (2021), Johnson (2021), and Rivas-Garza et al. (2023) all emphasized the significance of CCW in empowering leaders of color within the superintendency. For example, Horsford et al. (2021) argued that Black education leaders often balance a bureaucrat/administrator role identity, focused on meeting societal goals, with an ethno-humanist role identity that emphasizes the cultural needs and well-being of students.

Rivas-Garza et al. (2023) delved a little deeper and utilize Yosso's model of CCW as a framework for understanding the persistence and motivation of Hispanic women leaders in seeking and retaining superintendent positions in Texas. Rivas-Garza et al. (2023) argued that Hispanic women superintendents possess the following CCW: aspiration capital, social capital, familial capital, linguistic capital, and resistance capital. They found that Hispanic women superintendents faced various challenges in their ascension to the superintendency, which included microaggressions, societal oppression, lack of mentorship and networking opportunities, and familial expectations that conflicted with career demands. Rivas-Garza et al. (2023) found that Hispanic women superintendents leverage their CCW to navigate these obstacles by developing resilience in the face of oppression and finding and supporting other Hispanic women in educational leadership roles. Castillo et al. (2021) found that Hispanic women leaders often leverage their cultural knowledge and understanding of the community to build relationships, gain trust, and effectively serve their students and families. Castillo et al.

(2021) also noted that cultural responsiveness and community engagement are crucial aspects of the leadership approach of Hispanic women superintendents.

Johnson (2021) also argued that CCW highlights the importance of community engagement for Black women superintendents. Black women superintendents often draw upon their cultural wealth and community connections to navigate challenges and build support for their initiatives. Johnson (2021) argued that CCW is a valuable asset for leaders of color, enabling them to connect with their communities and leverage their cultural knowledge to address the unique needs of their students.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

This chapter provides valuable insights into the demographics, pathways, and experiences of superintendents, particularly those who are Black and Hispanic. The findings from the review support four main topics in relation to the attainment of superintendent roles for Black and Hispanic educators in Texas: (a) the current landscape of representation among Black and Hispanic superintendents, (b) pathways to the superintendency, (c) lived experiences and systemic barriers encountered by Black and Hispanic superintendents, and (d) DEI and politics in the superintendency. Each of the four themes was supported by several subthemes, which fully reflected the complexity of the findings in the literature review. Several subthemes supported each of the four themes to fully reflect the complexity of the findings in the literature review.

The review of literature highlights the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic superintendents, the barriers they face in ascending to leadership positions, and the unique challenges they face in their roles. The research studies also emphasized the

importance of representation and role models for aspiring leaders of color, as well as the need for leadership preparation programs to actively recruit and support individuals from diverse backgrounds. The literature review on the superintendency has also explored the influence of gender and race on leadership styles and perceptions, highlighting the unique challenges faced by both Black and Hispanic women.

Despite existing research, significant gaps remain in the literature on the superintendency pathways to leadership for Black and Hispanic individuals that remain underexplored. There remains a need to dig deeper into the unique perspectives of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas, particularly regarding their strategies for success and recommendations for aspiring leaders. This study aimed to address this gap by centering on the voices of these superintendents and exploring their unique perspectives on the challenges and opportunities they have encountered throughout their career pathway to the superintendency. The findings from this study could contribute to the existing literature on educational leadership, diversity, and representation. It could also be used to inform policies and practices to increase the representation of Black and Hispanic superintendents across Texas.

The literature review has highlighted significant gaps in our understanding of the experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas, particularly regarding the role of intersectionality and the specific strategies that have contributed to their career success. To address these gaps, this study employed a basic qualitative research design, utilizing semistructured interviews with a diverse sample of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas. Chapter 3 outlines the specific research questions,

methodology, and data analysis procedures that were used to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of these educational leaders.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The problem that was addressed through this study was that there is an underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas school districts. The purpose of this basic qualitative design study was to explore Black and Hispanic superintendents' perceptions of their successes, challenges, and recommendations to secure a superintendent position in Texas. Chapter 3 details the research design and methodology used to collect and analyze data. Chapter 3 is organized into the following key sections: research design, rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, and data analysis plan. Lastly, this chapter addresses the ethical considerations and trustworthiness related to participant recruitment, data collection, and the treatment of data.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What are Black and Hispanic superintendents' perceptions of their successes in securing a superintendent position in Texas?

RQ2: What are Black and Hispanic superintendents' perceptions of their challenges in securing a superintendent position in Texas?

RQ3: What are Black and Hispanic superintendents' recommended strategies to secure a superintendent position in Texas?

The phenomenon of this study was the lived experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents as they navigated their pathway to securing a superintendent position in Texas. This research used a basic qualitative design study approach to explore the perceptions of Black and Hispanic superintendents. A basic qualitative design study

design was particularly appropriate for this research because it allows for an in-depth, holistic, and contextualized exploration of the experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents within the Texas education system. Qualitative research methods enable a deep exploration of participants' perspectives, providing a rich understanding of their lived experiences within a specific context (Patton, 2014).

This research used a semistructured interview approach to capture the lived experiences and perceptions of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas. This approach was well-suited to address the research questions because it allowed for the collection and analysis of rich, nuanced data on personal experiences, beliefs, and perspectives (Patton, 2014). Semistructured interviews provide flexibility to explore emerging themes through the use of follow-up probes and unanticipated questions, which align with the study's goal of understanding the superintendent pathways from diverse perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

This study explored the experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents through the lens of CRT and intersectionality. These frameworks provided a theoretical foundation for understanding how systemic factors, such as race, ethnicity, and gender, intersect to shape individual experiences within social contexts of educational leadership (Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). By centering the voices of Black and Hispanic superintendents, this study aimed to challenge dominant narratives and shed light on the systemic barriers and facilitators that influence diversity and equity within the Texas superintendency.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In this basic qualitative design study, I assumed the role of researcher. As the researcher, I served as the interviewer, recorder, note-taker, and coder and analyzer of all data collected. I conducted the data collection with neutrality to prevent personal bias from affecting participant responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I did this by utilizing a semistructured interview guide with open-ended questions to encourage participants to express their perspectives freely, and I used active listening techniques and avoided leading questions to minimize influencing their responses. This role was consistent with the qualitative research approach, which seeks to understand the participants lived experiences and perspectives with minimal interference from the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

As a college adjunct instructor and small education consulting business owner, I have over 25 years of experience in the field of education, serving in various roles, including as a classroom teacher, department chair, assistant principal, principal, college dean, and program director of Teacher Prep within Texas. My extensive professional background in education provided me with a deep understanding of the educational landscape in Texas, including the challenges and opportunities related to educational leadership.

To mitigate these potential biases or power dynamics due to my experiences and current and past positions within the Texas education system, I employed several strategies. First, I engaged in self-reflection and bracketing to identify and acknowledge any preconceived notions or assumptions that may influence the data collection and

analysis process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This involved critically examining my own beliefs and experiences related to the superintendency, race, and ethnicity to understand how they might shape my interpretations of the data. Specifically, this self-reflection informed the way I developed interview questions, analyzed data, and interpreted findings. By being aware of my own potential biases, I took steps to ensure they did not unduly influence the research process. My position as a researcher was shaped by my 24 years of experience in the Texas education system, which gave me firsthand insight into the challenges and complexities of school leadership and racial and ethnic dynamics in education. However, I acknowledge that these experiences could have led to certain preconceptions about the perceptions of Black and Hispanic Superintendents in Texas regarding their superintendency pathways. For example, I did not want to assume that experiences in larger urban districts were more valuable or relevant than those in smaller rural districts when considering the pathways of superintendents. To address this, I actively challenged my own assumptions by seeking contradictory evidence, incorporating diverse perspectives, and member checking.

Second, I ensured transparency by clearly outlining the research design, methodology, and data analysis procedures in the dissertation, allowing readers to critically evaluate the study's rigor and trustworthiness (Patton, 2015). By providing a detailed account of my research process, I aimed to increase the credibility and transferability of the findings. Third, I maintained a neutral and respectful stance during the interviews, encouraging participants to share their experiences and perspectives openly without feeling judged or pressured (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This meant actively

listening to their stories, asking open-ended questions, and avoiding leading or biased questions that could influence their responses.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a basic qualitative design to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions and experiences of a specific group of superintendents in Texas. This approach was particularly well-suited to address the research questions, which focused on understanding the how and why behind the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic superintendents, and the strategies they used to successfully navigate their career pathways (Patton, 2014).

A basic qualitative design was selected for this research because it allowed for a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the lived experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents within the specific context of the Texas education system (Patton, 2014). Both ethnography and phenomenology offer valuable perspectives, but they do not align as closely with the goals of this study. Ethnography's emphasis is on understanding a culture-sharing group, which may not be as focused on the individual lived experiences and career pathways of superintendents. Phenomenology's emphasis is on exploring the phenomenon through the shared experiences of individuals, which may not capture the diversity of lived, unique experiences and strategies within the Texas superintendency (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The basic qualitative design allowed for a focused exploration of the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas. This allowed for a more in-depth assessment of the systemic barriers and

personal strategies that have shaped their lived experiences and career pathways (Patton, 2014).

### **Participant Selection**

The population of interest for this study consisted of Black and Hispanic superintendents currently serving in Texas school districts, which comprise approximately 1,200 school districts (TEA, 2023a). The state agency and service centers' websites provided a list of all Texas superintendents; however, they do not identify them by race. A comprehensive search of school district websites and LinkedIn was conducted to identify as many Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas as possible. These sources often included photos and self-reported demographic information, which were used to identify superintendents who self-identify as Black or Hispanic.

The study employed a purposeful sampling strategy to ensure that the participants represent a diverse range of experiences, perspectives, and regions (urban, suburban, rural) within the population of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas. Purposeful sampling is a common technique used in qualitative research to select participants who can provide rich and insightful data related to the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2014). The aim of this study was to identify and invite at least 100 participants, with the goal of recruiting 10 to 12.

The primary criterion for participant selection was that the individual must be currently serving as a superintendent in a Texas school district and self-identify as Black or Hispanic. To ensure diversity of perspectives, the study aimed to recruit 10 to 12 participants, with 2 to 3 superintendents from each of the following categories: Black

men, Black women, Hispanic men, and Hispanic women. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that basic qualitative design studies typically involve 4 to 5 participants per group. Because this study focused on two distinct groups (Black and Hispanic superintendents) with a further breakdown by gender (men and women), a sample size of 10 to 12 allows for “maximum variation,” providing a nuanced exploration of the lived intersectional experiences of the participants. This allowed for an intersectional analysis of how race, ethnicity, and gender may shape the experiences of these superintendents (Crenshaw, 1989).

Within each category, efforts were made to include participants with diverse backgrounds, especially in terms of district type (urban, suburban, rural). This variation in participant selection enhanced the transferability of the study’s findings by capturing a broader range of experiences within the population of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas.

Once identified, potential participants were contacted via email at their district email. The initial contact included a brief overview of the study’s purpose, the expectations for participation, and a consent form that outlined the study’s procedures, risks, benefits, and participants’ rights. Potential participants were given 2 weeks to respond to the initial email. Those who consented received a follow-up email with questions about their racial/ethnic identity, educational background, and an invitation for a virtual interview. They were also encouraged to ask any questions they had about the study via email or phone.

## **Instrumentation**

The primary data collection instrument for this study was a researcher-developed semistructured interview protocol. This protocol consisted of 10 main open-ended questions with associated probing questions designed to elicit rich, narrative data from the participants regarding their experiences and perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2014). The questions were informed by the study's research questions, conceptual frameworks (CRT and intersectionality), and relevant literature (Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2014), focusing on the successes, challenges, and recommended strategies related to securing a superintendent position in Texas. The interview questions were crafted to explore the participants' experiences through the lens of CRT and intersectionality by asking about the role of race, ethnicity, and gender in their career pathways. A copy of the interview protocol and questions, along with their alignment to the research questions, is available in the Appendix.

The interview protocol was structured around the following key topics: the superintendent's personal and professional background, motivations and aspirations for pursuing the superintendency, perceived successes and challenges in the superintendent pathway, the role of race, ethnicity, and gender in shaping their experiences, and recommendations for aspiring superintendents and policymakers. The qualitative semistructured format allowed for flexibility in exploring emerging themes during the interview and was consistent with the qualitative research design, which seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences and perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

To ensure the content validity of the interview protocol, Castillo-Montoya's (2016) interview protocol refinement framework was used. This involved ensuring alignment between research questions and interview questions, constructing an inquiry-based conversation, and receiving external feedback. After the interview questions were developed to align with the research questions, they were reviewed by a diverse panel of experts, including educational leadership faculty members and scholars in diversity and inclusion. Their feedback was used to refine the questions and ensure they were clear, relevant, and aligned with the study's research questions. The interview protocol was also peer-reviewed by the same small group of educational leaders in the field, and they were not part of the main study sample. This helped identify any potential issues with the questions or interview process, allowing for further refinement of the protocol (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Once a pool of potential participants was identified, they were contacted via their school district email to gauge their interest in participating in the study. The initial email included my contact information (email and phone number), a brief overview of the study (including its purpose, potential benefits and risks of participation, the expected time commitment, my credentials, and the reasons for conducting the study), and the informed consent form.

The eligibility of potential participants was verified through a follow-up email with a Google survey, which confirmed their self-identification as Black or Hispanic, ensuring they met the study's criteria. This step was crucial to maintaining the integrity

of the study and ensuring that the participants' experiences authentically reflected the perspectives of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas. After verifying the potential participants' eligibility to participate in the study, an invitation to schedule a virtual interview was sent to the participants. All interviews were conducted using a virtual conferencing program (Zoom). Participants electronically signed and returned the informed consent on the initial recruitment form before the interview.

Data collection involved individual, semistructured interviews conducted via Zoom. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. To ensure consistency and minimize bias, I used the same interview protocol for all participants. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' explicit permission to ensure accuracy and facilitate subsequent transcription. If a participant did not want to be recorded, detailed handwritten notes were offered as an option.

After the interview, I followed up with the participants, providing a summary of the key themes discussed and allowing them time to review, edit, and respond with any changes or answer any questions they may have. Participants were also reminded of their right to withdraw their data and the confidentiality measures in place to protect their identities. Additionally, they were offered a copy of the interview transcript for review and validation, allowing them to clarify or expand on their responses (member checking).

## **Data**

### **Analysis Plan**

Following the data collection phase, the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim using Zoom's transcription features. I then employed thematic

analysis to analyze the interview transcripts (Saldaña, 2016). This method involved identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The data analysis process was guided by the study's research questions, focusing on the successes, challenges, and recommended strategies related to securing a superintendent position in Texas.

For the thematic analysis, I began with open coding and assigned descriptive initial codes to meaningful units of text (words, phrases, or sentences) that reflect the participants' experiences and perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used a separate Excel worksheet for each transcript, with columns to identify the initial codes, and linked each code to the relevant section of the transcript. After initial coding, I moved to axial coding to identify relationships between codes and to group them into broader categories (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Here, I used Excel's sorting and filtering functions to group similar codes together and created pivot tables to summarize and analyze the frequency and distribution of codes across the transcripts.

I then categorize the data by grouping related codes into larger conceptual categories (Thorne, 2016). I did this by using Excel's formulas and functions (e.g., VLOOKUP, IF statements) to assign codes to their respective categories, and I created summary tables to visualize the distribution of data across various categories. Finally, to determine the overarching themes that integrate and synthesize the categories (Sandelowski, 2000), I used Excel's data visualization features (e.g., charts, graphs) to identify patterns and relationships between categories. I also created summary tables and charts to visually represent the key findings and themes. Lastly, I wrote narrative

summaries to interpret the findings and draw conclusions. These steps enabled me to conduct a thematic analysis effectively and generate meaningful insights from the interview transcripts, providing valuable insights into the complexities of the phenomenon under study.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This study employed several strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and analysis.

#### **Credibility**

Credibility, or internal validity, refers to the accuracy and truthfulness of the findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To enhance credibility, this study employed prolonged engagement with participants and member checking of interview transcripts to ensure a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I spent sufficient time with the participants during the interviews to build rapport and to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences. This involved active listening and asking clarifying questions, as needed. Participants were provided with a copy of their interview transcript and given the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the accuracy and interpretation of their responses. This ensured participants' perspectives were accurately captured and allowed for corrections or clarifications.

#### **Transferability**

Transferability, or external validity, refers to the extent to which the findings can be generalized or transferred to other contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To enhance

transferability, this study employed rich, detailed descriptions of the participants, their work/school/district settings, as well as the data collection process. This allows readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other contexts and make informed judgments about the potential for transferability. Additionally, the study included a diverse sample of Black and Hispanic superintendents from various backgrounds and district types. This variation in the sample increases the potential for transferability to other settings by including a wider range of experiences within the population (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

### **Dependability**

Dependability, or reliability, refers to the consistency and stability of the findings over time (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Dependability in this basic qualitative design study was ensured through a consistent and rigorous process of reflection and analysis. I carefully reviewed the audio recordings and interview transcripts multiple times to ensure accuracy and to identify any nuances or patterns in the data. This included using clear coding and identifying recurring themes and patterns to understand the participants' experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability, or objectivity, refers to the neutrality and rigor of the research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To enhance confirmability, I employed a structured reflexivity process that involved engaging in ongoing self-reflection to identify and acknowledge potential biases and assumptions that may influence the data collection and analysis process. A reflexivity journal was maintained throughout the study to document thoughts, feelings, and assumptions that could introduce bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

### **Ethical Procedures**

This qualitative study explored the experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas, prioritizing ethical considerations throughout the entire research process. Following approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I implemented several procedures to ensure the ethical treatment of participants. Recruitment materials and processes were transparent and noncoercive, providing potential participants with clear information about the study's purpose and expectations. Participation was strictly voluntary and based on informed consent. All data were treated as confidential. Pseudonyms were used in all publications and presentations to protect the identities of participants. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored securely on a password-protected computer accessible only to me.

As a college instructor and owner of a small education consulting firm, I acknowledged the potential for perceived power dynamics or conflicts of interest to arise. To address this, I maintained transparency by clearly outlining my role and noting that I have no direct authority or influence over superintendent positions or the policies governing their selection within the Texas education system. Participation in this study was voluntary and free from any coercion. To minimize bias in data interpretation, I engaged in self-reflection and bracketing to identify and address any preconceived notions that might influence my analysis. Detailed interview notes and analytic memos were maintained to document my decision-making and enhance the transparency of the research process. These ethical procedures aimed to protect the rights and well-being of participants while ensuring the rigor and integrity of the research. The procedures

addressed potential concerns at every stage, from recruitment to data analysis and dissemination.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 outlined the research design and methodology for this basic qualitative design study, which explored the perceptions of Black and Hispanic superintendents regarding their successes and challenges, and recommended strategies to secure a superintendent position in Texas. The study employed a basic qualitative design approach, utilizing semistructured interviews as the primary data collection tool. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit Black and Hispanic superintendents currently serving in Texas school districts. Data analysis involved thematic analysis, aided by Excel software, to identify key themes and patterns related to the research questions.

The chapter also detailed strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, including triangulation, member checking, and reflexivity. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and data security, were also addressed to protect the rights and well-being of the participants.

Chapter 4 presents the study's findings, based on the methods outlined in Chapter 3. It will present a detailed analysis of the interview data, highlighting the key themes and patterns that emerged regarding the successes, challenges, and recommended strategies for Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas. The chapter will also provide rich descriptions of the participants and the context of their experiences, enhancing the transferability of the findings. Evidence of trustworthiness will be presented throughout the chapter, ensuring the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the results.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative design study was to explore Black and Hispanic superintendents' perceptions of their successes and challenges, as well as recommended strategies for securing superintendent positions in Texas. Three research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are Black and Hispanic superintendents' perceptions of their successes in securing a superintendent position in Texas?

RQ2: What are Black and Hispanic superintendents' perceptions of their challenges in securing a superintendent position in Texas?

RQ3: What are Black and Hispanic superintendents' recommended strategies to secure a superintendent position in Texas?

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the in-depth, semistructured interviews with nine practicing Texas superintendents: two Black women, two Black men, two Hispanic women, and three Hispanic men. These findings are described in detail through the study setting, participant demographics, data collection process, data analysis process, results, and evidence of trustworthiness, organized by research questions.

### **Setting**

Participation was open to actively serving Black and Hispanic superintendents of Texas K-12 public school districts. Interim and retired superintendents were excluded from this study. A purposeful sampling strategy was used for recruitment.

Potential participants were identified using the TEA's (n.d.b) superintendent directory, which listed 1,219 public school superintendents. Because the directory did not

include race/ethnicity, a manual search of official school district websites, district/school Facebook pages, and LinkedIn profiles was conducted to determine the race/ethnicity of these superintendents. This process identified 180 potential participants: 55 Black superintendents and 125 Hispanic superintendents.

All 180 identified superintendents were contacted via their school email. The recruitment email included an overview of the study's purpose, expectations for participation, and a consent form. A total of nine superintendents agreed to participate, representing Black men, Black women, Hispanic men, and Hispanic women. The participant recruitment process is outlined in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Participant Recruitment Process*

Recruitment stage	Number of participants
Potential participants identified	180
Potential participants' emails delivered	178
Potential participants' emails marked undeliverable	02
Participants consenting	15
Pre-interview questionnaires completed	12
Interviews scheduled	10
Number of interviews conducted	9

All participants in this study were interviewed virtually. The interviews were recorded on both a computer and a secondary device to ensure data collection in case of technical issues. All participants were interviewed from their workplace offices. The range of experience of the participants as superintendents ranged between 1 and 8 years.

## **Participant Demographics**

Two criteria for this study were that all participants were currently serving superintendents and self-identified as Black or Hispanic. All participants met these demographic study criteria. The pre-interview questionnaire revealed that all participants had a doctorate, though this was not a criterion for the research study.

Participant demographics, characteristics, and the urbanization of their school districts are relevant to this study because these factors have the potential to affect the participants' experiences at the time of the research. The nine participants served in diverse educational environments across Texas, including rural, town, and city school districts. NCES (n.d.) defined school urbanization as:

- City: Inside an urbanized area and principal city
- Town: Inside an urban cluster
- Rural: Outside urban areas
- Suburban: Outside a principal city but inside an urbanized area

District size was classified by student enrollment using TEA (n.d.a) guidelines:

- Small: Fewer than 1,000 students
- Medium: 1,000 to 3,999 students
- Large: 4,000 or more students

While this study did not control for district size or urbanization, the diversity of participant districts reflects diverse variations across Texas, enhancing the study's richness by capturing a broad range of leadership experiences shaped by these factors. Strict confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, with all identifying

information removed or anonymized to ensure participant privacy. Relevant participant and school district demographics and characteristics for this study are detailed in Tables 3 and 4.

**Table 3**

*Participant Pseudonyms, Race/Ethnicity, Gender, Education, and Experience*

Pseudonym	Race/ethnicity	Gender	Highest education	Years in education
BF1	Black	Female	PhD	15-20
BF2	Black	Female	PhD	21-27
BM1	Black	Male	EdD	15-20
BM2	Black	Male	EdD	28+
HF1	Hispanic	Female	EdD	28+
HF2	Hispanic	Female	EdD	21-27
HM1	Hispanic	Male	EdD	21-27
HM2	Hispanic	Male	EdD	21-27
HM3	Hispanic	Male	EdD	21-27

**Table 4**

*Duration of Current Superintendency & Size with Location of School District*

Pseudonym	Years in superintendency	School district size	Location
BF1	1.5	Medium	Town
BF2	3.0	Medium	City
BM1	7.0	Medium	Town
BM2	1.0	Small	Rural
HF1	2.0	Large	Town
HF2	3.0	Small	Rural
HM1	2.0	Medium	Town
HM2	1.0	Small	Rural
HM3	8.0	Large	City

*Note.* District sizes and locale classifications based on TEA (n.d.) and NCES (n.d.) data.

### Data Collection

I collected data through one-on-one, semistructured interviews with nine participants. Each participant is a currently serving Texas superintendent who identified

as Black or Hispanic. Each interview was conducted between March 2025 and April 2025, and each lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. All nine interviews were conducted via Zoom and audio recorded using Zoom and a secondary device for backup. These semistructured interviews were used to explore Black and Hispanic superintendents' perceptions of their successes and challenges, and recommended strategies to secure a superintendent position in Texas.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe semistructured interviews as utilizing a framework of questions to guide the discussion. Each participant was interviewed using the same interview protocol found in the Appendix, which consisted of 10 open-ended questions and follow-up probing questions directly aligned with the three research questions guiding this study. These questions focused on exploring participants' perceptions of their successes (RQ1), challenges (RQ2), and recommended strategies (RQ3) in securing a superintendent position in Texas.

Interviews were conducted between March 2025 and April 2025, and each lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. With participant permission, all interviews were audio recorded only (Zoom) and on a secondary source (iPhone Voice Memos) as backup. The data collection method was consistently applied across all interviews, and all interviews proceeded without any unusual occurrences. Interviews were transcribed with Zoom's built-in transcription tool and converted to Word. Each audio recording was compared with the transcribed interviews to ensure accuracy.

Participants were offered the opportunity to review their transcripts for accuracy through a member-checking process conducted via email. Each participant was emailed

their line-by-line transcript spreadsheet, along with the initial codes, categories, themes, and the alignment with the research question. Participants were given 1 week to review and suggest changes. All participants confirmed the accuracy of their transcripts and indicated that the initial codes and categories accurately reflected their experiences. This step strengthened the study's credibility and allowed participants to clarify or elaborate on their responses if desired. The combination of virtual interviews, recorded transcriptions, and rigorous documentation provided a solid foundation for thematic analysis, contributing to the overall trustworthiness of the research process. Digital storage with limited access was used for all interview transcripts and related data, which will be retained for a maximum of 5 years post-study before being destroyed or deleted. The next section provides an overview of how the data were analyzed to develop the themes presented in this chapter.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted using a systematic and iterative process aligned with the basic qualitative design research process. For each interview, the output from Zoom's built-in transcription tool was converted to Word. This process included the detailed cross-referencing of each Zoom transcript against the original Zoom audio recordings. This step allowed for the identification and correction of errors, which was important in maintaining the accuracy and transparency of the data.

Next, the text from each interview was analyzed using open coding, followed by axial coding. Opening coding consisted of assigning descriptive initial codes to meaningful units of text (words, phrases, or sentences) that reflect the participants'

experiences and perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used a separate Excel worksheet for each transcript, with columns to identify the initial codes, and linked each code to the relevant section of the transcript. I then used axial coding to identify relationships between codes and to group them into broader categories (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Axial coding involved examining the initial codes for connections and patterns within the data. This allowed me to build categories that linked several related ideas and move from individual observations to more generalized concepts. These categories were aligned with the study's three guiding research questions. Table 5 captures two examples of the coding process from initial coding to RQ alignment.

**Table 5**

*Examples of the Coding Process*

Pseudonym	Transcribe line(s)	Quote or summary	Initial code	Category	RQ
BF1	137–144	“Take into account the reality of diverse backgrounds... students need role models”	Representative leadership	Representation	RQ1
HM3	93	“networking... you have to code switch”	Adapt communication to audience	Code-switching	RQ3

From these categories, narrative themes were synthesized for each research question by identifying recurring patterns and overarching meanings within the data. Throughout this process, I used Microsoft Excel as a supplementary tool to assist with sorting, organizing, and filtering codes, facilitating the comparison of frequency and patterns across transcripts. This was done to ensure consistency in the development of

categories and themes. All coding was directly informed by the CRT and intersectionality theory, the conceptual frameworks of this study. For instance, the coding process involved being attentive to issues of power, systemic barriers, and the intersecting identities of the participants as Black or Hispanic superintendents. Representative quotes were selected to illustrate the themes, ensuring that participants' voices remained central in the narrative and providing evidence to support and contextualize each theme. The themes were then organized by research question, as outlined in Tables 6-8 below.

**Table 6**

*RQ1 Perceptions of Success, Categories, Themes, and Frequency*

Category	Theme	Frequency
Confidence, values-based leadership, purpose, trust, authenticity, humility, listening, empathy, servant leadership, longevity, persistence, acceptance, resilience, perseverance, risk-taking, board rapport, readiness, success, collaboration, validation, uncertainty, students	Authentic and values-based leadership	30
Relationships, mentorship, peer support, social capital, family encouragement, family support, match community	Leveraging mentorship and support networks	17
Governance, leadership, development, preparation, instruction, leadership development, board training, knowledge	Strategic leadership and career development	15
Representation, intergenerational representation, cross-cultural adaptation, equity, fit, tenure, bias	Navigating representation and fit	13
Credibility, experience, expertise, reputation, diverse experience, instructional credibility	Building credibility through experience	7

**Table 7***RQ2 Perceptions of Challenges, Categories, Themes, and Frequency*

Category	Theme	Frequency
Bias, discrimination, double standards, ageism, linguistic bias, appearance bias, tokenism, misrecognition, labeling	Navigating bias and discrimination	24
Pay gap, gatekeeping, underrepresentation, inequity, cultural barriers, systemic gatekeeping, barriers, exclusion, delays, stagnation, intra-group support lacking	Barriers to access and advancement	15
Uncertainty, isolation, self-doubt, culture, self-acceptance, rejection, imposter syndrome, hostility	Emotional and psychological challenges	9

**Table 8***RQ3 Recommended Strategies, Categories, Themes, and Frequency*

Category	Theme	Frequency
Board access, board reform, credentials, data-driven hiring, entry, equity firms, exposure, job search, know policy, leadership entry strategy, search firms, training, transparency, visibility	Intentional preparation and positioning	17
Feedback, framing, motivation, planning, proactivity, reflection, review, strategic engagement, strategy	Strategic navigation and self-advocacy	12
Advice, affinity groups, assimilation, code-switching, support	Leveraging community and cultural tools	7

## Results

The participants in this study were interviewed using 10 questions developed from the three research questions. The interview questions focused on exploring Black and Hispanic superintendents' perceptions of their successes and challenges, and

recommended strategies to secure a superintendent position in Texas. The results below are presented by themes that emerged from each research question.

### **Research Question 1**

RQ1 asked: What are Black and Hispanic superintendents' perceptions of their successes in securing a superintendent position in Texas? The successes that participants described in attaining the superintendency resulted in five themes: authentic and values-based leadership, leveraging mentorship and support networks, strategic leadership and development, navigating representation and fit, and building credibility through experience.

#### ***Theme 1: Authentic and Values-Based Leadership***

Nine out of nine participants in this study highlighted authenticity and identity alignment as key strengths when discussing their perceptions of success in securing a superintendent position in Texas. Values such as resilience and service or servant leadership were frequently emphasized. Participants viewed race, ethnicity, and cultural background as assets, especially when these characteristics aligned with the values and demographics of the districts where these leaders worked. Participants explained how their personal narratives and leadership approaches, grounded in these values, contributed to building trust and legitimacy with school boards and communities. This approach aligns with authentic leadership theory, which emphasizes staying true to one's values and identity rather than conforming to external expectations (Johnson, 2021).

HF2 said, “I’m a bilingual Latina, and I represent the families in my district. That mattered to the board; they said they were ready for someone who ‘got it.’” This sentiment is reflected in her statement:

There was a very strong Latina board president here that I think saw in me what she wanted for her children who were in school here... and so I think that connection happened, and I was able to get in the door with that.

HF2’s ethnic identity fostered an immediate connection with board leadership, who sought representation that reflected the community they served. This cultural connection became a powerful advantage in the hiring process, illustrating how an authentic identity, when aligned with the community’s needs, can open up leadership opportunities. This finding aligns with Castillo et al. (2021), who found that Hispanic women superintendents in rural districts often viewed their cultural identity as an asset in building meaningful stakeholder relationships.

Similarly, BM1 shared that “being a Black male with roots in this area helped. I had history here. People wanted someone who understood their stories.” In his interview, BM1 explains that school boards often seek leaders who truly understand local realities. His ability to “talk the language” that resonated with the board underscored the value of his authentic connection to the district. His story supports Joseph’s (2023) assertion that Black superintendents contribute vital lived experience and cultural insight to their leadership roles.

This authentic expression of identity extended beyond cultural representation to encompass leadership style and values. BM2 said, “In the interview, I was not docile...

this is what you get...” This statement illustrates a deliberate choice to reject code-switching and instead present his authentic self. His refusal to dilute his identity or leadership style represents what CRT describes as counter-storytelling, challenging dominant norms surrounding leadership and professionalism (Joseph, 2023; Kingsberry & Jean-Marie, 2022).

The emphasis on service emerged as a core value, particularly captured in HM2’s statement: “It’s not about you, it’s about others.” This servant leadership ethos was especially prominent among Hispanic male superintendents, who viewed their roles primarily through the lens of community service. Greses et al. (2023) found similar patterns among Hispanic superintendents in rural South Texas, who leveraged their social and cultural capital as essential tools for community service.

Participants also exhibited extraordinary resilience. They saw professional challenges as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable obstacles. As BM2 reflected, “I would say my 31–32-year journey... was well worth all the trials...” Kingsberry and Jean-Marie (2022) similarly found that resilience was a key characteristic that enabled superintendents of color to persist despite facing intersectional challenges. Rather than conforming to traditional, often White-centered expectations of leadership, these superintendents leaned into their cultural identity and lived experiences, exemplifying CCW (Yosso, 2005).

Ultimately, participants attributed their success in securing superintendent positions in Texas to their emphasis on authenticity and alignment with their identities, combined with core values like resilience and service. They perceived that their authentic

presentation, drawing on their cultural backgrounds and lived experiences, was instrumental in establishing trust and credibility with key stakeholders. This focus on authentic leadership, resilience, and service not only facilitated their ability to overcome obstacles but also enabled them to reshape traditional leadership models, demonstrating both navigational capital (successfully maneuvering through institutions) and social capital (leveraging community support networks) as described by Yosso (2005), and contributing significantly to their successful pathway to the superintendency. Their narratives exemplify CRT's emphasis on counter-storytelling and using lived experience to challenge dominant narratives and redefine leadership paradigms (Kim & Smith, 2024; Kingsberry & Jean-Marie, 2022). Successful participants credited their authentic, values-based leadership as the foundation of their achievements, but they also highlighted the crucial importance of external support.

### ***Theme 2: Leveraging Mentorship and Support Networks***

Eight of the nine participants frequently credit mentors, professional networks, and familial support as critical to their successful journey. These support systems offered both technical knowledge and emotional affirmation. Research consistently identifies these support structures as essential for leaders of color navigating pathways to the superintendency (Horsford et al., 2021; Rivera, 2023).

A prominent subtheme was the value of identity-affirming networks, especially for women leaders of color. For instance, HF2 shared, "I had a group of Latina and African American women who coached me through the process—they helped me believe I belonged in the room." This same sentiment was similarly shared by BF1, crediting

some of her success to her “mentor groups of female and African American superintendents.” By connecting with other women leaders of color, HF2 and BF1 both accessed guidance from those who understood the specific challenges they faced at the intersection of race and gender.

These examples highlight the importance of affinity spaces for women of color in educational leadership. Participants believed that they were crucial in supporting them to successfully navigate systemic barriers by providing practical guidance, psychological support, and validation. Identity-affirming mentorship extends beyond general leadership advice to include strategies specifically relevant to navigating bias and isolation often encountered by those leading from marginalized identity positions (Kingsberry & Jean-Marie, 2022; Rivera 2023).

While identity-affirming networks were crucial, participants also noted the importance of broader professional networks. HM1 advised: “Networking, I think, get networking out, you know, not just Black and Hispanic organizations.” This balanced approach aligns with Schwartz et al.’s (2023) research, which shows that successful superintendents of color strategically participate in both identity-based and mainstream professional organizations. As BM2 emphatically advised,

Find a network. I would say that would be the theme of what I’m saying. Find a network before, find a network early, and find for the early phase, and then find a network that can sustain you throughout that superintendency.

BM2’s emphasis on proactively building and nurturing networks throughout one’s career highlights the evolving support needs at different professional stages. He further

elaborated on the strategic importance of network diversity when selecting references: “Even when you’re not there... make sure that network is diverse, that my network of references, teachers... literally teachers, fellow principals, former supervisors... educators.” Participants believed that having a comprehensive and diverse network of references strengthens one’s leadership credibility. According to Joseph (2023), Black superintendents often find it necessary to provide more extensive documentation of their qualifications.

Structured coaching emerged as another key support for successfully navigating the pathway to superintendency. BF2 emphasized “coaching as a key asset to overcoming systemic and personal challenges,” elaborating that

I think it’s important for everyone to have a coach, a leadership coach... the strategy of being vulnerable to be able to be coached. That has been essential for me, because I think we all have to have a thought partner, and it’s good to have objective feedback.

This structured coaching approach provided targeted skills development while addressing both institutional barriers and internal challenges, aligning with Horsford et al.’s (2021) findings on the importance of structured coaching relationships for Black education leaders.

This is an example of the strategic value of structured coaching in providing targeted skills development and addressing both institutional and internal obstacles to the superintendency pathway. Horsford et al. (2021) similarly noted the significance of structured coaching relationships for Black education leaders. Their study highlighted

how these relationships provide tactical guidance and emotional support. This perspective aligns with the recognition that superintendents from underrepresented groups face multiple leadership challenges, possibly making structured coaching a critical component for a successful pathway to the superintendency.

Participants emphasized the importance of identity-affirming networks, professional networks, and structured coaching in their journeys to the superintendency. They viewed these as critical to their success in securing these positions. Identity-affirming networks, particularly among women of color, played a significant role in mitigating isolation and guiding individuals through unwritten norms and biases. For leaders of color, professional networks facilitated broader connections essential for career advancement, while structured coaching delivered targeted skills development and support in overcoming challenges. These support systems align with research by Miles Nash and Grogan (2022), Smith and Gibbs-Roseboro (2023), and Rivera (2023), which highlights how mentoring and networking are critical for leaders of color, buffering against gatekeeping and aiding in leadership identity development. While strong support networks were foundational, participants also attributed their success to their purposeful, self-driven actions in strategic leadership and development.

### ***Theme 3: Strategic Leadership and Development***

Seven out of the nine participants noted that strategic leadership and career development were important factors in their success in obtaining superintendent positions in Texas. They described deliberately seeking roles, credentials, and opportunities that would enhance their competitiveness, especially in areas traditionally dominated by

White male leaders. This strategic approach aligns with what Horsford et al. (2021) describe as necessary career navigation for leaders of color, who often must create their own pathways rather than following established routes to leadership.

Participants emphasized the importance of being proactive in strategic self-development. As BF2 explained,

Felt like I really needed to step up my game here in Texas... because, if given the space to articulate who I am... have to be able to do that well. And so that meant I needed to educate myself.

HF1 demonstrated this through action: “I volunteered for every task force and committee I could—especially anything related to governance and finance.” For HF1, specifically targeting governance and finance committees, she strategically developed expertise in areas often considered technical strengths of male candidates. This deliberate focus on building credentials in these domains helped counter potential biases about women’s financial and governance acumen. These approaches reflect what Kingsberry and Jean-Marie (2022) identified as strategic career planning, where aspiring superintendents of color must deliberately cultivate experiences in domains traditionally dominated by White male leaders.

The importance of proactive career construction through self-advocacy emerged strongly in participants’ narratives. “You can’t just hope someone taps you. I created my own leadership path and made sure people knew I was ready,” stated BM1. This perspective was echoed by BM2, who highlighted the need to “be overly credentialed and be prepared.” This approach reflects both resilience and strategic agency in navigating

systems not designed for their advancement, aligning with Joseph's (2023) finding that Black superintendents must often create their own leadership opportunities rather than waiting to be selected through traditional pathways.

Formal leadership training gained through professional development and networking emerged as a valuable success strategy. BF2 highlighted, "the Academy for Superintendents for African Americans, you know, really connecting with associations like that, I think, is very important." Several participants mentioned the Holdsworth Center: HM2 stated, "I also went through the Holdsworth Center... going through their leadership cohort and leadership classes...you know, really prepared me for this role," and HM3 added, "I think the other thing that I think, helped me a lot was going through the Holdsworth Center...and Charles Butt Foundation, and I've learned a lot through their program." HF2 also noted the importance of "being part of organizations that provide training for women...The Texas Council of Women School Executives." Through formal leadership programs, participants acquired practical knowledge and symbolic capital, which improved their qualifications as superintendent candidates. Hart et al. (2022) similarly found that participation in elite leadership development programs was a common strategy among superintendents from underrepresented groups, providing both skills development and valuable social capital.

Participants emphasized instructional leadership as a foundation for credibility. HM2 explained, "You need to be a strong instructional leader... community relationships are important, but you have to be first and foremost, an instructional leader." HF2 reinforced this: "I also led curriculum developers and trainers... I had a balanced

experience in both school leadership and curriculum.” This strategy builds genuine capacity to improve student outcomes, creates credibility with teachers and principals, and addresses a primary concern of school boards. For superintendents of color, establishing unquestionable instructional credibility helps counter potential biases and creates a strong foundation for broader leadership. This focus on instructional expertise, as noted by Castillo et al. (2021), helps counter potential biases and creates a strong foundation for broader leadership.

Strategic career navigation, which involves understanding timing and context, was perceived as crucial in navigating the superintendency pathway. HM2 advised, “Don’t wait too long, because you may get pigeonholed into a career as an assistant superintendent.” HM1 emphasized being strategic about applying for superintendent positions: “Be strategic in where they apply. Because people talk right, Boards talk to each other.” This advice demonstrates how successful superintendents of color must navigate not just what opportunities to pursue but when to pursue them. This timing element of career planning is consistent with Kim and Smith’s (2024) research on strategic career navigation for leaders from underrepresented groups.

Participants’ success in securing superintendent positions often stemmed from their strategic leadership and career development strategies. These strategies reflect concepts such as contest mobility (Berry & Reardon, 2022) and strategic career navigation (Kingsberry & Jean-Marie, 2022), demonstrating how leaders of color actively constructed their paths to the superintendency through intentional preparation and strategic positioning. It also aligns with Schwartz et al.’s (2023) findings that

superintendents of color often pursue more extensive and diverse professional credentials than their White counterparts. This over-credentialing serves both practical purposes by building genuine expertise and symbolic ones by signaling competence to potentially skeptical stakeholders. A key element of participants' success was not just acquiring professional credentials, but also skillfully navigating the intricate dynamics of representation and cultural "fit" within district hiring.

#### ***Theme 4: Navigating Representation and Fit***

Six of the nine participants frequently discussed navigating the complex dynamics of "fit" and representation within districts when discussing their perceptions of success in securing a superintendent position in Texas. They acknowledged the need to strike a careful balance between authenticity and adaptation. While some boards valued diverse leadership, others had unspoken expectations influenced by racial norms. This dynamic aligns with DeMatthews et al.'s (2024a) research on implicit biases in hiring and the complex ways race influences leadership opportunities.

The intersection of qualifications and perceived "fit" emerged as a significant theme. BF2 captured this tension, stating, "Sometimes, I felt like I had to be twice as qualified just to be seen as 'a fit' for the district." This reflects the "super-competence" burden often faced by people of color, as described by critical race theorists, and aligns with Berry and Reardon's (2022) findings that Black principals needed significantly more qualifications and experience than their White counterparts to attain superintendent positions. BF2 further illustrated how "fit" could be a coded barrier, noting, "My credentials on paper are unmatched... However, they've articulated in a roundabout way,

they don't want a Black superintendent." This quote reveals the painful reality that even with outstanding qualifications, superintendents of color may face rejection based on immutable characteristics. BF2's ability to name this dynamic demonstrates both her professional insight and emotional resilience in the face of systemic barriers. This experience aligns with Joseph's (2023) findings that Black superintendents frequently encounter racial bias disguised as concerns about "cultural fit" or "leadership style," reflecting how racial discrimination in hiring often operates through coded language rather than explicit exclusion.

Participants described strategic approaches to identity presentation. BM1 shared, "I had to do some things... to not be so ethnic... add White kids in pictures... wear boots." This identity management reflects the "cultural taxation" described by Horsford et al. (2021), where leaders of color expend extra effort to conform to White normative expectations. BM1 also noted the need for linguistic code-switching: "I had to talk the language a White board wants to hear," highlighting the "double consciousness" required of leaders of color (see Kim & Smith, 2024). BF2 added depth to this discussion: "I start out early communicating. I know what I'm not, but here is what I offer," demonstrating how leaders actively frame their identities within professional contexts.

However, some participants emphasized the importance of strategic choices about where to lead, offering a more agentic perspective on "fit." HM3 advised, "Don't just look for districts with high Hispanic populations... don't rule yourself out because they only have 3%, 4%, 5% African Americans." HM1 added, "be strategic in where they apply. Because people talk, right boards talk to each other." By encouraging candidates

not to limit themselves to districts with high percentages of their own ethnic group, HM3 pushes back against the assumption that superintendents of color can only lead in demographically similar communities. This strategic approach to district selection aligns with DeMatthews et al.'s (2023) research on how superintendents of color navigate diverse district contexts.

Other participants found success in leveraging their cultural identity as an asset. HF2 reflected, "There was a very strong Latina board president here that I think saw in me what she wanted for her children who were in school here... and so I think that connection happened." BM1 similarly noted, "being a Black male with roots in this area helped. I had history here. People wanted someone who understood their stories." These experiences illustrate how cultural connections can yield significant advantages in the hiring process, as documented by Castillo et al. (2021).

In summary, participants' success in navigating representation and fit involved a complex interplay of recognizing and sometimes adapting to racialized norms, while also strategically asserting their qualifications and broadening their perceptions of where they could lead. This theme highlights the "representation dilemma" (Miles Nash & Grogan, 2022) and the nuanced ways in which race and professional role intersect, often requiring leaders of color to skillfully manage perceptions to access leadership opportunities. According to participants, to successfully address issues of representation and 'fit,' they needed to purposefully build undeniable credibility through broad and diverse professional experiences.

### ***Theme 5: Building Credibility Through Experience***

Eight of the nine participants discussed their views on achieving success in obtaining superintendent positions in Texas, highlighting the importance of building credibility through extensive experience and long tenure. They detailed how they intentionally created diverse career paths and utilized institutional knowledge to counteract potential biases. This pattern aligns with Hart et al.'s (2022) research showing that superintendents of color typically follow more extended and diverse career pathways than their White counterparts.

Deep institutional knowledge emerged as a powerful asset. BF1 reflected, "I worked my way up in the same district for over a decade. That history gave the board confidence in me because I understood the culture, the kids, the expectations." HF1 similarly noted, "I think that gave me a lot of credibility, having been a teacher, having been a principal, having been an assistant superintendent." Rivera (2023) found that administrators who advance to superintendencies often use their extensive institutional knowledge and relationships built through long-term district service to overcome selection biases.

Participants deliberately sought challenging assignments to build credibility. HM3 explained, "My success came from being in tough jobs, turnaround campuses, high-needs schools. Those roles gave me credibility." HM1 added insight about strategic experience-building: "A prospective superintendent needs to be able to highlight their range of experience... because on a board of trustees, you already have seven different perspectives." For HM1 and HM3, these challenging roles weren't just stepping stones

but credibility-building experiences that demonstrated their capacity to handle the complex challenges of the superintendency. This approach supports Joseph's (2023) findings about how leaders of color strategically seek challenging assignments to build "unassailable credentials."

The value of diverse educational roles emerged strongly. HM3 reflected, "I started off as a teacher, and then I became a principal, and then I became a curriculum director, and then I became a superintendent... each one of those roles helped me understand what teachers need, what principals need, what the district needs." BF2 added, "But in terms of their knowledge base, how knowledgeable are they about that particular school district? How knowledgeable are they about T.E.A. initiatives?"

DeMatthews et al. (2023) similarly found that superintendents of color often strategically cultivate diverse experiences across multiple domains of educational leadership to demonstrate comprehensive readiness for the superintendency, a strategy they termed "experiential breadth."

Participants highlighted the crucial ability to articulate their experience effectively. BF1 shared, "I had to be prepared to answer any question... I had to be overly prepared, and I had to be able to articulate my skill set in a way that would make sense to a board." HM2 reinforced this: "be overly credentialed and be prepared. I think that's what I would say." This quote demonstrates how BF1 recognized that her experiences alone were not sufficient; she needed to strategically present those experiences in ways that resonated with board members who might have different expectations for candidates of color. These reflections align with Kingsberry and Jean-Marie's (2022) findings that

Black women superintendents needed to demonstrate “super-competence” through both extensive qualifications and exceptional communication skills to be considered credible candidates.

Participants often secured superintendent positions by strategically showcasing their extensive educational experience. This approach reflects what Kim and Smith (2024) term *credential stacking* and what Berry and Reardon (2022) describe as *differential mobility patterns*. Their experiences confirm that leaders of color often face longer, more demanding pathways to the superintendency, requiring them to build credibility through comprehensive experience and exceptional preparation. This theme shows how successful superintendents of color turn barriers into opportunities by honing and showcasing their expertise.

## **Research Question 2**

RQ2 asked: What are Black and Hispanic superintendents’ perceptions of their challenges in securing a superintendent position in Texas? The challenges that participants described in attaining the superintendency resulted in three themes: navigating bias and discrimination, barriers to access and advancement, and emotional and psychological challenges.

### ***Theme 1: Navigating Bias and Discrimination***

In discussing their challenges in securing superintendent positions in Texas, nine of the nine participants consistently identified racial and gender bias as primary barriers. Both overt discrimination and subtle microaggressions created complex obstacles that required strategic navigation. This finding aligns with DeMatthews et al.’s (2024a)

research, which reveals systemic patterns where “Black and Hispanic principals take longer to ascend to the superintendency compared to their White counterparts,” suggesting that bias extends beyond individual encounters to systemic barriers within the superintendent pathway.

A significant challenge that participants identified in their pathway to superintendency was explicit racial discrimination in hiring processes. BM2 stated plainly, “Me being Black has definitely kept me from getting some positions,” while BM1 observed, “I think I mentioned one which is the all-White boards heading predominantly minority super districts. I think that that’s really odd. But I think that that is cultural.” This observation points to a potential systemic issue where the leadership of districts does not reflect the demographics of the students they serve. Berry and Reardon (2022) highlighted that Black and Hispanic leaders require more qualifications and experience than their White counterparts to achieve similar positions, illustrating unequal expectations and opportunities.

Another perceived barrier in securing superintendent positions was the compound effect of gender and racial bias. Female participants faced unique challenges at this intersection. BF1 revealed, “I was paid a lot less than he was... even though I had more responsibility,” while HF2 encountered direct appearance-based bias: “You don’t look the part; that isn’t what superintendents look like.” This comment points out the narrow perspective of who is considered appropriate for the role. It corresponds with Jansen’s (2021) findings that women superintendents, particularly women of color, encounter additional challenges due to intersectional discrimination.

Participants identified systematic preferences as another significant obstacle in their superintendent journey. HF2 observed, “They’re looking for other White people,” while BF2 elaborated,

The largest systemic barrier is just, of course, the racism. The racism and the lens by which the boards are hiring candidates... When you look at the dynamics of those school districts largely, they are, you know, Republican Caucasian male.

This detailed observation highlights the potential influence of both race and political affiliation in hiring decisions. This pattern aligns with Rivas-Garza’s (2023) research on how school boards often demonstrate a preference for candidates who reflect their own demographic characteristics, indicating that a lack of diversity on boards can perpetuate a lack of diversity in leadership.

A particularly challenging aspect of securing superintendent positions was navigating coded language and hidden bias. HM1 noted the underlying presence of bias, stating, “There is some level of prejudice,” acknowledging the difficulty in pinpointing but the persistent sense of its existence. HF1 described encountering “coded feedback about ‘fit’ and ‘style,’” revealing how seemingly innocuous comments can carry discriminatory undertones and serve to exclude candidates of color. These experiences reflect Perrone’s (2022) findings on how seemingly objective criteria, such as “fit,” can become vehicles for subjective discrimination, allowing bias to operate under the guise of professional judgment.

An additional challenge participants faced was the burden of exceptional performance expectations. BM2 emphasized the necessity to “be overly credentialed and

be prepared,” acknowledging the pressure to exceed expectations to be considered. HF2 stressed the importance of extensive knowledge and expertise, stating the need to “know instruction to the nth degree, and know your policies to the nth degree.” This aligns with Horsford et al.’s (2021) description of the paradox where leaders of color must excel within systems that perpetuate inequality, facing a higher bar for entry and success.

Participants’ perceptions of challenges indicated that they faced various obstacles related to racial and gender bias in securing superintendent positions. Their accounts show how bias functions at multiple levels, including explicit discrimination, subtle microaggressions, individual interactions, and systemic barriers. These findings align with CRT’s emphasis on how racism is embedded in institutional structures (Crenshaw, 1989) and intersectionality theory’s recognition of how multiple forms of discrimination compound challenges for leaders with marginalized identities (Collins, 2019). Securing superintendent positions demands both strong qualifications and the ability to navigate complex racial and gender dynamics. While navigating direct experiences of bias and discrimination was a significant challenge, participants also identified how these biases were embedded within larger systemic barriers to access and advancement.

### ***Theme 2: Barriers to Access and Advancement***

Eight of the nine participants cited major structural barriers that hindered their access to superintendent positions. These systemic obstacles extended beyond individual bias to include institutional gatekeeping mechanisms, political dynamics, and exclusionary networks. This finding supports Smith and Gibbs-Roseboro’s (2023) research, which showed that systemic barriers created by institutional structures hinder

aspiring leaders of color, highlighting that the issue is systemic inequity, not a lack of qualified candidates.

A primary structural challenge participants encountered in pursuing superintendent positions was the composition of school boards. BM1 observed the problematic dynamic of “all-White boards heading predominantly minority super districts,” indicating a fundamental disconnect between leadership and community. HF2 reinforced this observation:

Well, I think the biggest barrier that I see are our people, the board members not being open to bringing in administrators that don't look like them. So if your board is composed mainly of White people, then they're looking for other White people.

These experiences align with DeMatthews et al.'s (2024) findings about how board composition directly impacts leadership opportunities for candidates of color, suggesting that a lack of diversity on boards perpetuates a lack of diversity in district leadership.

Another significant obstacle participants faced in their superintendent journey was navigating political and cultural dynamics. BF2 provided a comprehensive analysis, noting,

The largest systemic barrier is just, of course, the racism and the lens by which the boards are hiring candidates. I think that plays a big, big factor. When you look at the dynamics of those school districts largely, they are, you know, Republican Caucasian male... Sometimes they may have a female on there.

HM3 added the succinct observation, “there’s just a lot of good old boyisms, you know that.” These observations reflect what Rivera (2023) termed *cultural gatekeeping* in educational leadership, where established norms and power structures favor certain candidates and exclude others.

A further barrier identified by participants in securing superintendent positions was the role of search firms. BM2 noted the lack of diversity within these firms, stating, “No search firm reps looked like us... discouraging,” highlighting a potential lack of understanding of the challenges faced by candidates of color.” HM3 identified search firms as a significant obstacle: “I think search firms really are the biggest factor that hinder candidates,” noting how some firms remain “very traditional way in their ways.” This lack of diversity and traditional approach in search firms aligns with Joseph’s (2023) findings about how homogeneous search committees often perpetuate rather than disrupt patterns of exclusion.

Participants identified exclusion from informal networks as another significant challenge in their pathway to the superintendency. HF1 described this barrier: “You’re not in the circle... you’re not getting the same information,” which can limit access to opportunities and insider knowledge. BM1 echoed this, noting, “It’s who you know, and we’re not in those circles,” emphasizing the importance of social capital and the disadvantage faced by those excluded from it. These experiences align with Horsford et al.’s (2021) research on how informal networks often function as invisible barriers for leaders of color, creating unequal access to information and influence.

Finally, many participants encountered hiring processes with predetermined outcomes. BM2 reflected on the need for acceptance beyond qualification, stating, "Still didn't get the job... we have to be accepted. And so I try to create an environment where everybody knows that we don't get to take the job. We have to prepare ourselves for the job. We have to present ourselves ready for the job, but we still have to be accepted."

HF2 added the disheartening observation, "Sometimes the decision is made before you even walk in the door." These experiences reflect what Kim and Smith (2024) describe as "institutional pre-selection" practices, where the selection process is skewed in favor of certain candidates from the outset.

In examining participants' perceptions of challenges, their lived experiences revealed multiple, interconnected barriers to accessing and advancing into superintendent positions. Their experiences demonstrate how institutional structures, political dynamics, and informal networks create layers of exclusion for aspiring superintendents of color. This is consistent with CRT's focus on institutional racism (Crenshaw, 1989) and recent research by DeMatthews et al. (2024), which indicates that these barriers contribute to underrepresentation in Texas superintendencies. The findings suggest that obtaining superintendent positions involves navigating complex institutional systems that uphold existing power structures. The constant navigation of these external barriers and discriminatory systems took a significant emotional and psychological toll, creating a distinct set of internal challenges for participants.

### ***Theme 3: Emotional and Psychological Challenges***

Seven of the nine participants faced emotional and psychological burdens beyond typical job-seeking stress due to racial and gender barriers while pursuing superintendent positions. This finding aligns with Johnson's (2021) research on the distinct psychological challenges faced by superintendents of color, particularly when they are the "first" or "only" in their districts, where the pressure of representation can be immense.

A significant psychological challenge participants encountered in pursuing superintendent positions was struggling with confidence and impostor syndrome. HM2 admitted to experiencing "imposter syndrome," questioning, "like, can I really do this?" This internal doubt is a common consequence of navigating systems that constantly question one's abilities. BF1 shared her own moments of self-doubt, stating, "There were times I questioned if I belonged at the table." HM1 revealed his need to seek external validation, stating, "I reached out to the consultant... needed to understand why I wasn't selected." These experiences align with Kingsberry and Jean-Marie's (2022) research on how systemic barriers often manifest as internalized doubt for leaders of color, eroding confidence, and creating a sense of not belonging.

Another emotional obstacle participants faced in securing superintendent positions was the psychological burden of isolation. HF1 reflected on this challenge, stating, "Being the only one... it gets lonely at the top." BM2 described the weight of being "the first and only African American superintendent in the district's history." HF2 articulated the compound nature of this isolation: "Sometimes you're the only woman in

the room, and the only Hispanic in the room... It's a heavy weight to carry." These experiences mirror Joseph's (2023) findings about the psychological impact of professional isolation on superintendents of color.

A particularly demanding challenge in the superintendent journey was managing constant scrutiny and performance pressure. BF2 explained this burden: "These are extra steps, and they are costly that we have to take because we are not given the ease of just being accepted into a role." HM1 noted the persistent sense of judgment: "There is some level of prejudice... you feel it in every interview." HF2 added: "Every decision you make is questioned through a different lens." This aligns with Kim & Smith's (2024) research on the additional performance pressures faced by leaders from underrepresented backgrounds, where every action is subject to intense scrutiny, and mistakes are often magnified.

To address these psychological barriers in their pathway to the superintendency, participants developed various coping strategies. BM1 emphasized the importance of external support: "I learned to build a strong support system outside the district." HF1 stressed the necessity of finding a "tribe... people who understand the journey. These strategies align with what Horsford et al. (2021) describe as important methods for leaders of color to preserve their well-being and resilience.

These psychological challenges affected participants' perceptions of their professional roles and identities. HM3 reflected on the need for perseverance and mentorship, stating, "You gotta get it by working hard, having a mentor that will push you," highlighting the importance of external support in navigating obstacles. BF2 noted

the continuous need for professional development, stating, “I am consistently. Even now I’m taking classes... staying on top of being an instructional leader,” demonstrating the ongoing effort to validate their expertise. These responses demonstrate what Miles Nash and Grogan (2022) describe as the complex relationship between professional identity and psychological resilience, where leaders of color must constantly negotiate their sense of self in the face of systemic challenges.

Participants’ stories reveal that pursuing superintendent roles requires not only professional qualifications but also strong psychological resilience. They demonstrate how the intersection of race, gender, and leadership presents unique challenges that necessitate sophisticated coping strategies. This aligns with intersectionality theory’s recognition of how multiple forms of marginalization create distinct challenges. Their stories reflect what Schwartz et al. (2023) identify as the “hidden curriculum” of leadership advancement for people of color—the unwritten emotional and psychological demands that accompany professional advancement, which demand a level of resilience and self-care not always required of their White peers.

### **Research Question 3**

RQ3 asked: What are Black and Hispanic superintendents’ recommended strategies to secure a superintendent position in Texas? The recommended strategies that participants suggested for securing a Texas superintendency resulted in three themes: intentional preparation and positioning, strategic navigation and self-advocacy, and leveraging community and cultural resources.

### ***Theme 1: Strategic Navigation and Self-Advocacy***

Six of the nine participants emphasized the importance of intentional and strategic career management. They suggested specific methods to navigate a hiring process that involves various factors such as optics, informal networks, and unspoken expectations. DeMatthews et al. (2024a) confirm this reality, noting that successful superintendents of color must navigate both formal qualifications and informal power structures that often privilege traditional leadership profiles.

A primary strategy participants recommended for securing superintendent positions was strategic self-presentation. HF1 advised, “Do your homework, pick a district that looks like you... and that you have something to offer.” HF2 emphasized proactive self-advocacy: “You can’t wait to be tapped. You have to let people know what you bring to the table and be unapologetic about it.” BM1 detailed his strategic approach: “I created a portfolio, practiced my interview presence, and even studied board agendas. You have to be sharp and strategic.” This emphasis on strategic preparation aligns with Rivera’s (2023) research, which shows that leaders of color must often exceed standard preparations to overcome systemic barriers.

Another key recommendation for aspiring superintendents focused on intentional preparation. HM2 advised, “It’s not about you, it’s about leading from the heart... striving for excellence but making sure that you are on the path towards excellence.” HF1 shared her strategic approach: “I kinda you know, I already knew HR, I already knew curriculum. The budget... become familiar with it, strategize and then show off like I’m ready to present. Horsford et al. (2021) discuss the “paradox of Black education

leadership,” where exceptional competence is needed despite systemic inequities. Joseph (2023) adds that successful superintendents of color often create sophisticated strategies to showcase their credentials and abilities.

Participants strongly recommended building strategic networks as crucial for success. BM2 explained, “Specific strategies that I found helpful in getting to this place... the totality of what I did led to this. Nothing singular led to this.” HM3 advised peers to “Seek out organizations that are outside of education, seek out organizations that help have conversations. The focus on network building aligns with White’s (2023) research on the importance of strategic relationship development for underrepresented leaders.

Another recommendation focuses on maintaining a presence in key professional spaces. As noted by DeMatthews et al. (2024b), this visibility is crucial for countering stereotype threat and implicit bias. BF2 advised, “These are strategies around educating oneself so that you are the best candidate, and you can speak to the work. HM1 stated, “You have to be in the right places, know the right people.” These insights emphasize the significance of visibility in areas where leaders of color may otherwise be overlooked. DeMatthews et al. (2024b) note that intensive preparation is necessary to mitigate stereotype threat and implicit bias, thereby ensuring their competence is acknowledged. In systems that favor traditional leadership profiles, self-advocacy is crucial for professional advancement.

Participants emphasized the need for strategic navigation and proactive self-advocacy in the political landscape of superintendent hiring in Texas. This includes deliberate self-presentation, thorough preparation beyond basic qualifications, and

building and leveraging strategic networks. Participants emphasized the need to be visible in key professional spaces and to confidently articulate their value, aligning with research highlighting the necessity for leaders of color to develop a ‘comprehensive leadership presence’ (Hart et al., 2022) to overcome systemic barriers and implicit biases (DeMatthews et al., 2024b; Rivera, 2023). In addition to proactive self-advocacy, participants recommended that aspiring leaders ground their strategy in intentional preparation and careful professional positioning.

### ***Theme 2: Intentional Preparation and Positioning***

In discussing the recommended strategies, participants emphasized the importance of comprehensive preparation and strategic positioning. This preparation extended beyond basic qualifications to include a deep understanding of district operations, community dynamics, and leadership expectations. Kim and Smith (2024) state that success in educational leadership requires knowledge of instructional and operational systems, especially for leaders from underrepresented backgrounds who may face greater scrutiny.

A key recommendation for aspiring superintendents was developing comprehensive knowledge of the district. BF2 emphasized, “But in terms of their knowledge base, how knowledgeable are they about that particular school district? How knowledgeable are they about tea initiatives? How knowledgeable are they about transformation?” HM1 reinforced this, advising, “If you don’t understand the board’s language or how budgets work, you won’t make it past the first round.” BF1 added, “Don’t just be a good principal. Learn about HR, transportation, and public messaging.

Be ready to lead the whole system.” This emphasis on comprehensive preparation aligns with DeMatthews et al.’s (2024) findings about the extensive credentials often required of candidates of color compared to their White counterparts to be considered viable candidates.

Another critical strategy participants recommended was strategic district selection. HF1 advised, “You have to be strategic about where you apply... look at the demographics, the board composition.” HF2 emphasized community alignment: “Know your community, know who you’re serving, and make sure there’s alignment there.” BM2 added, “Even when you’re not there... make sure that network is diverse.” Kingsberry and Jean-Marie (2022) confirmed this strategic approach, noting that successful superintendents of color carefully evaluate district contexts where their leadership style and cultural competencies will be valued. Smith and Gibbs-Roseboro (2023) add that this alignment between leader and community becomes particularly crucial for sustaining long-term success in the role.

Participants strongly recommended developing powerful professional networks. BM2 explained, “It’s not just about mentors who advise you—you need sponsors who will advocate for you.” HF1 emphasized broader connections: “Join organizations outside education... build relationships with decision-makers.” HM3 advised, “networking... you have to code switch.” Joseph (2023) emphasized this critical distinction between mentorship and sponsorship, particularly for leaders of color who need active advocates within power structures.

A crucial recommendation focused on formal leadership preparation. HM2 advised, “I also went through the Holdsworth center... going through their leadership cohort and leadership classes... really prepared me for this role.” BF2 emphasized continuous learning: “the Academy for superintendents for African Americans... There’s also the K-12 leadership forum... There’s the National Superintendent Academy. “As Horsford et al. (2021) note, this intensive preparation serves dual purposes: building necessary competencies while also establishing credibility in systems that may question leaders of color’s qualifications.

Participants highlighted the importance of thorough preparation and strategic positioning for aspiring superintendents, focusing on qualifications, district operations, community dynamics, and leadership expectations. This aligns with research indicating the need for knowledge in both instructional and operational systems (DeMatthews et al., 2024; Kim & Smith, 2024). Participants also stressed the importance of strategic district selection, emphasizing alignment with community values and demographics (Kingsberry & Jean-Marie, 2022; Smith & Gibbs-Roseboro, 2023), developing powerful professional networks with both mentors and sponsors (Joseph, 2023), and engaging in formal leadership preparation programs (Horsford et al., 2021) to build both competence and credibility. Beyond intentional preparation strategies, participants shared that aspiring superintendents should see their cultural identity and community alignment as a major leadership strength.

### ***Theme 3: Leveraging Cultural Identity and Community Alignment***

Regarding recommended strategies, four of the nine participants emphasized leveraging cultural identity and community alignment as powerful assets rather than potential barriers. This aligns with Rivas-Garza's (2023) concept of *hermanidad*, where cultural wealth is utilized to overcome systemic barriers in educational leadership.

A key recommendation for aspiring superintendents was to embrace cultural identity as a leadership asset. BF2 advised, "My background and my experiences growing up... they shape how I lead and connect with families." BM1 reinforced this strategy: "Don't hide who you are. Your identity is part of your value—it helps you lead with empathy and credibility." HF1 highlighted the practical advantages: "Speaking Spanish, understanding immigrant families, that's not a bonus; it's a leadership necessity in many districts now." These recommendations align with Yamashiro et al.'s (2022) research on "cultural responsiveness capital."

Another critical strategy participants recommended was developing cultural agility. BF1 advised, "You have to know when to code-switch... it's about being effective, not losing yourself." HM3 emphasized a dual approach: "Understanding both worlds - the community's needs and the board's expectations." HF3 added depth to this strategy: "Being bilingual and bicultural isn't just about communication, it's about understanding the deeper needs of our families, their aspirations, their struggles." BM3 connected identity to equity, stating, "My experiences as a person of color in education shape how I approach equity work. It's not theoretical for me; it's lived experience." This authentic approach resonates with Perrone's (2022) findings on the positive outcomes of

culturally aligned leadership and aligns with Kim & Smith's (2024) concept of "cultural agility."

Participants strongly recommended prioritizing community engagement and trust-building. BF2 advised, "Our communities need to see themselves reflected in leadership... it matters for trust." HF2 emphasized authentic connection: "When families see someone who understands their journey, it changes the conversation." BM3 connected identity to equity work: "My experiences as a person of color in education shape how I approach equity work. It's not theoretical for me; it's lived experience." This emphasis on authentic representation leading to stronger community partnerships is supported by Joseph's (2023).

In summary, participants recommended that aspiring Black and Hispanic superintendents leverage their cultural identity and community alignment as a powerful asset, not a barrier, in pursuing the superintendency. This involved embracing their cultural background as a strength, strategically developing cultural agility to navigate diverse contexts, and prioritizing community engagement to build trust. Participants highlighted the importance of authentic representation and drawing upon their cultural wealth (Rivas-Garza, 2023) to connect with families and communities, ultimately enhancing their leadership effectiveness (Perrone, 2022; Yamashiro et al., 2022)

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Ravitch and Carl (2016) identify credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as key aspects of trustworthiness in qualitative research. To uphold these

principles in this study, several specific strategies were implemented throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

### **Credibility**

Credibility, or internal validity, refers to the accuracy and truthfulness of the findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To enhance credibility, this study utilized several strategies. First, prolonged engagement was achieved through in-depth, semistructured virtual interviews, each lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. The sustained interaction fostered rapport with the participating superintendents and enabled a comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences through attentive listening. The inclusion of diverse participants, representing various racial/ethnic identities, gender groups, and district types (rural, town, city), further contributed to the credibility of the findings.

The data collection method was consistently carried out virtually via Zoom from the participants' workplace offices, creating a uniform context for the discussions. To maintain the credibility of the interview data, probing questions were used to obtain more coherent and comprehensive responses that aligned with the research questions.

Credibility was further supported through a rigorous data analysis process involving both first- and second-level coding. Throughout the analysis, I engaged in informal triangulation by connecting themes across participant interviews to shared experiences. Additionally, these themes were continuously connected to the critical race and intersectionality theoretical frameworks to ensure that interpretations were grounded in scholarly understanding.

Member checking was carried out, where participants examined their interview transcripts and a summary of the study's findings. This process enabled them to verify the accuracy of their statements and the interpretation of their experiences. No revisions were requested, which suggested a strong alignment between participant perspectives and the study's thematic analysis. These combined efforts contributed to the trustworthiness of the findings by ensuring they accurately reflected the participants' perspectives.

### **Transferability**

Transferability in qualitative research refers to the extent to which findings can inform other contexts by offering detailed, context-rich information (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This study enhances transferability by providing rich, thick descriptions of participant experiences, leadership trajectories, professional backgrounds, and the varied district settings in which they work, as presented in the *Setting* and *Results* sections.

By documenting detailed accounts of the successes, challenges, and recommended strategies to secure a superintendent position in Texas, this study provides insights that may resonate with similar contexts and can inform those engaged in educational leadership, equity work, or superintendent preparation. The diverse backgrounds and experiences of the nine participating superintendents (two Black women, two Black men, two Hispanic women, and three Hispanic men serving in rural, town, and city districts) further support the potential for others to connect the findings in similar contexts. Although statistical generalization is not the goal of qualitative research, these insights hold practical relevance to school boards, preparation programs, and

equity-focused policymakers seeking to better support aspiring Black and Hispanic superintendents.

### **Dependability**

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the research process, particularly in how data are collected and aligned with the study's central argument (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study, dependability was supported through a clear, replicable analytic process that included virtual, semistructured interviews using a standardized protocol, followed by systematic transcription, initial coding, axial coding, and thematic synthesis.

All participants were asked the same interview questions, which ensured consistency across data collection. Additionally, gathering data from several superintendents who had successfully attained their roles contributed to the stability and richness of the data obtained.

A comprehensive codebook, developed and maintained in Excel, documented the full analytic trajectory, from assigning pseudonyms and coding transcript excerpts to identifying and refining narrative themes. This detailed audit trail strengthens the dependability of the findings by providing transparency and a clear record of how themes evolved over time.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the degree to which research findings are shaped by the participants' experiences rather than researcher bias, achieved through transparency, reflexivity, and documentation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study, confirmability was

supported through multiple strategies designed to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in the data.

Confirmability was supported during the interviews through the use of clarification probes, which allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of participant responses directly related to the research questions. The inclusion of participant quotes as primary evidence for each theme directly grounds the findings in the participants' authentic voices. This ensures that the analysis is a direct reflection of the participants' lived experiences and not the researcher's interpretation alone.

Additionally, a reflexive journal was maintained throughout the study to document the researcher's positionality, including assumptions, evolving perspectives, and potential biases. This practice helped ensure that interpretations remained data-driven and consciously separated from personal viewpoints. Collectively, these strategies strengthened the trustworthiness of the study and provided a solid foundation for the thematic findings presented in the previous section.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 presents the findings of this qualitative study, which explored the perceptions of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas regarding their pathways to the superintendency. Data gathered through semistructured interviews revealed key themes related to both successes and challenges in securing these positions. Successes were characterized by authentic and values-based leadership, leveraging mentorship and support networks, strategic leadership and development, navigating representation and fit, and building credibility through experience and longevity.

Challenges encountered by participants included navigating racial and gender bias, overcoming barriers to access and advancement, and managing the emotional and psychological demands of the superintendency pathway. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing their representation in leadership and provide valuable perspectives for aspiring leaders and those seeking to foster equity in educational leadership. Chapter 5 will discuss these findings, draw conclusions, and offer recommendations for future research and practice.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative design study was to explore the perceptions of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas regarding their successes, challenges, and recommended strategies in securing a superintendent position. Against the backdrop of significant underrepresentation in educational leadership, this research sought to amplify the voices of Black and Hispanic superintendents who have successfully navigated the Texas pathway to the superintendency. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with nine current superintendents (two Black women, two Black men, two Hispanic women, and three Hispanic men). This study, grounded in CRT and intersectionality theory, was crucial to address the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas school districts, where the majority of students are Black and Hispanic, and the majority of school districts are led by White superintendents.

The study revealed four key findings based on the lived experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas. Participants demonstrated successes deeply rooted in cultural capital and leadership strengths, where their racial and ethnic identities became powerful assets in navigating educational leadership. The barriers encountered by participants confirmed persistent patterns of systemic inequity within educational administrative structures, revealing how race and ethnicity continue to shape professional opportunities. The intersectionality of race, gender, and professional identity created unique experiences that both challenged and empowered these superintendents, highlighting the complex ways multiple identities interact in leadership contexts. The research underscored the critical role of mentorship and sponsorship, revealing how

strategic professional networks and supportive relationships were instrumental in overcoming systemic barriers and advancing career trajectories.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The interpretation of the study's findings provides valuable insights grounded in CRT and intersectionality, offering a critical lens for understanding the experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas. These findings both confirm and extend previous research while offering new perspectives on the complex intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, and leadership at the superintendency level.

#### **Research Question 1: Successes**

Research Question 1 explored Black and Hispanic superintendents' perceptions of their successes in securing a superintendent position in Texas. These RQ1 themes, when analyzed through the lenses of CRT and intersectionality, provide nuanced insights into how Black and Hispanic superintendents navigate and succeed within systemic educational leadership structures.

The theme of authentic and values-based leadership demonstrated what Yosso (2005) describes as CCW, leveraging their racial and ethnic backgrounds as strategic assets rather than barriers. This finding disrupts the common assumption that minoritized identities are a deficit to be overcome in leadership. Instead, it advances knowledge by demonstrating how authenticity can become a strategic tool. For these leaders, being a "bilingual Latina" or a "Black male with roots in this area" was not just a demographic fact but a source of credibility and relational capital that allowed them to connect with boards and communities in ways other candidates could not. This authenticity, however,

does not exist in a vacuum. It is sustained and made effective through the validation and guidance received from trusted networks.

The theme of leveraging mentorship and support networks is intrinsically linked to authentic leadership. CRT helps explain this connection: in systems that pressure leaders of color to assimilate, identity-affirming networks provide the psychological safety needed to lead authentically. This finding aligns with Rivera (2023), who found that mentorship was crucial for Latinas navigating educational leadership. This study extends that finding by revealing that these networks serve a dual purpose: they offer practical, strategic advice while simultaneously validating the cultural identities that participants identified as a core component of their leadership success. For women of color in particular, these networks became essential counter-spaces to the intersecting challenges of racism and sexism, as described by Kingsberry and Jean-Marie (2021).

The strategic leadership and development theme advances our understanding of leadership pathways beyond a simple pipeline metaphor. The participants' focus on "over-credentialing" and strategic positioning disrupts the myth of a purely meritocratic system. It suggests that for leaders of color, the pathway is not a straightforward progression but a high-stakes strategic game requiring what Berry and Reardon (2022) call "contest mobility", a proactive and often exhaustive effort to construct a resume so compelling it becomes difficult for a biased system to ignore. This proactive career construction is not merely a best practice but a necessary response to the systemic barriers they anticipate, a point further clarified by the challenges we discussed under RQ2.

Intersectionality theory proved particularly illuminating in understanding how participants navigated representation and fit. Participants demonstrated what Kim and Smith (2024) describe as “cultural agility.” This concept of cultural agility is a nuanced approach to navigating professional spaces that require both adaptation and authenticity. From an intersectional lens, this is not simple code-switching; it is a complex negotiation of multiple identities (e.g., Black, male, leader) in contexts where each identity is subject to different forms of bias and expectation.

The findings on building credibility through experience align with and extend those of Schwartz et al. (2023) on superintendent career trajectories. This confirms DeMatthews et al.’s (2023) observation that superintendents of color often pursue more diverse and extensive professional paths compared to their White counterparts. This study shifts the paradigm from viewing these longer pathways as a sign of a “leaky pipeline” to understanding them as a deliberate strategy of “credential stacking.” These leaders are not falling behind; they are strategically building an undeniable record of competence to counteract the implicit and explicit bias they anticipate.

The study’s findings challenge deficit-oriented narratives about leaders of color. Participants demonstrated what Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) described as counter-storytelling, reshaping dominant narratives about educational leadership through their lived experiences. The successes revealed both individual resilience and a systematic approach to navigating and transforming educational leadership structures

## **Research Question 2: Challenges**

Research Question 2 explored Black and Hispanic superintendents' perceptions of challenges in securing a superintendent position in Texas. When analyzed through CRT and intersectionality, these themes highlight the complex systemic barriers that Black and Hispanic educators face in their attainment of the superintendency.

The theme of navigating bias and discrimination advances knowledge by making the abstract concept of institutional racism tangible. When participants described encountering coded feedback about "fit" or noted that all-White boards often lead minority-majority districts, they provided concrete evidence of how systemic bias operates in practice, moving beyond theoretical claims to lived reality. The intersectionality of race and gender emerged as a particularly powerful analytical lens, confirming Kingsberry and Jean-Marie's (2021) research on the compounded challenges faced by Black women in educational leadership. This finding extends previous scholarship by revealing the nuanced ways racial and gender discrimination interact to create complex professional obstacles.

Barriers to access and advancement revealed systemic gatekeeping mechanisms that align closely with Smith and Gibbs-Roseboro's (2023) research on institutional constraints facing leaders of color. These findings disrupt the assumption that access to leadership is primarily about individual qualifications. Instead, they show that access is mediated by social capital and inclusion in informal networks (the "good old boyisms") that operate as invisible barriers, reinforcing existing power structures. The emotional and psychological challenges identified in the study provide critical insights into the

internal toll of navigating racist institutional structures. These findings extend Johnson's (2021) work on the psychological impact of professional isolation. This shifts the paradigm of leadership challenges from a focus on external obstacles to an understanding of the significant, often invisible, emotional labor required. When leaders describe impostor syndrome or the loneliness of being "the only one," they reveal a hidden "identity tax" that is levied on superintendents of color, which can impact their well-being and sustainability in the role. CRT proved particularly illuminating in understanding these challenges. The participants' narratives consistently demonstrated what Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) described as the pervasive nature of racism in educational institutions. The study reveals how racism operates not just through individual acts of discrimination, but through complex institutional mechanisms that systematically limit opportunities for Black and Hispanic educators. These challenges directly highlight why the success strategies from RQ1 are so crucial. The widespread bias and gatekeeping participants described show why strategic career development and "over-credentialing" weren't just ambitious but essential for survival. While the emotional burden of isolation and impostor syndrome (RQ2, Theme 3) highlights the need for identity-affirming support networks that participants identified as a key to success (RQ1, Theme 2). In short, the challenges and successes aren't separate – one is a direct, strategic response to the other.

The findings both confirm and extend existing literature on educational leadership. While previous research has documented barriers faced by leaders of color, this study provides a nuanced, Texas-specific context that reveals both the persistent

nature of systemic inequity and the remarkable resilience of Black and Hispanic superintendents in navigating these challenges.

### **Research Question 3: Recommended Strategies**

Research Question 3 explored Black and Hispanic superintendents' recommended strategies for securing a superintendent position in Texas. When analyzed through the lenses of CRT and intersectionality, these strategies highlight the complex approaches Black and Hispanic educators facilitate to navigate the pathway to the Texas superintendency.

The theme of strategic navigation and self-advocacy finding advances knowledge by reframing this intense preparation not as a simple desire for self-improvement, but as a calculated act of resistance against anticipated bias. Intentional preparation and positioning emerged as a powerful theme that challenges deficit-oriented narratives about educational leadership. This finding represents a significant shift in paradigm. It moves beyond seeing diversity as a demographic goal and repositions it as a source of strategic leadership advantage. By leveraging their cultural wealth, these leaders are not only finding a way to succeed personally but are also actively redefining what successful leadership looks like, creating a counter-narrative to the dominant, often White-centered model. The theme of leveraging cultural identity and community alignment most directly reflects the principles of CCW articulated by Yosso (2005) and extended by Rivas-Garza (2023). Participants like BF2, who emphasized how their background shapes leadership, and HF1, who highlighted the value of bilingualism, exemplify what Yamashiro et al. (2022) describe as "cultural responsiveness capital." This finding extends existing

literature by demonstrating how cultural identity can be strategically transformed from a perceived barrier to a leadership asset.

Intersectionality theory proved particularly illuminating in understanding these recommended strategies. The participants' approaches reveal what Collins (2000) described as the "matrix of domination", sophisticated methods of navigating multiple, intersecting systems of oppression. The strategies suggested go beyond individual survival, representing a form of institutional transformation that challenges existing leadership paradigms. When we bring these strategies together, a sophisticated model for advancement emerges. Leaders need to both operate within the existing system (through intentional preparation) and actively work to change it (by using their cultural identity as a strength). CRT interprets this duality as a form of resistance (Ladson-Billings, 1995). By leveraging their cultural wealth, these leaders are not just achieving personal success – they are also reshaping the very definition of successful leadership, building a counter-narrative to the prevailing, often White-centric, model.

The study's findings both confirm and extend existing literature on educational leadership strategies. While previous research has documented the challenges faced by leaders of color, this study provides a Texas-specific context that reveals the innovative approaches Black and Hispanic superintendents develop to overcome systemic barriers. These strategies represent not just individual coping mechanisms, but collective forms of resistance and transformation.

These interpretations are bounded by the study's specific context of Texas and the experiences of nine superintendents. Future research could explore how these findings might translate to different geographical or institutional settings.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study had several limitations that warrant a deeper discussion. The primary limitation was the sample size of nine participants. Although nine is an appropriate number for a basic qualitative design study, it represents only a small number because the data pool itself is limited to approximately 184 Black and Hispanic superintendents identified in Texas. This limited sample size means that the findings may not capture the full range of experiences and perspectives of all Black and Hispanic superintendents across the state. Specifically, the nuanced intersectional experiences of leaders across different district types (e.g., urban vs. rural), career stages, and gender identities may be underrepresented, which directly informs the recommendation for larger, more diverse studies.

The geographic scope of the study was limited to Texas, with its unique demographic, political, and educational contexts. While this focus allowed for a contextualized understanding of superintendency pathways within Texas's educational landscape, it also limits the transferability of findings to other states with different demographics, governance structures, and hiring practices. The political dynamics and "good old boyisms" described by participants may be specific to Texas, meaning the strategies for navigating these challenges may not be directly applicable elsewhere. The

vast size of Texas and the geographical dispersal of school districts necessitated the use of virtual interviews rather than in-person interactions.

Selection and participant bias also presented limitations. All participants were current superintendents who had successfully navigated the pathway to leadership. This “survivorship bias” means that the perspectives of those who aspired to the superintendency but did not achieve it, or those who left the position, are not represented. Consequently, the challenges identified in this study may be understated, as the voices of those who were ultimately pushed out of the pathway are absent. The strategies for success are those of the “winners” and may not fully account for the barriers that proved insurmountable for other qualified candidates. Additionally, participants’ honesty and willingness to openly share their experiences, particularly regarding sensitive topics like discrimination and bias, could have influenced the findings. As public figures, superintendents may have been inclined to present a more polished narrative of resilience, potentially downplaying the severity of the biases they encountered to avoid professional repercussions.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the lived experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas and contributes to our understanding of the complexities of navigating the superintendency pathways as educational leaders of color.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations emerge for addressing the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas.

These recommendations are grounded in participants' lived experiences and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

### **Recommendations for School Boards and Search Firms**

Based on the finding that participants faced coded bias and exclusionary hiring practices (Theme 1, RQ2), school boards and search firms should implement transparent, equity-focused hiring practices that minimize bias in superintendent selection. This includes a focus on diversifying search committees to include members from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, establishing clear, objective qualification criteria before reviewing candidates, and requiring implicit bias training for all decision-makers. As DeMatthews et al. (2024b) noted, school boards often demonstrate preferences for candidates who reflect their own demographics. In response to participants identifying search firms as a significant barrier (Theme 2, RQ2), search firms should actively recruit diverse candidate pools. This would ensure that multiple Black and Hispanic candidates are included, which aligns with the ILO Group's (2022) finding that having at least two candidates of color significantly increases hiring diversity.

### **Recommendations for Superintendent Preparation Programs**

Given that participants credited identity-affirming networks and formal leadership programs as critical to their success (Theme 2 & 3, RQ1), preparation programs should intentionally recruit and support Black and Hispanic educators, creating cohort models that foster community and belonging. Programs should incorporate culturally responsive leadership frameworks and provide specific training on navigating the unique challenges faced by leaders of color. Mentorship opportunities connecting aspiring superintendents

with successful Black and Hispanic superintendents should be formalized within program structures. This addresses Reyes-Guerra et al.'s (2022) finding that leadership preparation programs must actively work to diversify the profession while preparing leaders for cultural diversity within schools.

### **Recommendations for Aspiring Black and Hispanic Superintendents**

In line with findings that successful participants built credibility through diverse, extensive experience (Theme 5, RQ1), aspiring superintendents should strategically pursue diverse leadership experiences across multiple domains of educational administration, such as curriculum, finance, and human resources. They should focus on building professional networks that include both identity-affirming connections and broader educational leadership circles. Developing a clear leadership philosophy grounded in authentic values while strategically selecting districts where their leadership approach will be valued is essential. This aligns with Kim and Smith's (2024) research on strategic career navigation for leaders from underrepresented groups.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

To address this study's limitation of only including successful superintendents, future research should expand the participant pool to include aspiring superintendents and those who have left the position to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the entire career pathway. Based on the finding that institutional practices serve as major barriers (Theme 2, RQ2), studies examining the specific practices of search firms and school boards in superintendent selection would illuminate institutional barriers and potential intervention points. Longitudinal research tracking Black and Hispanic

educators throughout their careers would reveal how barriers and supports evolve over time. Research comparing experiences across different states could identify context-specific factors that influence superintendent diversity. These recommendations address Schwartz et al.'s (2023) call for more comprehensive research on superintendent pathways and selection processes.

These recommendations, grounded in the study's findings and existing literature, offer practical strategies for increasing the representation of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas.

### **Implications**

The most significant implication of this study is that for Black and Hispanic leaders, the path to the superintendency is not a pipeline to be entered, but a complex, racialized system to be strategically navigated and actively resisted. This study offers significant implications for positive social change at multiple levels, with the potential to transform educational leadership in Texas and beyond. These implications are grounded in the lived experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents and the theoretical frameworks of CRT and intersectionality.

At the individual level, this study empowers aspiring Black and Hispanic superintendents by validating their experiences and providing concrete strategies for navigating systemic barriers. By highlighting successful pathways and offering practical recommendations, this research provides a roadmap for individual educators seeking to advance into superintendent positions. The findings demonstrate how personal attributes

like authenticity, resilience, and strategic networking can be leveraged to overcome institutional obstacles.

At the organizational level, this study challenges school districts, preparation programs, and search firms to examine and reform practices that perpetuate underrepresentation. The findings reveal how implicit biases, exclusionary networks, and coded language create barriers for qualified Black and Hispanic candidates. By recognizing these mechanisms, this research provides organizations with specific areas for intervention and improvement, potentially leading to more equitable hiring practices and increased diversity in leadership.

At the societal level, increasing the representation of Black and Hispanic superintendents has profound implications for educational equity. As DeMatthews et al. (2023) and Gilmore (2022) noted, diverse leadership is associated with improved outcomes for students of color. A more representative superintendency supports broader efforts to create educational systems that serve all students effectively,

This study demonstrates the value of qualitative approaches in capturing the nuanced experiences of educational leaders from underrepresented groups. It extends CRT and intersectionality by applying these frameworks to the specific context of superintendent leadership in Texas, revealing how race, ethnicity, and gender intersect to shape professional opportunities and challenges at the highest levels of school districts. Specifically, it extends these theories by demonstrating how abstract concepts, such as CCW and counterstorytelling, are operationalized as tangible, day-to-day leadership strategies by superintendents of color.

These implications suggest that addressing the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic superintendents requires a coordinated effort across multiple levels, from individual career development to systemic policy reform. By recognizing these barriers and pathways to success, this study contributes to the broader movement toward educational equity and inclusion.

### **Conclusion**

This study highlights the complex pathways of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas, revealing both persistent barriers and powerful strategies for success. The findings demonstrate that while systemic racism and bias continue to create obstacles on the pathway to superintendency, Black and Hispanic leaders have developed complex and unique approaches to navigate these challenges and achieve success.

The voices of these nine superintendents reveal a troubling disconnect between Texas's increasingly diverse student population and its predominantly White superintendent workforce. Yet, their stories also provide hope and direction for transformation. Their experiences highlight how authentic leadership, strategic career development, and cultural wealth can be leveraged to overcome systemic barriers and create more equitable educational systems.

The underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas is not just a demographic issue but a matter of educational equity. Students benefit from seeing themselves reflected in leadership positions, and diverse leadership brings valuable perspectives that enhance decision-making and policy development. As Texas continues

to grow more diverse, ensuring that its educational leadership reflects this diversity becomes increasingly crucial.

This research calls for united action from multiple stakeholders (school boards, search firms, preparation programs, and policymakers) to address the systemic barriers that perpetuate underrepresentation. By implementing the recommendations from this study, Texas can move toward a more representative superintendency that better serves its diverse student population and communities. Ultimately, this study is a call to dismantle the invisible architecture of exclusion and intentionally build pathways that allow the leadership of Texas schools to finally reflect the faces of the students they serve.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Date:

Time:

Interviewee Code #:

Location of Interview:

Background/Demographic information will be collected after the informed consent but before the interview via Google form.

Name:

Race/Ethnicity:

Gender:

Current School District:

Years as Superintendent:

Size of School District (1A, 2A, etc.):

Type of School District (Urban, Suburban, Rural):

College degree(s):

Texas Education Certification (s):

Superintendent Program Completed:

Time it took to complete the program:

Parts of the Interview	Interview Questions
Introduction	<p>Good morning/afternoon [Superintendent’s name], my name is Maria Faqier, and I want to thank you again for taking the time to speak with me today. I truly appreciate you sharing your insights and experiences as part of my doctoral research exploring the journeys of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas.</p> <p>As we discussed, my goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the pathways to the superintendency, including the successes, challenges, and strategies that have shaped your career. This conversation should take about 45-60 minutes.</p> <p>To ensure accuracy, I’ll be recording our conversation for later transcription. I want to assure you that your responses will be kept completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any reports or publications, and all data will be securely stored and anonymized. You have the right to stop the interview at any point, and you’re welcome to skip any questions you prefer not to answer.</p> <p>Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?</p>
Background	<p>Q1: Please describe your background in education, including teaching experience and previous administrative positions.</p> <p>Q2: Describe the career pathway leading to your current role as superintendent.</p>

<p>Interview Questions [Alignment to RQs]</p>	<p>Q1: Tell me about your journey in becoming a superintendent. What motivated you to pursue this role? [RQ1, RQ2] -Probing question: What aspects of your personal or professional background did you find most helpful in preparing you for the superintendency?</p> <p>Q2: What were some of the key successes you experienced in securing your superintendent position? [RQ1] -Probing question: How did these successes contribute to your overall career pathway? -</p> <p>Q3: What were some of the significant challenges you faced in securing your superintendent position? [RQ2] -Probing question: How did these challenges shape your understanding of the educational leadership landscape?</p> <p>Q4: What, if any, did your race, ethnicity, and gender play a role in your experiences as you navigated the pathway to the superintendency? [RQ1, RQ2] -Probing questions: Can you share any specific instances where you felt your race, ethnicity, or gender influenced the opportunities or challenges you faced in your career? - How have you navigated the expectations or stereotypes associated with your racial or ethnic background in your role as superintendent?</p> <p>Q5: What advice would you give to aspiring Black and Hispanic superintendents who are seeking to secure a superintendent position in Texas? [RQ3]</p> <p>Q6: What specific strategies did you find helpful in overcoming the challenges you faced in your journey to the superintendency? [RQ3]</p> <p>Q7: In your experience, what are some of the systemic barriers that may hinder the advancement of Black and Hispanic educators into Texas superintendent roles? [RQ2, RQ 3]</p>

	<p>Q8: What are some potential opportunities or resources that could support the development and advancement of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas? [RQ3]</p> <p>Q9: Reflecting on your experiences, how does the intersection of race, ethnicity, and gender influence the pathways and experiences of Black and Hispanic superintendents in Texas? [RQ1, RQ2, RQ3]</p> <p>Q10: What changes do you think are needed to create a more equitable and inclusive pathway to the superintendency for Black and Hispanic educators? [RQ3]  -Probing question: What advice would you give to school boards or search firms regarding the recruitment and hiring of superintendents from diverse backgrounds?</p>
Closing	<p>[Name], thank you so much for sharing your valuable lived experiences and insights with me today. They are incredibly important to my research. Before we end, is there anything else you'd like to add or any questions you have for me about the study?</p> <p>I truly appreciate you taking the time to participate in this interview and providing a deeper understanding of the pathways to the superintendency in Texas. Thank you again, and I wish you all the best in your continued leadership.</p>