

# The Study of the American Superintendent: 2015 Mid-Decade Update Summary of Findings

## Part 1: Enrollment Specific

- The pattern of an aging superintendent population continues from the 2010 study. Such an aging pattern has implications for the pipeline of replacements. Nearly one-third of superintendents indicate they plan to be retired five years from now.
- For every enrollment span, the percent of students of color exceeded what superintendents reported as the percentage of community of color. This follows a nationwide trend showing increases in minority children outpacing that of white children (e.g., U.S. Census 2015 Current Population Reports). As enrollment of districts grew, so did the percent of those of color.
- In all but the largest districts, women make up approximately a quarter of the superintendents. Although the number of respondents was limited, it is suggested that the largest districts have greater interest in employing females as their superintendent than smaller districts
- While the populations of special needs students are significant, half of all students are FRPL eligible, regardless of district enrollment size, presenting a significant challenge to superintendents.
- The majority of superintendents' career paths followed, as expected, the tradition of teacher to site administrator to assistant superintendent to superintendent. This trend is interrupted only in the smallest districts where it is assumed positions like assistant superintendent are not available as a stop along the career path.
- In a question new to this research and requiring significant candor on the part of the respondent, conflict with the board and wanting a new challenge were the most often cited reasons to have left a previous superintendent position. The unrestricted responses provided an interesting glimpse into the challenging life of superintendents. Some confirmed the existence of contentious relationships and conditions of the job were the reason, while family dynamics also played an important role in the decision.
- When asked about problems facing superintendents in their present position, superintendents ranked high job stress, time commitment, and lack of adequate funding.
- The 2010 decennial study provided the baseline data for career satisfaction among superintendents. Approximately three-quarters of present superintendents would choose to be a superintendent again. This was confirmed in the 2015 study.
- Self-reported factors that inhibit the superintendent's performance are revealing and do not differ significantly according to district enrollment size. Politics leads the factors by a significant margin.

## Part 2: Gender Specific

- Female participation in the 2015 study grew by slightly more than 2 percent to 26.9 percent of respondents compared to the 2010 decennial response rate.
- The mean and median age is higher for female superintendents than for their male counterparts. Related, female superintendents began their position at a later age than their male counterparts.
- Self-reporting of race/ethnicity found that slightly more than 5 percent of the respondent males reported themselves as minority (non-Caucasian) while nearly 11 percent of the female superintendents reported themselves as minority.
- The trend continues that significantly fewer female superintendents report that they are married or partnered. The data collected in this study and the 2010 decennial study combined with the significantly higher divorce rate among female superintendents suggests the price that might be paid by the career choice for women.
- Surprisingly, male superintendents who are as a group significantly younger (see Table 2.1) than their female counterparts report significantly more school-age children. This again adds to the valid area of inquiry not fully investigated by either the 2010 decennial study or this 2015 study that challenges of family obligations and career choice for women in particular deserve additional study.
- Female superintendents occupy urban superintendent positions at a higher percentage than their male counterparts. This trend, regardless of the study year, holds true for suburban districts as well.
- The 2010 decennial study and the 2015 study investigated teaching experience by gender of superintendent. Female superintendents generally spent more years as classroom teachers than male superintendents.
- This study looked at whether superintendents were hired from within the district or from a different district. Simply stated, males were hired from inside their present district at a higher percentage than were their female counterparts.
- Female respondents report slightly lower satisfaction with their career choice; more than two percent more female than male respondents say they would not choose the superintendency again.
- Aligned closely with the 2010 decennial study, the 2015 study clearly indicated that female superintendents were hired for their curriculum and instructional leadership prowess while male superintendents were favored for their personal characteristics.

The full report with tables is available via the new [my.aasa.org](http://my.aasa.org) site at [http://my.aasa.org/AASA/Resources/Policy\\_Advocacy\\_Resources.aspx](http://my.aasa.org/AASA/Resources/Policy_Advocacy_Resources.aspx)