

SNAPSHOT OF THE SUPERINTENDENCY III

A Study of School Superintendents in New York State

July 1998

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NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

and the Membership Committee

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Executive Summary

Recognizing that high quality educational leadership will be essential to their educational reform initiatives, the Commissioner and the Board of Regents announced a Task Force on Leadership. The Task Force is charged with investigating the state of the profession and making recommendations for its improvement in the coming years.

Based on the data contained in this report, their efforts could not be more timely. In 1996, NYSCOSS enlisted Ray O’Connell, Ed.D., an assistant professor at SUNY Albany, to conduct a study of the candidate pool for the superintendency and other administrative positions. The vast majority of the search consultants surveyed (88.5%) felt that the candidate pool had changed over the past 3 years. Two principal reasons emerged. Most reported the candidate pools to be smaller (87%), and comprised of less qualified candidates (70%).

Most search consultants report that the candidate pool is smaller and comprised of less qualified candidates than 3 years ago.

Reacting to a concern regarding “the future status of the superintendency,” a similar study conducted last year by the Syracuse University Superintendents Alumni Association (SUSAA) offered no fewer than 36 recommendations to improve the future of the profession. Common to both studies is the theme that the challenges of the superintendency, coupled with a changing and sometimes inhospitable work environment make this a less attractive career option at just the time when the largest portion of sitting superintendents will be retiring.

Based on these studies and the data gleaned in this survey, we have identified 4 major issues facing the superintendency:

1. Superintendents are getting older.

Despite considerable turnover in the past several years, the average age of superintendents has risen 3.3% since 1992. This trend has profound implications for educational leadership:

- More superintendents are closer to retirement than ever before, more than 53% will retire in the next 5 years. This number increases to 62% after 6 years.

The challenges of the superintendency, coupled with a changing and sometimes inhospitable work environment make this a less attractive career option at just the time when the largest portion of sitting superintendents will be retiring.

- Superintendents are entering the profession later in life. Fewer superintendents still have children of school age than in the previous Snapshot survey.
- Fewer young educators are approaching the superintendency as a career option.

2. Diversity needs improvement.

Despite gains made in the number of women superintendents in New York, the vast majority of superintendents do not reflect the diversity of the population they serve.

- Just over 12% of superintendents are women. While this is a significant increase over 8% in 1992, there remains considerable room for improvement, and investigation of barriers that exist for women superintendents.
- New York superintendents are overwhelmingly white (97%). While this is statistically similar to the national average (95%) it still could use improvement.

3. There is a high degree of turnover.

Past Snapshot surveys have recognized that longer employment contracts point to a recognition by school boards that the superintendents leadership is best manifested over a period of several years, and that periods of stability have proven to be the most productive. Unfortunately, long periods of leadership stability are less and less the case:

- The average tenure in any given superintendency is less than 4.5 years, based on NYSCOSS membership data.
- As superintendents turnover, the likelihood that they will be replaced by experienced superintendents is diminished as 53% will retire over the next 5 years.

4. Job climate/satisfaction is diminishing.

While 69% of superintendents rated their relationship with their Board as high, most superintendents reported spending far more time on Board relations than they would have preferred. In addition SUSAA and others have pointed to an increasing climate of incivility in the relationship between Boards, communities, and superintendents which may be influencing the attractiveness of the position to other educators.

In addition, superintendents have singled out resources/finances and new standards implementation as two central frustrations of the position, suggesting that

the difficulty of achieving these standards in an increasingly resource constricted environment is leading to less job satisfaction.

- Obviously, diminishing job satisfaction will have a detrimental impact on the ability to attract new candidates to the superintendency.
- While the overwhelming majority of superintendents report good relationships with Boards they respect, the number of districts with strained relationships has been steadily increasing, adding to the perception that the superintendency is under fire.

The Chancellor of the Board of Regents, Carl T Hayden, has stated, “No school works without inspired leadership;” a truth we hold to be self-evident. To better serve the state’s children, we must have the best educational leaders possible. To understand better the nature of the position and our educational leaders, we take this snapshot.

Acknowledgements

A subcommittee of the Membership Committee analyzed the data and wrote the report. Geoffrey H. Davis Ed.D., District Superintendent at the Hamilton Fulton, Montgomery BOCES chaired the subcommittee. Frederick D. Volp, Ph.D., Superintendent of Oneida City School District, served as lead author.

William E. Whitehill Jr., Ed.D., Syracuse University, Marilyn Terranova Ed.D., Superintendent, South Lewis Central School, Patricia Archambault Ed.D., Superintendent, Caledonia-Mumford Central School; Robert Service, Superintendent, Mohawk Central Schools and Anthony Barretta, Superintendent, Holland-Patent Central Schools wrote, analyzed specific sections and contributed to the study as a whole.

The Regional Information Center at Madison-Oneida BOCES, with the very able assistance of Katie Duell, gave the subcommittee expertise in creating charts and analyzing data. Mrs. Marsha Campanaro contributed very professionally to early drafts of the manuscript.

Response Rate

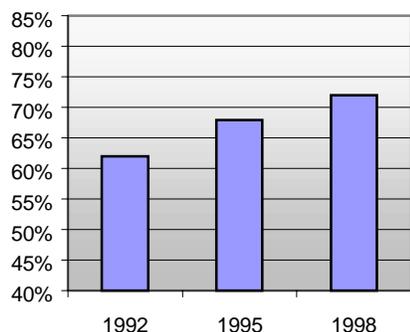


Table I

Membership Returns

	Number	% of Total
Superintendents	497	92.0%
Assistant Superintendents	10	1.9%
District Superintendents	28	5.2%
NYC Community Sup'ts.	2	0.4%
Other	2	0.4%
Total Returns	539	100.0%

Table 2

District Types

Type	% of Total
Rural	52.7%
Suburban	36.2%
Small City	7.4%
Large City	0.6%
Other	3.1%
Total Returns	100.0%

Introduction

In July 1991, during the Summer Planning Session at the Gideon Putnam Hotel in Saratoga Springs, New York, the Membership Committee of the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) prioritized a comprehensive study of the demographics and attitudes of superintendents as a means of better understanding our membership and the position of the superintendency. The committee determined that it would be useful to conduct parallel studies in the future at approximately 2 to 3 year intervals to continue to validate the data, refine the questionnaire, track various aspects of the New York superintendency, and provide an updated data bank with an historic perspective for research in the future.

This document represents the third in our series of Snapshots of the Superintendency, following Snapshot I (1992) and Snapshot II (1995). Dr. Robert Loretan, Executive Director of New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS), has been active in support of the research effort.

The original study, Snapshot I, was well received by the membership and it produced a 63% response rate. The response rate improved in 1995 to 68%, and in this study, an impressive 72% of the superintendents responded. Although some questions have been revised as a result of experience, most questions still provide a valid longitudinal comparison. The data are separated into four parts:

- I. Personal-Geographical Data;**
- II. Contractual Issues;**
- III. Retirement;**
- IV. Superintendents' Satisfaction and Perception of Issues.**

The breakdown of the 539 questionnaires received is reported in Table I.

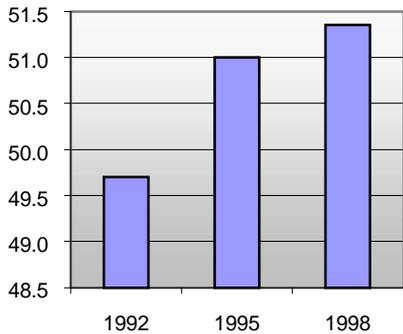
This return is compared to the size and type of school district, and the breakdown was again very representative. Table 2 summarizes the types of school districts responding.

The review of the study and related comments are provided in the following analysis.

Part I: Personal / Geographical Data

The return rate for Snapshot III was 72%. This was a 9% increase in usable returns over Snapshot I. This return rate reinforced and strengthened the validity of our data

Mean Age



and approaches a sample of the total membership, not merely a statistical sample. We now have a validated and significant body of data on the superintendency in New York over a period of seven (7) years that gives us the ability to make useful conclusions.

Age

The mean age of superintendents responding was 51.4 years old. This was an increase from the original study in 1992. This trend reinforced our past conclusions that many individuals entering the superintendency in the last few years were older, thus raising the mean age slightly in the past 3 years. Given the substantial superintendent turnover since 1995, it is somewhat surprising to note the mean age of superintendents is increasing. One possible explanation is that superintendents are entering the profession later in their careers.

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This will likely have two impacts: First, a greater proportion of superintendents will be closer to retirement, leading to accelerated turnover; and second, later entry to the profession will mean less experience in the superintendency.

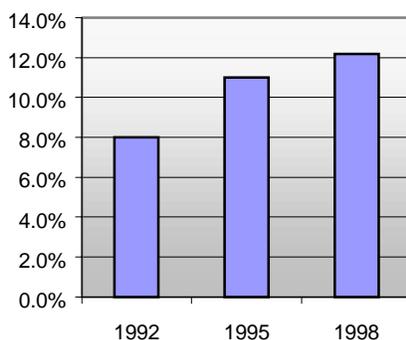
Race/Gender

Eighty-seven and eight-tenths percent (87.8%) of the respondents are men and 12.2% women. There was a slight increase of 5.2% in the number of women who are superintendents when compared to 1992. New York State is comparable to a recent national study which showed that 90% of the superintendents are male and 10% are female. Ninety percent (90%) of the respondents were married, 5% divorced and 2% were never married. This pattern has been consistent since 1992.

The overwhelming proportion of superintendents in our study, 97.2%, were white, with 1.5% African-American, 0.4% Hispanic and 0.4% Native American. This ethnic breakdown was comparable to national statistics in which 95% are white, 3% Black, and 2% Hispanic.

Nevertheless, there is considerable room to increase the diversity of superintendents. This has been a priority of the Council and is reflected in our mission statement and goals.

% of Women

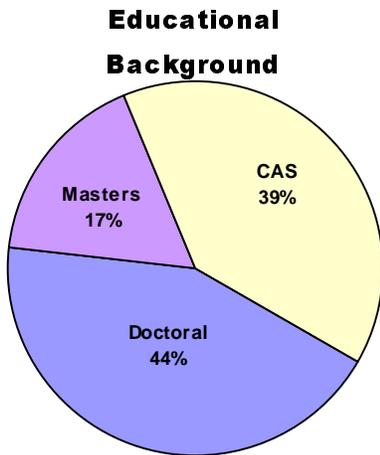


Education/Experience

Forty-three percent (43%) of the superintendents have Doctorates, 17% have Master's Degrees, and 39% have Certificates of Advanced Study, or both.

Sixty percent (60%) of New York superintendents have five or more years of experience. Nationally, by comparison, 43% of chief school officers have served for more than five years. We believe that this statistic is notable and has an implication for the future of our profession. Within the next six years a significant portion (62%) of the superintendents in New York will be retiring. How quality leaders aspiring to the superintendency will be developed and recruited, is a serious question.

More than 53% of superintendents will retire within the next 5 years. This proportion grows to 62% in 6 years. This will result in a profound turnover in educational leadership in the near future.



Consideration was given to whether superintendents tended to move up from within the district to the superintendency or move to it from outside the district. Seventy percent (70%) of those involved in our study accepted the superintendency from the outside, with 27% moving up from within. Three percent (3%) of the respondents did not provide answers. It was interesting to note that the majority of the sample (46%) were not required by contract to move into the district. Of those who were not required to move, 51% did so anyway. Eighty-six percent (86%) of those who moved received moving expenses. Sixty-four percent (64%) of that figure received total payment. Seventy-three percent (73%) of those superintendents who moved did so within 150 miles of their previous location and 54.9% moved only within 50 miles.

Forty percent (40%) of the group had children of school age. In 1994, 55% of the children attended a school district in which their parent served as superintendent. The Snapshot III rate for attendance in the district of employment was 40%, a significant change. Such a finding seems to confirm the "graying" of the superintendency in New York.

Part II: Contractual Issues

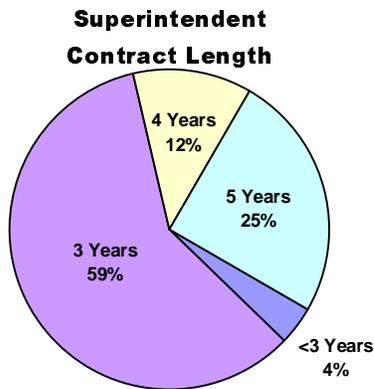
The employment contract typically defines the working relationship between the Superintendent of Schools and the Board of Education. While the general duties and responsibilities of the superintendent are set forth in Education Law, the contract specifically references terms and

Table 3

Contract Length

Type of District	Length
Common, Union Free, Central	3-5 years
Central High School	3-5 years
Small City	<5 years
Large City*	<5 years

*Rochester and Buffalo are limited to 4 years.



conditions of employment, including compensation and benefits.

The Superintendent of Schools serves as the chief executive officer of a school district in New York, appointed by resolution of the Board of Education. The employment contract is a binding agreement upon both parties and is respected as a legal document of great significance.

Terms of Employment

In common, union free, central high school, and central school districts, the term of an employment agreement between superintendent and Board may range from three to five years. In all city school districts, other than Buffalo and Rochester, the Board may, by resolution, set forth a term of employment not to exceed five years, and then enter into a contractual agreement for other terms and conditions of employment. In Buffalo and Rochester, superintendents may be appointed for up to four years.

The employment contract is typically negotiated between the superintendent and Board (or representatives of each) at the time of initial employment, and at any time the term of employment is extended or modified. Contractual provisions typically address the term and renewal of the agreement, salary and other compensation, health benefits, evaluation procedures; leaves of absence including sick, vacation and personal leave; professional development and reimbursement of professional expenses. The Snapshot III survey instrument addressed each of these areas, based upon 539 usable responses. In addition, salary data were drawn directly from State Education Department data, as the salary disclosure requirement provided a complete and current database for analysis. Comparisons with data from the Snapshot I and II surveys yield remarkably consistent patterns within contractual issues, as will be discussed at the conclusion of this section.

The most common term for a superintendent's contract in New York continues to be three years (59%), a slight increase over the 1995 data. This is not unexpected, however, given the number of new superintendents entering the system. One quarter of the respondents hold a five year contract, and 12% have a four year agreement. In previous studies, we postulated that the longer terms reflect an acknowledgement on a Board's behalf that a superintendent's leadership may be best manifested over a period of several years, and that both parties require some degree of stability in order to be most productive.

Evergreen (or rolling contract) provisions continue to be popular, although slightly less prevalent than in 1995, which may be explained by an increasing number of entry contracts. Thirty-six percent (36%) of respondents have an annual renewal clause in their agreement. This type of a contract comes before the Board each year for renewal. Failing to achieve a renewal, the superintendent retains the balance of the term of the original agreement. The rolling contract provides the Board with an opportunity to translate the annual performance review into an extension of employment, and also allows the superintendent a longer period of time to seek alternatives if employment is not to be extended.

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The annual performance review continues to be reported by superintendents as a valued component of their relationship with the Board. Typically a formal, written document (85% of respondents so noted), the evaluation was cited by 83% as significant to their professional relationship with the Board.

Compensation

Salary — The mean earned salary for a superintendent in New York, during the 1997-98 school year, was \$97,720. This figure closely approximates the \$97,632 median salary figure reported by the State Education Department as part of the salary disclosure initiative. (This amount excludes additional compensation, or the cash value of earned benefits.)

The 1997-98 mean salary among BOCES superintendents was \$123,301, with a legislative cap of \$128,625. Eighteen percent (18%) of superintendents reported earning more than \$110,000 per year, basically unchanged from the 1993-94 school year, the base year for salary reporting in the Snapshot II study. The 93-94 mean salary was \$93,612.

Benefits — Compensation is contractually provided to superintendents through a variety of methods in addition to salary. Nearly all superintendents (98%) are compensated for their professional travel. Twenty-four percent (24%) are provided with a vehicle at district expense, with the balance receiving either mileage reimbursement at the I.R.S. rate, or lump sum distributions.

Table 4
Salary Data

Region	Median
New York State	\$97,632
National Average	98,106
Mid-East Average	104,169

A mutual interest in the wellness of the superintendent is reflected by the number of contracts (73%) calling for annual medical evaluations at district expense. Professional obligations are addressed by Boards of Education through the payment of dues and memberships in professional organizations, along with reimbursement for expenses incurred through attendance at professional conferences. Consistent with previous Snapshot studies, superintendents nearly universally (98%) report that dues for the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) are provided as a condition of employment, as are expenses for NYSCOSS conferences.

Health and life insurance coverage is nearly universally provided within the contractual employment agreement. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of superintendents are afforded family health insurance coverage, with 46% required to offer a co-pay of varying degrees. Seventy-eight percent (78%) are provided additional life insurance coverage, with the majority (56%) holding term policies. Nearly half of the respondents, consistent with previous studies, are afforded disability insurance at district expense.

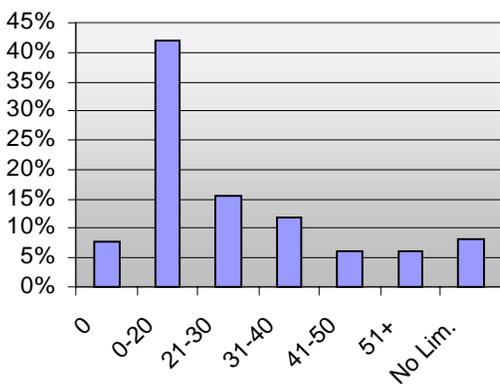
In terms of other compensation, the Snapshot III data reflect a steep reduction in the percentage of superintendents reporting a paid contribution from their Board to a tax sheltered annuity. Twenty-two percent (22%) currently claim that benefit, down from 33% in 1995.

Leave — Employment contracts typically provide for the provision of vacation, sick and personal leave, with many options for accumulation of unused days. While the contract of a BOCES superintendent is regulated in this regard, local Boards of Education have wide latitude in negotiating these provisions.

Ninety-seven percent (97%) of superintendents receive 20 or more vacation days per year, with 89% allowed to accumulate 20 days or more. Nearly one-third (32%) are allowed to accumulate 30 or more vacation days.

Sick leave is provided in all reported cases, with 64% of the respondents receiving between 11 and 15 sick days per year (29% receive 20 or more sick days per year). Ninety-one percent (91%) can accumulate 200 or more sick days, and a growing percentage (37%) can accumulate sick days without limit. Given the often transient nature of the superintendency, a third of the respondents reported that they were permitted to transfer accumulated leave from their prior employment.

Accumulated Vacation Days



Personal leave days are commonly provided, and the majority of superintendents (56%) receive three per year.

While only (4%) of the respondents reported language related to an early retirement incentive, nearly half carry terminal pay provisions based upon accumulated sick, vacation and personal leave.

Observation

The consistency noted in matters related to employment contracts since 1992 is remarkable. There seems to be a slight tendency toward more conservative agreements, suggesting that Boards are increasingly reluctant to offer benefits other than salary, which may be a result of the salary disclosure requirement. The model contract published by the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) and review process offered through the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) may also contribute to the relatively homogeneous nature of employment contracts across the state.

Part III - Retirement

The third section of the 1997 NYSCOSS membership survey contained six items on retirement.

Superintendents were asked to indicate their membership in one of four tiers in the New York State Teacher’s Retirement System (NYSTRS). Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the superintendents belonged to Tier I, with 13% enrolled in Tier II, 9% in Tier III, and 11% in Tier IV.

Tier I and Tier II NYSTRS members are eligible to retire at age 55.

Table 3 summarizes the retirement tier data from the 1992, 1994, and 1997 Snapshot surveys.

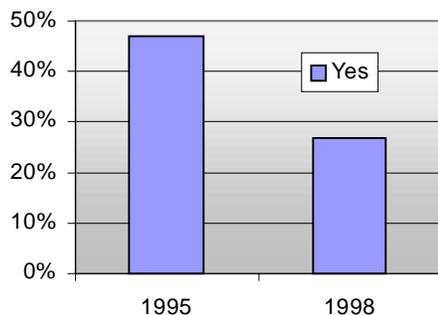
The profile of tier membership for superintendents, somewhat predictably, stands in stark contrast to that of the total NYSTRS population. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the superintendents belong to Tier I, the inverse of the total 1997 membership in the NYSTRS, with nearly 200,000 active members. Since the average age of school superintendents responding to the survey was 51.4 years, such a finding is not unexpected.

Table 5

Tier Membership

Tier	1992	1994	1997
I	76%	75%	67%
II	9%	10%	13%
III	7%	9%	9%
IV	5%	6%	11%

Would you want your son or daughter to be a superintendent?



The largest percentage of superintendents continue to indicate that they plan to retire at age 55 (27%). Seventy-one percent (71%) of the superintendents answering this survey plan on retiring by age 60. This percentage increases to 87% by the time the respondents reach 62 years of age. These statistics underscore the exodus from the superintendency over the next decade.

The data collected on the year that superintendents plan to retire show that by the year 2003, 281 (54%) plan to retire and 324 (62%) by 2004.

When superintendents were asked what career they would choose if starting over, 49% indicated the superintendency, and 84% said they would stay in education in some capacity. Superintendents' satisfaction in choosing a career in education is high. Only one-half of the respondents, however, express satisfaction in the superintendency per se. Table 4 catalogs results of the three Snapshot Surveys.

In a related question, when chief school officers were asked if they would want a son or daughter to be a superintendent, the results showed 27% responding "yes" and 42% responding "no." These percentages mark a dramatic change from 1994, when the results were evenly split with 47% saying yes and 46% saying no.

There is less satisfaction with the superintendency: Given the chance to start over, more than half wouldn't choose the superintendency. Fewer than 30% would encourage their children to be superintendents.

Table 6

Career Choice

Occupation	1992	1994	1997
Superintendency	44%	51%	49%
Stay in Education	66%	71%	84%

Superintendents were asked to report their primary motivation to retire. Thirty percent (30%) of the superintendents responded that the primary reason was that they had accomplished all of their goals; 27% were seeking a career change; and 17% indicated they had secured satisfactory retirement income.

PART IV: Superintendent's Satisfaction and Perceptions of Issues

The Snapshot III Survey concludes with perceptions of those issues that impact the daily lives of superintendents. These issues include the areas that provide professional satisfaction and/or frustration; Board of Education characteristics and priorities for SED initiatives; and desired and actual attention given to educational issues. For sure,

Table 7

Most Satisfying Responsibilities

Responsibility	% resp.
1. Instruction/Curriculum	64%
2. Board Relations	63%
3. Extracurricular Activities	61%
4. Public Relations	57%
5. Facilities	55%
6. Personnel	51%

Table 8

Most Frustrating Responsibilities

Responsibility	% resp.
1. Finances	46%
2. New Assessments Implementation	34%
3. Standards Implementation	33%
4. Compact Implementation	30%

Table 9

Preferred vs. Actual Use of Time

Preferred	Actual
1. Curriculum	1. Board Relations
2. Personnel	2. Finance
3. Public Relations	3. Facilities
4. Labor Relations	4. Personnel
5. Finance	5. Curriculum
6. Board Relations	6. Labor Relations
7. Facilities	7. Public Relations
8. Extracurricular	8. Extracurricular
9. Transportation	9. Transportation

this is a “snapshot” of the daily life and activities of superintendents across New York.

Satisfaction/Frustration

Snapshot III sought to identify the responsibilities that bring the most satisfaction to superintendents. Respondents ranked items on a five-point scale from satisfying to frustrating. The most satisfying and frustrating responsibilities are highlighted in tables 5 and 6:

In any position, what one wants to do often varies from what one actually does on any given day. The position of superintendent is not different. Superintendents in Snapshot III report a discrepancy between the responsibilities they would ideally like to spend time on and the responsibilities they actually spend time on each day. Instruction/curriculum, and personnel were ranked the highest by superintendents on how they would ideally spend their time. Chief school officers report actually spending the highest percentage of their time on Board relations and finance. Working on facilities consumes more time than superintendents would prefer in an ideal world. Furthermore, superintendents spend less school time on public relations than they would desire. Only two responsibilities, transportation and extracurricular activities, had identical ideal and actual rankings.

Public Policy

Reaction to some current issues and reform efforts facing superintendents today was revealing. Ranking these as a “great idea” or a “poor idea” gave superintendents an opportunity to express opinions about issues that provoke much public discussion. Some of the better ideas included:

Great Ideas

1. Elevated standards (73%)
2. Parent involvement (56%)
3. Teacher involvement (54%)

On the other hand, public policies viewed as poor ideas were:

Poor Ideas

1. Private school choice (75%)
2. Public school choice (58%)
3. Salary disclosure (56%)
4. Small city budget vote (51%)

With 58% of chief school officers reporting that “public school choice” is a poor idea, it is clear that superintendents have a mixed perception of the current “charter school” movement in New York.

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Perhaps most interesting were those issues and efforts that had mixed reactions. These included:

Mixed Reactions

1. All Regents curriculum (34% great/24% poor)
2. Consolidation (29% great/21% poor)
3. Shared decision-making (22% great/24% poor)

Given the fact that elevated standards and parent/teacher involvement were applauded by so many superintendents, it is curious that less than a majority ranked an “All- Regents” curriculum and shared decision making as a great idea or a poor idea. One explanation for this “mixed” finding may be the timing of the Regents’ decision on new graduation requirements. A final decision by the Regents on the “All Regents” diploma was not reached until December 1997. The SNAPSHOT III survey took place in the Spring, 1997.

However, based on the high levels of frustration noted with finances and implementation, it may be that superintendents are concerned that the standard is being raised too high for some children or that the resources necessary to implement an “all-Regents’ curriculum are unattainable.

Key Issues — Superintendents in schools across the country face a myriad of issues each school year, and superintendents in New York are no exception. Snapshot III attempted to identify five key issues at the local and state level that regularly occupy the attention of superintendents. The item also sought to determine if the local issues were different from more global statewide issues.

Financing of schools, special education, and new standards were issues that made both local and state lists. Local concerns also included passing budgets (43%), use of technology (37%), and negotiations (33%). Statewide concerns included new assessments (52%), special education (35%) and confidence in education (35%). It’s significant to note that technology, special education, and staff development have surfaced as important issues for

Table 10
Key State Issues

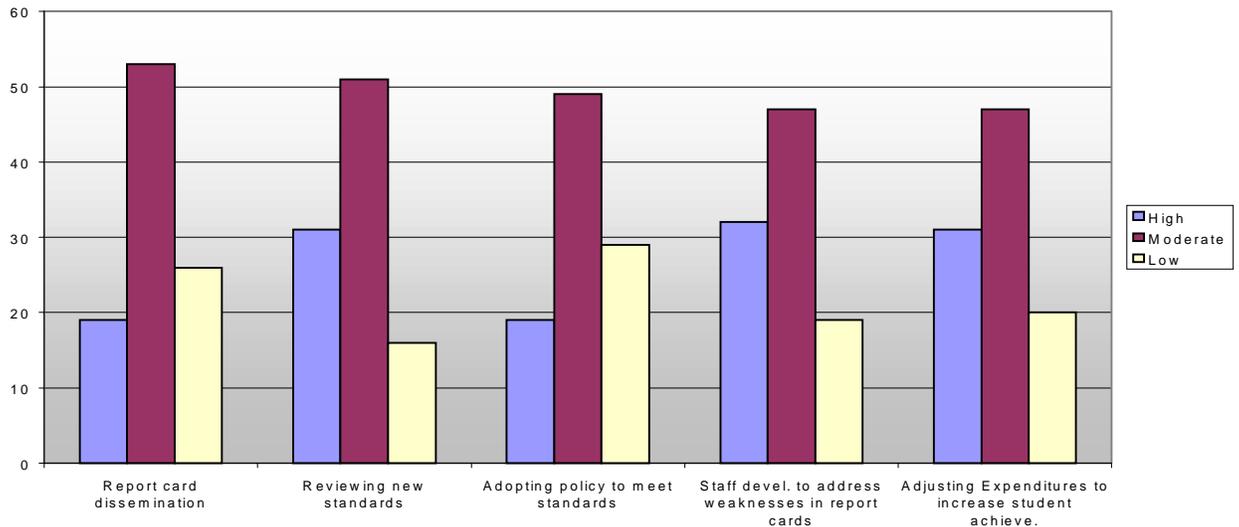
Key State Issue	% resp.
7. New Standards	70%
8. Financing of Schools	62%
9. New Assessments	52%
10. Special Education	35%
11. Public Confidence	34%
12. Record Keeping	28%

superintendents in their home districts. In the larger arena of the state, concerns have remained almost the same as previous Snapshot surveys. “New standards” have replaced A Compact for Learning as the number one concern, and “accountability” made the list for the first time. Data on key local and state issues are found in Tables 10 and 11.

The final survey question sought to determine how superintendents rank the importance Boards of Education place on State Education Department initiatives. These are the initiatives that influence student achievement, how time is used in districts, and how budgets are developed. Thus, they very much influence the lives of superintendents.

No one issue emerged as a clear, top priority for Boards of Education. Rather, a majority of superintendents indicated their Boards place “moderate” priority on such issues as report card dissemination (53%), adopting policy to meet new standards (49%), staff development to address weaknesses revealed in the new report cards (47%), and adjusting expenditures to increase student achievement (47%). Perhaps this item could be structured differently in future surveys to “tease out” more definitive results. The following chart displays this data.

Board Priority Given To SED Initiatives

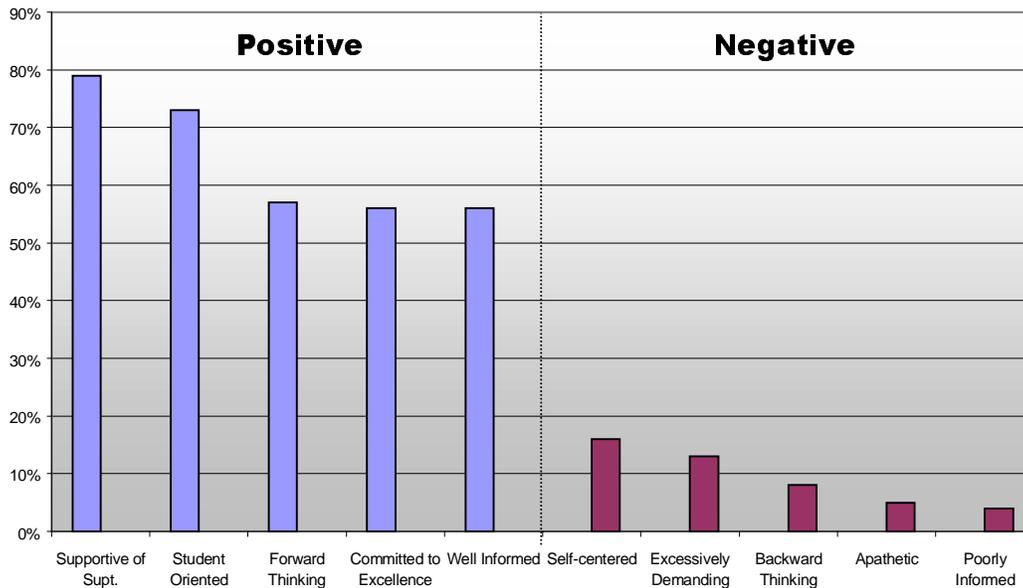


Board Relations

Snapshot III also tried to determine those areas of a superintendent’s professional life that are satisfying, par-

ticularly with regard to the people within a school district whom a superintendent interacts with on a regular basis. There appear to be many positive relationships and feelings about quality of life among superintendents in New York. The reason behind the positive relationship that so many superintendents indicate they have with their Boards is most likely reflected in the terms used to characterize Boards of Education.

Characteristics of Boards of Education As Described by Superintendents



These data indicate clearly that superintendents *do not* view Board members as adversaries. Most, in fact, seem to appreciate their Boards and enjoy a good working relationship with them. Snapshot III, as was true of Snapshot I and Snapshot II, dispels the myth that superintendents and Boards of Education are at odds with one another. It does not, however, probe deeply enough to determine if there are Board members who, if ranked individually, are a cause of concern to superintendents. There is also no way to determine from this survey whether superintendents responded as they think they should, using their “public voice”, versus how they might respond privately.

Concluding Observations

Snapshot of the Superintendency III represents a third generation survey of active school superintendents in New York State. In 1992, the initial survey was completed and results were published with the support of the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS). In 1995-96, *Snapshot of the Superintendency II*, with a 68% response rate, built on the results of the original 1992 survey. *Snapshot of the Superintendency III*, reflects the highest response rate to date (72%) and thus, allows us to draw certain conclusions from the data with considerable confidence. Analysis of some of the educational issues associated with the superintendency will be explained in light of the existing political and financial climate of New York.

Our 1992 study pointed to a potential “leadership vacuum” in the ranks of the superintendency. Evidence mounted to support such a finding in the 1995-96 study. At the risk of overstating the case, the prospect of a leadership vacuum may have become a leadership “chasm.” Why? The 1997-98 survey data show 62% of the chief school officers plan to retire within six (6) years or by the year 2004. Furthermore, given substantial superintendent turnover since 1995, it is somewhat surprising to note the mean age of superintendents actually increased from 51 years in 1995 to 51.4 years by 1997.

Recognition of the leadership crisis, a “clear and present danger,” found voice in the words of Carl T. Hayden, Chancellor, Board of Regents, University of the State of New York in a February 1998 address in Albany.

“No school works without inspired leadership. Your (superintendents’) shoes are the biggest to fill and, increasingly, no one wants to walk a mile in your shoes.”

Look at the traditional leadership track: teacher to administrator to superintendent. Tried and true. Always oversubscribed. And suddenly out of favor.”

The Chancellor proceeded to underscore the importance of Commissioner Richard Mills and the Regents supporting superintendents. Recruiting skilled educators into the administrative ranks remains an important objective, not only to assure quality superintendent candidates, but also to groom effective school principals on their way to becoming superintendents. If talented, energetic, and thoughtful educators are not encouraged to seek leadership posts in schools, then the superintendency may dissolve like sandcastles at high tide.

Having practitioners, that is, present superintendents identify future administrators, and more importantly, to serve as “mentors” for a new corps of school leaders is not a novel idea. The need, however, to advise, motivate, and champion potential decision-makers has perhaps never been more compelling. Chief school officers need to use their “bully pulpit” to highlight the intrinsic worth and exciting tasks attached to school leadership. Action to recruit and appoint women and other minority candidates into the chief school officer’s post is unmistakably necessary in light of the data. While there was a 5% gain in the percentage of women in the superintendent’s job from 1994 to 1997, women still only held 12% of New York State superintendentcies in 1997. The number of women and minority candidates promoted to the top job could increase dramatically given the amount of talent currently enrolled in administrative training programs, principalships, district office positions, and teaching in classrooms at all levels. In a state as diverse as New York, greater numbers of African-American, Hispanic, Indian, Asian and Native American candidates are needed as superintendents of schools.

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The Commissioner of Education and the New York State Board of Regents have acted affirmatively to elevate student standards for classroom performance. New state testing protocols, curricular documents, and rigorous high school graduation requirements, including an All-Regents Diploma, have helped to implement the earlier state reform agenda known as A New Compact for Learning. Superintendents identify “Elevated Standards” as an important initiative with considerable merit. By the same token, data from our survey suggest some frustration, undoubtedly born of the uncertainty as to how to assure student success with such challenging standards. In the recently adopted 1998-99 state budget, the inclusion of a new “operating standards aid” allocation in the education package represents a solid step in supporting the Commissioner’s goals and may help reduce some of the anxiety associated with attaining higher standards.

Building a budget that directly supports students continues to consume an extraordinary amount of a local superintendent’s time. Surely one key to achieving an “All-Regents” graduating class is on-going state budgetary support for this crucial initiative. Just as the new

graduation requirements are phased in over time, so is it paramount to continue funding at healthy levels over the next decade. The confluence of “issues” as reported here reinforces the fundamental nature of investment in education as a “public good.” State budgets in general, and education aid packages specifically, are surely influenced by the state’s overall economic circumstances. If the promise of elevated student standards is to be realized, then the state’s commitment to invest in education must remain high on the legislative list over the long haul.

Surely one key to achieving an “All-Regents” graduating class is on-going state budgetary support.

The strong emergence of technology in the 1997 survey illustrates another need to invest. The continuing presence of special education as a key state issue, and its associated costs in light of new federal laws, further complicates the future goal of achieving higher standards for all students. Price tags for broad, quality staff development programs, a necessity to keep teachers and other school personnel in the “standards forefront,” constitute significant investments. While not explicit in the survey data, the potential remedial expenses for students unable, at least on the first attempt, to scale the All-Regents “mountain” could be daunting.

The talent and the collective will exist to embrace all of these educational issues. Superintendents can and should be expected to lead. To do so will require improved student achievement and rededicated classroom instruction. School leaders must exhibit vision, energy, courage, understanding, civility, and the skills to build alliances with others invested in education, both at the local and state levels. Chief school officers must assume responsibility and accountability for the state and local investments by producing higher student achievement.

How superintendents lead begins locally in school board – chief-school officer relationship. Excellent communications, trust and mutual respect are indispensable ingredients of a professional working association between the elected Board of Education and the superintendent of schools. When the relationship is positive, students interests are served consistently and well. Survey data offer some optimism about superintendent-school board interactions. Such school board attributes as being supportive, student-oriented, forward thinking and committed to excellence were cited by high percentages of superintendents. *More than two-thirds of the chief school officers characterized their Board relationships as satisfying.* Of

course, there are highly dysfunctional relationships in some school systems. Our data, however, point out the efficacy of most superintendent-school board interactions. Such a finding may collide with public perceptions, particularly when the press and electronic media shape these perceptions.

School leaders must exhibit vision, energy, courage, understanding, civility, and the skills to build alliances with others invested in education, both at the local and state levels.

How can positive relationships between school boards and superintendents be sustained and less than ideal interactions be improved? One answer may be renewed collaboration between the State Education Department (SED), the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS), and the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA). By offering frequent, cooperatively planned, and imaginatively delivered professional training seminars for superintendents and school board members, SED, NYSCOSS, and NYSSBA would provide one approach to improvement. Chief school officers for their part, independently and collectively, can help to inform, acculturate, and steepen the learning curve, especially for newly elected school board members. Clarifying the distinctions between Board policy and budget responsibilities, and the superintendent's day-to-day duties to administer those policies for students and staff, requires ever-present and on-going dialogue. One of the continuing challenges for Boards of Education throughout New York is to fashion student-focused policies efficiently in an era of shared-decision making.

The reform agenda for education in New York State remains formidable, far reaching, and urgent. Ambitious goals for the school community, coupled with the uncertainties of funding, inconsistent public endorsement, and dwindling candidate pools place leaders in the center of the action. A transcendent goal of public education is to help all students search for meaning and purpose in their lives. It is now incumbent for all school leaders to find fresh meaning and purpose in learning, higher standards and community alliances to bring about student success in the Empire State.