The Career Paths, Supports, and Challenges of Senior Educational Administrators in Manitoba

The Effects of Position, Context, and Gender

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University of Manitoba

Manitoba Education Research Network (MERN)
Monograph Series
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Executive Summary

Despite the important roles that school superintendents and assistant superintendents play in the development of public education, little Canadian research has been conducted into their work. This research study addresses this gap by examining the career patterns (career paths, supports, and challenges) of senior division-level educational administrators (superintendents and assistant superintendents) in Manitoba. Central to this research is an interest in the ways in which these career patterns might vary by position, context, and sex/gender. Specifically, the purposes of the research are fourfold:

1. To examine the career paths of senior educational administrators in Manitoba public school divisions
2. To examine the perceived level of career development supports and work challenges for Manitoba senior educational administrators
3. To compare and contrast these career patterns in relation to
   i) position (chief superintendents and assistant superintendents)
   ii) context (rural or urban)
   iii) sex/gender (male or female)
4. To develop implications for career development programs for senior educational administrators and for educators who are contemplating pursuing such a career

The research was conducted during the 2007-2008 school year and used a mixed-methods design. A questionnaire was sent to all superintendents in public school divisions in Manitoba (a total of 91), and 49 completed questionnaires were returned to the researcher, providing a 54% response rate. In addition, an interview schedule was developed to enrich and extend the questionnaire responses, and interviews were conducted with 10 senior educational administrators, selected to ensure representation according to position, context, and gender/sex.

The following represent some of the main findings of this monograph:

1. Senior administrators in Manitoba public school divisions tend to be well qualified, experienced, and committed to their work, and have moved into the superintendency via a variety of routes, although in-school administration remains the primary pool from which they are drawn.

2. There appears to be a "new" pool for the superintendency in Manitoba, which is a younger and more highly qualified group than in the past, and whose responses to this survey suggest they are more attuned to personal and professional work balance than their predecessors, and are likely to demand (and benefit from) family-friendly policies that were not available to previous generations of senior administrators.

3. Senior administrators tend to enter their positions because they have been encouraged to do so by others, because they are interested in a challenge, or because the timing of the position aligns with personal ambition, credentialing, or goals. They tend to remain in their positions because they are still learning about aspects of their position, or because they are committed to the communities in which they work. They tend to leave their positions because of system constraints or opportunities to take on new positions more aligned with their personal interests.

4. For the most part, senior administrators in Manitoba feel supported in their roles. Having supportive relationships with spouses/partners was the most valued support mentioned by senior administrators in Manitoba. Interviewees also value supportive relationships with senior administrative colleagues, access to professional development, and mentoring opportunities.

5. Work challenges tend to vary by context. The diversification of and/or increasing student needs across the province was the primary work challenge mentioned, followed by others such as dealing with rapidly changing curricula, provincial mandates, professional isolation, and balancing home and career.

6. Although sex/gender, position, and context were found to affect the experiences of senior administrators in Manitoba, most of the differences in this study are related to context (i.e., whether one lives in an urban or rural community). Context tends to have strong impacts on educational level, the extent to which senior administrators are channeled into traditional "lock-step" career paths, and the number of positions served by an administrator overall. It also affects the breadth and scope of portfolios handled by senior administrators, mobility issues, and the focus of the position as being system or community oriented.

7. There are some inconsistencies between survey data and interview data, particularly related to sex/gender. In the survey data, sex/gender very seldom was reported to influence the experiences of senior administrators by itself, and was most often evidenced in interaction with context and position (which meant that the experiences of men and women did not only depend on their sex/gender, but also on whether or not the man or woman worked in a rural or urban environment, and/or whether he/she was an assistant superintendent or superintendent). However, in the information shared by interviewees, sex/gender was still seen as very much a factor that shaped the experiences of men and women, particularly in terms of family responsibilities and personal life balance, access to the superintendency, experiential background, the nature of the roles men and women are expected to take on within senior administration, and the granting of legitimacy and credibility in leadership.

8. Overall, in the survey data, there were more interaction effects than main effects, which alludes to the complexity of issues surrounding senior administration, and the need to pay attention to position, context, and gender when designing career development programs, rather than focus on each of the categories as separate entities.

Given the differences that were shown to occur in the career patterns of senior educational administrators, this author advocates for leadership groups across Manitoba to reconsider the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for effective leadership in senior administration, and to design career development programs targeted to developing those varied skills. The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS), with input from interested groups, is highly qualified and supported and is recommended as the appropriate source of leadership for this task. Such groups could include Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, the four preparatory universities in the province, the Manitoba School Boards Association (formerly Manitoba Association of School Trustees), the Council of School Leaders, and the Manitoba Teachers' Society. Based on this reconceptualization, it is recommended that a career development program that targets both aspiring and current incumbents within senior administrative positions be designed to reflect the complex and interconnected relationships among position, context, and gender shown in this research. In addition, it is recommended that such a program consider design and delivery elements and topics that reflect the varied needs of senior administrators and are accessible across the province.

Introduction

Have you ever wondered what it must be like to be a superintendent of a school system? Or have you ever considered how those who are currently assistant superintendents or superintendents came to be in those powerful leadership positions? Given the increasing complexity of today's educational context, what are the factors that shape the nature of the work of the superintendency, and what advice would senior administrators offer to anyone who desired this kind of position?[1]

These curiosities prompted me to jump feet-first into the Manitoba context to examine who was leading our public school systems. My own research work in the areas of gender, rural education, and leadership studies led me to ponder the following questions:

a) What positions are actually available in Manitoba, and in what contexts?

b) Who holds those positions, and what was their pathway to getting there?

c) What supports and challenges did they face along the way?

I quickly found out in a cursory "number check" that sex/gender is still shaping who gets senior administrative positions in Manitoba, particularly the position of *chief superintendent*. For example, in the 2007/2008 school year, which was the year in which this study was conducted, only six of the 37 public school division chief superintendents were women. This finding was not surprising given that the research in the area of sex/gender and the superintendency in North America continues to recognize the persistence of a disproportionately low representation of women in this position (Brunner, 2004; Crippen & Wallin, 2008; Glass, Bjork & Brunner, 2000; Grogan, 2000; Reynolds, 2001; Skrla, 2003; Wallin, 2005a; 2005b; Wallin & Sackney, 2003). However, I soon found that the proportions of women in the *assistant superintendency* in Manitoba are more equitable. Women represent half (26 out of 52) of the assistant superintendents in the province. Even though one would intuitively think that those who hire superintendents draw primarily from the pool of assistant superintendents, the major drop in representation from the assistant superintendency to the (chief) superintendency illustrates that sex/gender does play a role in senior-level career advancement, either systemically or individually. Coralie Bryant (2004), executive director of MASS, made three points that exacerbate this reality:

a) since 2001 at the University of Manitoba, 66% of the graduates with a Master's in Educational Administration were women

b) 65% of the teaching staff in Manitoba are women

c) 45% of in-school administrators across the province are women

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* In this study, the term "senior administrators" is used to refer to the positions of chief (and in Winnipeg School Division "area") superintendent and assistant superintendents – the senior educational administrators at the school board level. In this report, "the superintendency" refers to all of these positions and where the term "superintendent" is used on its own without the "chief" or "assistant" descriptor attached, reference is to the position of "chief" superintendent.

These findings suggest that there should be no lack of qualified females to warrant such a difference in sex-based representation in senior administrative appointments.

I also noticed in my number checking that context appears to play no less of a role in the career patterns of senior educational administrators in Manitoba. For example, if we define "urban" to include the one census metropolitan area (Winnipeg) and the three census agglomerations (Brandon, Portage la Prairie, and Thompson), we find that there were only nine urban chief superintendents in the province, and 28 rural chief superintendents. However, of the 52 assistant superintendent positions, exactly half existed in urban areas. This means that there are a number of rural school divisions without an assistant superintendent position, which eliminates the opportunity of using this position as a succession management "training ground" for career development purposes.

Some significant trends also developed when sex and context were cross-tabulated. Women constituted 14% of the population of rural chief superintendents (4 out of 28), and 22% of the population of urban chief superintendents (2 out of 9). Paradoxically, however, males constituted 65% of the rural assistant superintendent population (17 out of 26), but females constituted 65% of the urban assistant superintendent population (17 out of 26), an exact opposite proportion that clearly begs some questions related to how context may be shaping the career trajectories of men and women.

It would seem that women are advancing into assistant superintendent positions, and in particular into urban assistant superintendent positions. Men, on the other hand, appear to have an advantage in gaining the chief superintendent positions and assistant superintendent positions in rural divisions, but they are underrepresented in the urban assistant superintendent roles. Interestingly, none of these data are distributed by any of the professional leadership organizations in the province, which emphasizes the "conspiracy of silence" in data collection and reporting mentioned by researchers who work in the area of gender and leadership (Pounder, 1990; Shakeshaft, 1999).

When I delved into the literature related to the impact of sex and context on the superintendency, studies of female superintendents suggested that females generally do not enjoy the same level of encouragement, mentorship, or sponsorship as males, and that they continue to face gender bias and gender discrimination in their career development (Brunner, 2000b, 2003; Coleman, 2007; Skrla, Reyes & Scheurich, 2000; Tallerico, 2000; Wallin & Crippen, in press; Young, 2005). Other studies contend that context plays an important role in who is hired in administrative positions, as women have been documented to have gained strides in obtaining administrative positions in some very small school divisions (Gupton & Slick, 1996; Wallin, 2005a; 2005b) and some urban divisions (Mertz, 2003; Murtadha-Watts, 2000; Wilson, 2003).

As well, while some researchers argue that there are significant differences in the ways in which men and women lead that may have an impact on the perceptions of their effectiveness (Bjork, 2000; Brunner, 2000a; Gunbayi, 2005; Kruger, 2007; Pounder, 1990, Shakeshaft, 1989, 1999), others have argued that leadership style has little to do with gender and more to do with accommodations to socially constructed leadership norms

(Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001, Mandell & Pherwani, 2003; Ridgeway, 2001; Wallin & Crippen, 2007). I began to query whether the experiences of those in the assistant superintendency or superintendency in Manitoba would align with any of this research and where, if any, differences might occur.

Added to this is the common understanding that the nature of the position of superintendent has changed dramatically in the past decade (Grogan, 2000), which has implications for both men and women in the position. But what is the nature of the position in Manitoba, and what factors do senior administrators themselves suggest have the greatest impact on their work? Unfortunately, there are few Canadian studies that examine the roles of senior administrators (Crippen & Wallin, 2008), and even fewer comparative studies to help determine whether findings are shaped by sex, context, or role requirements.

It is because of the curious contextual and sexed representative statistics of the senior administrative cadre in Manitoba that I decided to conduct a study that examined the career paths, supports, and challenges of senior educational administrators during the 2007-2008 school year. Its purposes were fourfold:

i) to determine the career patterns of senior educational administrators (chief superintendents and assistant superintendents) in public school divisions

ii) to compare and contrast their career patterns based on position (assistant superintendent versus chief superintendent), context (rural versus urban), and sex (male versus female)

iii) to determine the level of career development supports and work challenges for senior educational administrators

iv) to develop implications for career development programs targeted for senior educational administrators

The remainder of this monograph will document the findings of this work based on the responses of those assistant superintendents and superintendents who graciously answered my questions and helped to frame this "snapshot" of senior administration in Manitoba

Methodology

I chose to seek answers to my questions using a mixed methods design, incorporating data from both a survey with statistical analysis and interviews so that I could constantly compare findings and gather data that I could qualify and extend with lived experiences. In order to gather some sense of the provincial "picture" of senior administration, I chose to send a survey to all superintendents and assistant superintendents in public school divisions in Manitoba. The response rate was 54% (49 of 91 surveys).

I used the software program *SPSS 16.0* (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 16.0, 2007) to conduct chi-square tests of the nominal demographic data, and independent t-tests and analysis of variance of the career support and work challenge items of the survey using the demographic variables of position, context, and sex to determine where significant differences and/or possible interaction effects occurred. A probability level of .05 was utilized for all tests of significance. Spearman rank correlations, means, and variances were used to determine which career support and work challenge items were consistently ranked of highest importance, and to determine relationships between them. In addition, I created visual models using tables to represent career profiles of the average years served in various positions (teachers, in-school administrators, senior administrators, and "other"), which included career interruptions and/or leaves in service.

After I analyzed the survey data, I created interview questions that could extend and enrich the survey findings related to career progression, career supports, and work challenges. Five superintendents and five assistant superintendents (representing an even proportion of male/female and six rural/four urban school divisions) were contacted to participate in interviews that focused on the career development progression, career development supports, and work challenges they faced as senior educational leaders. The qualitative data related to the career patterns of respondents were input into a qualitative data analysis program, *Atlas-ti*, (Atlas-ti 4.0, 2006) and were analyzed using a constant comparative method.

Although more interview data and commentary are available within the full research report (Wallin, 2009), in order to streamline the length of the monograph and establish consistency in reporting, I include only those issues that align with majority views, which generally means that at least three of the five interviewees in any given category of position (assistant superintendent or superintendent), context (rural or urban), or sex (male or female) mentioned similar issues in their career progression, supports, or work challenges.

Table 1 shows the representative proportions of individuals from each of the population, the survey sample, and the interview sample for the key variables under study (position, context, and sex). The proportions suggest that the survey sample very closely represents the population from which it is drawn. In fact, most categories differ by no more than 2%. The sample is somewhat over-represented by assistant superintendents. Overall, these findings suggest that the survey sample is representative of senior administrators in Manitoba.

Table 1
Proportions of Study Sample That Reflect Study Variables

Variable	Category	Population	Survey Sample	Interview Sample
Position	Superintendent	39.6%	34.7%	5
	Assistant Superintendent	60.4%	65.3%	5
Context	Rural	40%	38.8%	6
	Urban	60%	61.2%	4
Sex	Male	62.6%	60.4%	5
	Female	37.4%	39.6%	5

Who Are the Senior Administrators in Manitoba?

In order to determine who actually has been successful in gaining senior administrative positions in Manitoba, I crafted questions in the survey that requested basic demographic information related to the following: family status; age; education and/or certification; and, length of time served in current position, in senior administration, and in all administrative positions.

I found that the vast majority of senior administrators have a spouse or partner (91.8%; N=45), and have children (81.6%; N=40). Sixty-one percent of the senior administrators (N=30) were over the age of 50, followed by 28.6% (N=14) between the ages of 41-50, while only three (6%) of the senior administrators were between the ages of 31-40. The average age of senior administrators suggests that many are close to retirement, particularly since almost 40% indicated that they had over 20 years of total administrative experience. However, there is some indication that administrative turnover has begun. This is exemplified by the fact that chi-square tests indicated that current assistant superintendents are significantly younger than superintendents. It was not surprising, therefore, to find that superintendents were likely to have significantly more senior administrative experience and total administrative experience than assistant superintendents. The trend towards administrative turnover is also evident in the fact that the vast majority of senior administrators (71%), and in particular rural senior administrators, had less than 10 years of experience in senior administrative positions, and 61% had worked in their current position for less than five years.

The sample also describes a well-educated and credentialed cadre of professionals, although rural senior administrators were generally less highly educated compared to urban administrators. Although rural senior administrators' education levels represented all four of the potential categories (Bachelor's degrees, Post-Graduate diplomas or certificates, Master's degrees, and Doctoral degrees), they were significantly more likely than urban senior administrators to have obtained their position with a Bachelors' degree as their highest level of education.

Some of this, no doubt, stems from issues of access to higher learning institutions that are centred in the cities of Winnipeg and Brandon, and can be hours away from many of the rural communities in which these administrators work. It may also be due to the fact that collective bargaining for teachers and school-based administrators is done at the local divisional level in Manitoba. Collective agreements in urban areas tend to be more comprehensive because of their larger scope of coverage, and are more apt to encourage and provide some resource support (time, sabbaticals, and reimbursement) for professional development activities, including higher education. Urban school professionals are more likely to use this access and opportunity to gain educational credentials before entering senior administration, where contracts are negotiated individually.

Statistically, there was no difference in the educational and certification levels between assistant superintendents and superintendents (and, in fact, the proportions of assistant superintendents with Master's degrees and Level II Principal certificates were higher than superintendents). Given this fact, and that assistant superintendents were found to be significantly younger than superintendents, it might be argued that the "new" pool for the superintendency tends to be a younger and more highly qualified group than in the past.

Even though neither educational level beyond a Bachelor's degree nor certification is required by law in Manitoba, many local school divisions prioritize them in hiring procedures, as evidenced in posted advertisements, and it appears that assistant superintendents are taking the initiative to increase their educational credentials. An implication for career development therefore suggests the need to design programs that "level the playing field" of access and opportunity for rural administrators.

A program designed to minimize time, resource, and distance challenges for rural educators would help to increase the educational credentials available to them and would likely enhance hiring practices in rural areas. Such a program might include senior administrators, but it could also target those aspiring to administration, so that rural areas could build capacity in succession planning for the future. This may include some combination of online work, cohort programs offered onsite in rural communities, and summer/weekend initiatives. In addition, some discussion on collective bargaining and the negotiation of individual contracts to include opportunities for learning might be beneficial, so that those who have not accessed collective bargaining benefits before they move into senior administration are able to do so after they enter.

What are the Pathways to Senior Administration?

In order to find out how senior administrators came to be in their positions, I asked respondents to list all of their formal employment positions in chronological order, as well as the length of time served within those positions. All interruptions of service were to be included (i.e., parental leaves, study leaves, sick leaves, et cetera), as well as the length of service interruption. Each position described by respondents was organized into the following categories:

a) teacher

b) other school-based professional

c) school-based administrator

d) division-based professional

e) senior administrator

f) leave

g) other

This information was used to create profiles of the typical career paths of senior administrators. The visual profiles of career paths can be found in Appendix A.

Leaves

The data on leaves are interesting because of their highly gendered and contextual nature. In the survey data, there were 22 leaves taken by 14 respondents. Women were most apt to have multiple leaves due to maternity, or to a combination of maternity and educational leave. No men indicated they had taken a parenting leave. No urban superintendents, male or female, indicated that they had ever taken a leave of any sort. However, the majority of this cadre of professionals "arrived" in terms of age and service in senior administration at a time that pre-dates many of the current collective bargaining agreements that now include opportunities for parental leave for men, as well as the current federal legislation that in effect grants up to a year's leave for maternity.

The women in this study, at the time they had children, often took less than a year's maternity leave before going back to work, which has implications for their average service length, and career path overall. However, there was found to be no significant difference in the number of positions held by men and women either when leaves were included in the analysis or when they were not. The fact that men can now take parenting leaves may have implications for future career paths into senior administration, and may challenge some of the gendered norms regarding parenting roles and responsibilities for both men and women. The fact that assistant superintendents are significantly younger than superintendents offers the potential for

some of them to be taking parenting/maternity leaves while in a senior administrative position, which was almost unheard of in the past, but has occurred recently in Manitoba for a handful of women.

The fact that no urban superintendents had taken a leave of any sort opens up questions regarding why this may be so.

- Are the incumbents more apt to be "career bound" individuals, whether male or female, and, even if they have family responsibilities, have supports in place to minimize potential disruptions to service?
- Are they more able to access educational qualifications because they are urban and therefore do not have to take educational leaves?
- Or have they accommodated the highly political, often hyper-masculinized role norms (Blackmore, 1999; Lambert, 2007; Skelton, 2002) of the urban superintendency by ensuring their visibility and by not taking leaves, possibly at the expense of their own preferences?
- Since both male and female urban assistant superintendents have taken leaves for maternity or education, will the past pattern of behaviour of urban superintendents no longer apply in the future?

All of these questions suggest the need to watch the patterns of leaves taken in the future as they affect lengths of service and the time it takes to enter administration. It appears that some discussion over how leaves are negotiated and patterned over time, along with building parenting leave clauses into individual contracts, would be prudent. Such practices could serve current incumbents and may attract potential aspirants as they become aware of the potential to negotiate and balance familial and educational interests and obligations. In addition, some consideration of how changing leave legislation and processes may affect senior administrative appointments by context and/or sex might help to build in structures that could ameliorate disadvantages that might accrue over time.

Career Path

Besides wanting to know *who* was in senior administration in Manitoba, I also wanted to know *what* positions they acquired and how they got there. To answer these questions, I traced the career path of current senior administrators back until the point in time when they had received their first senior administrative appointments. Almost three-quarters of the respondents (73%) began their senior administrative appointments as assistant superintendents. Respondents worked in education an average of 21.76 years before entering their first senior administrative appointment, after serving in an average of 5.41 positions.

Chi-Square tests were conducted to determine whether position, context, or sex were related to the first position acquired. T-tests for each variable and univariate analysis of variance (UNIANOVA) were conducted to search for significant differences between the three variables under study (context, position, sex) and the mean time served before receiving the first administrative appointment, and the number of positions held before receiving the appointment. No main effects or interaction effects were found for the data related to time served before appointment or for the number of positions served. However, the chi-square tests revealed that current position was moderately related to first senior administrative position served (Chi-square=11.67; p=.001; Phi=.488, p=.001; Cramer's V=.488; p=.001; Contingency Coefficient=.439; p=.001).

It appears that the majority of those individuals who are current assistant superintendents began their senior administrative careers as assistant superintendents (87.5%). Similarly, the majority of current superintendents began their careers as superintendents (58.8%). Only 41.2% of the current superintendents began their careers as assistant superintendents.

At the time of the study, senior administrators had served between four to 13 positions, with an average of 7.24 positions. The visual profiles of the career path analysis based on the average years of service and positions by position, context, and gender are outlined in Appendix A.

Reasons for Choosing Senior Administration

Because I wanted to gain some sense of what motivated people to move into senior administration, I asked interviewees to explain the factors that led to their decision to accept a senior administrative position. Table 2 provides the list of factors in order of frequency of citation. As is evident, many senior administrators were encouraged by others to apply for their first administrative position. Alternately, they self-selected because they felt that they were ready for more professional challenges, or because timing, opportunity, and their own experiences aligned.

Table 2 Factors Leading to Decision to Applly for a Senior Administrative Position							
Factor	**Total Responses (out of 10)**	**Rural (out of 6)**	**Urban (out of 4)**	**Male (out of 5)**	**Female (out of 5)**	**Assistant Superin-tendent (out of 6)**	**Superin-tendent (out of 4)**
Encouragement by Others	**9**	5	4	5	4	6	3
Need for Change or Transition	**4**	3	1	2	2	2	2
Blend of Timing and Opportunity	**3**	3		2	1	3	
Opportunity to Influence or Contribute	**3**	3		2	1	2	1
Initial Career Goal	**1**		1		1	1	
Critical of Past Incumbent	**1**	1			1	1	

Given that the impetus for moving into a senior administrative position tended to be positive, I then asked about factors that encouraged interviewees to move on from their first senior administrative position or encouraged them to hold on to their positions. Five interviewees spoke of reasons for staying in their position. Three women were in their first three years of the assistant superintendency position, and were therefore, not surprisingly, content to remain to gain more experience in their areas of responsibility. The remaining two respondents (both males) were content both in their career responsibilities and in the communities in which they worked. In fact, three rural interviewees, two men and one woman, indicated that their connection to their local communities was a decisive factor in their decision to remain in their current positions. The decision to remain in the local community was also affected by the considerations of retirement for one of these men, who suggested, "the only reason I would leave is to be closer to my kids."

Of the five remaining senior administrators, when asked what factors led them to leave their first senior administrative appointment, two interviewees indicated that the amalgamation of their divisions with another division was of primary importance because of the uncertainties in terms of maintaining their positions. Two of the senior administrators moved on from their first appointments because they had the opportunity to move into positions where their responsibilities aligned more with their personal interests. One of the superintendents suggested that she had moved on because of her high need for change and what she referred to as the "seven year itch." In her estimation, senior administrators need to help establish a vision for the division and then ensure that the structures and processes are in place for that vision to move forward with or without the current incumbent. Because she felt that she had done this, she could now focus on her personal career interests in new ways that would be stimulating and interesting.

What Differences Exist in the Career Paths of Senior Administrators?

Based on the visual career path analysis represented in Appendix A, it is quite clear that the pool of senior administrators is primarily drawn from in-school administrators. But after completing the "general snapshot" or profile of the "typical" senior administrator in Manitoba, I wanted to consider whether, or to what extent, the variables of sex, context, or position affected the complexity of senior administrative career paths. To that end, chi-square tests were conducted to determine if there were relationships among the three variables of analysis (position, context, and sex) to each of the career positions. Table 3 summarizes the statistical results.

Table 3
Study Variable Relationship with Career Positions

Study Variable	Career Position	Chi-Square	p	Phi Value	Cramer's V	Contingency Coefficient	Relationship
Position 4 Without Leaves	Context	9.940	0.041	0.455 (p =0.041)	0.455 (p =0.041)	0.414 (p = 0.041)	Moderate
Position 2 With Leaves	Gender	13.194	0.010	0.524 (p = 0.010)	0.524 (p = 0.10)	0.464 (p = 0.10)	Moderate

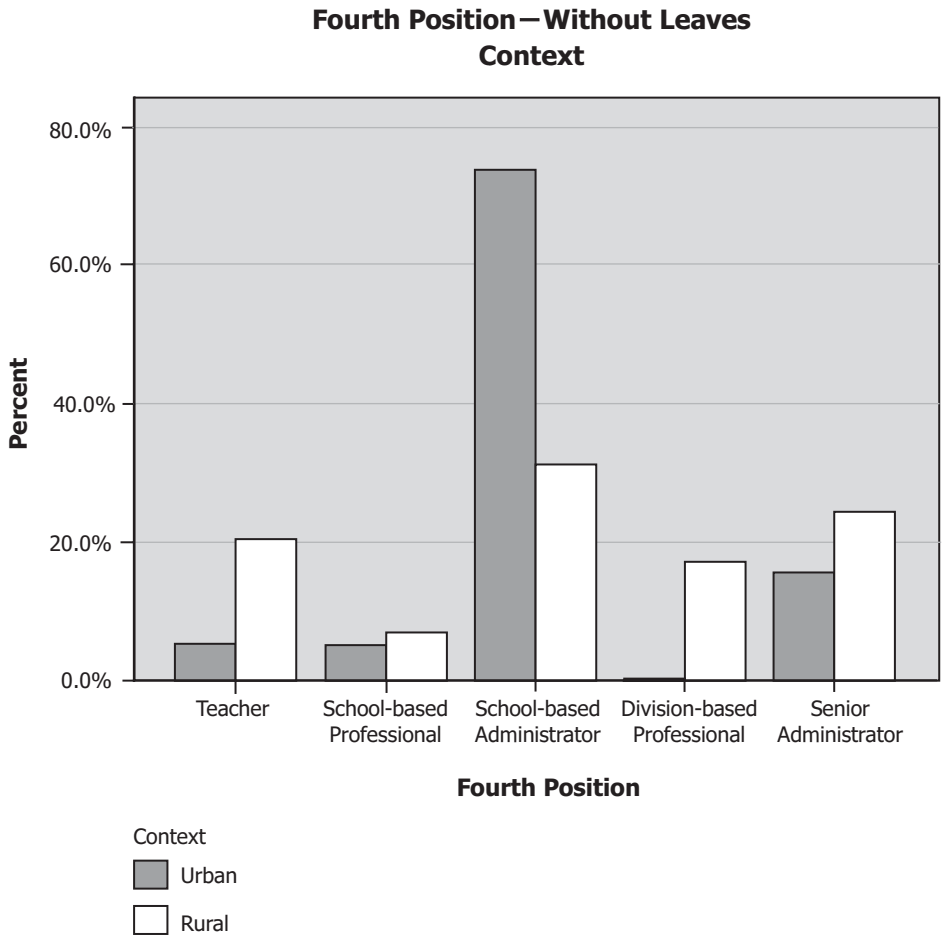
Figure 1, on the following page, provides a visual representation of the positional categories for the fourth position associated with rural and urban senior administrators. By the time urban administrators move into their fourth position, the majority have converged into school-based administration. In rural areas, the career position categories (teaching, school-based professionals, division-based professionals, and "other") are much more evenly represented, and there are higher proportions of individuals who have already moved into division-based positions, either professional or administrative.

This raises questions about why this would occur. It may be that rural professionals can demonstrate visibility and capacity for leadership more easily in a smaller division, and therefore the opportunities for securing leadership positions occur sooner. It could be that administrative positions in rural areas are less competitive and fewer people apply, thereby granting greater access into those positions by those who want them. It may also be that urban areas tend to have an entrenched succession management system with leadership candidates in larger supply.

Therefore "earning one's stripes" may come only through gaining experience in a larger number of positions. Some support for this comes from the finding that rural senior administrators served in significantly fewer positions overall. The fact that each position category was represented over the course of people's careers in rural areas speaks to a less rigid convergence into administration as the "typical," "traditional" or only

pathway into senior administration. Interestingly, this finding contrasts with the intuitive understanding that since urban areas have a greater diversity of positions, there is greater opportunity to move into senior positions. There has become a bureaucratization of movement into administration that channels people first into school-based administration and then into senior administration.

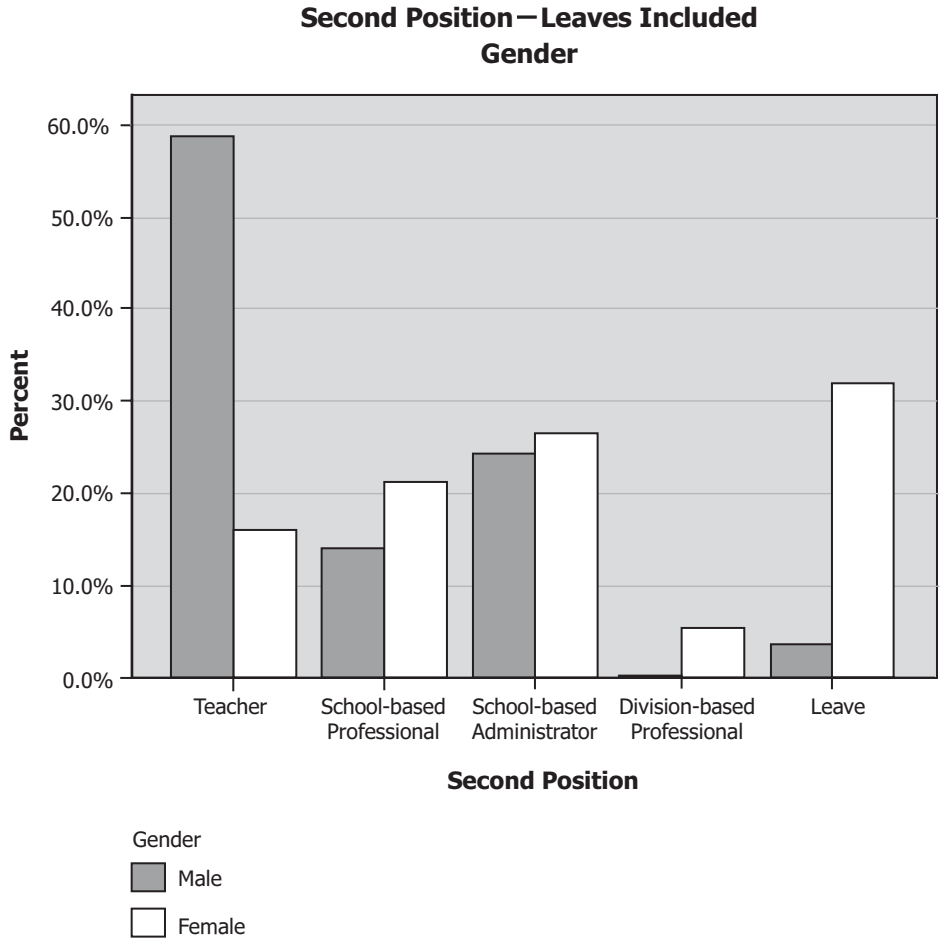
Figure 1 FOURTH POSITION (WITHOUT LEAVES) BY CONTEXT



While this also occurs in rural divisions, it may be that the greater visibility in rural areas allows for more flexibility in the hiring process and less typical reliance on an in-school administrative background as the indicator of effectiveness for senior administration.

Figure 2 presents the data on males and females for the second position of respondents' careers. The similarities between men and women occur in the fact that the majority of men and women remain in school-based positions in their second position, including either school-based professionals or school-based administration. However, while the majority of men move into a second teaching position (almost 60%), over one-third of women use their second "position" as a maternity leave. This is likely due to the fact that younger teachers entering the profession, particularly females, secure a teaching position, work for awhile, and then begin a family, as evidenced by the fact that the vast majority of study participants were married with families.

Figure 2 SECOND POSITION (WITH LEAVES) BY GENDER



Until recently, male teachers did not have access to parenting leave, whereas females did, and they took advantage of the opportunity, particularly in rural areas. Since no males in the study had ever taken parenting leave, and only three had taken any kind of leave at all (except for two others who declared their first attempts at retirement as leaves in service), they were less apt to report a leave as their second position.

In addition to the survey data, I asked interviewees to comment on their own life experiences and talk about whether they believed that senior administrative careers developed differently based on place (rural or urban) or sex (male or female). Although survey findings did not indicate many differences, the lived experiences of senior administrators suggest that sex, context, and position do affect the ways in which their careers unfolded.

Rural/Urban Differences

Both urban and rural administrators suggested that there are differences in career development. Six of the 10 interviewees spoke of the difference that the impact of geographic size and enrolment makes on the roles of senior administrators. Essentially, since rural jurisdictions tend to be smaller in scale with lower student enrolments but are often larger geographically, senior administrative positions in rural areas tend to be fewer in number, and therefore the responsibilities for overseeing a variety of portfolios are greater. In urban areas the major administrative responsibilities tend to be directed by a chief superintendent and divided up among a group of assistant superintendents (or sometimes area superintendents) who often further delineate responsibilities by delegating them to consultants and directors.

In rural areas, the superintendent and assistant superintendent (if there is an assistant superintendent) carry the responsibility for all major administrative and student service areas. In fact, one senior administrator suggested that rural senior administrative positions are great "training grounds" for urban environments, since incumbents learn a variety of skills across general areas of focus. Another senior administrator suggested that the specialization in urban environments leads to more distance between the chief superintendent and assistant superintendents, which could create a bureaucratic separation in urban senior administration that was less apparent in rural areas.

Senior administrators indicated that urban environments provide more opportunity overall in terms of number of positions, professional development opportunities, committee work, and working with larger school boards. However, three of the interviewees indicated that due to the issues of scale and scope, consistent with the survey findings, urban areas tend to have a much more "lock-step" process for access to senior administrative positions. Two administrators suggested that urban senior administrators have generally served longer in the education system because of this more hierarchical approach that focuses on ensuring aspirants advance through a traditional career path of varied teaching and administrative experiences.

One superintendent suggested that this focus was facilitated by the fact that urban divisions are able to transfer employees with greater ease than rural divisions; another suggested that rural divisions have had to become more creative in their succession planning strategies because of this. In fact, a rural senior administrator suggested that those who live in rural environments often have to be willing to move to other divisions in order to access senior administrative positions, which may be less difficult to do in urban areas where relocation may not be necessary.

Three senior administrators spoke of the greater focus on educational credentials that they saw occurring in urban environments, which aligns with the finding in the survey data described earlier that rural senior administrators tend to be less highly educated than those in urban areas. In the estimation of two superintendents, when it comes to hiring decisions, rural school boards are more likely than urban school boards to focus on the match between an individual's skills/experiences and the positional requirements and be more flexible regarding the credentials of the candidates, though it was stated that credentials are becoming increasingly important in rural areas as well.

Many of these comments were made by a rural senior administrator who observed that urban divisions are more apt to have a "systems focus," whereas rural divisions maintain a "community focus." Although the lack of anonymity in rural communities could be a "blessing or a curse" for senior administrators, and the professional isolation could be greater, these administrators enjoyed the opportunity to serve their communities and make career decisions based on the quality of life they wanted to lead.

Sex Differences

In terms of career development based on sex, the most often cited differences perceived by six interviewees (five males and one female) were the following: women still maintain a larger share of home duties; the balance between professional and private lives may be more difficult for women; and males tend to have greater spousal support for managing home responsibilities. An urban female assistant superintendent maintained that administrative positions remain more challenging for women with children, and suggested that "if you're going to be successful, don't plan on having balance…. There are very few moments that are my own." Two males spoke of their assumptions that women still maintained the larger portion of home responsibilities, and three others credited their spouses' support at home for contributing significantly to their own career development.

On the other hand, two of these men openly regretted the time they had lost with their families. One superintendent talked of his decision to obtain his Master's degree, and "I was able to do it, and I managed to do it while I was working and with small kids. But time with my wife and family was compromised." As he continued to speak of the gratitude he had for his wife's support, he suggested, "I'm not sure I would have been able to handle what my wife did, if she had gone on and done her Master's while we had two young kids; I don't know. She put her career on hold and let me do those things."

Another male superintendent suggested, "I didn't spend the time with my family that I would have liked…when they were young my wife spent the time with the boys." This man spoke hopefully of the discussions he has been privy to with his own children who, now as husbands, talk more openly about family issues and role differences, and discuss how to better compromise and balance the priorities of work and home.

Five senior administrators (two males and three females) commented upon what they perceived to be a difference in the experiential background between males and females. They perceived that females tend to gain positions in senior administration through previous backgrounds in the areas of curriculum, special education, or student services, and men tend to have backgrounds in high school education, physical education, educational administration, and finance. Curiously, the actual backgrounds of these respondents does not corroborate this generality, as at least three of the five male interviewees had backgrounds in special education or curriculum, and three of the five women came from more traditional administrative backgrounds. In addition, these same individuals suggested that in rural areas, women were more apt to gain senior administrative positions that also included student service roles. In urban areas, they perceived that males gained positions in facilities, finance, and human resource management, and females accessed positions related to curriculum, programming, student services, and special education.

Two urban female senior administrators believed that women are more apt to receive supportive, or task-oriented, roles rather than lead or decision-making roles, and they are not encouraged to voice disagreement. As one of them suggested:

> Where there are men superintendents, and they are mostly men, if they are chief executive officers, they have women associate superintendents or assistant superintendents. The women are different from the men, are different from the women that I have met who have been, or are, superintendents. They have task-oriented jobs. "OK, Susan, you are in charge of curriculum." And so all Susan gets to do is curriculum. She doesn't get much influence in the decision making; she doesn't get much influence with the board; she is like a help-mate. And it's interesting watching the women in the superintendents' association, because very, very few of them will ever challenge a male idea. I haven't seen it yet. I remember going to a meeting in the second year I was here, and I forget what it was about—funding or something. I remember disagreeing at a table and all the men looked at me as if so say, "Don't you know your place?" And you know that told me right away what was going on. But the women here do not appear to be as assertive and aggressive in their senior admin career development or paths as [other] women I have met.

Three interviewees (two women and one man) spoke of the impact of elitism within the role, clarifying the notion either as being based on gender or context. Two female senior administrators suggested that, to a greater degree than women, males tend to be focused on status, prestigious portfolios such as particular committee work or work background, and public accolades. In their estimation, women do not need the "pomp and pomposity" that sometimes occurs in the networking opportunities found in their professional associations. A male senior administrator suggested that urban senior

administrators tend to be more focused on power, image and politics, and that "rural people have a little different focus."

Four interviewees (three females and one male) suggested that males tend to be granted credibility and or legitimacy in leadership sooner than females. Interestingly, three of these comments were made by rural senior administrators and only one from an urban administrator, which speaks also to a comment made by one senior administrator that rural areas may still foster more conservative gender stereotypes. When speaking of her experience as a new assistant superintendent, one woman stated the following:

> It was easier for males…the people that I end up networking with are people who know me and have worked with me before, and have a certain level of respect for me already…. Whereas males I think will come into it, and they already have got a little bit of respect. They don't have to have that knowledge, that this is somebody that you can trust, or this is someone who works hard. They are welcomed into it differently…. They are already granted credibility.

One male superintendent suggested that males are granted credibility as senior administrators because:

> …males, for years, it was much more acceptable for them in senior administrative positions…. Our admin team now, school-based, is half and half, but I think there is still a discrepancy at the senior level. There are not very many female superintendents. I would say they've had a harder time being accepted by [school] boards.

A third female assistant superintendent also spoke of board acceptance when she suggested that "I suspect that boards still want to be, have their CEOs be a man. That they may not know that consciously, though they probably would never say that out loud, I think there is evidence to show that, really."

All five women indicated that, in their view, female senior administrators have to work harder, longer hours, and multi-task in order to be granted the same credibility as their male colleagues. One assistant superintendent suggested that by hiring a female, school divisions got a "two for one" deal. In her estimation, "male colleagues are much better at closing the door and leaving…women are much more prepared to finish something." None of the men mentioned this factor in their conversations. One rural female mentioned that women are often more highly credentialed, although another urban male administrator suggested that credentials no longer are much of an issue in urban environments because they are required for all senior administrative positions.

Two urban senior administrators (one male and one female) alluded to the fact that gender equity is still not built in to senior administrative contracts, using the example of maternity benefits. For example, the male superintendent suggested:

> It's not that the will isn't there; it's just never been dealt with…. Some people look at that and say, "That organization obviously doesn't value that or they would have put that in place…. It's like when I was negotiating my contract. I said, "So what about technology? Do you provide that? Do you provide a cell phone? Do you provide a laptop? Do you provide a Blackberry?" Because those were things that I had in my previous position…. And they said, "well, we will, we can consider it." And they included it. But I don't think that basic things like maternity benefits should fall into that category where you have to ask for it. Those things in this day and age should already be in place. It isn't like a Blackberry.

A female senior administrator concurred by stating that senior administrative contracts are "not built for women who want families."

The remaining factors mentioned by respondents around sex differences in career development reflected a number of differences in opinion. Although four senior administrators (two male and two female) overtly mentioned the existence of a "boys' club" in senior administration, the general perception of all but one female was that "the club" is either "dead or dying." One of the females mentioned that "the old boys' club is kind of dying off" as new younger males entering the profession have a different outlook that is more equitable. Yet, this same woman contradicted herself later when she suggested that males still are more apt to be hired in positions as "poster boys" who "can talk the current educational rhetoric but don't necessarily practice it." One of the males suggested that "the days when the boys got together and smoked cigars are over," particularly in response to the growing number of women who comprise the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS).

A second male suggested, "I think that males have an easier time partially because of the old boys' club, though I think it's disappearing. I hope it's disappearing." He also indicated, however, that he is aware that he likely benefited from its presence when he stated, "I guess I was lucky. And that's maybe why I was saying there's an old boys' club. It might have been easier for me because I felt accepted fairly quickly, and enough people knew about this town, but it was enough connection that I quickly got in." The second woman, however, was adamant that "the club" is alive and well:

> It is easier for men to move from a position of maybe school-based administration into a superintendency or assistant superintendency with little classroom experience if they are part of the old boys' network. And it's alive and well everywhere. I've seen people go into superintendencies who are not prepared, and they suffer and everyone else around them suffers.

And yet, two women offered that females are not always excluded from "the club;" in fact, some are contributing members of it. As one woman suggested, "the fact that they happen to be male or female by sex doesn't necessarily mean that they will practice what I think are more gender neutral practices or more inclusive practices." In her view, the role of senior administration is masculinized, so women have felt pressure to be "male oriented, male dominated." This was echoed by another female who suggested, "The school system, the division office rural, is totally androcentric. The elementary is more androgynous. And senior high schools are kind of schizophrenic. So the systems of school systems, within school systems, have been developed by men." Given the view of many senior administrators that the context of leadership is changing, they suggest that neither males nor females exclusively align with traditional sex roles in their leadership styles.

This leads to the final ambiguity around the career development of senior administrators by sex: the idea that there are no longer any sex-based differences in the career development of males and females. Two men suggested that there are no longer any differences in the career development between men and women, but later qualified this by suggesting that there still is a greater expectation for women to maintain the primary role in the home even if she has a full-time position in senior administration.

One of these men also later qualified his comment by stating that there are fewer women who came into senior administration with high school principalship experience, and that the majority of elementary principals are female. A third male and one female spoke of the changing context around career development whereby more females were accessing senior administrative positions over time, and that the males who were in positions tended to have a more equitable outlook on inclusive leadership practices as well as more equitable private roles in the home.

What Helps Senior Administrators Do Their Jobs?

Given the complexities of senior administrative leadership in today's educational milieu, I was interested to find out what kinds of supports senior administrators rely upon in both their personal and professional lives. Based on prior research conducted on the superintendency outlined earlier in the introduction, I asked survey respondents to rank their top 10 career supports out of a potential list of 20 items. Only one item met the criteria of being consistently ranked as very important (i.e., over 30 respondents out of the 49 chose the variable, ranking it in their top five career supports: supportive relationships with spouse or partner (N=35; mean = 2.86; variance = 6.59). However, over 30 of the respondents ranked the following six variables in their top 10 career supports:

i) strong positive relationships with other senior administrative colleagues (N=40)

ii) supportive relationships with spouse/partner (N=35)

iii) opportunities for professional growth (N=32)

iv) adequate career advancement opportunities (N=30)

v) support from family/friends (N=30)

vi) encouragement from a personal mentor (N=30)

Over three-quarters (77.6%) of the senior administrators in the province indicated that they often or always benefited from adequate career opportunities, and a similar proportion (73.5%) benefited from networking opportunities. However, 65.3% of the group indicated that they had seldom or never benefited from formal mentoring programs, though 61.3% had benefited from encouragement from a personal mentor. Respondents suggested that they often or always had supportive work relationships with various stakeholder groups: senior administrative colleagues (83.7%), local administrative teams (77.6%), school boards (69.3%), and the community (65.3%). Another three-quarters of the sample (73.5%) suggested that they often or always received support from family and friends, as well as a spouse/partner (75.5%).

A large proportion (83.7%) of respondents felt professional growth opportunities had supported their career, as did opportunities to work on local, provincial, national, or international committees and/or projects (65.3%). Remuneration was determined to be an adequate career support by 69.4% of the respondents. Although the proportions were relatively high among respondents who suggested that they sometimes or often benefited from family-friendly divisional policies and work/responsibility accommodations made for personal/family reasons (77.5% and 71.5%, respectively), it must also be noted that a substantial proportion of respondents suggested that they seldom or never benefited from these kinds of supports (12.2% and 16.3%, respectively).

In terms of training for the position, only very small proportions of senior administrators felt that they had always benefited from the following:

i) opportunities to gain advanced credentials (14.3%)

ii) school division leadership training programs (4.1%)

iii) adequate training regarding role responsibilities (2%)

In all three cases, larger proportions of respondents suggested they had seldom or never benefited from these kinds of career supports (18.4%, 38.7%, and 26.5%, respectively). One-fifth of the group suggested that they always received performance reviews and feedback (20.4%); although another one-fifth of the group responding to this item suggested that they seldom or never received feedback on their service (20.4%).

I showed the survey findings to interviewees and asked them to choose the top three supports they believed to be important, and to explain why they felt that way. They could also offer other supports that were not on the list and explain their reasoning. Table 4 provides the frequency of supports chosen by interviewees. The support mentioned by almost all of the senior administrators was that of having supportive relationships with other senior administrative colleagues. However, this is qualified somewhat by the finding that a larger number of males, and a larger number of assistant superintendents, suggested this was important.

Table 4
Career Support (Interviews)

Support	All	Male	Female	Urban	Rural	Assistant Superin-tendent	Superin-tendent
Supportive relationships with other senior administrative colleagues	7	5	2	3	4	5	2
Opportunities for professional growth	6	1	5	3	3	4	2
Mentorship	5	4	1	3	2	4	1
Support from spouse/partner	4	3	1	1	3	2	2
Support from family/friends	3	0	3	1	2	2	1
Strong relationships with local administrative teams	2	0	2	0	2	1	1
Strong relationshps with school boards	2	1	1	0	2	1	1
Networking	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
Opportunities for career advancement	2	2	0	1	1	0	2
Opportunities for receiving feedback	1	1	0	1	0	1	0

Such a finding by gender aligns with the literature that suggests that female senior administrators may feel more isolated from other senior administrators, and often do not build relationships even with other female senior administrators (Wallin & Crippen, 2008). The finding for assistant superintendents may speak to the need for support and mentorship as they continue on their career path, perhaps into the superintendency. It also may speak to the larger numbers of younger assistant superintendents who are newer in their positions and looking for support from more experienced senior administrators.

Those interviewees who chose this support spoke to the importance of MASS and its work to ensure that, through its meetings and conferences, senior administrators have the opportunity to come together to support each other. Others clarified their choice by referencing their work with senior administrative teams at the local divisional level, which included the need for autonomy in areas for which one is hired, while at the same time working as a team to share, support one another, bring multiple perspectives to deliberations, and hold critical conversations about the leadership of the division.

Finally, two of the senior administrators qualified this support from a mentoring perspective, in terms of being able to call on a trusted colleague in times of need, for encouragement, support, or to provide opportunities for leadership.

Access to professional development opportunities was mentioned by six interviewees. More women and more assistant superintendents mentioned this as a support. One of the respondents spoke of the benefits she believed she had accrued as a consequence of completing her Master's degree, which helped her to both confirm and challenge her own beliefs about leadership. Another spoke of completing his Master's degree and of engaging in other types of professional development activities for the purpose of putting those new ideas into practice, or to provide more opportunities for career advancement, or to provide evidence of continued and demonstrable improvement. Another spoke of her opportunity to take courses and teach at a university, as well as to work on projects locally and internationally that meaningfully supported her professional growth and leadership. A fourth assistant superintendent spoke of the importance of having professional development clauses built into senior administrative contracts to ensure that the entire senior administrative team was provided with fair and equitable opportunities to grow and develop together. The fifth respondent spoke of the importance of professional development for ongoing learning that provides access to a rich source of people and knowledge.

This finding aligns with the literature that suggests that women tend to be more concerned with teaching and learning than men, which could translate into the greater desire to continue that learning after leaving the classroom. It could also align with the literature findings that suggest that more women than men are now entering university-based educational administrative programs to gather the credentials of leadership in order to ensure that they are at least as equally qualified as their male counterparts.

The findings supported the notion that women tend to consider professional development opportunities from a personal development perspective, as something that they do in order to challenge or confirm their beliefs, to help them develop their leadership abilities, and to provide them with ongoing individual learning opportunities. The one male who responded considered professional growth opportunities in a more utilitarian fashion, as the knowledge gained could then be used directly, either within the scope of leadership, or to help in personal advancement, or to demonstrate continued improvement. The fact that more assistant superintendents mentioned this as a support also speaks to the finding that assistant superintendents tend to be more concerned with gathering the appropriate credentials for entry into these positions, as well as carrying on their learning as they consider leadership and a potential move into the chief superintendent role. It may also reflect the increasing intensity and focus on assessment and curriculum, social, and demographic issues that senior administrators may feel they need to understand in order to keep up with the changes occurring in education.

Mentorship was the third most often cited support by interviewees, as five of the 10 respondents spoke of its importance. Once again, there were some differences by sex and by position, as more males and more assistant superintendents suggested this had been important to them. Mentorship was spoken of in three different areas:

a) as encouragement by others to apply for a senior administrative position, most often by someone in a senior administrative position
b) as support at the local level while one was developing one's skills as a new senior administrator
c) as support from MASS at a provincial level with its mentorship program but also its general support for senior administrators

Most of the senior administrators suggested that they made their final decision to apply for a senior administrative position at the encouragement of a senior administrator. At the local level, senior administrators spoke of being allowed to learn from their colleagues and develop their own skills in working with people, problem solving, dealing with conflict, procedure, board governance, and the needs of students. They appreciated the opportunity to "bounce ideas" off their colleagues even though they were given the independence in terms of time, space, and opportunity to do their jobs on their own. Others commended MASS on its mentoring program, as it had the effect of breaking down isolation and, as one superintendent suggested, it was especially helpful for those who come from outside of Manitoba who are unsure of local or provincial context.

Having support from a spouse/partner was mentioned more by males and by those senior administrators working in rural environments. Three women (no men) broadened the notion of personal support beyond their spouses/partners to include family and friends. In addition, only two urban administrators chose either spouse/partner or family and friends as major supports for their careers, whereas five of the rural administrators chose them.

In the case of support from spouses, all the men spoke of the fact that their wives had made the following sacrifices: moved with them to support new positions; been understanding of the time away due to work commitments; and/or had supported them while they completed a Master's degree. When the women spoke of the supports from family or friends, they spoke of considering the needs of, and requiring the support of, those for whom they cared. They believed that in order to do well in their work life, they needed to maintain harmony at home. As one woman indicated, "sometimes I get a bit of hassle from the family that I maybe work a little too hard, or work a little too late. And I can tell if I've done too many evenings." This woman indicated that her family and friends were often "sounding boards" for ideas, and she in fact regularly booked evenings of "events," such as concerts or programs for which she had to plan and buy tickets so that she would feel less compelled to break her commitments with family and friends for the sake of work. A third woman felt that having family and friends helped her to validate her identity as a woman from herself as a superintendent, as she suggested that "support for me has always been where I'm accepted as a person first and a role second."

The findings on spousal/family support may suggest that males tend to recognize their immediate partners as their critical sources of support. Women perhaps view their supports in a more networked fashion, including their spouses/partners in their broader understandings of "family." It also appears, however, that those in rural areas focus more on the familial aspects of their careers than those in urban areas.

This could be related to the fact that the acceptance of a senior administrative position in a rural area often entails a major move from one community to another, which is likely to create major changes for a family unit. It may also reflect a lack of services external to the family for child care or other familial supports, a more traditional arrangement of family still being practiced in some of these areas, or a stronger sense of how all aspects of leadership in the school system are connected with community and family life in rural areas. Because there is little to no anonymity in rural areas for senior administrators, there is also less separation between work life, community life, and family life.

Although many school divisions now have leadership training programs for in-school administrators, the same cannot be said for the superintendency. Perhaps this is an initiative that could be designed and offered in conjunction with professional, governmental, and scholarly groups, and led and coordinated by MASS representatives. Some of these issues are already being addressed by MASS—for example, mentoring—and by the aspirants themselves who are clearly more oriented towards gaining advanced credentials.

As one assistant superintendent suggested, senior administrators need two kinds of mentorship: one kind that involves encouragement and moral support, but another that provides the technical aspects and understandings of the current realities of senior leadership in school divisions. Many of the issues, layered within these topics, are encountered differently by senior administrators than by in-school administrators, suggesting that preparation programs must be designed in a parallel fashion but not be the same as in-school administrative development programs.

Differences in Career Supports

Table 5 outlines the findings of significance for the career support variables. There were no significant main effects by sex on any of the career support variables. Superintendents had significantly higher scores than assistant superintendents in their perception that they had benefited from family-friendly divisional policies. This is curious when one considers the fact that almost all administrative leaves (i.e., family support) were taken by assistant superintendents.

Although this is speculation on my part, I wonder if part of the difference may be that as the formal leaders of the school division, superintendents have had a direct hand in ensuring those family-friendly policies were written (or not). They may believe that whether or not they have benefited from the policies personally, they did have a direct hand in ensuring those policies were developed as supports for others. It may also be that the superintendents, who are significantly older, come from a more traditional orientation whereby family was compartmentalized from work in ways that no longer apply in today's work-world. Younger assistant superintendents may be more apt to demand personal and family balance to a greater degree than in the past, and this difference in culture may have some bearing on the findings, particularly in a time when professionals are often having children later in life. Regardless of reasons, however, the data suggest that career development programs should target the need for, and design of, family-friendly clauses in divisional policy and individual contracts.

Table 5
T-tests for Career Supports

	Study Variable	N	Means	F	Sig	Equal Variances	t	Sig
Family-friendly divisional policies	Position	Supt 17 Ass't Supt 31	Supt 3.7059 Ass't Supt 3.129	0.064	0.801	Assumed	2.328	0.024
Encouragement from a personal mentor	Position	Supt 17 Ass't Supt 32	Supt 3.1765 Ass't Supt 3.9688	0.035	0.852	Assumed	–2.388	0.021
	Context	Rural 30 Urban 19	Rural 3.4 Urban 4.1579	0.48	0.033	Not Assumed	2.546	0.014
Strong, positive relationships with school boards	Context	Rural 30 Urban 19	Rural 4.1 Urban 3.4737	0.2877	0.096	Assumed	–2.699	0.010

Assistant superintendents had significantly higher scores than superintendents in their perception that they had encouragement from a personal mentor, as did urban administrators in comparison to rural administrators. I speculate that part of the reason for this finding may be that assistant superintendents—and urban administrators in general—have a larger cadre of professionals from which to draw support, as there exists a stronger culture of mentoring among MASS members these days, and there are simply more mentors to be found in urban environments.

In addition, rural administrators had significantly higher scores than urban administrators in their perception that strong, positive relationships with school boards were a career support. It may be that relationships in rural areas are more important because of the high visibility of public education in rural communities, as well as the lack of "buffers" between personal and professional roles that exist in these communities. Peoples' lives are entwined in rural communities in ways that do not exist in urban environments. For this reason, having strong positive relationships provides a foundation for senior administrators to be able to work with, educate school board members, and move educational initiatives along. Lacking those relationships makes for uncomfortable professional and personal circumstances because there is little relational distance between "players."

Once again, in the interview data I noted that interviewees tended to verbalize differences in their lived experiences based on context, sex/gender, and place more fully than was evident in survey findings. For example, they suggested that differences by place could be found in terms of professional development opportunities, career advancement, networking, and achieving a sense of community. Not surprisingly, professional development activities were perceived to be more limited for those working in rural areas. This was evidenced by inadequate professional development budgets, which tended to be disseminated to schools and did not often facilitate sending divisional teams to conferences or other professional development events.

In addition, distance and extra time commitments for travel and lodging always necessitated larger costs in money and time. Career advancement opportunities in rural Manitoba often require families to move to a new community. However, one assistant superintendent suggested that much of the movement remains in particular educational regions, and therefore many of the same people become networked within their regional areas, which helps provide some visibility and networking opportunities.

Three administrators spoke of differences in networking opportunities. One individual talked of professional isolation that exists in most rural areas, which is less evident in urban areas that have extensive senior administrative teams. Another individual suggested that urban assistant superintendents may not build as immediate relationships with school boards as rural assistant superintendents do because they are more singular in their focus, and present on fewer issues to the board.

A rural superintendent suggested that senior administrators are more dependent upon building positive relationships with the unions with whom they negotiate as part of the management team, since the lives of community members are all intertwined. This individual believed that there is more impetus to deal with potential conflicts and to view issues from multiple perspectives because of the intimacy of rural environments.

Finally, it was felt that there exists a stronger sense of community in rural areas, and that senior administers tend to be respected community leaders. In addition, the media is often a positive support for promoting the school division with the community, which was perceived to be less evident in urban environments.

Table 6 outlines the interaction effects found in the survey data between position, context, and/or gender for the career support variables. Position interacted with context for two supports: (i) professional growth opportunities, and (ii) opportunities for gaining advanced educational credentials. In both instances, the 95% Confidence Intervals (CIs) of the data suggest that urban superintendents had significantly lower scores than all other groups. However, both phenomena are more fully explained by the interaction among position, context, and gender for these supports, outlined in subsequent paragraphs.

Position (superintendent or assistant superintendent) interacted with sex in terms of the support of access to professional growth opportunities. In this instance, female superintendents had significantly lower scores than other groups. Again, however, it is argued that the interaction effect between position, context, and sex likely explains the phenomenon better than position and gender alone. Context interacted with sex for a number of supports:

i) professional growth opportunities
ii) opportunities for gaining advanced educational credentials
iii) support from family and friends
iv) adequate training regarding role responsibilities
v) strong positive relationships with the school board
vi) community support
vii) opportunities to work on local, provincial, national, or international committees and/or projects

Table 6 Interaction Effects for Career Supports					
Interaction		F	p	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Professional growth opportunities	Position x Context	5.179	0.028	0.360	0.249
	Position x Context	7.314	0.010	0.360	0.249
	Position x Context	10.017	0.003	0.360	0.249
	Position x Context x Sex	5.727	0.021	0.360	0.249
Opportunities for gaining advanced credentials	Position x Context	13.767	0.001	0.379	0.271
	Position x Context	8.447	0.006	0.379	0.271
	Position x Context x Sex	10.569	0.002	0.379	0.271
Support from family and friends	Position x Context	5.118	0.029	0.165	0.019
	Position x Context x Sex	4.405	0.042	0.240	0.104
Strong, positive relationships with school boards	Position x Context	9.086	0.004	0.364	0.252
Community support	Position x Context	13.265	0.001	0.364	0.253
Adequate training regarding role responsibilities	Position x Context	6.613	0.014	0.187	0.045
Local, national, or international projects	Position x Context	9.734	0.003	0.248	0.116

Urban females have lower perceptions than other groups regarding opportunities for professional growth and opportunities for gaining advanced educational credentials, although the interaction effect between position, context, and sex likely offers a better explanation of the phenomena. The 95% CIs suggest that urban males and rural females have significantly higher scores than urban females and rural males in their perceptions that support from family and friends has been a career support, and that they have received adequate training regarding role responsibilities. Urban females have significantly lower scores than all other groups in their perceptions that strong, positive relationships with school boards and community support have been career supports. Finally, rural females have significantly higher scores than all other groups in their perceptions that they have had opportunities to work on local, provincial, national, or

international committees and/or projects. Position interacted with context and sex for three supports:

i) professional growth opportunities

ii) opportunities for gaining advanced credentials

iii) family-friendly divisional policies

The 95% CIs demonstrated that female urban superintendents had significantly lower perceptions than all other groups regarding their opportunities for professional growth. The same finding occurred for the career support for gaining advanced credentials with the addition that female rural superintendents had significantly higher scores than all other groups.

Finally, urban male and female superintendents are significantly higher than all other groups in their perceptions that family-friendly divisional policies are career supports, while the perceptions of urban female assistant superintendents are significantly lower than all other groups. What is clear in the data is that position interacts with context and gender for three of these supports, but context and gender interact on all of these supports.

The findings tend to support the interview data that emphasized contextual and sex-based differences over positional differences, as interviewees tended to report more differences and more influences on their career related to whether they were urban/rural or male/female, rather than by their position as superintendent or assistant superintendent. The interaction effect findings suggest that career development programs therefore should not examine either rural/urban differences or male/female differences alone; rather, discussions must center on how these supports are experienced differentially by subgroups (rural females, urban males, rural males, and urban females).

What are the Work Challenges for Senior Administrators?

Just as I questioned what supports senior administrators had to do their work, I also wanted to know what challenges they prioritized within the complex world of educational leadership. Of the potential 25 work challenges, only one met the criteria of being consistently ranked as very important (i.e., over 30 respondents chose the variable, ranking it in their top five challenges): Diversification of and/or increasing student needs (N=34; mean = 4.38; variance = 4.84). However, over 30 of the respondents ranked Diversification of and/or increasing student needs (N=34); and Increasing provincial mandates (N=33) in their top 10 work challenges.

The career support items from the previous section tended to be strongly negatively skewed, meaning that larger proportions of respondents indicated they had "often" or "always" *benefited favourably* from a number of supports. The work challenges items, however, tended to be either moderately negatively or moderately positively skewed, since the majority of categories were chosen either as "sometimes" and "often" (negative skew) or "seldom" and "sometimes" (positive skew). This suggests that the work challenges senior administrators face across the province tend to vary considerably by context.

The overall responses to five of the 25 items represented somewhat polarized positions. Almost all of the respondents (81.6%) suggested that increasing provincial mandates is "often" or "always" challenging. The remaining four items represented work challenges for which the majority of respondents responded "seldom" or "never" occurred: poor relationships with administrative colleagues (89.8%), personal relationship stress (81.6%), inadequate access to professional development (71.5%), and gender stereotyping and discrimination (69.4%).

The political nature of the position was mentioned by 98% of the respondents as being "sometimes," "often," or "always" a challenge. Using the same composite of responses, managing the diversification of and/or increasing student needs is also becoming difficult (89.8%), as is dealing with increasing accountability mandates (85.7%). On a more personal front, 87.8% of the respondents suggested that balancing home and career presents challenges, and that they do not have enough personal/family time (81.6%). The two work challenge items that the majority of respondents suggested "sometimes" or "often" occurred are the competency or experience level of trustees (83.7%), and keeping up with curricular or instructional challenges (75.6%).

The data suggest that the extent to which senior administrators face a range of work challenges is quite variable. This is indicated by a large proportion of individuals who suggested in relative equal categories that they "seldom," "sometimes," or "often" face the following challenges: stressful work environments (95.9%), lack of a qualified candidate pool for senior administrative positions (91.9%), decreasing resources (83.6%), and the effects of restructuring (77.6%).

Those items that were most strongly designated in the "seldom" or "sometimes" categories include inadequate or unfavourable policy directions (83.6%), personnel issues (81.7%), distressed community environments (77.6%), and increasing grievance or litigation pursuits (69.4%). Finally, it was suggested that a number of work challenges "never, " "seldom," or "sometimes" occurred. These items include community resistance and/or apathy (93.9%), a lack of career opportunities (93.8%), inadequate remuneration (91.9%), misalignment of personal vision with that of the school board (89.9%), and dealing with the media (85.7%).

As I did with the career supports, I reported the survey findings on work challenges to the interviewees and asked them to choose their top three challenges and to explain why they chose those challenges. They could also offer other challenges that were not on the list and explain their reasoning. Table 7 provides the frequency of challenges chosen by respondents.

Table 7
Work Challenges (Interviews)

Challenge	All	Male	Female	Urban	Rural	Assistant Superin-tendent	Super-intendent
Increasing diversity of student needs	9	4	5	4	5	5	4
Keeping up with curricular change	5	2	3	2	3	4	1
Increasing provincial mandates	5	2	3	3	2	3	2
Balancing home and career	5	1	4	3	2	3	2
Political nature of the position	4	1	3	2	2	2	2
Isolation	4	3	1	3	1	3	1
Not enough family time	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
Lack of networking	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
Increasing litigation	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
Human resource issues	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
Lack of public support	1	1	0	0	1	1	0

The challenge mentioned by all but one of the interviewees was the increasing diversity of student need. Given the breakdown of responses, this challenge seems to be affecting all response groups equally intensively. Respondents spoke of the increasing diversity of students related to:

1. immigration
2. the need for English as an additional language (EAL) supports
3. the increasing focus on differentiated instruction
4. the need for classroom management, behavioural, and threat assessment support
5. the need to accommodate technological impacts
6. the need to accommodate the social backgrounds affecting students
7. the various environmental issues that affect students
8. the growing professional development needs to offset this diversity
9. the impacts on special needs programs and worry over the capacity of those programs
10. the difficulties in balancing special service needs with the rest of the needs in schools

One interviewee suggested that although professionals have become better at identifying needs and strategies of support, that as a consequence, identification is then increasing the service needs demanded of the system. Another suggested that, "we're being asked to meet the needs of all students now in a way that never happened 10, 20 years ago." A third worried over the loss of history, experience, and information as good teachers move closer to retirement, and the need to talk to teachers about what this diversification really means, or "we could go too far and break the backs of these people."

Keeping up with curricular changes was a challenge mentioned by five respondents. Differences seemed to be related to position, as more assistant superintendents spoke of this challenge than superintendents. These administrators spoke of the pace and quantity of curricular changes, and discussed the growing difficulties associated with keeping track and implementing these changes in ways that can be monitored and appropriately supported. In particular, respondents spoke of recent changes made to physical education, social studies, mathematics, health, and arts curricula, and of the difficulties associated with supporting and working with teachers to effectively implement these curricula and to embed within them appropriate assessment processes or Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). They also spoke of the administrative difficulties associated with facilities, staffing, and scheduling of new requirements, particularly in relation to the physical education curriculum.

Keeping up with curricular changes was linked to a third challenge mentioned by five senior administrators—that of increasing provincial mandates. Many of the respondents provided evidence of these increasing mandates by mentioning the curricular changes that have been initiated across the province. However, every respondent spoke with frustration less with the curricular changes per se but rather when they discussed the speed and lack of support with which these mandates had been "downloaded" from the province. They perceived that these mandates made it almost impossible for school divisions to provide the kind of support and monitoring that was necessary to ensure successful implementation. As a result, the expectations:

- were either impossible to meet
- created conflict between local priorities and provincial mandates
- constituted an inappropriate micromanagement of local school divisions by the province

There was a perception articulated by participants that the provincial government was attempting to address too many issues at once, and then downloading responsibilities for those issues onto local school divisions with less than adequate support. As one respondent suggested:

> I can't get over the amount that the province messes around with us in terms of the information requested. We're always getting stuff to fill out for them…. They're not a help to us. To a large part it seems like they are a hindrance to us…. Because you never saw evidence that they did something with some of the information they collect. I suppose they could argue that they do. But I've never seen anything quite like it. And they give you such a short timeline, like they'll give you three weeks, six weeks.

This superintendent supported the expectation of divisional accountability for its work, but saw accountability in terms of providing evidence that divisions were making a difference in academic curriculum, in social responsibility, and supported learning. However, this superintendent suggested that instead the kind of data collection being requested often became "busy work" around less important issues. Another superintendent suggested that tasks assigned to him from Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (MECY) tended to draw him away from what he believed to be important, as he reported:

> I'm managing paper and problems rather than getting into classrooms. I try to stay more in tune with the kids and professional development of our staff and it's increasingly hard to do that…I think we're allowing ourselves too often to get into the politics, and get into paper, reporting, and things that make us look like we are busy and doing things, but probably could be time spent better.

A third superintendent spoke with frustration of the ways in which these mandates were delivered by suggesting that there were often mixed messages from various areas within the Department, and that there was a need for clear communicative statements:

> If the Department could come out with, or the provincial government could come out with, clarity and vision… If you've got to do something, you've got to be able to strategically plan. You cannot tell us something three weeks before, and in two days expect a change. Actually, policy and pressure helps me do my job easier. They're telling us to go out and do it. It's easy to go out and do it. But I've got to find creative ways to do it. It's the timing, it's the lack of visioning, it's a lack of leadership, it's lack of communication with one voice. Because sub-departments are contradicting senior members of parliament - and somehow they have got to get that communication strategy.

In this person's view, school divisions can only facilitate Manitoba Education Citizenship and Youth's political mandates if the province demonstrates vision, clarity, leadership, and strategy.

The challenges associated with balancing both home and career responsibilities were mentioned by five interviewees, four of whom were women. When combined with the challenge of having not enough personal time, there are potential differences by sex (five women, one man) and by position (four assistant superintendents, two superintendents). The one male who did speak to this issue believed that achieving balance was necessary for one to be effective in the superintendent's role.

This aligned with the views of the women in the group, who suggested that the difficulty often lay in achieving perspective between family and work. They spoke of the many evenings and weekends that required them to overlook family responsibilities in order to complete work assignments. But they also spoke of the multiple ways in which they consciously strategized to achieve that balance:

a) by making the attempt never to bring work home
b) bringing their children to work on the weekends and planning to have lunch or dinner with them in order to provide breaks and balance in the work routine
c) consciously planning evenings where one had to purchase tickets or make emphatic commitments to ensure that personal time was privileged on occasion
d) creating a personal sanctuary for self, family, and friends where one can regenerate, combined with needing to know when to withdraw from work and focus on personal life

This last point was responded to thoughtfully by one superintendent who commented:

> I saw my mother die…I watched her as her life slipped away, and I watched her withdraw, and I watched her fight…. To keep …being a part of something. But if these jobs are so consuming, and are so consumptive that if you don't learn to draw away, you risk not being able to do that at another important time of your life…. And when you achieve it to a degree, there is a peace that comes that enables you to even do your work better, and to do it with a clearer mind, and to do it with an objectivity, and not to pretend something is when it isn't.

This superintendent has come to realize that personal sanctuary and the protection of her private and sacred self helps her lead effectively with purpose, objectivity, and perspective.

Challenges associated with the political nature of the superintendency were mentioned by four individuals, three of whom were women. One superintendent spoke about macro-political issues that affect the politics of education, including educational funding and political agendas. The interviewee indicated that, in her view, the provincial government has to put more money into funding school boards, and seriously rethink the reliance on the local levy. In this person's view, the local levy is an unfair third level of taxation. Poverty abounds across the province, and smaller, less affluent school divisions cannot raise the same kind of monetary support on the economy of scale as places with larger enrolments. In this way, current funding formulae are inadequate for protecting the rights of all children and their programs.

The second point made by this interviewee concerned her perception that our political systems tend to serve the needs of adults rather than children, and this preoccupation with serving the political agendas of adults is one we seriously need to consider, stating "I don't understand why, at this period in our history, we have to fight to get our kids educated properly. And we have to fight to get our seniors looked after in hospital properly. There is something about who we are discarding and who we are valuing."

One of the assistant superintendents spoke of the micro-political realities of working as a senior administrator, with a particular focus on school board relationships, by suggesting:

> …when you sit around the board table, or you have a trustee phoning, and the political nature of the position is not necessarily tied to the board of trustees, or you have a decision to make, or input to give in a situation that you know there really is no win-win, where you have to dance around things very carefully…when that rears its head, it is difficult. It is very difficult.

Another superintendent reiterated the political nature of this relationship by stating:

> A lot of us don't want to admit it, but I know quite a few of my colleagues have left, retired early, want to retire but can't, and are dying on the inside. And I know of younger colleagues in the profession that are dying on the inside because of the lack of relationship with the board. It's not something you want to talk about. It's not something we openly talk about. But it's there.

In this person's view, some of the issues relate to school boards that lack expertise, trustees who come to the table with particular political agendas, or those trustees or superintendents who do not understand board governance or who won't take the time to develop expertise. In this person's estimation:

> If you don't understand the political lay of the land, if you don't know how to predict and prevent, it can happen so quickly, that something can come on the agenda and kill an initiative that's been three years in the making. So you've got to take control of the agenda with your chair. You've got to do a lot of educating about what governance is, and you've got to be outspoken in a diplomatic way.

These comments suggest that, for this administrator, the "art" of senior administration is knowing how to predict the political agendas and "bents" of the "players" in public education, be they provincial governments, school boards, unions, et cetera, and to be vigilant, thoughtful, strategic, and diplomatic in the ways in which the educational agenda of the school division is promoted and maintained.

Four individuals spoke of professional isolation (in combinations that included three men, three urban senior administrators, and three assistant superintendents) related directly to professional isolation either for rural senior administrators or for superintendents in particular. Two of these respondents mentioned their perceptions regarding others rather than specifically speaking to their own situation. One assistant superintendent suggested that there is greater professional isolation for superintendents, simply because "you are already the superintendent and have to be the boss of the organization." Another assistant superintendent suggested, "being a superintendent is probably the loneliest job in education." Two respondents spoke of their own experiences. One male assistant superintendent spoke of the lack of networking for rural senior administrators due to distance, time, and smaller work teams. And one superintendent affirmed the comments made by the assistant superintendents by suggesting, "I think we need conversation. We're desperate for conversation because it's a very, very lonely job."

Based on the findings in the survey and interview data, it seems logical to suggest that career development programs would target work challenges and find ways to address them with research, theory and practice. It also seems to make sense that further research into the reasons why certain work challenges appear to be more relevant in particular contexts should be conducted in order to more appropriately address the needs that occur in those contexts.

Differences in Work Challenges

Table 8 outlines the tests of significance for work challenges. There were no main effects by gender on any of the work challenge variables. Assistant superintendents had significantly higher scores than superintendents in the challenges they reported facing in balancing home and career responsibilities. This may be a direct result of the finding that assistant superintendents are significantly younger and less experienced than superintendents. They may still have greater family responsibilities at home and may be less adept at organizing support because of their limited experience. It may also be reflective of the increasing credentialing being done by this group, which adds to the time commitments and obligations outside of the home on top of the "day job."

Table 8 T-tests for Work Challenges								
	Study Variable	**N**	**Means**	**F**	**Sig**	**Equal Variances**	**t**	**Sig**
Difficulties balancing home and career	Position	Supt 16 Ass't Supt 32	Supt 3.25 Ass't Supt 3.875	0.023	0.879	Assumed	–2.075	0.044
Lack of career opportunities	Context	Rural 29 Urban 19	Rural 2.4483 Urban 1.9474	1.955	0.194	Assumed	–2.097	0.041
Increasing accountability responsibilities	Context	Rural 29 Urban 19	Rural 3.8276 Urban 3.1579	0.067	0.797	Assumed	–2.614	0.012
Distressed community environments	Context	Rural 29 Urban 19	Rural 2.8621 Urban 2.3684	1.124	0.295	Assumed	–2.149	0.037

In the interview data, the challenges associated with balancing home and career responsibilities, or of having not enough personal time, were referenced most often by women (four of five interviewees) and/or assistant superintendents (three of five interviewees). Although there was a recognition that male senior administrators also want to spend time with their families, the perception remained that women "will still feel more pressure to take care of the home environment as well as their career. The same pressure is still not put on males." A woman suggested, "I rarely have male colleagues talk about balance…. They just go home…. I think it's pressure we put on ourselves…. He just says, 'Well, I'll have to do it later.'" Although one male superintendent suggested that the balance issue was likely "solved" by the time women move into senior administration, he did indicate that it could be something that would prevent some women from moving into school administration.

A female assistant superintendent, on the other hand, spoke of senior administrators with young children at home who are moving into positions with contracts that do not, as a matter of course, provide maternity benefits. In her estimation, some of these issues may be stopping other younger women from applying for these positions. In the estimation of four of the five women in the study, even though both men and women have many opportunities to seize, a woman has to be singularly focused on becoming a senior administrator if that is what she wants to do. Given the fact that there still remain only five female superintendents in the province out of 38 public school divisions, some credibility must be given to these statements.

It appears from this study that women continue to find that balancing home and career responsibilities is challenging. This finding likely reflects the males' stronger reliance on spousal support, and females' suggestions that they were more cognizant of the need for support from, but also consideration of, a broader network of family and friends. It also is suggestive of the fact that females still maintain the primary responsibility for the home environment in addition to their work commitments, as mentioned by both males and females in this study. The larger cadre of assistant superintendents who mentioned this as a potential challenge may be reflective of the younger group of assistant superintendents who are less experienced in their roles, have younger families to support, and feel they need to spend long hours at work learning and leading.

Another difference found in the survey data is that rural senior administrators had significantly higher scores than urban senior administrators for the following work challenges:

a) a lack of career opportunities

b) increasing accountability requirements

c) distressed community environments

It should be no surprise that decreasing enrolments, much smaller economies of scale, increasing rural poverty, and fewer educational resources to go around (which has led to school closures, although at the moment in Manitoba there exists a provincially mandated moratorium on closure) is linked to the findings above. Fewer positions are available in communities that are shrinking. As communities face poverty and school closure, the distress levels increase. In addition, even though fewer resources are available to rural school divisions, accountability requirements continue to increase, which often constrains a division's ability to be flexible in its funding, programming, or management. Career development programs may not be able to address the problems themselves, but they could be designed to help senior administrators learn how to deal with them, as well as create networks among senior administrators facing similar issues. Another idea would be to build an accessible online site that advertises career opportunities available to senior administrators within the province and beyond.

Most of the perceptions of interviewees regarding rural/urban differences centred on capacity and the effects of professional and geographic isolation. Interviewees spoke to the fact that rural senior administrators have to be generalists who pay attention to all of the issues facing the division without the benefit of a large team for support. They suggested this can lead to workload stress, reactionary planning, burnout, lack of multiple perspectives for decision making, lack of resources, or attention to management versus leadership. One rural superintendent worried about the capacity of the senior administrative team and the division when he suggested, "we only have so much energy and so many issues, you can't take on new things all the time. So how do you stay focused, keep people moving on the right topics, on the important things? Focusing whatever resources we have on those issues and not allowing the other things to tug us away from what we need to be stressing."

An urban assistant superintendent who had previously worked in a rural division, however, perceived that the pace in rural environments is perhaps less frenetic because rural areas are "further from decision making on Broadway [provincial government] and there's a greater sense of autonomy." In this person's view, rural areas have to "push some things off to the side because they just can't do it. And you can't do it with only one person…. I wish we could, would have the sense to push some of the things off." Another urban assistant superintendent suggested that changing population demographics are magnified in urban divisions because of their sheer number, and this places demands for extra supports that may not be necessary in some rural environments. However, this same person indicated that urban divisions are fortunate in that there is a variety of consultants to help support curricular changes, as well as programs for new teachers, mentorship opportunities, and teaming, that is available for senior administrators. This person suggested, "sometimes the people who are advantaged the most keep getting more advantage."

Geography was mentioned by rural senior administrators who suggested that administrators become more mindful of time management and planning based on geographic differences in community locations, travel arrangements, et cetera. This also was mentioned as being an issue that affects the balance between home and career because it takes more time to make the transition from home to work each day. One of the rural male assistant superintendents suggested that some rural areas may have more conservative notions around gender stereotypes when it comes to leadership, and that this might affect the leadership opportunities of women.

Finally, a rural superintendent suggested that there is a difference in the amount of attention rural senior administrators pay to politics. In this person's view, urban senior administrators tend to "be more about power and image, politically astute. I think rural people have a little different focus maybe."

In terms of differences by position, the perception of senior administrator interviewees was that the position of the superintendent is more politically focused than that of the assistant superintendent. This was mentioned in terms of meeting accountability requirements, and in managing relationships with school boards. Assistant superintendents were perceived to be more focused on curricular or educational issues, or the needs of students in general. The perception that they are generally more focused in supportive capacities was evidenced by one superintendent who humorously replied, "when we get into tough situations—for example, board issues and administrative transfers—we can play 'good cop, bad cop.' [The assistant superintendent] has to be the [person] they come to for support, and I'm usually the [bad cop]." Finally, superintendents were considered to be more responsible for vision, and faced, according to one assistant superintendent, higher expectations of expertise (even if this is unrealistic, particularly for new superintendents).

Table 9 outlines the interaction effects found between position, context, and/or gender for the work challenge variables. Position interacted with context for the work challenge of increasing provincial mandates. The 95% CI suggested that rural assistant superintendents and urban superintendents had significantly higher scores than rural superintendents and urban assistant superintendents for this work challenge. This means that rural assistant superintendents and urban superintendents are more likely to see increasing provincial mandates as significant challenges to their work than are rural superintendents or urban assistant superintendents.

Position interacted with gender for two work challenges:

a) the political nature of the position

b) lack of a qualified candidate pool for senior administrative positions

In terms of the first of these challenges, female superintendents rated the political nature of the position as more of a work challenge than all other groups, and female assistant superintendents had significantly lower scores than all other groups, indicating that they were the least concerned with the political nature of their position as a work challenge. In terms of the second work challenge, female superintendents and male assistant superintendents had significantly higher scores than male superintendents and female assistant superintendents. This means that the first two groups (female superintendents and male assistant superintendents) tended to be more concerned than the latter two groups (male superintendents and female assistant superintendents) about having a small qualified candidate pool for senior administrative positions.

Table 9
Interaction Effects for Work Challenges

Interaction		F	p	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Professional growth opportunities	Position x Context	7.577	0.009	0.227	0.084
Political nature of the position	Position x Sex	7.702	0.008	0.281	0.152
Lack of qualified candidates for senior administrative positions	Position x Sex	4.738	0.036	0.150	0.003
Dealing with the media and/or public image	Context x Sex	4.654	0.037	0.174	0.026

Finally, context interacted with gender for the work challenge of dealing with the media and/or public image. Female urban senior administrators had significantly higher scores than all other groups for this work challenge. For each of these findings, it would be beneficial for career development programs to consider why these challenges affect subgroups differentially, and then work to address them, or, at the least, help senior administrators deal with them in their work environments.

So You Want to Be a Senior Administrator?

Finally, in this research study, I asked interviewees to make some comments about the factors that aspirants should consider before moving in to senior administrative roles, as well as to provide some words of advice. The following section outlines the "words of wisdom" offered by these senior administrators.

Factors to Consider

Senior administrators told me that the primary factors that aspirants must consider before moving in to a position relate to the nature of the position, self-knowledge, and the realities of the work. First and foremost, interviewees suggested that aspirants must consider the huge responsibility that a senior administrative position accords, and that this position is a tenuous one with little security. As one superintendent suggested, "there are many interesting parts to the job, but there is no glamour and there is no prestige. Not anymore."

Another superintendent suggested that aspirants must consider that the position is one of service, and "you need to honestly understand that it becomes a little bit less about you, and more about others." An assistant superintendent suggested that aspirants need to consider how important the role of human relations is in these positions, in terms of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, understanding change, and knowing how systems and groups work.

Aspirants were also asked to consider that movement into a senior position is always overwhelming at first, because of the plethora of information with which new administrators are rarely adequately equipped. An assistant superintendent offered the humorous insight that being successful as a new senior administrator entails learning the "duck philosophy," whereby "you have to be calm on the top, meanwhile you're paddling like hell underneath." Senior administrators encouraged aspirants to recognize that the position is often characterized by a high level of conflict. As one superintendent suggested:

> Accept that you are often in a no-win situation—you have to make decisions. People won't be happy with you and you have to be able to live with yourself and those people afterwards…. Hopefully they can understand why you did it, and you try to educate them and make them knowledgeable about why we made that decision. But at the end of the day, some decisions just come to 'that's the way it has to be.'

Others mentioned that litigation is increasing within school divisions, and aspirants need to consider whether they are prepared to work in such an environment where they may need to seek legal counsel. Finally, aspirants were encouraged to consider the fact that the position is highly public, and with that comes the need to recognize that the position will have an impact on family and personal life. One superintendent talked

about "stories of people banging on their door, throwing eggs at their windows, accosting them in the grocery store because of decisions." Another spoke of recognizing that "you lose all balance in your life and there are very few moments that are my own."

Two areas of consideration were mentioned by senior administrators for the second factor of self-knowledge:

a) knowing one's own value system

b) the need to be a lifelong learner

Interestingly, the first of these factors was mentioned only by women. Aspirants were asked to consider what it was that truly motivated them in their jobs or led to stress, and then to consider whether a senior administrative position would hold promise to affirm the motivation or minimize the stress. These women suggested that senior administrators needed to be energetic, enthusiastic, and act with integrity; they must know their own values and be aligned with the organization with which they work. If they do not align, senior administrators need to be able to stand firmly on issues, since "you don't negotiate values and beliefs" and "you must maintain a focus on governance and the bottom line is education." They also must know their own areas of strength and weakness, and be prepared to build their skills.

This leads to the second factor to consider, which is the need to be a lifelong learner. Four senior administrators (two male and two female) made specific reference to this factor. Aspirants are asked to consider whether they are prepared to "learn as you go" and "be on the cutting edge as the educational leader to be cognizant of trends" in order to "model and facilitate a balance of autonomy and accountability." One of the assistant superintendents suggested that movement into the position was "the biggest learning you'll ever have in your life; you'll have fantastic opportunities to work with fantastic people, get to be process oriented, and lead a system with others, but it is a huge responsibility."

The third factor mentioned by senior administrators that needs to be considered was the realities of the work environment. Six of the senior administrators spoke of the political nature of the position, particularly as it relates to working with school boards. Senior administrators need to be able to find the balance between board governance, policy, and human relationships. Senior administrators "can't be the 'yes person' for the board or jump to individual trustees…they can't get sidetracked on the political issues." Rather, they must be diplomatic and maintain a focus on providing educational service with integrity.

Another superintendent suggested that "you have to really deeply believe in what you are doing to survive the politics of it; you have to be prepared to accept what you see in the black box, because when the board room door closes at times, it's not pretty in there." Senior administrators also need to be able to sustain the workings of the school division after school board elections when trustees change.

In addition to working with boards, one of the assistant superintendents spoke of the political diplomacy needed in something as "small" as a written communication: "be planful, conscious of everything you do—you don't just re-read a memo once; you re-read it three times. You think about potential ramifications. What words have you used? What words have you missed using? You have to be very careful…. You have to be field dependent and field independent all at the same time."

Finally, a superintendent suggested that aspirants need to consider that having the skills and credentials alone do not guarantee that a person will successfully acquire a senior administrative position, because "there are a lot of other factors that are politically aligned that impact on who gets any particular job."

The second most often cited area of this factor was that of recognizing the time commitments that accrue with a senior administrative position. Interviewees suggested that aspirants need to consider the serious time commitment required by the position, as "weekends are consumed with the job and the job is always with you." Meetings, committee work, and working with policy often occur outside of the "regular" work day, to include early mornings, late evenings, and weekends. A superintendent suggested that, "It won't be true that you'll have summers off and spare time. If you went to an hourly rate as a senior administrator, you'd be far better off to stay as a classroom teacher; lots of evenings and weekends, even if the pace is different."

The flexibility of a senior administrative position was also cited as an area to consider. Interviewees suggested that in many ways senior administrators have flexibility in designing their work days, and that those who are personally motivated could make great progress in their work. On the other hand, flexibility in personal schedules have to come second to the needs of schools or community issues that might come up unexpectedly. Senior administrators have to "expect the unexpected" and be flexible in their accommodation of others. A superintendent also suggested that "you may have more control over how things happen, but somewhat less as far as some of the directives that you are responsible for taking on."

Finally, senior administrators suggested that aspirants need to consider the isolation that often comes with the position. As one assistant superintendent suggested, "the environment is more businesslike and completely different from a school…. It's as quiet as a mortuary in there sometimes." Another superintendent suggested that aspirants need to consider "whether they are prepared to do a job that is ultimately, totally alone, and whether they are prepared to pay that price." For this reason, aspirants were encouraged to be cognizant of the potential loneliness, professional isolation, and lack of collegiality that can occur in these positions.

Advice

It is safe to say that the senior administrators interviewed in this study enjoy their work and take their responsibilities seriously. All of them spoke of the rewards of the position and encouraged aspirants to carry on with their dreams of moving into a senior position, even if that means moving to a different community or school division. Aspirants were encouraged to take on leadership roles and responsibilities that promote their visibility, and to indicate to senior administration their career ambitions. But before they decide to move into these roles, aspirants were encouraged to be very cognizant of the reasons why they want to move into them. As one superintendent suggested:

> It's a rewarding experience; a very rewarding career. But it can't be about the pay, or about the position; it has to be for kids, schools, and the advancement of education…. Servant leadership struck home with me…. I think if you come in with another philosophy then you run the risk of being replaced in a short time. These are contract jobs. You no longer have a union, you no longer have the same level of protection. And that shouldn't be a scary thing. But if you think you need that, then you're probably coming at it the wrong way.

"Know thyself" was a common piece of advice from senior administrators. In addition, aspirants were encouraged to become knowledgeable about the particular roles into which they might move, by talking to previous incumbents or others who have been in senior administration, by visiting the division, and by getting to know the school board or community. It was also mentioned that there are many factors at play in senior administrative appointments, so aspirants should not be discouraged if their personal career ambitions do not immediately align with what happens systemically. Finally, aspirants were encouraged to apply first for an assistant superintendency and to consider it as a training position from which to learn about the superintendency from those currently in the role.

Interviewees also noted that once in a senior administrative position, aspirants must realize "that you are incredibly vulnerable because of what you don't know and need to learn." And because of this, they must be willing to be mentored, coached, and accept help from others. Developing networks with communities, provincial organizations, school administrators, and other senior administrators is very valuable, and will provide senior administrators with a larger knowledge base from which to draw support. They must be prepared to challenge others and be challenged themselves, and to "lead by example and by the power of persuasion, maintaining their sense of professionalism and leadership." They were encouraged to work hard and efficiently, to listen to multiple perspectives in order to inform their own decisions thoroughly, and to be open-minded to accepting alternate possibilities.

Senior administrators suggested that leaders should continue to study to exemplify their sincerity to learn and to become better visionary leaders. In their view, good senior administrators focus on developing a team and constantly search for innovation and innovative people while developing the talent that currently exists. In terms of balancing family and home, senior administrators advised that people in these positions need to "set a standard of balance in (their) professional life; legitimize the opportunity for personal balance" and to make time for personal space and family commitments.

Perhaps the primary piece of advice for those aspiring to become senior administrators was not to lose sight of the educative purposes of the role. As one superintendent suggested, "think of the position as a vocation, not a job, a legacy commitment, soulful work, not administrative work. Think about your work from the perspective of the students, because ultimately you can make a difference in the lives of kids by the appointments you make, by the advice you give, a whole host of things." A second superintendent suggested the following:

> As a senior administrator we can make a difference for kids and their future—we provide hope…. There are kids in this community who, aside from us, have little hope for the future. And I really think that's what we need to be reminded of—that's what we do…. Just like Dr. DeBakey who said, "I'm a doctor—I fight death," I'm an educator—I provide hope.

Ultimately, aspirants were encouraged to move into senior administration to bring hope, innovation, and passion for developing the capacity of our school systems to provide the best possible service to students.

Conclusion

So what did I learn about the fascinating complexities of senior administration in Manitoba? I learned that senior administrators tend to be well qualified, highly experienced, committed to their work, and that they hail from a variety of backgrounds, though in-school administration remains the primary pool from which they are drawn. There appears to be a "new" pool for the superintendency, which is a younger and more highly qualified group than in the past, and given the turnover that appears to be happening, there is a need in Manitoba to initiate retirement planning and induction efforts. Fortunately, MASS has initiated a mentoring program for new members, and to date the feedback on the program has been positive.

Senior administrators tend to enter their positions because they have been encouraged to do so by others, because they are interested in a challenge, or because the timing of the position aligns with personal ambition, credentialing, or goals. They tend to remain in their positions because they are still learning about aspects of their position, or because they are committed to the communities in which they work. They tend to leave their positions because of system constraints or possibilities to take on new positions more aligned with their personal interests.

I noted in this study some inconsistencies between survey data and interview data, particularly as they relate to sex/gender. In the information shared by interviewees, sex/gender is still very much a factor that shapes the experiences of men and women, particularly in terms of family responsibilities and personal life balance, access to the superintendency, experiential background, the nature of the roles men and women are expected to take on within senior administration, and the granting of legitimacy and credibility in leadership. However, in the survey data, sex/gender very seldom was found to have a major effect, and was most often evidenced in interaction with context and position.

Such an interesting finding makes me wonder whether the data were in fact contradictory, or if perhaps people responded differently to "objective" survey items than they did when offered the opportunity to discuss the nuances and contexts of their work, supports, and challenges. In fact, in the survey data, context played a larger role in the differences among career paths, supports, and work challenges than either position or gender, and it was represented strongly in interaction effects. Context was also mentioned in interview data as having an impact on the extent to which there exists a "lock-step" career path into senior administration, the breadth and scope of portfolios handled by senior administrators, mobility issues, and the focus of the position as being system or community oriented.

Overall, in the survey data, there were more interaction effects than main effects, which alludes to the complexity of issues surrounding senior administration, and the need to pay attention to position, context, and gender when designing career development programs. For example, there is a "new generation" of assistant superintendents, both male and female, who, by their responses to this survey, are younger, more attuned to personal balance, and are likely to demand (and benefit from) family-friendly policies that were not in existence for previous generations of senior administrators.

Context tends to have strong impacts on educational level (access), the extent to which senior administrators are channeled into traditional career paths, and the number of positions served overall. Context, gender, and position interact to form complexities based on leaves from service, and create discrepancies on the experiences of career supports and work challenges.

Given the differences that occur, it may be wise for groups in Manitoba that have an interest in senior administration to reconsider the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for effective leadership in senior administration, and to design career development programs targeted to developing those skills. Although such an in-depth perusal of the role requirements and skill sets of senior administration is not likely to be radically different than those developed over time in in-school administration, it may unearth issues and skill sets for consideration that are outside of this experience, and underscore the value of considering aspirants who have alternate professional experiences or less traditional career paths. Such a consideration will also shed light on potential improvements that could be made to existing university programs and/or coursework, and professional development opportunities that would more relevantly serve the needs of senior administrators in Manitoba, and aligns with previous work that advocates for Manitoba-based, context-sensitive programming (Hickcox, 2002).

The career support cited in both the survey and interview data was having supportive relationships with spouses/partners. Interviewees also mentioned the need for supportive relationships with senior administrative colleagues, access to professional development, and the need for mentoring opportunities. Survey items in the career support section tended to be strongly negatively skewed, since larger proportions of respondents indicated they had "often" or "always" benefited favourably from a number of supports. Such a finding suggests that, for the most part, senior administrators are supported well in Manitoba, and career development programs should work to reinforce those supports while they address those that seem to be lacking.

The primary work challenges found in the survey data were the diversification of and/or increase in student needs, with other items tending to be either moderately skewed negatively or positively. This suggests two possibilities:

a) the work challenges senior administrators face across the province vary by context, and therefore vary moderately by virtue of how/where one is situated

b) people tend to work in environments where the challenges are moderately irritating, but not necessarily debilitating

Interviewee data supported these findings, and included the fact that senior administrators are facing challenges when dealing with rapidly changing curricula, provincial mandates, professional isolation, and balancing home and career.

The key to working with some of this complexity is to move towards a reconceptualization of the knowledge, skills, and role requirements of senior administrators in Manitoba, led by MASS, with input from those groups that have an interest in ensuring that the senior administrative cadre in Manitoba is highly qualified and supported. Such groups may include MECY, the four preparatory universities in the province, the Manitoba School Boards Association (formerly Manitoba Association of School Trustees), the Council of School Leaders, and the Manitoba Teachers' Society. Based on this reconceptualization, a career development program that targets both aspiring and current incumbents within senior administrative positions should be designed that reflects the complex and interconnected relationships between position, context, and gender. This development program must consider design and delivery elements and topics that reflect the needs of senior administrators and are accessible to all. It is my hope that the ideas presented in this monograph offer a starting point for such a discussion, to the end that senior administrators in Manitoba can feel supported in their roles as educational leaders of the public school system.

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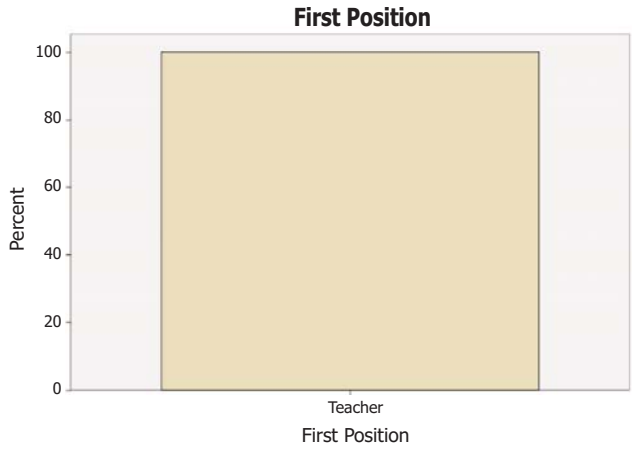
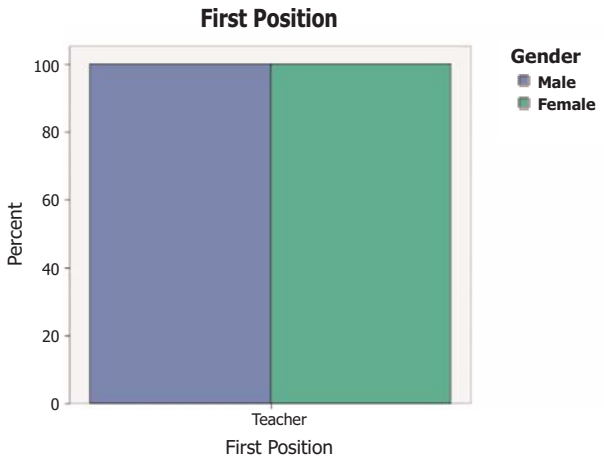
Appendix A: Visual Career Paths

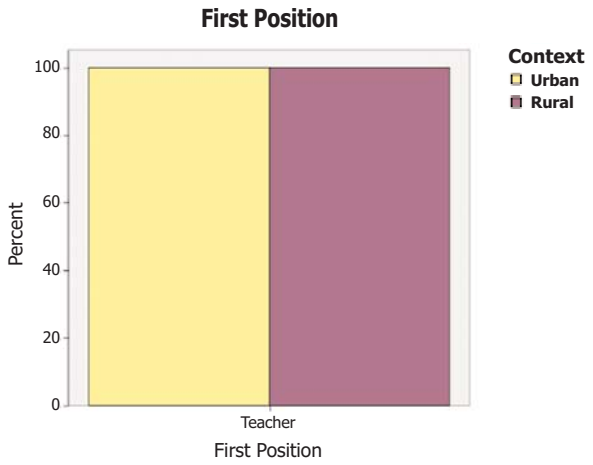
Career Path of Senior Administrators in Manitoba (with Leaves)

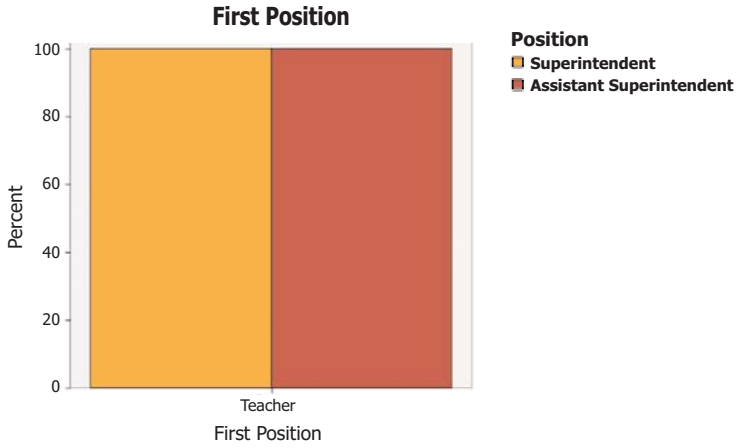
Average 21.76 years of service in 5.41 positions before entering first senior administrative positions.

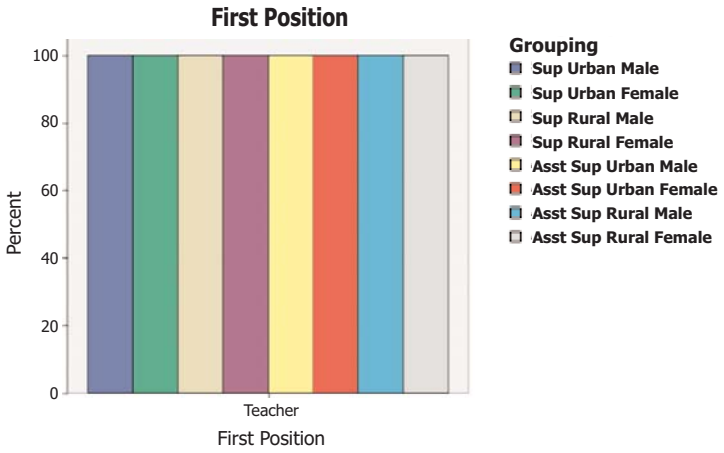
Position 1: Average Time Served 5.59 Years



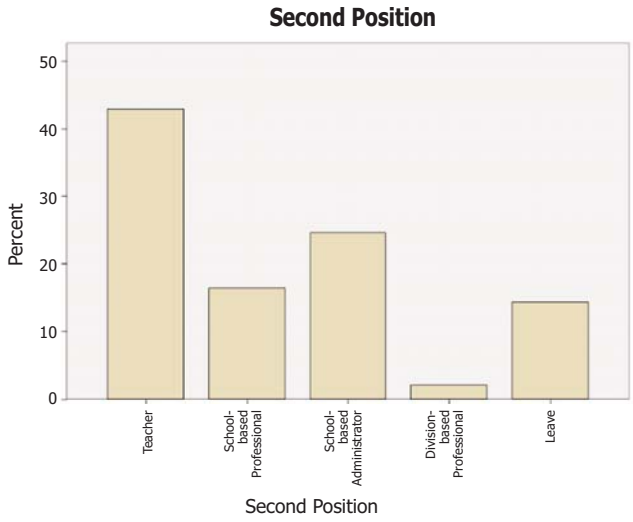


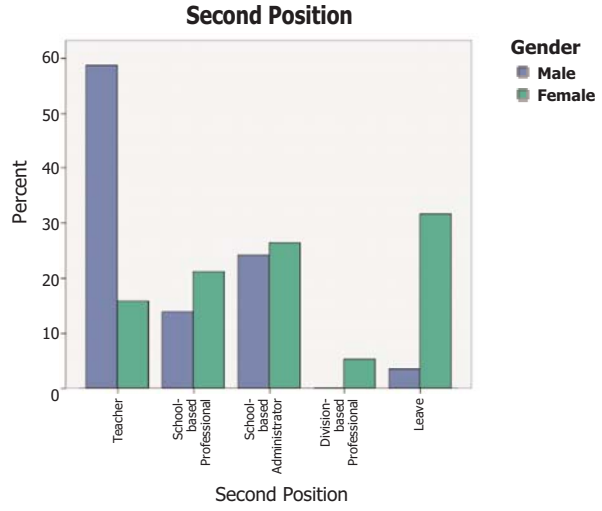

First Position
Context
Urban
Rural
Percent
100
80
60
40
20
0
Teacher
First Position

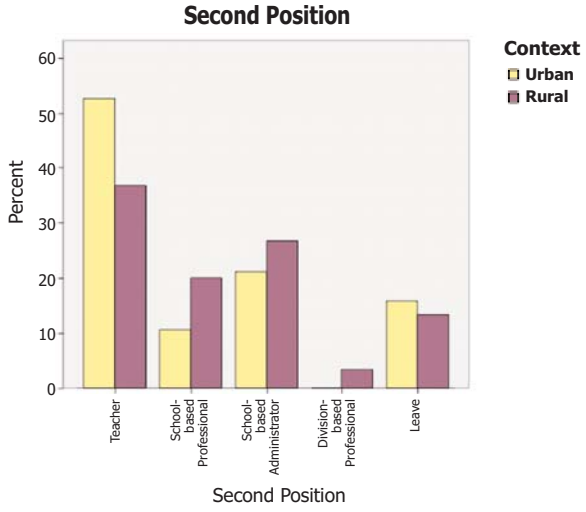

First Position
Position
Superintendent
Assistant Superintendent
Percent
100
80
60
40
20
0
Teacher
First Position

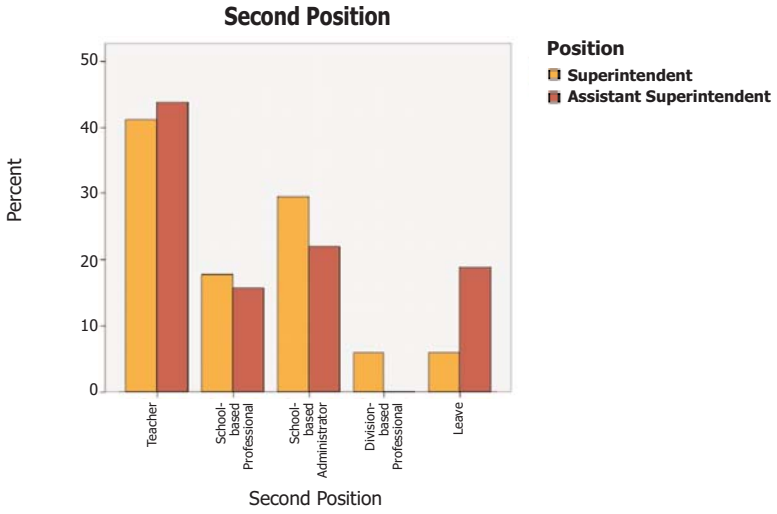

First Position
Grouping
Sup Urban Male
Sup Urban Female
Sup Rural Male
Sup Rural Female
Asst Sup Urban Male
Asst Sup Urban Female
Asst Sup Rural Male
Asst Sup Rural Female
Percent
100
80
60
40
20
0
Teacher
First Position

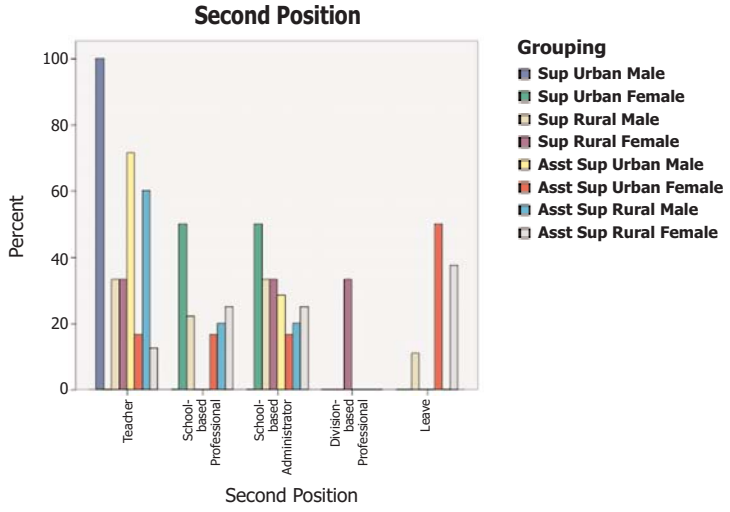
Position 2: Average Time Served 4.44 Years



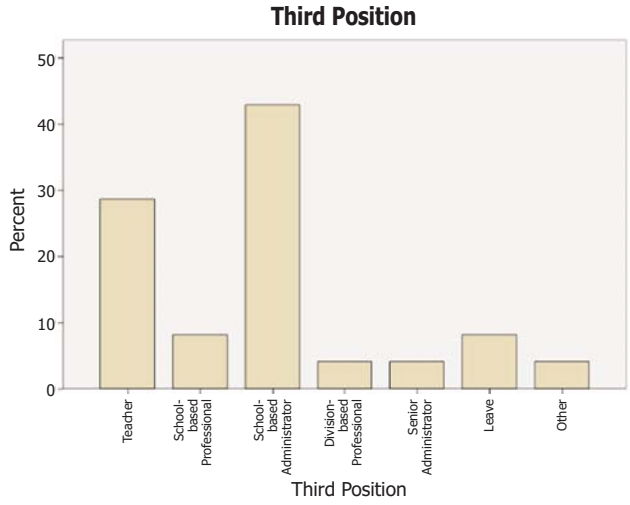


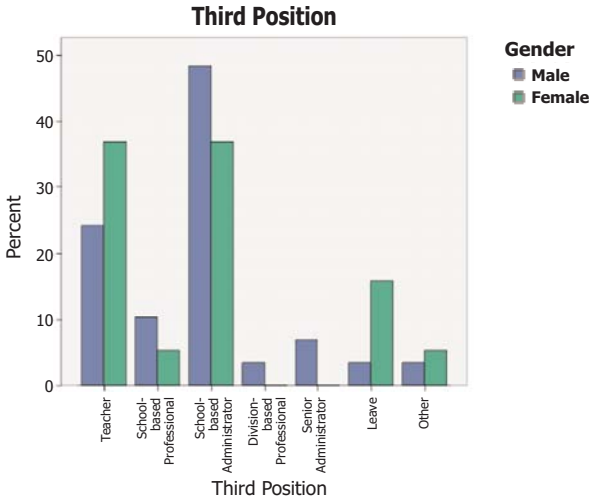


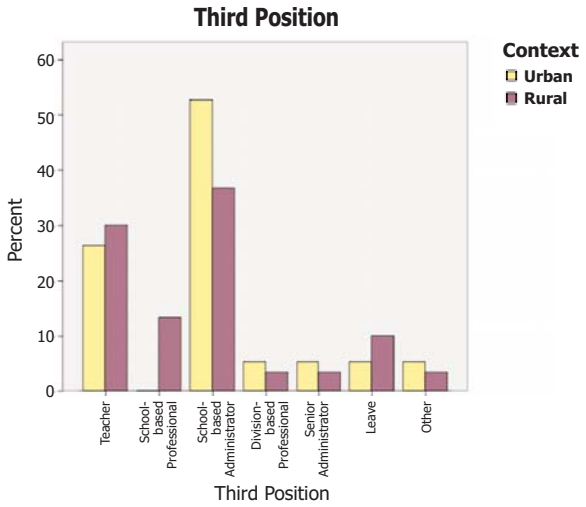

Second Position
Percent
50
40
30
20
10
0
Teacher
School-based Professional
School-based Administrator
Division-based Professional
Leave
Second Position
Position
Superintendent
Assistant Superintendent

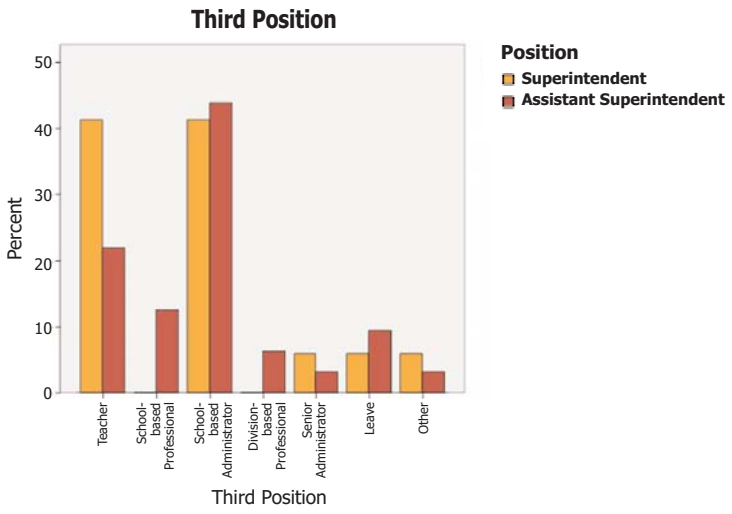

Second Position
Percent
100
80
60
40
20
0
Teacher
School-based Professional
School-based Administrator
Division-based Professional
Leave
Second Position
Grouping
Sup Urban Male
Sup Urban Female
Sup Rural Male
Sup Rural Female
Asst Sup Urban Male
Asst Sup Urban Female
Asst Sup Rural Male
Asst Sup Rural Female

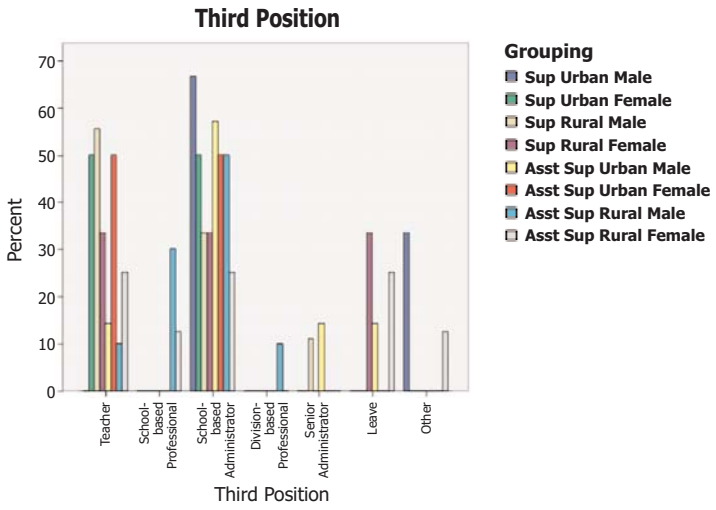
Position 3: Average Time Served 3.81 Years



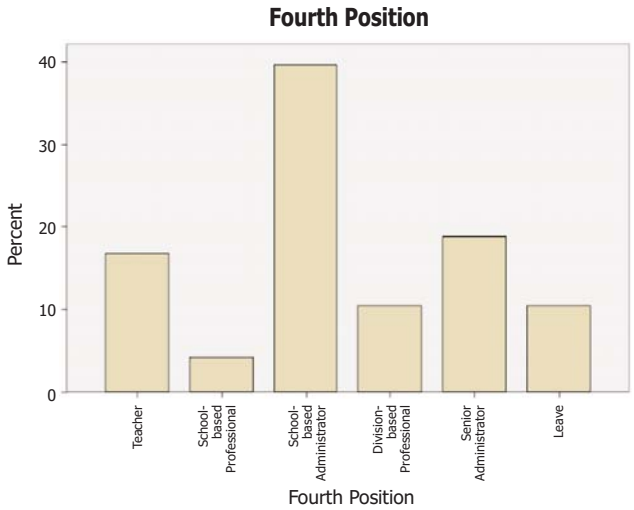


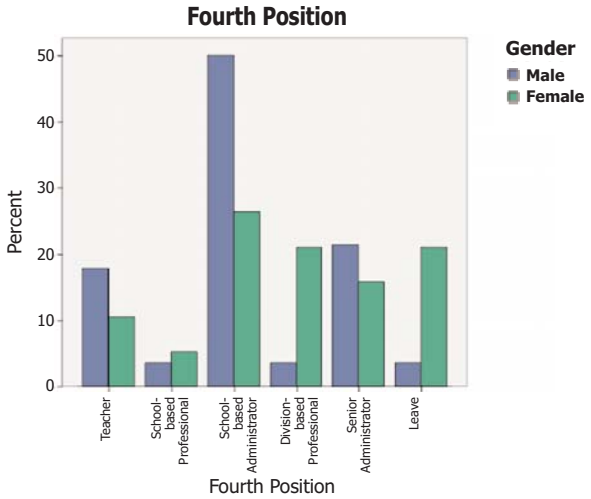


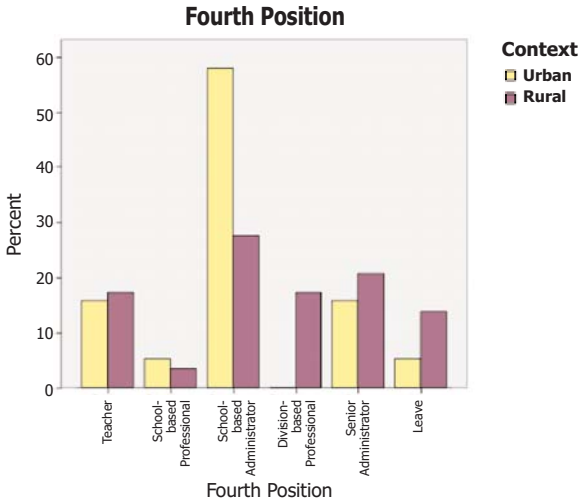

Third Position
Percent
50
40
30
20
10
0
Teacher
School-based Professional
School-based Administrator
Division-based Professional
Senior Administrator
Leave
Other
Third Position
Position
Superintendent
Assistant Superintendent

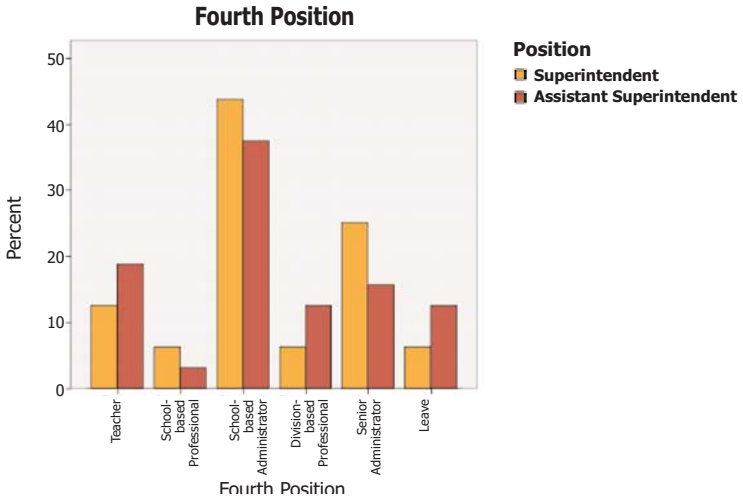

Third Position
Percent
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Teacher
School-based Professional
School-based Administrator
Division-based Professional
Senior Administrator
Leave
Other
Third Position
Grouping
Sup Urban Male
Sup Urban Female
Sup Rural Male
Sup Rural Female
Asst Sup Urban Male
Asst Sup Urban Female
Asst Sup Rural Male
Asst Sup Rural Female

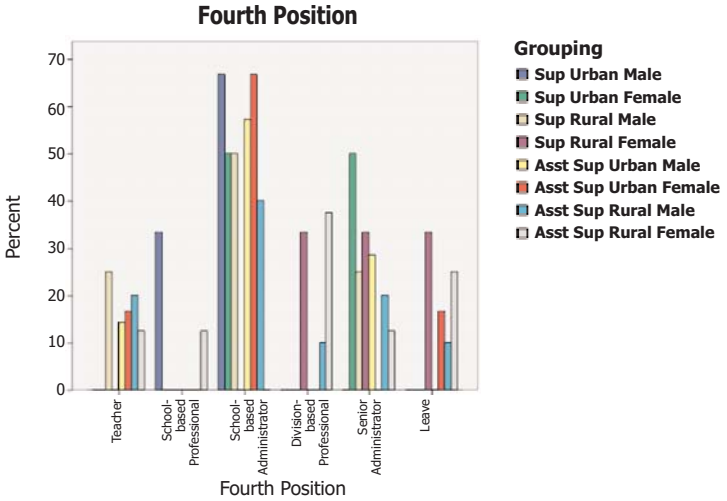
Position 4: Average Time Served 3.43 Years



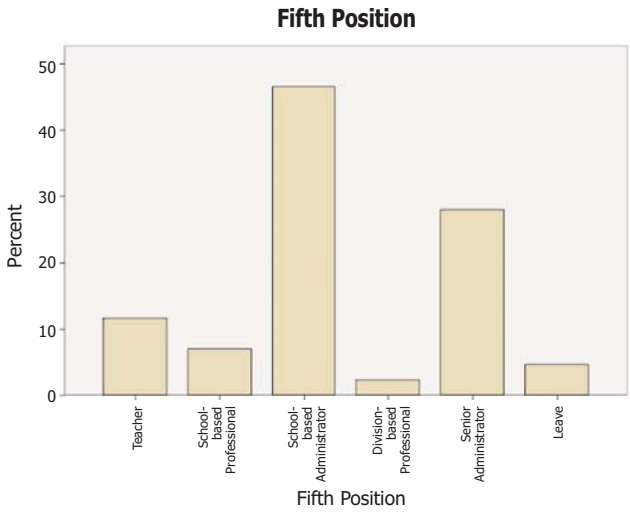


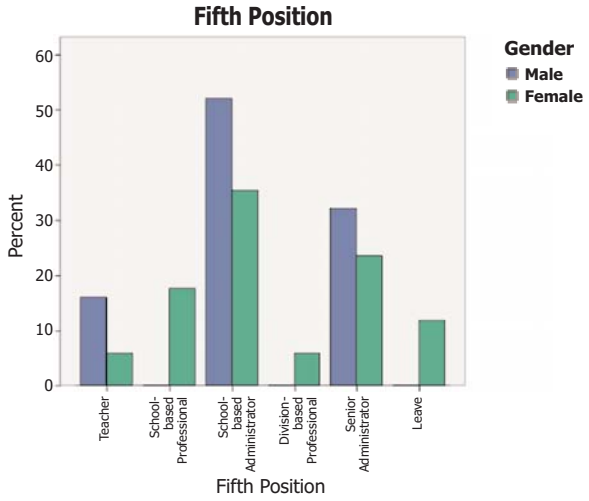


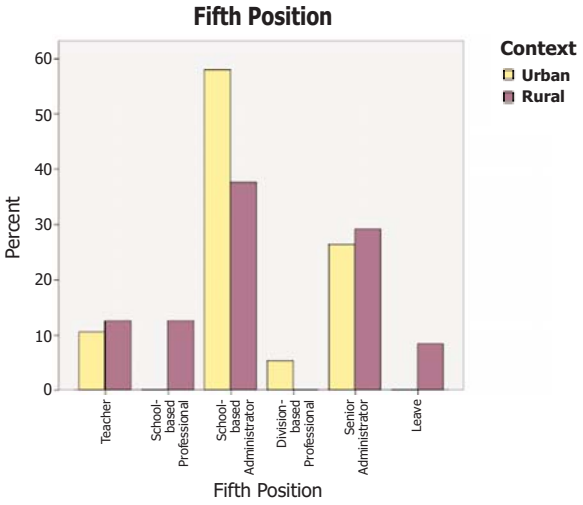

Fourth Position
Percent
50
40
30
20
10
0
Teacher
School-based Professional
School-based Administrator
Division-based Professional
Senior Administrator
Leave
Fourth Position
Position
Superintendent
Assistant Superintendent

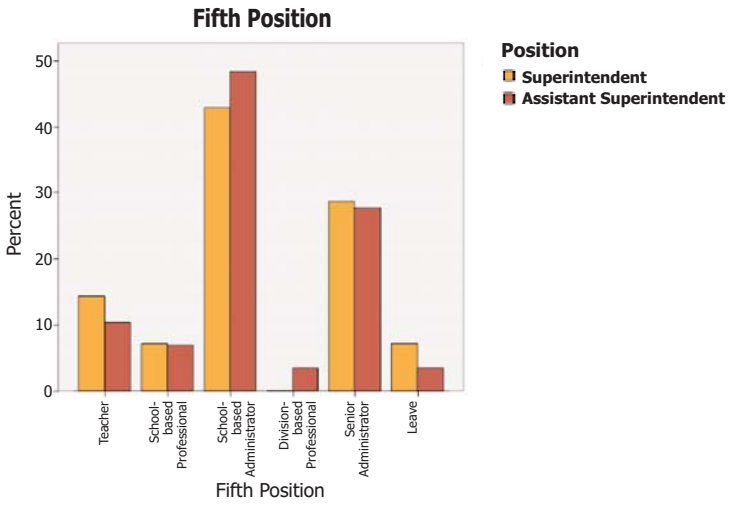

Fourth Position
Percent
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Teacher
School-based Professional
School-based Administrator
Division-based Professional
Senior Administrator
Leave
Fourth Position
Grouping
Sup Urban Male
Sup Urban Female
Sup Rural Male
Sup Rural Female
Asst Sup Urban Male
Asst Sup Urban Female
Asst Sup Rural Male
Asst Sup Rural Female

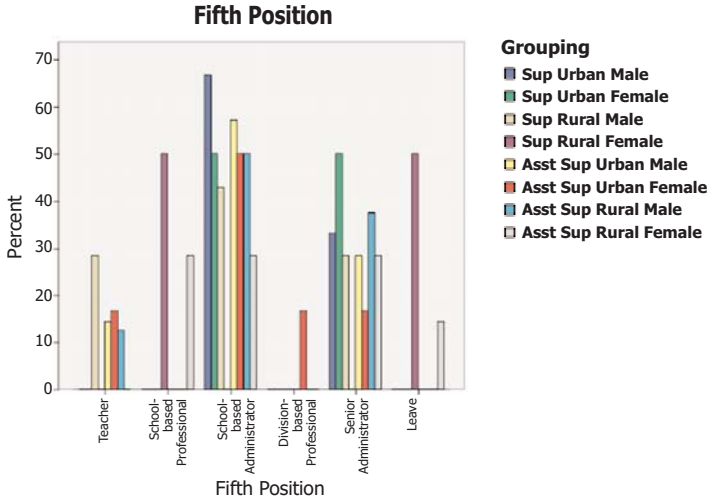
Position 5: Average Time Served 3.55 Years



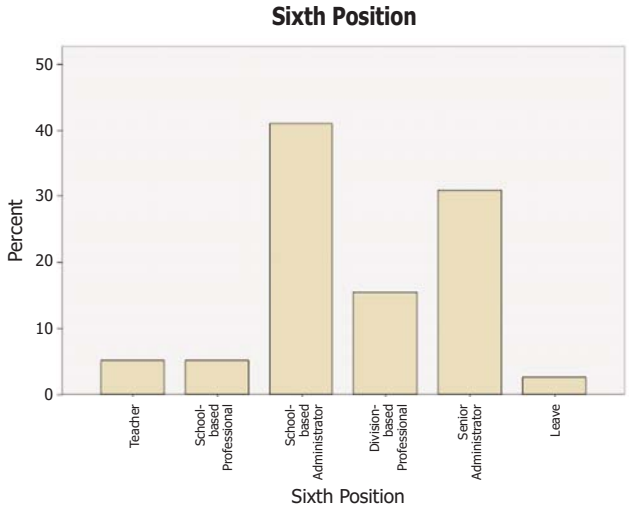


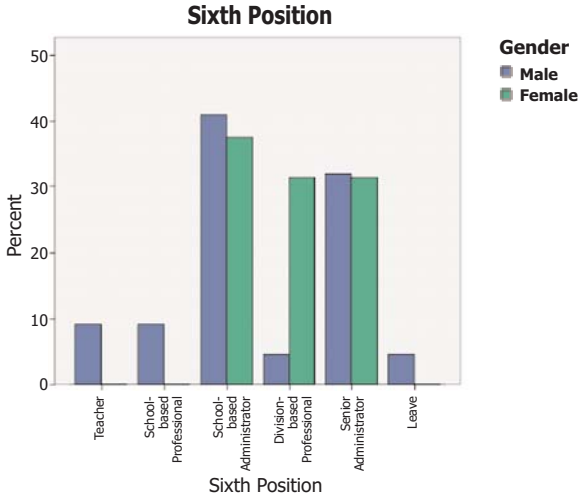


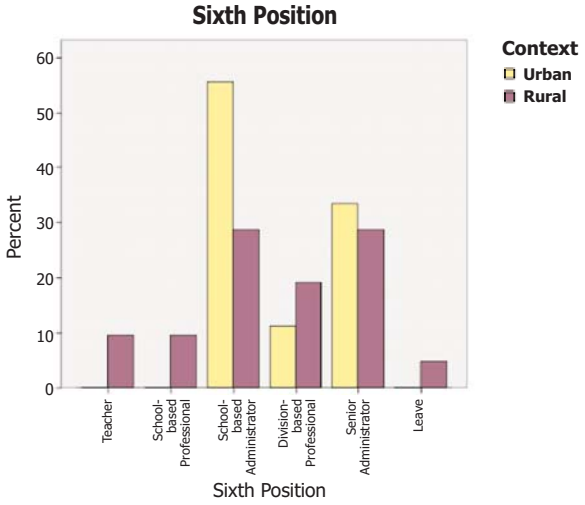

Fifth Position
Percent
50
40
30
20
10
0
Teacher
School-based Professional
School-based Administrator
Division-based Professional
Senior Administrator
Leave
Fifth Position
Position
Superintendent
Assistant Superintendent

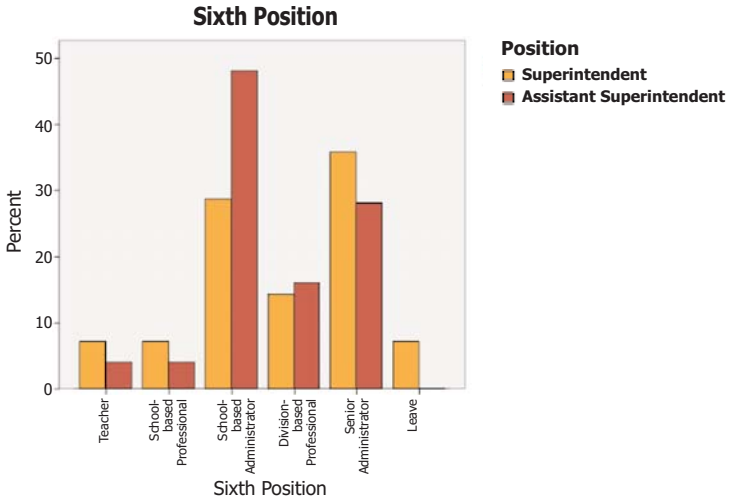

Fifth Position
Percent
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Teacher
School-based Professional
School-based Administrator
Division-based Professional
Senior Administrator
Leave
Fifth Position
Grouping
Sup Urban Male
Sup Urban Female
Sup Rural Male
Sup Rural Female
Asst Sup Urban Male
Asst Sup Urban Female
Asst Sup Rural Male
Asst Sup Rural Female

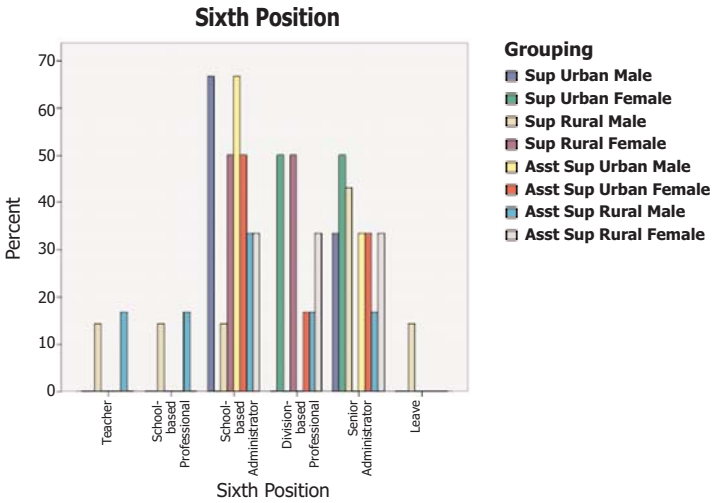
Position 6: Average Time Served 3.51 Years



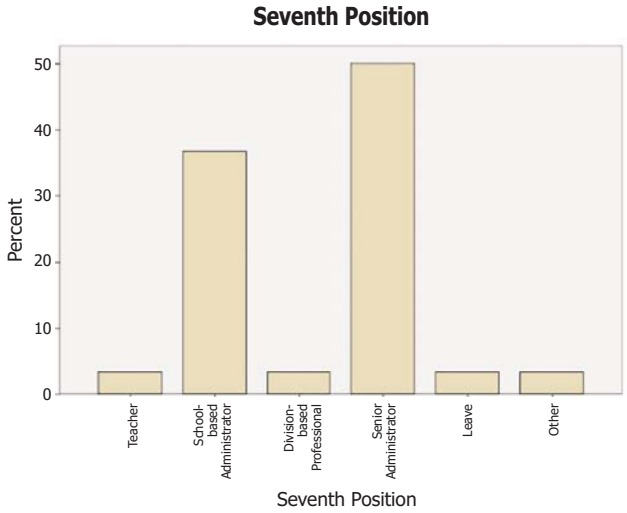


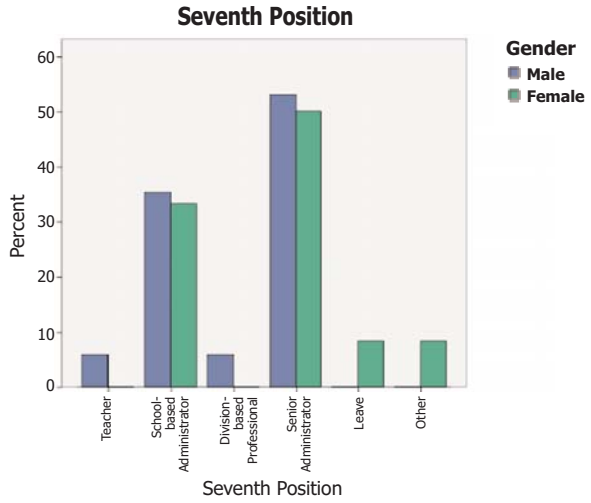


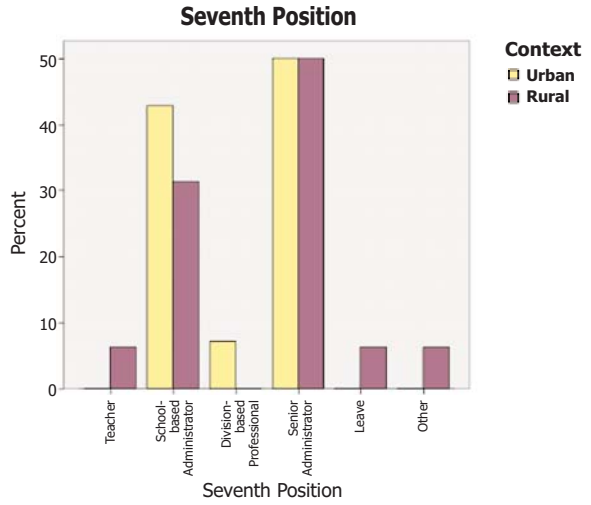

Sixth Position
Percent
50
40
30
20
10
0
Teacher
School-based Professional
School-based Administrator
Division-based Professional
Senior Administrator
Leave
Sixth Position
Position
Superintendent
Assistant Superintendent

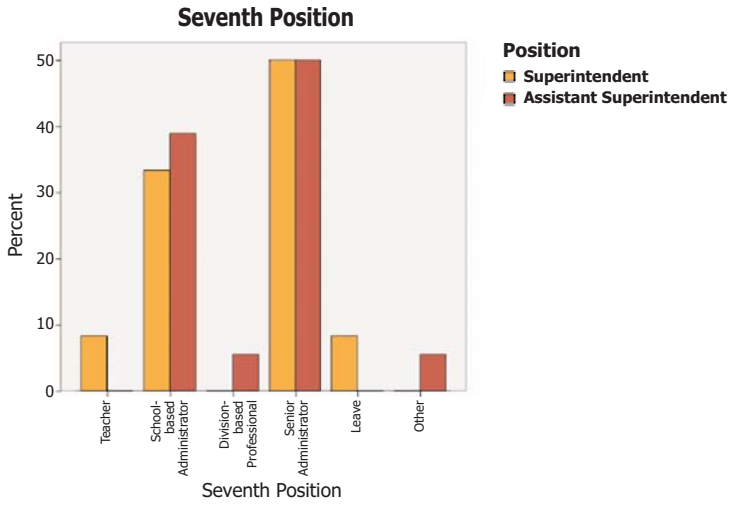

Sixth Position
Percent
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Teacher
School-based Professional
School-based Administrator
Division-based Professional
Senior Administrator
Leave
Sixth Position
Grouping
Sup Urban Male
Sup Urban Female
Sup Rural Male
Sup Rural Female
Asst Sup Urban Male
Asst Sup Urban Female
Asst Sup Rural Male
Asst Sup Rural Female

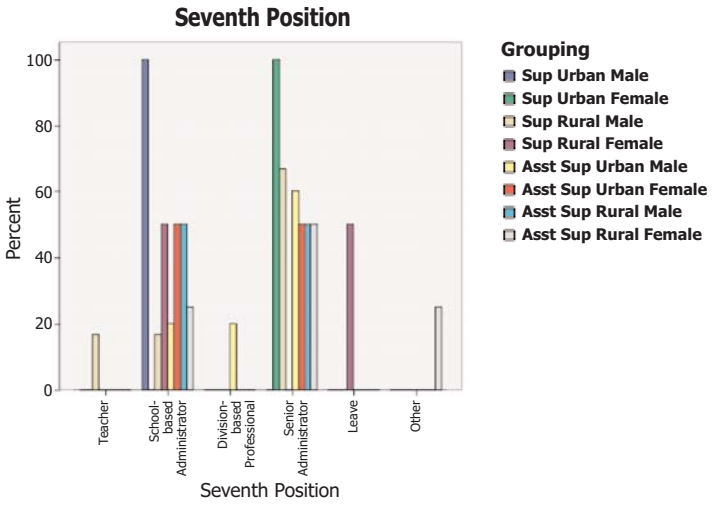
Position 7


Seventh Position
Percent
50
40
30
20
10
0
Teacher
School-based Administrator
Division-based Professional
Senior Administrator
Leave
Other
Seventh Position


Seventh Position
Gender
Male
Female
Percent
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Teacher
School-based Administrator
Division-based Professional
Senior Administrator
Leave
Other
Seventh Position


Seventh Position
Context
Urban
Rural
Percent
50
40
30
20
10
0
Teacher
School-based Administrator
Division-based Professional
Senior Administrator
Leave
Other
Seventh Position


Seventh Position
Percent
50
40
30
20
10
0
Teacher
School-based Administrator
Division-based Professional
Senior Administrator
Leave
Other
Seventh Position
Position
Superintendent
Assistant Superintendent


Seventh Position
Percent
100
80
60
40
20
0
Teacher
School-based Administrator
Division-based Professional
Senior Administrator
Leave
Other
Seventh Position
Grouping
Sup Urban Male
Sup Urban Female
Sup Rural Male
Sup Rural Female
Asst Sup Urban Male
Asst Sup Urban Female
Asst Sup Rural Male
Asst Sup Rural Female

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