How Superintendent Retention, Mobility, and Attrition Vary by Personal and District Characteristics: An Indiana Study.

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The accomplishment of finishing my coursework and dissertation from Indiana University has been challenging. Throughout this ten-year journey, I have been blessed with two wonderful kids, struggled through a global pandemic while working in a dual role as superintendent and principal of a PreK–8th grade building, coached multiple youth sports, driven many bus routes, and become a deacon at my church. This accomplishment would not have been possible without the support of so many individuals.

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Branden Roeder

How Superintendent Retention, Mobility, and Attrition Vary by Personal and District Characteristics: An Indiana Study.

Superintendent retention is associated with increased student achievement and, potentially, a district's financial stability. Prior research suggests that retention, mobility, and attrition may be influenced by personal and professional factors such as gender, race/ethnicity, years of experience, and amount of compensation. Likewise, a district's urbanicity, size, financial condition, and political culture among school board members predict whether superintendents remain in their districts. Notably, research on superintendent retention in Indiana is both dated and limited. Thus, there is clearly a need for a better understanding of superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition within the state. The current descriptive quantitative study analyzed data from the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) to calculate average retention, mobility, and attrition rates for superintendents in Indiana public school districts, how these rates vary based on personal and professional factors, and how long superintendents serve in their districts. This comprehensive quantitative study, spanning a decade of unique data on superintendent and district characteristics, reveals that 84.5% of superintendents remained in the same district, while 4.1% moved to different districts within the state, and 11.4% left the state's education system all together. The state retained superintendents differently depending on their personal and district characteristics. Women and leaders of color were more likely to remain in the same district than men. Superintendents in rural settings were more likely to move than superintendents in urban and suburban areas. On average, superintendents remained in their school districts for 4.07 years. The findings of this study

provide important insights into the retention, mobility, and attrition of superintendents in Indiana and suggest that, on the whole, the state's superintendent workforce behaves similarly to those of other states throughout the nation.

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RESUME

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Effective leadership is crucial to any organization's success (Boyland, 2013; Yates, 2016). The superintendent of schools is the most senior position in a district, and their success impacts students and communities (Metcalf, 2007; Ulrich, 2017). The position requires leadership skills capable of navigating the complexity and politics of public education (Byrd et al., 2006). Kamrath's (2007) dissertation found that "stressors embedded in the superintendency make it a very demanding job" (p. 1). School districts struggle to retain successful superintendents (Metcalf 2007; Myers, 2011) due to board relations (Mountford, 2004), locale (Kamrath, 2007), and salary (Grissom & Mitani, 2016).The failure to retain superintendents "can impede the attainment of positive school reform" (Alsbury, 2008, p. 205). Each new superintendent has the potential to change district priorities and initiatives, resulting in a possible decline in district success (Hattar, 2013). Constant superintendent leadership can also improve the district's financial stability and infrastructure (Buchanan, 2006) and increase student achievement (Simpson, 2013). For these reasons, the retention of superintendents is a worthy problem for research.

Superintendent Retention and Student Achievement

Several studies have connected superintendent retention with student achievement. A dissertation written by Libka (2012) found a significant correlation between these factors in Illinois from 2001 to 2010, particularly when analyzing student math and reading scores on the American College Testing (ACT) exam. These results have been supported by other research

(Gibbens, 2019; Metcalf, 2007; Plotts & Guttmore, 2014; Rudolph, 2016; Simpson, 2013). Williams and Hatch (2012) suggest that this correlation may stem from a positive influence on employee retention, attendance, district-wide buy-in from students and staff, improved attendance, and decreased student discipline. Despite the strong connection between superintendent retention and student success, superintendents tend to be retained for shorter periods than professionals in other public-school positions in the United States (Ellerson et al., 2018). Continuous leadership changes can disrupt reform movements, preventing them from fully maturing (Jutabha, 2017; Leon, 2008). Although this relationship is well-documented, recent studies focusing on Indiana are sparse (Metcalf, 2007). This underscores the need for further research to explore the factors that contribute to longer superintendent retention.

Overview of the Problem

Research consistently indicates that superintendent retention is linked to improved student outcomes. However, frequent superintendent turnover continues to negatively impact districts nationwide (Buchanan, 2006). Since the first national study in 1923, superintendent retention has consistently been around six years (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). However, recent studies suggest that this rate has declined (Ellerson et al., 2018). Fullan (2007) posits that successful reform requires a minimum of five years of retention, implying that superintendents may not be retained long enough to fully implement their reform initiatives. States and districts must develop strategies to retain successful superintendents, with the overarching goal of improving education (Ulrich, 2017).

Various studies have examined superintendent retention in different states, including Indiana (Metcalf, 2007), Illinois (Boyland, 2013), Kentucky (Johnson et al., 2011), Texas (Trevino et al., 2008), and Oregon and Washington (Wolverton, 2004). These studies have identified causes for superintendent departure, ranging from political conflict with the school board (Hatrick, 2010; Moody, 2011), to budget struggles (Boyland & Ellis, 2015; Yates & De Jong, 2018), and salary differences (Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Ulrich, 2017). More research is needed to understand superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition and how these vary based on personal and district characteristics. Understanding these factors could lead to better decision-making processes for future school boards and superintendent candidates. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing descriptive information related to personal and district characteristics within the context of Indiana over a 10-year study.

Theoretical Framework

For at least four decades, scholars have studied why superintendents leave their districts (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). Recent qualitative studies have focused on school board and superintendent relationships as the primary reasons for superintendent departures (Glasshoff, 2020; Schill, 2019). The analytical approach of dissatisfaction theory examines the impact of school board dissatisfaction with the superintendent. However, this theory is limited, as it considers only one predictor for retention. This study addresses this limitation by acknowledging that superintendents leave districts for various reasons, including career advancement and decisions regarding their personal lives.

This study adopts a labor market perspective, viewing superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition as decisions made by both parties: superintendent (labor supply) and the school board (labor demand). This analytical framework has been previously applied to the retention of teacher and building-level administrators (Baker et al., 2010; Guarino et al., 2006), as well as superintendent retention (Grissom & Anderson, 2012; Grissom & Mitani, 2016).

Labor demand represents the school board's decision to retain or dismiss the superintendent, weighing the costs of early termination, searching for a replacement, and political or public relations implications (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). While labor demand is a potential reason for a superintendent's departure, this study focuses more directly on labor supply, representing the superintendent's decision to stay or leave based on factors such as salary, district characteristics, and job satisfaction. Studies have shown that superintendents often leave for personal reasons such as career advancement and district locale (Byrd et al., 2006; Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Metcalf, 2007). This framework is used to explain how average retention, mobility, and attrition vary based on the personal characteristics of the superintendent and district characteristics such as enrollment size and locale.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigated public school superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition in Indiana between 2010–2011 and 2020–2021. Using a state-level dataset, the study calculated year-to-year retention, mobility, and attrition, then averaged these rates across the 10-year period based on personal and district characteristics. As such, the study adds to the existing research by identifying which of these characteristics contribute to longer retention and which characteristics

contribute to mobility and attrition. The study considers three research questions: (1) What proportion of superintendents stay, move or leave an Indiana school district from one year to the next? (2) How do superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition vary by personal and district characteristics? (3) What is the average number of years a superintendent remained in the same school district between 2010–2011 and 2020–2021? To answer these questions, the study used a descriptive quantitative research design drawing upon a unique dataset obtained from a records request to the Indiana Department of Education. The data included personal and district characteristics for every public-school superintendent employed in the state between 2010–2011 and 2020–2021. Additionally, the records request provided the name and school personnel number of each superintendent and where they were employed at the beginning of each school year. Lastly, the records request included details on district characteristics such as enrollment size, locale, and student demographic information.

Significance of the Study

Strong leadership at the highest level of a school district establishes a vision that drives both financial and academic success (Boyland & Ellis, 2015). Gaining a deeper understanding of characteristics that promote longer retention can help school districts foster a supportive culture for subsequent leaders. Research suggests that effective superintendent leadership can impact student achievement by as much as 1% to 10% (Blazar & Schueler, 2022). In turn, crucial roles like the superintendent require longer retention to ensure a sustained, positive impact over time. (Trevino et al., 2008). With a well-founded knowledge of factors that lead to longer

superintendent retention, this study's findings will help future school boards to select their next district leaders.

This study offers valuable insight for school boards, political leaders, future scholars, university educational leadership programs, and prospective superintendent candidates. One of the most important duties of a board of education is to hire and retain a capable superintendent of schools (Hattar, 2013). By providing quantitative research on superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition rates in Indiana, this study enables school boards to better understand the impact of personal and district characteristics on these metrics. Political leaders can utilize this information to develop strategies to improve retention rates and, potentially, student achievement. Furthermore, this research enriches the academic literature, supporting future scholars' investigation of superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition.

University educational leadership programs can also benefit from these findings by incorporating them into their curricula, thereby better preparing future leaders for school district leadership roles. Prospective superintendent candidates will gain a deeper understanding of the district characteristics that contribute to longer retention. Finally, current superintendents can use this research to reflect on their own attributes and district compatibility, potentially leading to more informed career decisions and longer retention in their roles. Investing in research on superintendency provides valuable insights that can inform both practice and policy. This, in turn, strengthens student outcomes and contributes to a more robust system of governance.

Definition of Terms

Superintendent

Chief administrative officer of a school corporation (Indiana Code 20-18-2-21)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

The primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education. This organization's website was used to obtain locale data from each district.

Locale

A district's designation as rural, suburban, or urban, based on information from the NCES website.

Retention

The period during which a professional, in this case, a superintendent, remains in the same district.

Mobility

The movement of a superintendent from one Indiana district to another.

Attrition

The departure of a superintendent from the Indiana system, indicated by their absence from the data.

Limitations

This study was impacted by three primary limitations. First, the findings from Indiana may not be applicable to states with different demographic profiles, limiting the generalizability of the results. Second, this study observed the retention, mobility, and attrition of superintendents between 2010–2011 and 2020–2021, a timeframe that includes the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. This unprecedented event may have influenced the study's outcomes, especially attrition rates. Lastly, the study does not delve into the specific reasons superintendents chose to stay,

move, or leave the Indiana public school system. Future research could address this gap by exploring the underlying factors driving these decisions.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is structured in five chapters. Chapter Two presents a comprehensive literature review, examining previous research on superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition. It also introduces superintendent and district characteristics pertinent to the study. Chapter Three details the quantitative design, including data collection, cleaning, and analysis methods, as well as potential limitations. Chapter Four presents the findings from the study research. Finally, Chapter Five contextualizes these findings within the broader literature on superintendent retention and offers recommendations for future research, key stakeholders in Indiana public education systems, and state policy.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

A substantial body of research explores the multiplying career challenges and retention issues faced by superintendents (Byrd, et al., 2006; Grissom & Anderson, 2012; Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Lamkin, 2006; Natkin et al., 2002; Noppe et al., 2013; Trevino et al., 2008). While the retention of school district leaders has been studied extensively across the United States, there is a notable paucity of research specific to Indiana. In one of few Indiana studies, Metcalf (2007) investigated the relationship between superintendent retention and student achievement in Indiana though his dissertation. This quantitative correlational comparative study, spanning from 1996–2006, found a positive correlation between retention and student achievement. Additionally, the study revealed that 82% of districts experienced a change in district-level leadership during the 10-year timeframe, with most departures attributed to career advancement.

Given that Metcalf's (2007) dissertation is over a decade old and does not examine the superintendent's personal characteristics or district characteristics in relation to retention, mobility, and attrition, there is a need for more current research on superintendent retention in Indiana. This study addresses this gap by exploring the relationships of superintendent characteristics (gender, race/ethnicity, years of experience, and salary) and district characteristics (locale, student enrollment, free and reduced lunch percentages, racial and ethnic diversity of the student population, percentage of students that qualify for special education services, and percentage of students that qualify as English language learners) with average retention, mobility, and attrition rates over a 10-year period.

Retention in a district's highest leadership position can have a long-lasting positive impact on the district (Trevino et al., 2008; Ulrich, 2017), including increased student

achievement (Adelman & Lemos, 2021; Gibbens, 2019; Lavo & Boiko, 2017; Plotts & Guttmore, 2014; Simpson, 2013). Conversely, a district leader's departure can create a domino effect, leading to continuous shifts across multiple districts (Ulrich, 2017). Therefore, understanding these dynamics is crucial for school boards, current and future district leaders, scholars, and legislators.

This chapter is organized into four sections. The first introduces the research on the reasons superintendents have historically left their districts. The second explains the importance of superintendent retention, particularly in relation to student achievement. The third details historical retention rates with a focus on Indiana. Finally, the literature review examines the relationship between retention, mobility, attrition, and superintendents' personal characteristics (gender, race/ethnicity, years of experience, and salary), as well as district characteristics (locale, enrollment size, racial and ethnic diversity of the student population, free and reduced lunch rates, special education percentages, and English language learner percentages).

Reasons for Departure

Numerous studies have examined the reasons superintendents leave their districts, identifying common factors such as political conflict, budget issues, and salary concerns (Glasshoff, 2020; Metcalf, 2007; Schill, 2019; Ulrich, 2017). This study aims to contribute to the existing research by providing insights into the variance in percentage of retention, mobility, and attrition based on personal and district characteristics.

Political Conflict and Retention

Educational politics, ranging from community members to state and federal lawmakers, significantly impact district success. Among these levels of politics, local and state politics potentially have the most direct influence on superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition.

Local school boards are responsible for hiring district leaders and collaborating with them for the betterment of the district. Hatrick (2010) emphasizes that the primary duty of a school board is to hire a competent superintendent, noting that a majority vote does not always result in a stable relationship. Research consistently shows that tension between a school board and its superintendent often leads to the leader's voluntary or involuntary departure (Moody, 2011; Mountford, 2004). For instance, Moody (2011) found that 82.61% of superintendent departures in Nebraska were due to strained board relationships. However, Glass and Franceschini (2007) suggest that many superintendents maintain positive relationships with their school boards. Boyland and Ellis (2015) report that in Indiana, board relations were the least cited reason for superintendent departures, with issues such as vouchers and funding cuts being more prominent.

State politics also play a crucial role in superintendent retention. Boyland and Ellis (2015) conducted a quantitative study analyzing surveys from Indiana superintendents to investigate a significant number of retirements, which included 21% of the state's superintendents in a single year. They determined that state funding cuts, particularly those related to voucher programs, were a primary cause of these retirements. By examining both local and state political contexts, this study aims to enhance the understanding of the multifaceted reasons behind departures and how these factors have affected year-to-year averages of retention, mobility, and attrition in Indiana public education school districts over a 10-year period.

As Boyland and Ellis (2015) note, state funding issues can contribute significantly to superintendent attrition. Additionally, the complexity of educational reform often results in shorter superintendent retention (Trevino, et al., 2008). Indiana, known for its extensive education reforms, provides a pertinent backdrop for this study (Boyland & Ellis, 2015; Streeter, 2011). Over the last 15 years, Indiana has implemented numerous reforms, including:

- Increased accountability and standardized assessments,
- An innovative educator evaluation model with performance-based pay components,
- Grading of schools and districts,
- Revisions to the school funding process and formula,
- New academic standards,
- Full-day kindergarten, and
- Expansion of charter schools and a rapidly growing voucher program (Hirth & Eiler, 2014).

Indiana's voucher program is particularly notable, being the fifth largest in the nation (Catt, 2022). Funded from the same sources as public education, the voucher program effectively reduces public education budgets. For instance, during the 2017–2018 school year, the voucher program cost $151 million, and this cost increased to $193.1 million in 2021-2022 school year (Catt, 2022; Downs, 2018). These state-level policy changes introduce a range of new challenges and demands, placing additional pressures on district leaders to adapt, comply with evolving regulations, and effectively manage the increased complexity of their responsibilities.

Budgets and Retention

Many studies have established a link between superintendent retention and funding shortfalls related to state funding formulas (Boyland & Ellis, 2015; Yates & De Jong, 2018). Across the United States, school district budgets are often based on student counts taken on a specific day, known as "count day." These counts primarily determine the distribution of monies to the general fund, which covers classroom expenditures, such as salaries, while leaving local property taxes to cover other funds, such as bus replacement, transportation, and debt service (Bowling et al., 2019). In addition, Indiana tax caps, also known as the "circuit breaker," were introduced as part of a broad property tax reform in 2008 and later solidified through a constitutional amendment approved by voters in 2010, with 71% approval (Bowling et al., 2019; Bradner, 2010). These caps limit taxes to 1% of assessed valuation for homeowners, 2% for agriculture properties, and 3% for business properties (Indiana Department of Local Government Finance, 2015). The tax caps aim to protect homeowners from rising costs, create a more predictable tax environment, and enhance economic competitiveness to attract businesses (Lagoni, 2011).

However, this system has created challenges for the superintendents, leading to disparities between past and future budgets (Bowling, et al., 2019). According to Bowling et al. (2019), district enrollment has significantly influenced funding losses, as districts receive additional funds per student for classroom expenditures, such as salaries, but lose substantial revenue for debt service and operations such as transportation, capital expenses, and construction. This often necessitates transferring funds and potentially cutting staff and personnel benefits to compensate for the funding shortfall (Gentry & Hirth, 2017; Lagoni, 2011).

The legislative changes in Indiana's school funding at the start of the century created disparities, which benefited districts with stable or growing economies through higher enrollment

and larger state funds. Conversely, districts with declining enrollments experienced funding reductions. Trevino et al. (2008) identified funding shortages as one of the top three challenges for superintendents. Nylan (2019) echoed this, stating that "school system leaders face pressures to balance operating budgets, keep teacher salaries competitive, and invest more in student achievement" (p. 17). Stewart et al.'s (2012) study supports this conclusion, with the authors stating that a lack of funding is one of the four most prevalent reasons for superintendent mobility or attrition. A declining budget can cause additional stress on the superintendent, possibly causing them to contemplate leaving for a more financially stable corporation or in response to pressure from the school board.

Salaries and Retention

Increasing compensation can significantly influence a superintendent's decision to change positions. Many superintendents start their careers in small, rural districts and use these positions as steppingstones to advance their careers (Alsbury, 2008). Typically, superintendents in rural school districts earn smaller salaries due to lower enrollments, making retention a challenge for these districts (Ulrich, 2017). Yates and De Jong (2018) suggest that "the most significant factor that would convince young superintendents to remain with a school district is offering an increase in compensation" (p. 17). In Missouri, Grissom and Mitani (2016) found that a $10,000 salary increase equated to a 10% greater likelihood of retaining a superintendent (Grissom & Mitani, 2016). Their study concluded that higher salaries are associated with longer retention rates, a finding consistent with research on private-sector CEOs, which also indicated that higher compensation leads to longer tenures (Shen et al., 2010).

One of the characteristics included in this study is district size, a crucial factor in superintendent compensation packages (Ulrich, 2017). Superintendent salaries are closely tied to both retention and mobility, with pensions also playing a significant role in superintendents' career decisions. For example, a higher salary combined with extensive experience can increase the likelihood of retirement (Domene, 2012). In Indiana, superintendent pensions are calculated by multiplying 1.1% by the product of total years of experience in the state and the highest five years of salary (Toutkoushian et al., 2011). As a result, a superintendent nearing the end of their career might choose to move to a different district to secure a higher compensation package, which would subsequently boost their annual pension income. This strategic move highlights the interconnected nature of salary, mobility, and retirement planning, as superintendents weigh their options to maximize long-term financial security. This study used cross-tabulation to examine whether the inclusion of salary alongside other characteristics influenced retention, mobility, and attrition averages. Understanding these factors is crucial to addressing superintendent departure, and this study adds valuable insight to this gap.

Why Superintendent Retention Matters

Numerous studies have established a strong link between superintendent retention and student achievement (Gibbens, 2019; Plotts & Guttmore, 2014; Simpson, 2013). This connection is likely due to the stability and continuity in leadership that long-term superintendents provide, allowing for the sustained implementation of educational policies and initiatives. When superintendents remain in their positions over time, they can build trust with staff, foster a cohesive vision for the district, and effectively address challenges, all of which contributes to a more consistent and improved academic environment for students. Gibbens's dissertation

showed a positive correlation between superintendent retention and district-wide math scores as measured by the Texas Assessment of Academic Excellence. Plotts and Guttmore (2014) discovered that the total number of years of superintendent experience had a positive impact on student achievement in New Jersey districts where high percentages of students received free and reduced lunch. In another study, Simpson (2013) found a positive association between superintendent tenure and student achievement in rural Appalachian Kentucky school districts, noting significant growth in achievement a superintendent stayed in their district for five or more years.

Superintendents' responsibilities extend across many departments, impacting not only student achievement but also transportation, finance, curriculum, human relations, community relations, and policy implementation (Weiss et al., 2015). Changes in leadership can disrupt ongoing reform efforts, shift focus to short-term goals, and create fiscal burdens, often leading to instability and inconsistency within the school system (Grissom & Mitani, 2016). Additionally, frequent turnover in the superintendent position can undermine long-term strategic planning, hindering the district's ability to achieve sustained improvement.

Student Achievement

Further research supports the connection between superintendent retention and student achievement. Myers (2011) found a significant positive relationship between superintendent retention and third-grade state-wide reading assessment scores in Kansas. Johnson et al. (2011) concluded that Kentucky districts with no superintendent turnover between the 1998-1999 and 2007-2008 school years achieved the highest student achievement ratings, while those with two or more changes in superintendents had the lowest. Based on these findings, retaining district-level leadership remains critical for sustaining positive student outcomes and achievement,

suggesting that school boards consider superintendent retention in their decision-making processes.

Superintendent Retention

While the media often highlights the departure of high-profile superintendents, the portrayal of high turnover in the position is not entirely accurate (The Broad Center, 2018). Research across different states reveals varying retention periods. For instance, Glass et al. (2000) found that superintendents nationwide averaged 8.75 years per district. In Iowa, the average was eight years in 2013–2014 (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2014). A New York study in 2012 showed an average of 4.9 years (Terranova et al., 2012). Bowser's (2021) recent dissertation based in Ohio indicated an average tenure of 6.48 years, with a standard deviation of 6.07 years. More recent research in Indiana indicated an average retention of approximately five years, three years shorter than previously reported (Ellerson, et al., 2018). These discrepancies highlight the need for further exploration of superintendent retention rates across different states and within Indiana.

Although the average superintendent retention has historically been around six years, various factors, including urbanicity, enrollment, and salary, influence this figure. Urban districts tend to have shorter tenure compared to suburban and rural ones (Council for Great City Schools, 2010). Hattar (2013) suggests that the increasing age of superintendents over the last 70 years may have contributed to shorter tenures. Boyland and Ellis (2015) observed that the proportion of superintendents over 60 years old rose from 8% in 2000 to 18% in 2010. As responsibilities and job insecurity have grown, superintendents often delay accepting a position as the district

leader until later in life (Terranova et al., 2012). Late entry can lead to shorter retentions due to earlier retirements, affecting retention rates.

Superintendent Characteristics and Retention, Mobility, and Attrition

This study examines how retention, mobility, and attrition vary based on four personal characteristics of Indiana superintendents. The four studied characteristics are as follows:

1. Gender
2. Race/Ethnicity
3. Years of experience
4. Salary

Superintendent Gender

Historically, males have dominated superintendency across the country (Bjork et al., 2005; Finnan & McCord, 2016; White, 2023). While women account for a large proportion of the K–12 public school workforce, they are underrepresented in leadership roles (USDOE, 2008; White, 2023). This underrepresentation is not due to a lack of motivation or qualifications among women (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011): "Women are twice as likely to have earned a doctorate in education, yet men are five times more likely to hold the job of superintendent of schools" (Wallace, 2014, p. 48). Superintendency has more gender inequality than other executive positions (Bjork et al., 2005; White, 2023). White (2023) notes that the "glass ceiling" in K–12 education is particularly thick, with women outnumbering men at every level except superintendency. Through a qualitative dissertation, Boyette (2019) found that gender bias

significantly affects the hiring process for superintendents, a conclusion supported by other studies (Banuelos, 2008; Whitaker, 2006). McLean et al. (2016) suggest that women experience marginalization when seeking the district-level positions.

However, research indicates that the gender gap in superintendency is narrowing (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011; Roger and Tienkin, 2020; White, 2023). In a national study, the proportion of female superintendents was found to increase from 13.1% in 2000 to 26.7% in 2020 (Roger & Tienkin, 2020). However, Indiana appears to be an outlier, with 17.2% of superintendents being female in the 2023–24 school year, slightly below the national average (White, 2023). In her dissertation findings, Clark-Saboda (2022) noted that women often leave the superintendency due to challenges in balancing home life and work, among other factors.

Career mobility is also influenced by gender. Yong-Lyon & Brunner (2009) found that career trajectories for superintendents differ by gender, with women often aspiring to leadership roles but facing greater obstacles. Brunner and Grogan's (2005) qualitative study showed that women aspire to be in leadership positions in school districts. Yong-Lyon and Brunner's (2009) work examined mobility within education professionals' career trajectories from teacher to central office leader. Mobility, in this context, refers to the movement of superintendents from one district to another within Indiana. Research on superintendent mobility that isolates gender as a variable is limited, highlighting the need for this study.

In addition to differences in mobility, there is also a disparity in attrition rates when comparing superintendents by gender. Attrition rates are higher among male superintendents. For instance, White's (2023) study from 2020–2024 found that men leave the professional at nearly twice the rate of women. Clark-Saboda (2022) identified four main reasons women leave the

superintendency: balancing home life with work responsibilities, marriage and partnership, leadership preparation and professional development, and school board dynamics. She notes that women superintendents are more likely to face challenges related to childcare and time away from family. Additionally, women often need higher degrees to obtain superintendent positions than men. She also suggests that gender stereotypes and increased oversight from school boards contribute to shorter retention for female superintendents.

Most research on the retention of women superintendents has been qualitative, focusing on personal narratives, leadership experiences, and the unique challenges faced by women in these roles (Boyette, 2019; Gresham & Sampson, 2019). However, as the dynamics of the profession continue to evolve, it becomes increasingly important to understand whether gender plays a significant role in superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring the potential impact of gender on these factors, aiming to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers and opportunities facing women superintendents. By examining gender as a critical factor, this study also hopes to contribute to the development of strategies and policies that support greater equity and diversity in educational leadership.

Superintendent Race/Ethnicity

Research has consistently shown that people of color are underrepresented in the superintendent workforce (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Rodriguez, 2019; Rodriguez, 2021; Simmons, 2012; Williams, 2018). As Alston (2005) notes, “In these United States, persons of color represent 10.9% of the nation’s teachers, 12.3% of the nation’s principals, but only 2.2% of the nation’s superintendents” (p. 675). More recent findings by Rodriguez (2019) indicate that in California, where 54% of students are Latino, only about 1.8% of superintendents identify as such, with

similar results in Texas. FanFan's (2022) dissertation found that only 5% of all district leaders in Massachusetts were people of color.

Previous research suggests that superintendents of color face different expectations, which may impact their retention. For instance, Parker (2009) states in her dissertation that superintendents of color feel they must "work harder, are questioned, and doubted more often, do not receive every possible opportunity to advance, are often treated as outsiders, are typecast into certain roles, have unfair expectations placed upon them, and don't 'play on a leveled field'" (p. 54). This highlights the unique challenges they face in their roles.

Most research on individuals who identify as people of color in superintendent positions has focused on the difficulties of the hiring process. The limited research on retention of superintendents who identify as people of color has often centered on women, adding the dimension of gender to the discussion. While many studies have documented the underrepresentation of people of color in superintendencies (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Williams, 2018) and proposed solutions (Brown, 2014), there is a paucity of research on the actual retention, mobility, and attrition of superintendents who identify as people of color, especially within the context of Indiana, a predominately rural state. This study addresses this gap in Indiana.

Superintendent Years of Experience

Retirement is a major factor in superintendent departures. Grissom and Anderson (2012) found that 40% of superintendent turnover was due to retirement. Typically, superintendents follow a career path from teacher to assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and finally,

superintendent. Consequently, many superintendents accept their first superintendent position later in life (Metcalf, 2007).

The most recent AASA decennial study by Rogers and Tienken (2020) revealed that superintendents are getting younger. Their study of 1,218 district leaders from 45 states found that in 2020, 59% of superintendents were hired before the age of 45, compared to 49.5% in 2010. This younger age of appointment may lead to higher retention rates in the future. For those close to retirement, superintendents typically consider 57 to be retirement age, which aligns with 35 years of service in roles contributing to a state retirement fund (Glass et al., 2000). Due to retirement, years of experience is a significant predictor of superintendent retention, with those near the end of their career leaving at higher rates (Grissom & Mitani, 2016). Continuous monitoring of superintendents' years of experience is essential to anticipate potential shortages of district leaders. While research has explored superintendent experience in terms of attrition, there is a gap in understanding experience through the lens of retention and mobility. This study contributes to this under-researched area.

Superintendent Salary

Compensation is a key factor influencing job changes, and this holds true for school district leaders. Many superintendents begin their careers in small, rural districts, using these positions as stepping stones to advance their careers (Alsbury, 2008). Yates and De Jong (2018) suggest that "the most significant factor that would convince young superintendents to remain with a school district is offering an increase in compensation" (p. 17). Superintendents often make lateral moves from small rural districts to larger, suburban, or urban districts (Glass et al., 2000). External factors, such as higher pay and better working conditions, matter in retention (Grissom

and Anderson, 2012). In their California study, Grissom and Anderson (2012) identified retention factors by matching surveys from superintendents, school boards, and local newspaper articles related to superintendent departures. They found that superintendents tend to move to higher-paying districts, with a salary increase of about $21,000 at the median ($p < 0.01$). Grissom and Mitani (2016) found similar results: a superintendent was 10% more likely to leave a district than stay in the current position for a $10,000 salary increase.

Research shows that superintendent mobility increases when superintendents are paid less than their regional peers (Grissom & Anderson, 2012; Grissom & Mitani, 2016). Wood et al. (2013) note the importance of competitive salaries. This trend mirrors the private sector, where higher chief executive officer compensation increases retention (Shen et al., 2010). For superintendents, those earning $84,000 to 94,000 annually were likely to move within two years, while higher-paid superintendents showed significantly higher retention (Grissom & Mitani, 2016). While salary is a known predictor of retention and mobility, there is a lack of research to determine whether attrition varies with superintendent salary. This study contributes to closing this research gap.

District Characteristics and Retention, Mobility, and Attrition

This study investigated six characteristics of Indiana school districts to determine how they affect superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition. The six characteristics investigated are as follows:

1. District locale
2. District enrollment
3. District percentage of students who receive free and reduced lunch

4. District percentage of students who qualify for special education services
5. District percentage of student racial/ethnic diversity
6. District percentage of students who qualify as English language learners

District characteristics significantly influence superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition. Numerous studies have explored the relationships between these factors. For example, retention has been linked to poverty (Cooper et al., 2000; Grissom & Anderson, 2012), enrollment size (Alsbury, 2008; Yates, 2016), percent of student minority population (Superville, 2018), percent of students that are English language learners (White, 2023), locale (Tekniepe, 2015), and special education. Below, literature related to each characteristic is reviewed.

District Locale

Research has suggested that superintendent retention can be linked to whether a district is rural, suburban, or urban (Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Yates, 2016). Many studies link district locale with enrollment size, noting that urban districts typically have larger student enrollments. It is essential to analyze these factors separately to understand which significantly impact retention. This study investigated these factors independently.

Superintendents often leave rural districts for suburban and urban areas. One explanation for this mobility is the lack of support in rural areas, leading to additional responsibilities in transportation, student services, and curriculum (Kamrath & Brunner, 2014). Grissom and Mitani's (2016) study reported that 76% of all departing superintendents moved from rural district to other districts. Howley (2012) found that greater resources and funding at suburban and urban school districts contribute to higher retention rates. Lamkin (2006) supports this, stating that rural districts struggle to attract and retain leaders due to a lack of resources. Grissom

and Anderson (2012) observed that superintendents often move from rural districts to suburban districts, with most superintendents departing from rural districts transitioning to suburban or urban districts.

Conversely, other research has shown lower superintendent retention in urban districts compared to suburban and rural districts. Ulrich (2017) notes in his dissertation that urban superintendents have lower retention rates. There is a paucity of research on the relationship between locale and attrition. More research is needed to better understand how superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition vary according to district locale. This study contributes to the literature on the relationship between locale and superintendent retention in Indiana.

District Enrollment Size

The size of a school district plays a vital role in the retention of district leaders. Research indicates that higher salaries in larger districts correlate with lower retention rates, partly explaining why superintendents often leave districts with smaller enrollments (Tekniepe, 2015). Additionally, districts with the largest enrollments face challenges in retaining district leaders due to increased job complexities with increased enrollment (Bosworth et al., 2015; Grissom & Anderson, 2012).

District size may further predict superintendent retention and turnover. Alsbury (2008) states that "turnover of superintendents in smaller districts is among the highest of all district sizes. This is primarily because younger, less experienced superintendents start in smaller districts and then move up to higher-paying positions in larger districts" (p. 220). This trend reflects the career trajectories of many superintendents, who seek opportunities for professional

advancement and increased compensation. Supporting this observation, the Council of Great City Schools (2010) and Ulrich (2017) note that larger districts typically offer higher superintendent salaries, making them more attractive to seasoned leaders. Furthermore, Grissom and Anderson (2012) found that retention patterns often shift with significant increases in enrollment, specifically noting that superintendents are more likely to move to another district when the enrollment is 2,300 students or more larger than their current district. This suggests that both the size and growth rate of a district can influence a superintendent's decision to stay or leave, as large and expanding districts may present more complex challenges in addition to greater opportunities for career development.

Yates (2016) added to the existing research on small districts by examining superintendents of small districts in South Dakota, finding in his dissertation that these leaders often move to higher-paying districts. In Indiana, lower compensation for superintendents employed in a district with a small enrollment is prevalent, as highlighted by the Indiana School Board Association's 2019 management survey. The survey showed that 94% of superintendents in small districts (fewer than 1,000 students) earned less than the state's average superintendent salary (Baldwin, 2019). This data may shed light on leadership mobility in Indiana's school districts with small enrollments.

In contrast, research has shown that districts with large enrollments have the shortest retention rates for district leaders. Grissom and Anderson's (2012) study found that superintendents in the largest California districts were 4.5 times more likely to leave their districts than the other 90% of school superintendents. However, there is a lack of comprehensive research on the effect of district enrollment size on superintendent attrition. This

study provides insight into the association between district enrollment size and superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition in Indiana.

Student /Race Ethnicity and Student Poverty

Prior research has suggested that superintendent retention differs in school districts with varying student demographics, such as different proportions of minority students or of students living in poverty, as measured by free or reduced-price lunch eligibility. The literature suggests a strong inverse relationship between retention and certain student demographics. For instance, Superville (2018) notes that superintendents tend to stay for shorter periods in districts serving a large proportion of students of color. Bjork et al. (2014) observed that the largest school districts with mostly white students kept their superintendents for more than twice as long as than similar districts with mostly students of color. Clotfelter et al. (2007) found that superintendents often left districts with higher proportions of students of color and high rates of eligibility for free and reduced lunch.

Cooper et al. (2000) found that school districts with free and reduced lunch eligibility rates above 80% retained superintendents for 4.5 years, compared to 7.5 years for districts with less than 50% eligibility for free-and-reduced lunch. Hart et al. (2019) suggest that the proportion of students eligible for free and reduced lunch was the sole factor resulting in shorter superintendent retention. Grissom and Anderson's (2012) research also indicates that student poverty is positively associated with the higher turnover of district leaders.

These results are of concern because, as Plotts and Gutmore (2014) explain, in New Jersey, superintendent retention positively affects achievement scores for students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. Due to lower retention rates in high poverty districts, superintendents

tend to move toward districts with fewer low-income students and higher achievement levels (Clotfelter et al., 2007; Grissom & Mitani, 2016). This study investigated whether retention, mobility, and attrition vary with free and reduced lunch rates in Indiana.

Special Education and English Language Learners

An extensive search was conducted using Google Scholar and IU Academic One Search to find studies related to superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition concerning special education and English language learners. Unfortunately, this researcher could not find studies related to this field. There were studies related to special education directors retention, but not for superintendent retention. When the literature search was focused on superintendent retention and English language learners, Schug's (2015) qualitative study most closely addressed the topic of retention, but it investigated superintendents' leadership qualities that lead to higher success rates among English language learners. Hence, research on these topics is needed, and this study adds to this literature gap.

Summary

Understanding the factors affecting the retention of district leaders is vital. Connections between superintendent retention and student achievement and district finances (Gibbens, 2019; Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Plotts & Guttmore, 2014) suggest a need for a deeper knowledge base. The newest AASA decennial study reports that only 42.8% of current superintendents plan to remain in their current district in five years (Rogers & Tienkin, 2020), which means that more than half of superintendents do not foresee staying in their current district. Simpson (2013) suggests that superintendent retention of five years or longer is associated with increased student

achievement. Despite this, superintendent retention has remained around six years since 1923. Retention rates vary in specific contexts, as noted in this literature review. This robust study using a unique dataset adds to the existing body of knowledge by reporting the average percentage of retention, mobility, and attrition over a 10-year period, considering personal and district characteristics.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Using personnel data obtained from the Indiana Department of Education, this descriptive research study examines the retention, mobility, and attrition of public school superintendents working within the state between 2010 and 2020. This study addresses three research questions:

1. What proportion of superintendents stay, move, or leave an Indiana public school district from one year to the next?

2. How does superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition vary according to personal and district characteristics?

3. What is the average number of years a superintendent remains in the same school district between 2010–2011 and 2020–2021?

The first research question seeks to explore the retention, mobility, and attrition rates of superintendents in Indiana public school districts. The second question considered these averages across personal and district characteristics. The final question used the data to calculate the number of years a superintendent remained within the same district and then calculated the average superintendent retention for the state as a whole. All questions drew upon data spanning a 10-year period, which began in the 2010–2011 school year and concluded in the 2020–2021 school year. As such, the dataset represents an initial look at retention, mobility, and attrition at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Population of Superintendents and Districts

The study examined 561 superintendents, comprising 451 men and 110 women. Among them, 539 identified as white, while 22 identified as people of color. Superintendent salaries varied widely, ranging from $55,088 to $273,440, with an average salary of $118,049 and a median salary of $108,971. The superintendents in this study had between 9 and 51 years of experience, with an average of 28.4 years of experience and a median of 28.5 years of experience.

The research focused on 289 Indiana public school districts. Of these districts, 8% were classified as urban, 17% as suburban, and 75% as rural, reflecting Indiana's predominately rural landscape. District enrollment varied significantly, with the smallest district serving 269 students and the largest serving 31,401. On average, 81% of students were white, and 19% were students of color, with a median of 90% white students and 10% students of color. Student poverty levels, as indicated by the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch, ranged from 5.12% to 88.7%, with an average percentage of 45.3%. Additionally, an average of 17% of students were identified as qualifying for special education services, with a median of 16.2%. The percentage of English language learners in these districts ranged from 0% to 68%, with a mean of 4.6% and a median of 1.6%.

Description of the Data Used to Complete This Analysis

This study includes two datasets, both of which were obtained from the Indiana Department of Education. The first, which is referred to as the personnel data set, includes data for every public school superintendent that served in one of Indiana's 289 public school districts between 2010–2011 and 2020–2021. In both datasets, the Indiana Department of Education

included a four-digit identification code, which allowed the personnel and district data to be merged into a single dataset reflecting both superintendent and district characteristics.

Preparation of the Data for Analysis and Identification of Variables

Using techniques described in a descriptive study conducted by Lochmiller et al. (2016), data preparation for the present study involved initial cleaning of the personnel data file to ensure that each superintendent was assigned to one district in each academic year. When multiple superintendents appeared for the same district, the researcher used their knowledge of the field, the annual membership roster of the Indiana Association of Public School Superintendents, or the district's annual financial audit report to identify the superintendent that should be listed. Once the personnel data was prepared, the researcher merged the personnel data with the information for each school district. The resulting dataset included one superintendent for each district for each academic year between 2010–2011 and 2020–2021.

The final dataset included personal and district variables. Personal variables included each superintendent's gender, race or ethnicity, years of service, and total salary. District variables included the district's locale, enrollment, percentage of students from racial and ethnic minority groups, percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals, percentage of students receiving special education services, and percentage of students qualifying as English language learners for each academic year. Since the objective was to report superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition based on personal and district characteristics for the entire study period, the researcher calculated the average values for personal and district characteristics. These included the superintendent's salary, school district enrollment, and percentage of students who were members racial/ethnic minorities, eligible for free or reduced-priced meals, receiving

special education services, or receiving services as English language learners. The resulting dataset included a single record for each superintendent and school corporation.

Data Analysis

To answer the research questions, the researcher used a panel of data created by merging the personal and district data plus data obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics. To calculate the retention, mobility, and attrition for each superintendent in the state, the researcher compared the each superintendents' School Personnel Number (SPN) assigned to each school district in each year. If the SPN was the same from one year to the next, this indicated that the superintendent had stayed in the same school district. If the SPN was different but still reflected a superintendent from within the dataset, this indicated that the superintendent had moved to the district from another district in the state. Finally, if the SPN was not listed any subsequent year, this indicated that the superintendent had left the Indiana public education system or, more accurately, their role as a superintendent. This same analytic approach has successfully observed retention, mobility, and attrition percentages compared to similar personal and district characteristics in other studies (Lochmiller et al., 2016a; Lochmiller et al., 2016b). Because the data contained one superintendent for each school district, pivot tables within Microsoft Excel were used to calculate the number of superintendents stayed, moved, or left in each year, and ten percentages were then calculated for each year based on these counts. The results of this analysis provided data addressing how many superintendents stayed in the same district, moved to a different school district, or left the education system or their role from one year to the next. Average rates were then determined across the ten-year period.

Next, the researcher calculated quartiles for years of service, salary, district enrollment, the percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price Meals, the percentage of students eligible for special education services, and the percentage of students who qualifying as English language learners. Each superintendent was assigned to one quartile, and the number of superintendents within the quartiles who stayed, moved, or left the system were then calculated. Average rates were then determined across the 10-year period for each of the quartiles.

Finally, the researcher calculated the number of years for which a superintendent remained in the same school district. This calculation was determined by counting the number of years the same superintendent remained in the same school district. These calculations were then merged with personal and district characteristics and the previously described quartiles. This allowed the researcher to report the average years of retention by personal and district quartiles.

Limitations

While the researcher made efforts to minimize limitations on the study's overall design, three limitations influenced the completion of this research. First, the study examined the retention rates of Indiana superintendents over a 10-year period. The COVID-19 pandemic occurred at the end of this study. As such, the findings about retention, mobility, and attrition reflect mostly pre-pandemic conditions. To address this limitation, future research is needed to update findings and report how the pandemic impacted retention, mobility, and attrition. Second, the study did not include information about the reasons superintendents left their districts. For example, the study cannot report whether a superintendent left voluntarily (i.e., due to retirement) or involuntarily (i.e., due to termination by the board). Thus, further data collection is needed to extend the capacity of the dataset to address these more nuanced questions. Finally, the

study reports on superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition within the context of a single state. As such, it cannot be known whether the superintendent left the Indiana public education system to work as a superintendent elsewhere. Indeed, this represents a limitation of many education datasets.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

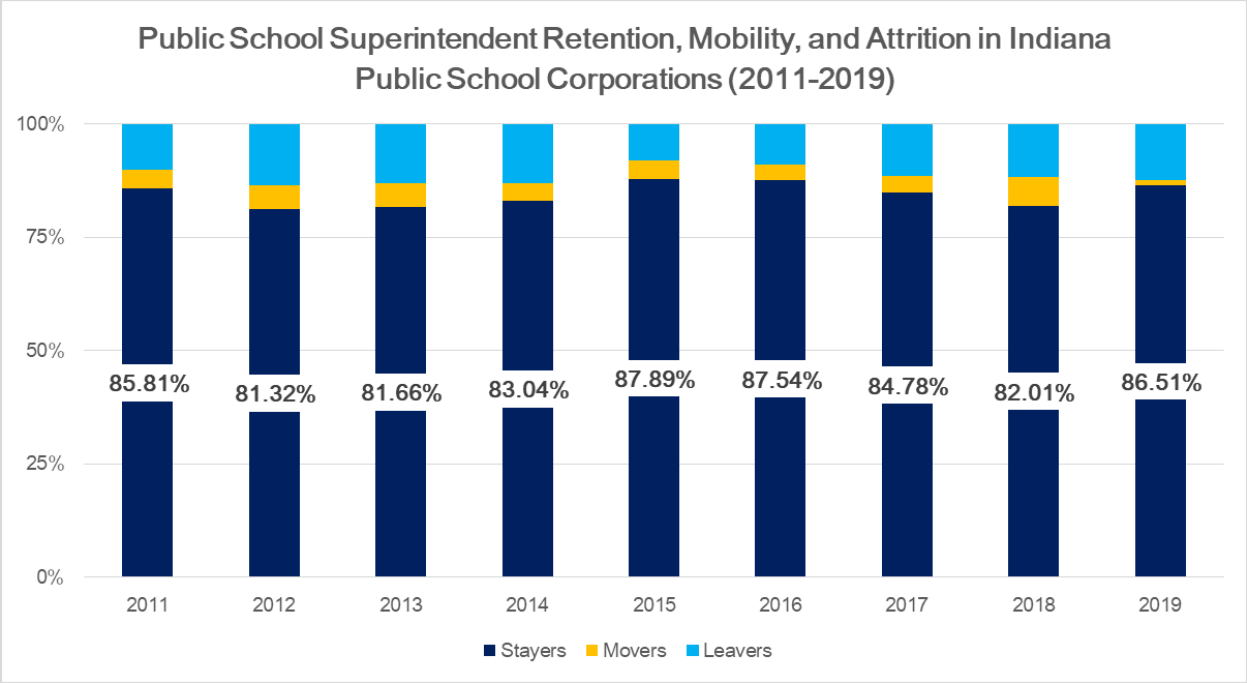
Understanding superintendent retention is essential because of its possible influence on student achievement (Gibbens, 2019; Jacobs, 2009; Sorgi, 2006) and its implications for district financial stability (Buchanan, 2006). This chapter reports on retention, mobility, and attrition between 2010 and 2020 for superintendents employed in public school districts. The study includes year-to-year retention and average retention over the 10-year span, and it reports the average number of years that an Indiana superintendent stayed in the same public school district. The information presented is also disaggregated by personal and district characteristics, which are shown in the literature to bear significantly on superintendent retention decisions. Between 2010–2011 and 2020–2021, the Indiana superintendent workforce included mostly white men, and relatively few districts were led by women or people of color. These findings raise important considerations about the state's efforts to diversify the superintendent workforce, as well as the conditions that may lead to shorter tenures and greater mobility among women and people of color.

Additionally, it is notable that over the 10-year study, 83% of districts saw a change in leadership. Moreover, 12.8% of districts experienced three or more leadership changes over the study, with one school having five superintendents in the 10-year span. This is worthy of future research due to the multiple connections between superintendent retention and improved student outcomes (Adelman & Lemos, 2021; Metcalf, 2007; Lavy & Boiko, 2017).

Retention, Mobility, and Attrition by Year

Based on the analysis, superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition varied from year to year during the 10-year period studied. Retention decreased 4.49% from 85.81% in 2011 to 81.32% in 2012. The highest retention occurred in 2015, with 87.89% of superintendents staying in the same district. The retention percentage decreased in 2017 (84.78%) and 2018 (82.01%) before increasing again to 86.51% in 2019. Superintendents' mobility varied from one year to the next, ranging from the highest percentage in 2018 (6.23%) to the lowest percentage in 2019 (1.04%). Other than between 2018 and 2019, mobility did not vary greatly from one year to the next, with all other year-to-year mobility percentage changes of 1.38% or less. Attrition varied more than retention or mobility across the 10-year period. For instance, in 2012, 13.9% left the Indiana public school system compared to 10.04% in 2011. Attrition remained relatively stable from 2012 to 2014 before decreasing by 5.19% in 2015. Since 2015, the attrition percentage has slightly increased each year by between 0.35% and 2.41%.

Figure 1.
Superintendent Retention, Mobility, and Attrition



Note: The average number of superintendents is presented as a reference and may not sum the same total in each category because of rounding.

Average Retention, Mobility, and Attrition

Using data from each year of the study, the researcher calculated the average retention, mobility, and attrition for Indiana superintendents. On average, 84.5% of superintendents remained in the same district from one year to the next, while 4.1% moved to a different school district and 11.4% of superintendents left the Indiana public education system. These averages varied based on personal and district characteristics, as described in the next sections.

Retention, Mobility, and Attrition by Personal Characteristics

Gender

In Indiana, male and female superintendents stayed in the same school district at similar rates. During the 10-year period, 84.9% of female superintendents and 84.4% of male superintendents remained in the same school district from one year to the next. Female superintendents moved to different districts at slightly higher rates than their male peers. Across the 10-year period, 5.3% of female superintendents moved to another school district compared with 4% of male superintendents. Interestingly, a larger proportion of male superintendents left the public education system. During the 10-year period, 11.6% of male superintendents left the public education system compared with 9.8% of female superintendents. This could reflect the greater number of male superintendents working in the state, or it could reflect a disproportional distribution of professional opportunities for male superintendents.

Race/Ethnicity

Racial and ethnic diversity continues to be a significant challenge for the Indiana superintendency, as there continue to be relatively few superintendents of color leading the state's school districts. During the 10-year period, the average proportion of superintendents who identified as people of color was 3.7%. Despite their relatively small number, superintendents of color appear to be retained in the Indiana education system at higher rates than their white peers. During the 10-year period, 88.7% of superintendents of color were retained compared to 84.4% of white superintendents. Superintendents of color moved to different school districts at lower rates than their white peers. On average, 4.3% of white superintendents moved to a different district in the state during the 10-year period, whereas none of the superintendents of color did

so. Superintendents of color and white superintendents left the system at similar rates, with 11.3% of superintendents who identified as people of color and 11.4% of white superintendents leaving. This is a promising result for a state that has struggled to attract leaders of color to its public school system.

Years of Experience

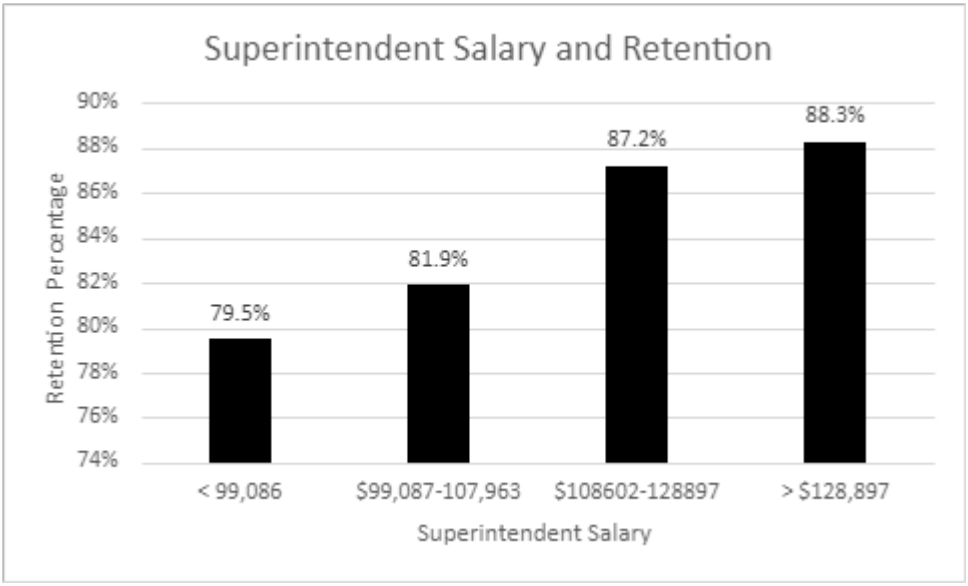
Indiana superintendents were retained within the public education system at similar rates regardless of their number of years of experience. Average retention rates ranged from 86% to 87.2% across experience quartiles. Mobility, however, appeared highest among superintendents in the middle of their career. Superintendents with between 21 and 28.5 years of experience moved at a higher rate than other superintendents. Across the 10-year period, 5.2% of superintendents with 21 to 28.5 years of experience moved to another district. While the data provides no indication about the reasons these superintendents moved more than their peers, it is conceivable that these moves reflect superintendents' pursuit of career advancement opportunities. Unsurprisingly, a larger proportion of superintendents with more than 36.15 years of experience left the public education system during the 10-year period. It is likely that departures among the state's most experienced superintendents reflect planned retirements.

Salary

Superintendent salary appears closely related to movement choices and thus indicates that compensation may be one of the most significant predictors of retention. Strikingly, superintendents earning the most were the least likely to move to other districts or leave the public education system. Figure 2 shows that a smaller proportion of superintendents earning the least were retained (80%) than superintendents earning the most (88%).

Figure 2

Superintendent Salary in Relation to Superintendent Retention

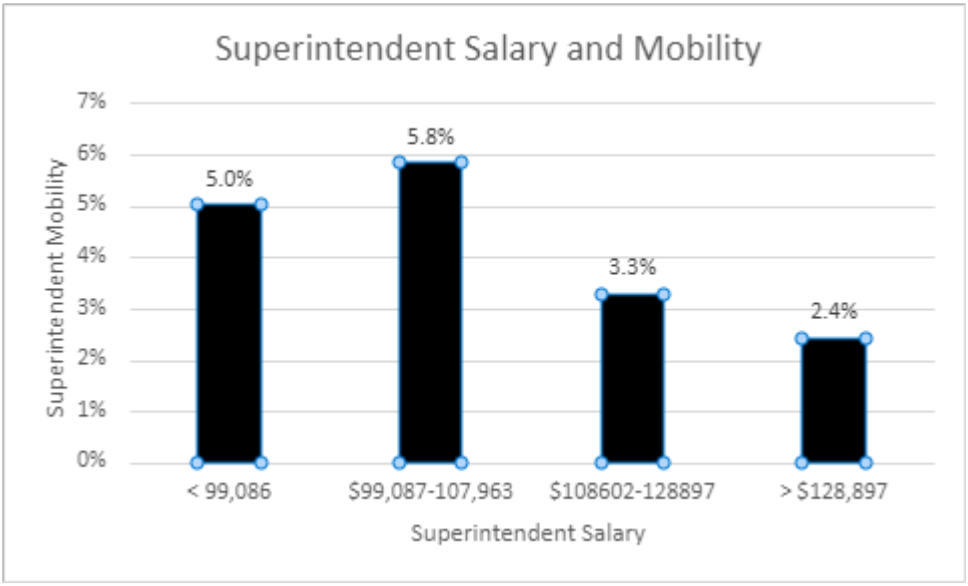


Note: The average number of superintendents is presented as a reference and may not sum the same total in each category because of rounding.

Figure 3 below illustrates the average mobility rate of superintendents according to their annual salary. As shown, a larger proportion of superintendents earning lower salaries (i.e., those earning less than $108,602) moved to different districts than superintendents earning higher salaries. While the data provides no reasons for their departure, one possible explanation is that superintendents may have left their districts to pursue more lucrative contracts, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Superintendent Salary Compared to Superintendent Mobility



Note: The average number of superintendents is presented as a reference and may not sum the same total in each category because of rounding.

A large proportion of superintendents in the lowest salary range (i.e., those earning less than $99,086) left the Indiana public education system during the 10-year period. During this period, 15.5% of superintendents in the lowest salary range left the Indiana public education system – or 6.3% more than superintendents in the highest salary quartile.

Table 2.

Average Superintendent Retention, Mobility, and Attrition by Individual Characteristics

			Stayed		Moved		Left		
Characteristics	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	Years
Gender									
Female	32	11.1%	27	84.9%	2	5.3%	3	9.8%	4.07
Male	257	88.9%	217	84.4%	10	4%	30	11.6%	4.04
Race/Ethnicity									
Supts. of Color	11	3.7%	9	88.7%	0	0%	1	11.3%	4.05
White	278	96.3%	235	84.3%	12	4.3%	32	11.4%	3.98
Average Years of Experience									
> 36.15	75	26.1%	57	87.2%	3	3.6%	15	21%	2.91
28.51–36.15	79	27.4%	69	86%	2	2.7%	8	10.1%	4.19
21–28.5	76	26.4%	67	88.2%	3	5.2%	5	6.6%	3.71
< 21	58	20.2%	38	86.8%	3	4.6%	5	8.6%	2.86
Average Annual Salary									
> 128,897	83	28.6%	73	88.3%	2	2.4%	8	9.2%	3.47
108,602–128,897	70	24.2%	61	87.2%	2	3.3%	7	9.6%	3.48
99,086–107,963	81	28%	66	81.9%	5	5.8%	10	12.2%	4.35
< 99,086	55	19.2%	44	79.5%	3	5.0%	9	15.5%	2.72

Note. The average number of superintendents is presented as a reference and may not sum the same total in each category because of rounding.
Note. No.=Number; Pct.=Percentage; Supts.=Superintendents

Average Retention, Mobility, and Attrition Based on District Characteristics

Prior research has suggested that superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition vary based on school district characteristics. These characteristics include the district's locale (e.g., urban, suburban, or rural), student enrollment, percentage of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, percentage of students who are members of a racial/ethnic minority, and percentage of students who receive either special education or English language learning services. Below, average retention, mobility, and attrition rates are reported for superintendents according to these characteristics.

Locale

Superintendent retention varies based on the district's location in the state (e.g., rural, suburban, or urban). Superintendents working in urban school districts stayed in the same district from one year to the next at the highest average rate (86.8%) during the study period, while superintendents working in suburban and rural school districts were retained at lower rates (83.8 and 84.0%, respectively). Superintendents working in rural school districts moved at the highest rate (4.9%) during the study period, while superintendents working in urban and suburban districts moved at approximately the same rates during the study period (1.8% and 1.9%, respectively). Superintendents working in suburban districts left the public education system at the highest rate during the study period (14.4.%), while superintendents working in rural and urban districts left the system at similar rates (11.1% and 11.3%, respectively). In summary, while retention appears to be similar among superintendents working in different locations, the data suggests that superintendents in rural settings are more likely to move to another district,

while superintendents working in suburban settings are more likely to leave the public education system entirely.

Student Enrollment

Superintendent retention varies based on district size as measured by student enrollment. On average, superintendents working in the state's smallest districts were retained at the lowest rates compared with their peers working in larger districts. On average, 81% of superintendents working in school districts with fewer than 1,183 students stayed in the same district from one year to the next. Superintendents working in districts with between 1,184 and 1,890 students stayed in the same district at slightly higher rates (e.g., 83.2%), as did superintendents working in districts with student enrollment greater than 3,865 students (85.5%). Superintendents working in districts with student enrollment between 1,891 and 3,864 students were retained at the highest rate (88.0%) during the study period. Superintendents working in the state's smaller school districts (i.e., those with fewer than 1,890 students) moved to a different school district at the highest rate (e.g., 5.7%), while superintendents working in the state's larger school districts (i.e., those with more than 1,891 students) moved to a different school district at lower rates (e.g., 2.3% for districts with > 3,865 students and 2.9% for districts with between 1,891-3,864 students) during the study period. This may suggest that superintendents in rural school districts are pursuing more lucrative contracts, different living conditions, or the attainment of more complex professional responsibilities; however, the data provides no coding to specifically identify these reasons. In terms of attrition, superintendents working in the smallest school districts left at the highest rate during the study period (13.3%). However, superintendents working in districts with more than 3,865 and districts with between 1,891 to 3,864 left at similar

rates during the study period. For example, 12.3% of superintendents working in the state's largest school districts left the public education system, while 11.1% of superintendents working in school districts with between 1,184 and 1,890 students left. An anomaly was the group of superintendents working in school districts with between 1,891 and 3,864 students, who left at the lowest rate (9.1%) during the study period.

Racial/Ethnic Diversity

Superintendent retention varies based on the racial and ethnic background of the student population as measured by the percentage of students of color. On average, superintendents working in districts with the lowest percentage of students of color were retained at the lowest rates, compared with their peers working in districts with higher percentages of students of color. On average, 82.8% of superintendents working in school districts where less than 4% of the total student population comprised students of color stayed in the same district from one year to the next. Superintendents working in districts where students of color comprised between 5% and 7% of the population stayed in the same district at slightly higher rate (e.g., 83.4%), as did superintendents working in districts where the percentage of students of color comprised between 8% and 16% of the population (85.7%). Superintendents working in districts where more than 16% of the total student population comprised students of color were retained at the highest rate (86.2%) during the study period. Superintendents working in districts with the lowest percentage of students of color (i.e., those with less than 7%) moved to a different school district at the highest rate (e.g., 5.3% in districts with 5.5% students of color and 5.5% in districts with less than 5.3% students of color). Superintendents working in districts where students of color comprised between 8% and 16% of the student population moved to a different district at a

rate of 3.2% during the study period. Superintendents working in school districts with the highest percentage of students of color (i.e., those with higher than 16%) moved to a different school district at the lowest rate. This could reflect the fact that districts with the highest percentage of students of color are located in urban areas, where, based on the study data, superintendents receive higher compensation; however, the data provides no coding to specifically identify these reasons. In terms of attrition, superintendents left districts at similar rates, ranging from the lowest at 11.1% (i.e., 5–7% and 8–16% students of color) to the highest at 11.8% (i.e., less than 4% students of color). In summary, the data suggests that as the percentage of students of color increases, superintendent retention increases and mobility decreases.

Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Eligibility

Superintendent retention varies based on the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. On average, superintendents working in school districts with the lowest percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch (i.e., less than 36.75%) stayed in the same district from one year to the next at the highest average rate (87.1%) during the study period. Superintendents working in districts with higher student poverty (i.e., 36.76–45.05%, 45.06–53.95%, and above 53.96%) were retained at lower rates (e.g., 83%, 84.1%, and 83.6%, respectively). Superintendents working in districts with the lowest rate of student poverty moved at the lowest rate (2.7%), followed by superintendents working in districts with the highest percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch (3.7%) during the study period. However, superintendents working in districts with a percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch between 36.76% and 53.95% moved at approximately the same rates and more often than districts with above 53.96% and below 36.75% during the study period (e.g., 4.7%

and 4.9%, respectively). In terms of attrition, superintendents left districts at similar rates, ranging from 11% (i.e., 45.06–53.95% of students in poverty) to 12.7% (i.e., above 53.96% of students in poverty). In summary, while rates of attrition appear to be similar among superintendents working in districts with different percentages of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch, the data suggests that superintendents in districts with the lowest rates of student poverty are more likely to remain in the same district, while superintendents working in districts with higher percentages of student poverty are more likely to move to another Indiana public school district.

Special Education Eligibility

Superintendent retention varies based on the percentage of students that qualify for special education services. On average, superintendents working in school districts that serve the lowest percentage of students receiving special education services (i.e., less than 14.6%) stayed in the same district from one year to the next at the highest average rate (86%) during the study period. Superintendents working in districts with the highest percentage of students receiving special education (i.e., above 16.97%) were retained at lowest rate (82.7%). On average, superintendent retention was similar in districts where14.7–16.07% and 16.08–16.96% of students received special education (84 and 85.3%, respectively). Superintendents moved at the highest rate (5.2%) when working in districts with the highest percentage of students receiving special education services (i.e., above 16.97%). On average, superintendents moved at the lowest rate (2.3%) when working in districts with the lowest percentage of students that qualify for special education services. Superintendents working in districts with a percentage of students that qualify for special education services of 14.7–16.07% and 16.08–16.96% moved at approximately the same rate during the study period (4.5% and 4.3%, respectively). In terms of attrition, superintendents

left districts at similar rates, ranging from 10.2% (i.e., 14.7–16.07% of students receiving special education) to 12% (i.e. above 16.97% of students receiving special education). In summary, while attrition appears to be similar among superintendents working in districts with different percentages of students that qualify for special education services, the data suggests that the superintendent retention rate is the highest (86%) and mobility is the lowest (2.3%) in districts with the lowest percentage of students receiving special education services. Conversely, on average, the superintendent retention rate is the lowest (82.7%) and mobility is the highest (5.2%) in districts with the highest percentage of students that receive special education services.

English Language Learners

Over the 10-year study, superintendent retention varied based on the percentage of students that are English language learners. For instance, superintendent retention is higher in districts with a higher percentage of students who speak a language other than English as their primary language. Districts with 0.94–3.03% English language learners retain their superintendents at a rate of 85.2%, while superintendents stay at a rate of 86.6% in districts with the highest percentage of students who are English language learners (above 3.03%). Comparatively, the superintendent retention rate is lower (83.6% and 82.4%) in districts with a smaller percentage of students who speak English as their second language (e.g., 0.35–0.94% and below 0.35%, respectively). Likewise, superintendent mobility is above 5% in districts with a smaller percentage of students who are English language learners (i.e., below 0.35% and 0.35–0.94%) compared to mobility rates of 2.3% and 3.7% in districts with a higher percentage of students who are English language learners (0.94–3.03% and above 3.04%, respectively). On average, attrition rates were similar across the study, with superintendents leaving the Indiana public education system at a rate between 11% and 12.5% across all quartiles. In short, districts with a

percentage of English language learners of 0.94% or higher retained their superintendents more often and also had less superintendent mobility between Indiana public school districts over the study.

Table 3.
Average Superintendent Retention, Mobility, and Attrition by District Characteristics

			Stayed		Moved		Left		
Characteristics	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	Years
Locale									
Rural	216	74.7%	181	84.0%	11	4.9%	24	11.1%	3.92
Suburban	24	8.3%	18	83.8%	0	1.9%	3	14.4%	4.7
Urban	49	17.0%	43	86.8%	1	1.8%	6	11.3%	3.79
Student Enrollment									
> 3,865	74	25.6%	56	85.5%	2	2.3%	9	12.3%	4.41
1,891–3,864	73	25.3%	64	88.0%	2	2.9%	6	9.1%	4.60
1,184–1,890	76	26.3%	63	83.2%	4	5.7%	8	11.1%	3.76
< 1,183	66	22.8%	42	81.0%	4	5.7%	9	13.3%	3.29
% Minority Students									
> 16%	69	23.9%	59	86.2%	2	2.3%	8	11.6%	4.29
8 to 16%	70	24.2%	60	85.7%	2	3.2%	8	11.1%	4.33
5 to 7%	71	24.6%	59	83.4%	4	5.5%	8	11.1%	3.83
< 4%	79	27.3%	65	82.8%	4	5.3%	9	11.8%	3.72

% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible									
> 53.96%	73	25.3%	60	83.6%	3	3.7%	9	12.7%	3.72
45.06–53.95%	72	24.9%	61	84.1%	4	4.9%	8	11.0%	3.94
36.76–45.05%	72	24.9%	60	83.0%	4	4.7%	9	11.9%	3.83
< 36.75%	72	24.9%	64	87.1%	2	2.7%	7	10.2%	4.63
% Receiving Special Education									
> 16.97%	72	24.9%	60	82.7%	4	5.2%	9	12.0%	3.61
16.08–16.96%	72	24.9%	60	84.0%	3	4.3%	8	11.7%	4.04
14.7–16.07%	72	24.9%	61	85.3%	3	4.5%	7	10.2%	4.18
< 14.6%	73	24.9%	63	86.0%	2	2.3%	9	11.7%	4.34
% Receiving English Language Learning									
> 3.04%	73	25.3%	63	86.6%	2	2.3%	8	11.1%	4.28
.94–3.03%	72	24.9%	61	85.2%	3	3.7%	8	11.1%	4.41
.35–0.94%	72	23.9%	59	82.4%	4	5.1%	9	12.5%	3.51
< 0.35%	72	26.0%	60	83.6%	4	5.4%	8	11.0%	3.95

Note. The average number of superintendents is presented as a reference and may not sum the same total in each category because of rounding.
Note. No.=Number; Pct.=Percentage

Comparison of Retention, Mobility, and Attrition by Personal and District Characteristics

District Locale and Superintendent Salary

In rural districts, superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition varied significantly according to salary, as shown in Table 4 below. Superintendents earning less than $99,087 had an average retention rate of 46 out of 57 (80.7%), with three movers (5.3%) and eight leavers (14.0%) over

the 10-year study. Superintendents earning between $99,087 and $108,602 had higher retention, on average, with 62 stayers out of 69 (89.9%), three movers (4.3%), and four leavers (5.8%). Superintendents earning in the range of $108,602 to $128,897 had similar retention with, on average, 48 stayers out of 56 (85.7%), three movers (5.4%), and five leavers (8.9%). Superintendents in the highest salary range, earning over $128,897, showed the lowest retention rate and highest attrition rate of rural superintendents. On average, 27 out of 36 (75.0%) superintendents earning in this range were retained, with two movers (5.6%) and seven leavers (19.4%) over the 10-year study.

In urban and suburban districts, retention rates were relatively high across most salary ranges. Superintendents earning less than $99,087 had the highest retention rate, with all superintendents remaining in the same district, with no movers or leavers over the 10-year period. Superintendents earning between $99,087 and $108,602 had the lowest retention and highest attrition rates. Table 5 shows that superintendents working in an urban or suburban district and earning in this salary range accounted for five stayers out of eleven (45.5%), no movers, and six leavers (54.5%). For superintendents earning in the $108,602 to $128,897 range, nine out of ten stayed (90.0%), with one leaver (10.0%) and no movers. Superintendents in the highest salary group, earning over $128,897, had high retention, with 44 out of 45 (97.8%) staying, one mover (2.2%), and no leavers.

Overall, superintendents in rural districts showed higher mobility and attrition rates than those in urban/suburban districts. In rural areas, retention was highest among superintendents earning between $99,087 and $108,602, while the highest attrition rates were observed in the lowest and highest salary groups. In urban/suburban districts, retention was exceptionally high among the highest salary group, with a notable exception in the $99,087 to $108,602 range, for

which more superintendents left the system from one year to the next than were retained. The data presented in Table 5 suggests that salary may significantly impact superintendent stability, particularly in rural districts.

Table 4

Superintendent Retention, Mobility, and Attrition When Comparing District Locale and Superintendent Salary

	Rural (N = 218)				**Urban/Suburban (N = 69)**			
	< $99,087	$99,087–108,602	$108,602–128,897	> $128,897	< $99,087	$99,087–108,602	$108,602–128,897	> $128,897
Stayers	46 (80.7%)	62 (89.9%)	48 (85.7%)	27 (75%)	3 (100%)	5 (45.5%)	9 (90%)	44 (97.8%)
Movers	3 (5.3%)	3 (4.3%)	3 (5.4%)	2 (5.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.2%)
Leavers	8 (14%)	4 (5.8%)	5(8.9%)	7 (8.9%)	0 (0%)	6 (54.5%)	1 (10%)	0 (0%)
Total	57	69	56	36	3	11	10	45

Note: The average number of superintendents is presented as a reference and may not sum the same total in each category because of rounding.

District Locale and District Enrollment

In rural districts, superintendent retention varied across different student enrollment ranges from year to year across the 10-year period, as shown in Table 5. For districts with fewer than 1,183 students, 43 out of 54 (79.6%) superintendents stayed in their positions, three (5.5%) moved to

other Indiana districts, and eight (14.8%) left the public education system from year to year over the study. In districts with 1,184 to 1,890 students, 68 out of 82 (82.9%) superintendents stayed, five moved (6.1%), and nine left (10.9%). Superintendents in districts with 1,891 to 3,864 students had a retention count of 51 out of 58 (87.9%), with two movers (3.4%), and five leavers (8.6%). In the largest rural districts, those with more than 3,865 students, 20 out of 23 (86.9%) superintendents stayed, one (4.3%) moved, and two (8.7%) left the Indiana public education system over the 10-year period.

In suburban and urban districts, the data shows different trends. For districts with fewer than 1,183 students, three out of three (100%) superintendents stayed, with no movers (0%) or leavers (0%) reported over the study's timeframe. In districts with 1,184 to 1,890 students, four out of four (100%) superintendents stayed, again with no movers (0%) or leavers (0%) over the 10-year study. Districts with 1,891 to 3,864 students retained, on average, nine out of ten (90%) superintendents, with no movers (0%), and one leaver (10%) from one year to the next. In the largest districts with more than 3,865 students, 43 out of 51 (84.3%) superintendents stayed, one moved (2.0%), and seven left (13.7%) the Indiana public education system altogether.

In conclusion, the data shows that rural districts generally had higher superintendent mobility and attrition rates than suburban/urban districts from year to year across the 10-year study. Superintendents working in rural districts in the smallest and largest enrollment ranges had higher attrition rates. Suburban/urban districts demonstrated higher retention rates across all enrollment ranges, with notably low mobility and attrition over the 10-year period.

Table 5

Superintendent Retention, Mobility, and Attrition by District Locale and District Enrollment

	Rural (N = 218)				Suburban/Urban (N = 69)			
	< 1,183	1,184–1,890	1,891–3,864	> 3,865	< 1,183	1,184–1,890	1,891–3,864	> 3,865
Stayers	43 (79.6%)	68 (82.9%)	51 (87.9%)	20 (87%)	3(100%)	4 (100%)	9 (90%)	43 (84.3%)
Movers	3 (5.6%)	5 (6.1%)	2 (3.4%)	1(4.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
Leavers	8 (14.8%)	9 (11%)	5 (8.6%)	2 (8.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	7 (13.7%)
Totals	54	82	58	23	3	4	10	51

Note: The average number of superintendents is presented as a reference and may not sum the same total in each category because of rounding.

District Locale and District Percentage of Free and Reduced Lunch

In rural districts, superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition showed similar patterns across different percentages of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, as shown in Table 6. For districts with less than 36.75% eligibility, 50 out of 59 were stayers (84.7%), and there were three movers (5.1%) and six leavers (10.2%) across the study. In districts with 36.76% to 45.05% eligibility, 47 out of 56 were stayers (83.9%), and there were three movers (5.4%) and six leavers (10.7%) from year to year over the 10-year period. In districts with 45.06% to 53.95% eligibility, 43 out of 51 were stayers (84.3%), and there were two movers (3.9%) and six leavers (11.8%).

Similarly, in districts with more than 53.96% eligibility, 43 out of 51 were stayers (84.3%), and there were two movers (3.9%) and six leavers (11.8%) from year to year over the study.

In suburban and urban districts, the data showed more variability. For districts with less than 36.75% eligibility, 16 out of 19 were stayers (84.2%), and there were no movers (0%) and three leavers (15.8%). In districts with 36.76% to 45.05% eligibility, 14 out of 16 were stayers (87.5%), and there were no movers (0%) and two leavers (12.5%) from year to year over the 10-year study. In districts with 45.06% to 53.95% eligibility, 18 out of 21 were stayers (85.7%), and there was one mover (4.8%) and two leavers (9.5%) over the 10-year study. In districts with more than 53.96% eligibility, 13 out of 15 were stayers (86.7%), and there were no movers (0%) and two leavers (13.3%) across the study.

In summary, the data shows that superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition rates are relatively consistent across different percentages of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in rural districts. However, in suburban/urban districts, retention rates vary slightly more, with the highest retention observed in districts with 36.76% to 45.05% eligibility. Mobility was minimal in suburban/urban districts and higher in rural districts, yet attrition was higher in suburban/urban districts compared to rural Indiana districts from year to year over the 10-year study.

Table 6

Superintendent Retention, Mobility, and Attrition by on District Locale and Percentage of Free or Reduced Lunch

	Rural (N = 218)				Suburban/Urban (N = 69)			
	< 36.75%	36.76–45.05%	45.06–53.95%	> 53.96%	< 36.75%	36.76–45.05%	45.06–53.95%	> 53.96%
Stayers	50 (84.7%)	47 (83.9%)	43 (84.3%)	43 (84.3%)	16 (84.2%)	14 (87.5%)	18 (85.7%)	13 (86.7%)

Movers	3 (5.1%)	3 (5.4%)	2 (3.9%)	2 (3.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.8%)	0 (0%)
Leavers	6 (10.2%)	6 (10.7%)	6 (11.8%)	6 (11.8%)	3 (15.8%)	2 (12.5%)	2 (9.5%)	2 (13.3%)
Totals	59	56	51	51	19	16	21	15

Note: The average number of superintendents is presented as a reference and may not sum the same total in each category because of rounding.

District Locale and Superintendent Gender

In rural districts, there are similarities in retention, mobility, and attrition rates between female and male superintendents, as shown in Table 7. Female superintendents working in rural districts had a retention rate of 16 out of 19 (84.2%), with one mover (5.3%) and two leavers (10.5%) from year to year over the 10-year study. Male superintendents in a similar setting had similar retention, mobility, and attrition rates as their counterparts, as 166 out of 197 were stayers (84.2%), and there were nine movers (4.6%) and 22 leavers (11.2%), respectively.

In suburban and urban districts, there was a notable difference in retention, mobility, and attrition rates between female and male superintendents. Female superintendents had a retention rate of 11 out of 12 (91.6%), with no movers (0%) and one leaver (9.1%) over the 10-year study. In similar district settings, male superintendents had a slightly lower retention rate of 52 out of 61 (85.2%), lower mobility rates with one mover (1.6%), and slightly higher attrition rates with eight leavers (13.1%) when observing the data from year to year over the 10-year study.

Overall, the data shows that retention, mobility, and attrition rates are similar for superintendents of different genders in rural settings. However, female superintendents in suburban/urban districts tend to have higher retention rates compared to their male counterparts. In addition, male superintendents show higher mobility and attrition rates. Hence, these findings indicate that while rural districts show gender parity in the career paths of superintendents, suburban and urban districts show significant gender-based differences.

Table 7

Superintendent Retention, Mobility, and Attrition by District Locale and Superintendent Gender

	Rural (N = 216)		Suburban/Urban (N = 73)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Stayers	16 (84.2%)	166 (84.2%)	11 (91.7%)	52 (85.2%)
Movers	1 (5.3%)	9 (4.6%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)
Leavers	2 (10.5%)	22 (11.2%)	1 (8.3%)	8 (13.1%)
Totals	19	197	12	61

Note: The average number of superintendents is presented as a reference and may not sum the same total in each category because of rounding.

Average Years of Retention

A major impetus for this study was to determine the average number of years that a superintendent stays in one Indiana school district, as this question has been largely neglected in the literature. Based on the data used in this analysis, superintendents remained in the same district for about 4.07 years, which is less than in other states where similar statistics have been calculated. Additionally, personal and district characteristics appear to be related to the number of years for which a superintendent remains in their district.

Personal Characteristics

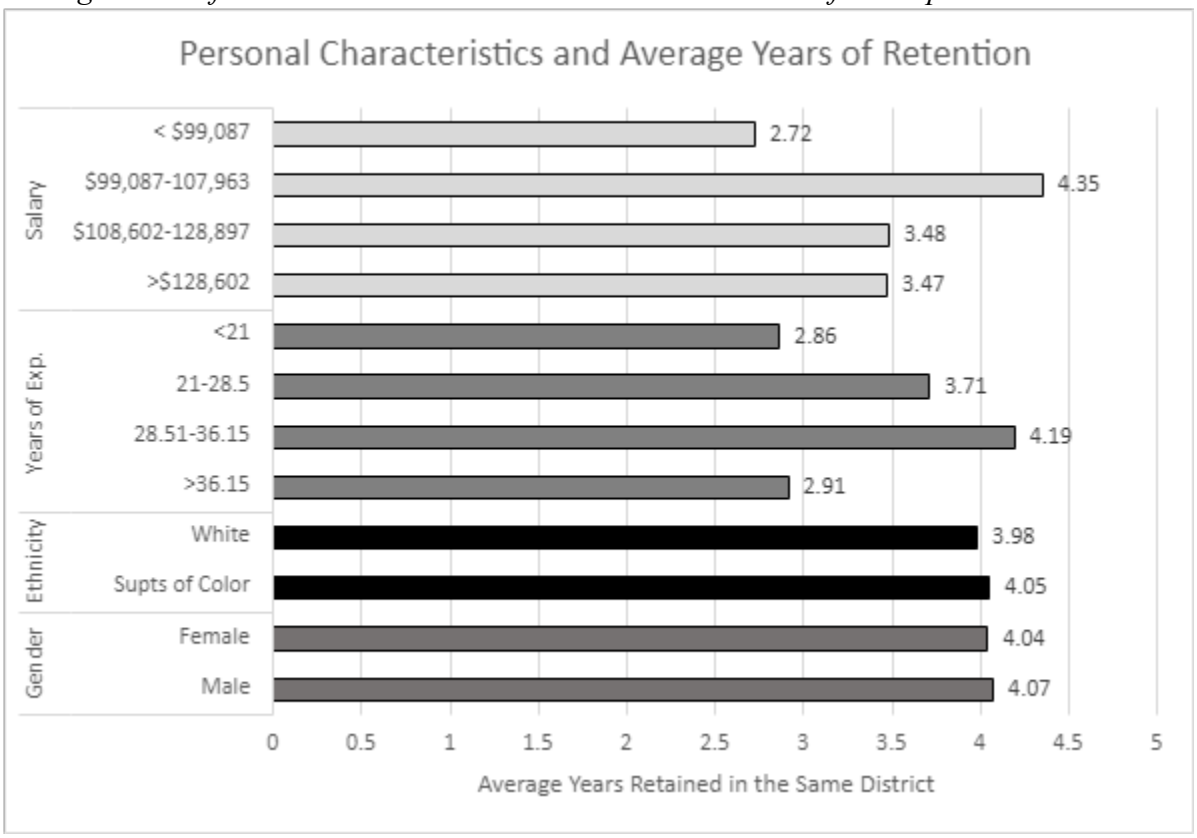
There were two notable results related to personal characteristics, as shown in Figure 4 below. First, the superintendent's years of experience had a quartile with at least one year more of retention than two other quartiles. Over the 10-year period, superintendents with between 21 and 28.5 years of experience were retained 1.28 years longer, on average, than superintendents with

more than 36.15 years of experience. In addition, superintendents with 21 to 28.5 years of education experience were retained 1.33 years longer, on average, than superintendents with less than 21 years of experience.

Second, there was difference in the number of years of retention between salary quartiles. Superintendents earning the least (less than $99,087) stayed in a district 2.72 years on average. Superintendents earning in the third quartile ($108,602–$128,897) and fourth quartile (> $108,989) stayed in the same district 3.7 years and 3.8 years, respectively. Superintendents stayed in the same district the longest (4.35 years) when earning in the second salary quartile of $99,087–$107,963.

Figure 4

Average Years of Retention Based on Personal Characteristics of the Superintendent



Note. The average number of superintendents is presented as a reference and may not sum the same total in each category because of rounding.
Note. Exp.=Experience

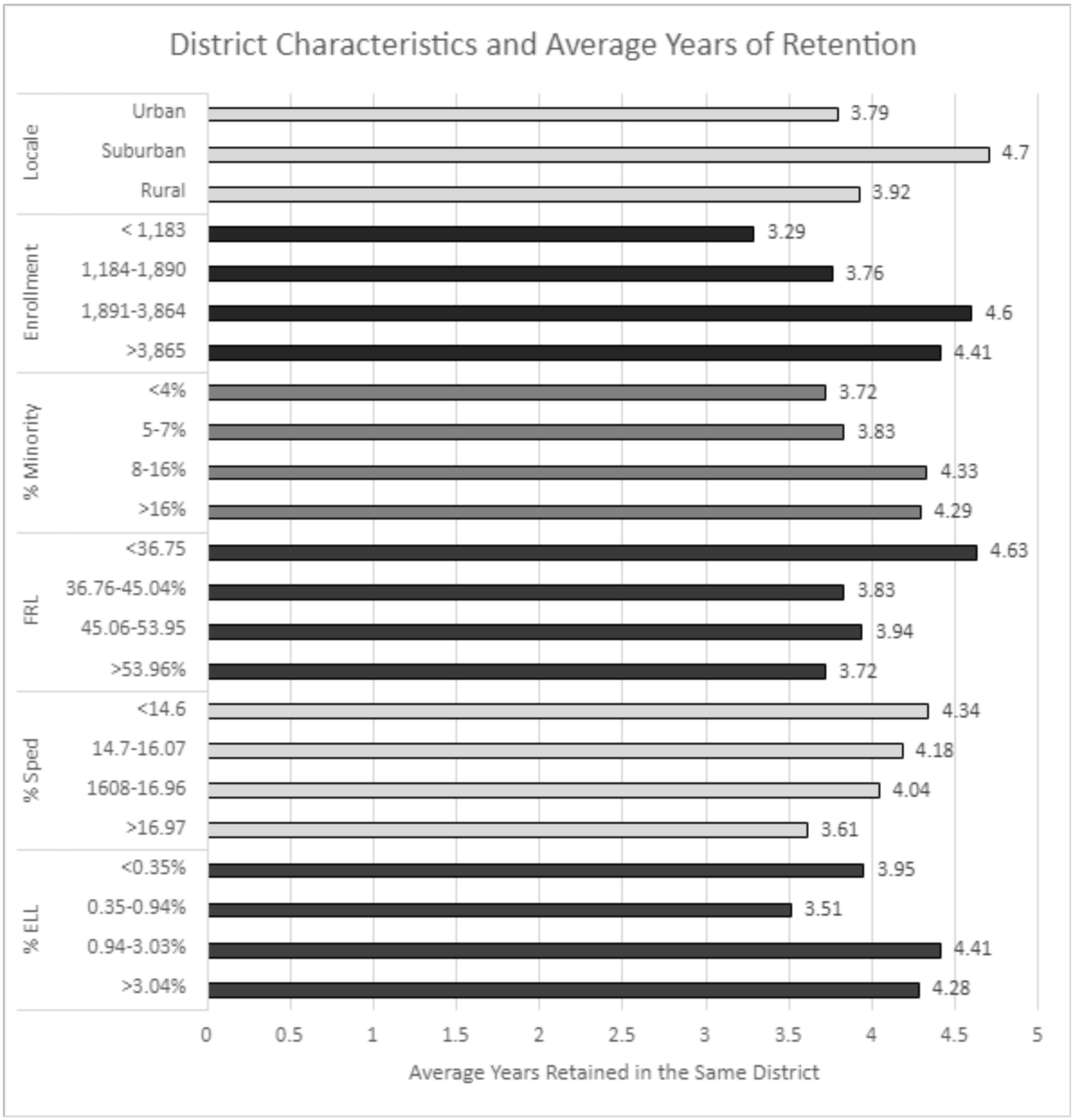
District Characteristics

Findings for district enrollment were the only reportable variable for district characteristics, as shown below in Figure 5. Superintendents who worked in districts with more than 3,865 students were retained 1.12 years longer than superintendents who worked in a districts with fewer than 1,183 students. In addition, superintendents who worked in districts with enrollments between 1,891 and 3,864 students were retained, on average, 1.31 years longer

than superintendents who worked in school districts with enrollment of fewer than 1,183 students.

Figure 5

District Characteristics and Years of Retention



Note: The average number of superintendents is presented as a reference and may not sum the same total in each category because of rounding.

Note. FRL=Free-or-reduced lunch; Sped=Special Education; ELL=English language learners

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

A primary conclusion of this study is that superintendent retention in Indiana varies based on personal and district characteristics. This finding aligns closely with prior research, including recent studies conducted by White (2022), Metcalf (2007), Grissom & Anderson (2012), and Grissom & Mitani (2016). Central to this study is the observation that during the 10-year period, a majority (84.9%) of superintendents were retained in the same school district from one year to the next and served, on average, 4.07 years in that district. Relatively few superintendents (about 4.1% on average) moved to a different district in Indiana, while approximately 11.4% left the public education system for reasons that this study cannot explain.

Comparisons of superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition by personal and district characteristics suggest that these characteristics could influence a superintendent's desire to remain in the same school district. For example, superintendents who were women and people of color were retained in the same district and moved at lower rates than their white male counterparts. Moreover, superintendents earning the lowest salaries – which is likely correlated with district size – moved to other districts at higher rates or left the public education system entirely. Finally, superintendents working in smaller or rural districts tended to move to other districts at the highest rate. These findings illuminate interesting policy considerations and connections to prior research.

Personal Characteristics

Gender

Overall, the study's results align closely with prior research on superintendent retention, mobility, and attrition. Notably, the findings mirror White's (2023) research on gender disparities in superintendency. White reported that only 21.6% of all superintendents were female in the 2023–2024 school year. The present study also revealed a disproportionate number of female superintendents in Indiana, with an average percentage of 11.1% being female superintendents from year to year, a percentage slightly below White's findings. The present study, which investigated the period from 2010–2020, suggests that Indiana has increased the hiring of female superintendents by 10.5% compared to White's 2023–2024 analysis. This trend is consistent with a study by Roger and Tienken (2000), which showed an increase from 13.1% in 2000 to 26.7% in 2020.

Superintendent Race/Ethnicity

When comparing the findings of the present study to previous literature on superintendent race/ethnicity and race as factors in superintendent retention, similarities emerged. Studies consistently highlight the underrepresentation of people of color in the superintendent role (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Rodriguez, 2019; Rodriguez, 2021; Simmons, 2012; Williams, 2018). The present study showed that, on average, only 3.7% of all Indiana superintendents were people of color, which is similar to percentages from other states, ranging from 1.8% in California (Rodriguez, 2019) to 5% in Massachusetts (FanFan, 2022).

Salary

Similarities also emerged between the findings of this research and previous studies when observing superintendent mobility and compensation packages. The present study reported that lower superintendent salaries resulted in higher rates of mobility and attrition. Many studies have shown similar results (Byrd et. al., 2006; Metcalf, 2007; Grissom & Mitani, 2016). Yates and DeJong (2018) found that superintendents move school districts with a $10,000 increase in salary, while Grissom and Anderson (2012) found significant movement at an increase in compensation of around $21,000. These studies found similar rates of superintendent retention and mobility, as does the present study, which found that the average percentage of mobility increases with each increase in salary quartile.

District Characteristics

As stated in the findings, 83% of Indiana districts experienced a leadership change at the district level between 2010 and 2020. This is similar to Metcalf's (2007) dissertation findings, which showed that 82% of districts experienced a leadership change during his 10-year study. This consistency in the changes in district leadership found in Metcalf's 1996–2006 study and the present 2010–2020 study is noteworthy, especially given the link between superintendent retention and increased student achievement (Gibbens, 2019; Metcalf, 2007; Plotts & Guttmore, 2014; Rudolph, 2016; Simpson, 2013).

Locale

Similarities also exist between the findings of this study and prior research regarding district locale. This study aligns with Grissom and Anderson (2012), who state that superintendents in

rural areas move more often than those in other districts. Howley (2012) and Lampkin (2006) concur with this finding. Grissom and Mitani (2016) found that 76% of superintendents moved from rural areas to other districts. While the present study does not specify the destination locale of these superintendents, it suggests that rural superintendents move more frequently, with an average percentage of superintendent movement 3% higher from year to year. Although Ulrich (2017) suggests that urban superintendents have the lowest retention, the findings of the present study highlight that retention is actually higher in urban districts. This higher retention could be linked to higher compensation for superintendents in suburban and urban districts, as this study showed that over 72% of superintendents in these districts earn the highest salaries, whereas 59% of superintendents in rural districts earn in the two lowest quartiles.

Enrollment Size

Research is mixed on whether enrollment size leads to longer superintendent retention. For example, Bosworth et al. (2015) and Grissom and Anderson (2012) suggest that retention is lower in districts with the largest enrollments due to increased job complexities and political impact. Grissom and Anderson (2012) found that the top 10% of the largest districts seem to experience significantly higher turnover rates compared to the remaining 90%, with the likelihood being 4.5 times greater, even after considering other district characteristics.

Conversely, other studies have shown that retention is lowest in small districts. Yates (2016) and Tekniepe (2015) found that as enrollment size increases, superintendent salaries increase, which in turn increases retention. Alsbury (2008) also found that retention is lower in districts with smaller enrollments due to the hiring of younger, less experienced individuals. The present study agrees with these findings, showing that superintendent retention is lower in

districts with smaller enrollments. In this study, the smallest districts in Indiana had the lowest retention and the highest mobility and attrition rates.

Free or Reduced Lunch

This study had similar findings regarding free or reduced lunch and superintendent retention as prior research. Clotfelter et al. (2007) suggest that superintendent mobility increases as free or lunch rates increase. Cooper et al. (2000) suggest that superintendents stay for 4.5 years when the free or reduced lunch rates are above 80% compared to 7.5 years when the rate is below 50%. Additionally, Grissom and Anderson (2012) suggest that superintendent turnover is positively correlated with student free or reduced lunch rates. Hart et al. (2014) found that free or reduced lunch rates were the sole factor influencing superintendent retention. The present study suggests that retention is affected by the percentage of students that qualify for free or reduced lunch, with superintendents in districts with the lowest percentages of free or reduced lunch staying the longest and moving or leaving the least. Conversely, this study found that in suburban and urban districts, superintendents have the lowest retention in districts with the lowest free or reduced lunch rates.

Student Race/Ethnicity

Research has suggested that superintendent retention decreases as the percentage of students of color increases, but the present study shows different results. For example, Superville (2018) and Cloftelter et al. (2007) found shorter retention of superintendents as the proportion of the student of color increases. Similarly, Bjork et al. (2014) found that superintendents stayed longer in districts with the highest proportion of white students. Conversely, the present study suggests that districts with the highest percentage of students of color retained their superintendents the

longest and had the lowest mobility rates. This is a unique finding, as no other research with similar results was identified in the literature review.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, several policy recommendations can be formulated to guide both state legislative activity and public advocacy from state-level professional associations. First, the results highlight how state school funding and compensation policies, which largely do not establish a minimum salary, may contribute to turnover among superintendents in the state's smallest school settings. Prior research has indicated that higher superintendent salaries increase retention (Byrd et al., 2006: Grissom & Anderson, 2012; Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Metcalf, 2007; Yates & De Jung, 2018). Furthermore, many school districts within the state are primarily rural, leaving superintendents few opportunities to move within their communities and instead incentivizing them to relocate to other communities or states. To address this, salary equalization across similarly situated districts or state-supported salaries could significantly impact superintendent retention in rural districts with smaller enrollments, where the workload often includes multiple job roles.

Second, enhancing professional development programs that align with recruitment priorities could play a crucial role in addressing the underrepresentation of women and ethnic/racial minorities in the superintendency. Tailoring these programs to build leadership skills, provide mentorship opportunities, and offer networking platforms specifically for these underrepresented groups could help bridge the gap. Furthermore, it is essential to conduct additional research to identify the specific barriers that women and people of color encounter in

their paths to becoming superintendents. Understanding these obstacles is key to developing targeted strategies to achieve diversity in these leadership roles. By addressing these issues, the educational system can move toward a more equitable and diverse leadership landscape.

To bridge this gap, state policy actors, including the Indiana Association of Public School Superintendents (IAPSS), have embraced new approaches to recruiting and retaining women superintendents and superintendents of color. For example, the Women in Education Leading Learning (WELL) initiative provides professional development opportunities and peer collaboration opportunities for women. A dissertation by Rodriguez (2021) and journal article by DiCanio et al. (2016) emphasizes the importance of role models and mentorship in increasing representation. Additionally, support groups such as the American Association's Coaching and Mentoring Superintendents of Color and IAPSS's Administrators of Color – Preparing for the Future Conference are steps in the right direction. Still, more needs to be accomplished to increase the number of women and people of color in superintendency. Tracking career advancements through educator licensure data can help improve the understanding of the disparity between the number of women and minority teachers/administrators versus superintendents.

Third, the study calls for better data systems to understand superintendents' work, responsibilities, and advancement expectations. Robust data collection systems exist for teachers, but similar systems are needed for district leaders. This data should include the superintendent pipeline, licensure, timeframes to positions after licensure, and personal characteristics. Such information is crucial to help state-level policymakers, researchers, and school boards make informed decisions.

In relation to improved data infrastructure, leaders might also consider the adoption of standard practices for evaluating superintendents so that they receive growth-oriented feedback from their constituencies that are consistent with the practices for evaluating other superintendents across the state. Such universal evaluation already exists for teachers in Indiana and helps new principals taking over a building understand areas for improvement. There is a similar need for superintendents to become better at their positions and to help school boards in hiring new superintendents.

Future Research

The present study highlights the need for further research to understand both the factors influencing superintendent retention and the supports necessary to diversify superintendency. The limited research on the link between personal characteristics of the superintendent to outcomes such as student achievement; superintendent retention, attrition, and mobility; and equity can hinder the field's understanding of this important component of the education workforce. Stability in the superintendent's office is essential for increasing student achievement and maintaining consistency within school districts (Plotts & Guttmore, 2014; Simpson, 2013).

First, it is imperative to determine whether Indiana superintendents are retiring or leaving for positions in other states. If they are moving to other states, understanding the reasons for this and the appealing conditions elsewhere could help Indiana improve retention. Policymakers could use this research to enhance conditions in Indiana, thereby retaining current superintendents and attracting those from other states. This effort could substantially support the state's goal of diversifying the superintendency.

In line with this goal, more research is needed on retention, mobility, and attrition among women superintendents in Indiana. White's (2022) research suggests differences in career trajectories among women, based on nationwide data. Future qualitative research focusing on female superintendents in Indiana could provide deeper insights into their lived experiences. Recent research indicates that women in the Indiana superintendency encounter different interactions than male superintendents with colleagues and community members (Brown, 2021). Exploring these conditions further could enhance the current understanding of the factors leading to increased turnover.

Furthermore, this study shows that the underrepresentation of superintendents of color requires further research. Future studies could survey Indiana principals who identify as people of color to understand the barriers they face in applying for or securing superintendent positions. It would also be important to investigate whether superintendents who identify as people of color are underrepresented in other states and to track trends in their representation nationwide.

Finally, rural superintendents in Indiana, who move to other districts at the highest rates, present a particular concern because most of the state's districts are rural. Prior research has shown that lower salaries may drive superintendents in rural settings to seek employment elsewhere, a finding consistent with other research showing that compensation is a significant factor in superintendent mobility (Grissom & Anderson, 2012; Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Wood, et al., 2013). More research is needed to explore whether rural superintendents earn lower salaries and whether this contributes to their departure. Factors such as smaller student enrollments and lower net assessed valuations in rural districts, which lead to fewer tax dollars, may play a role. Net assessed valuations for Indiana districts are available through the Indiana Department of Government Finance (DLGF). Future researchers could use surveys to understand

the factors influencing rural superintendents' decisions to leave their districts. Additionally, qualitative studies could explore the reasons behind these superintendent departures. Lastly, replicating this study in other states could reveal common patterns in the retention, mobility, and attrition of superintendents based on district locale.

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Resume

Branden Roeder

Professional Experience

Superintendent
Rising Sun Schools – Rising Sun, IN
2014–Present

Principal
Ohio County Elementary-Middle School – Rising Sun, IN
2020–2024

Mayor
City of Rising Sun – Rising Sun, IN
2012–2014

Kindergarten & 3rd Grade Teacher
Rising Sun Elementary – Rising Sun, IN
2011–2014

Title 1 Teacher & 1st Grade Teacher
Sunman Elementary – Sunman, IN
2009–2011

6th–8th Grade Science & Language Arts Teacher
Switzerland County – Vevay, IN
2007–2009

Special Education Teacher
Bright Elementary – Bright, IN
2006–2007

Education

Doctorate in Educational Leadership
Indiana University – Bloomington, IN
November, 2024

M.A. in Curriculum and Instruction
University of Phoenix
2010

B.A. in Elementary Education
Northern Kentucky University – Highland Heights, KY
2006