



# Participatory Action Research on Gender Equity in the Superintendency

Results and Recommendations from qualitative and quantitative data with Oregon's female K-12 Superintendents.

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## Research Questions

- What are the barriers embedded within the female experience in reaching and serving in the role of superintendent and what are the supports?
- How do current structures help or hinder equity in the profession?
- How can understanding these challenges better inform more equitable policies and practices in education?

# Participatory Action Research (PAR)

- Research Approach
  - Emphasizes Participation, Action, and Collaboration
  - Shared Power between Researchers and Participants
  - Reflective and Collaborative Process
  - Focus on Change
- Groundbreaking for Oregon



## Background and Overview

1. AASA 2015 Mid-Decade Survey: Current landscape of gender equity in the superintendency.
2. Joan Acker's *Inequality Regimes* grounds this study. Inequality in the superintendency persists *systemically* and *structurally*.



## Methods

- Qualitative Study with 28 of Oregon's 54 female superintendents.
- Recruitment
- 45 mins to 1 hour
- Open-ended questions
- Pre-Interview Quant. Survey with 31 superintendents.

# Survey Results-Demographics

54 female Superintendents of 197 school districts

Age, Race, and Ethnicity have been left out to respect confidentiality.

## Highest Degree Attained: \*self-report (N = 31) (urban/rural)

Age Range	Count	Percentage
Masters	17	54.8%
Doctorate	12	38.7%
Certification(s)*	2	6.4%

## District Size & Geography

District Size	Count
> 1,000 students	9
1,001 – 5,000 students	8
5,001 – 10,000 students	5
10,000+ students	6

# Results-Trajectory

## Gender Prejudice, Hiring

- Hiring for Administration
- Hiring for Superintendency → **School Boards**

# Results-Trajectory

## Gender Prejudice-School Boards

### Explicit

- “So the person who I supervised my first year came to be the superintendent. And I was told, The board isn't going to hire you. [District] is just not ready for a female. [They hired] a male. He didn't last the full year.”

### Implicit

- “I have applied for positions that people have begged me to apply for. Headhunters and the like. And then, not moved through the process... Instead, they're still hiring white, middle aged men who don't have the same type of resume or years of experience that I do.”

### Location/Mobility



# Results-Trajectory

## School Boards & Gender Discrimination

1. Lack of school board diversity

2. Inexperienced/Equity Training  
Oregon School Board Association

3. Prejudiced Stereotypes

“there was a comment afterwards about whether or not I should be hired. Because people were afraid that [former Superintendent] and I would have a relationship because I was a woman. Which was just sickening to me, that somebody, even as much as nine years ago, would actually think that.”



# Results-Trajectory

## Interim, Appointed, or Internal Candidates

- “I try to picture my school board hiring another female superintendent that wasn't from [District] that they didn't have a relationship with, and I wouldn't see that happening.”

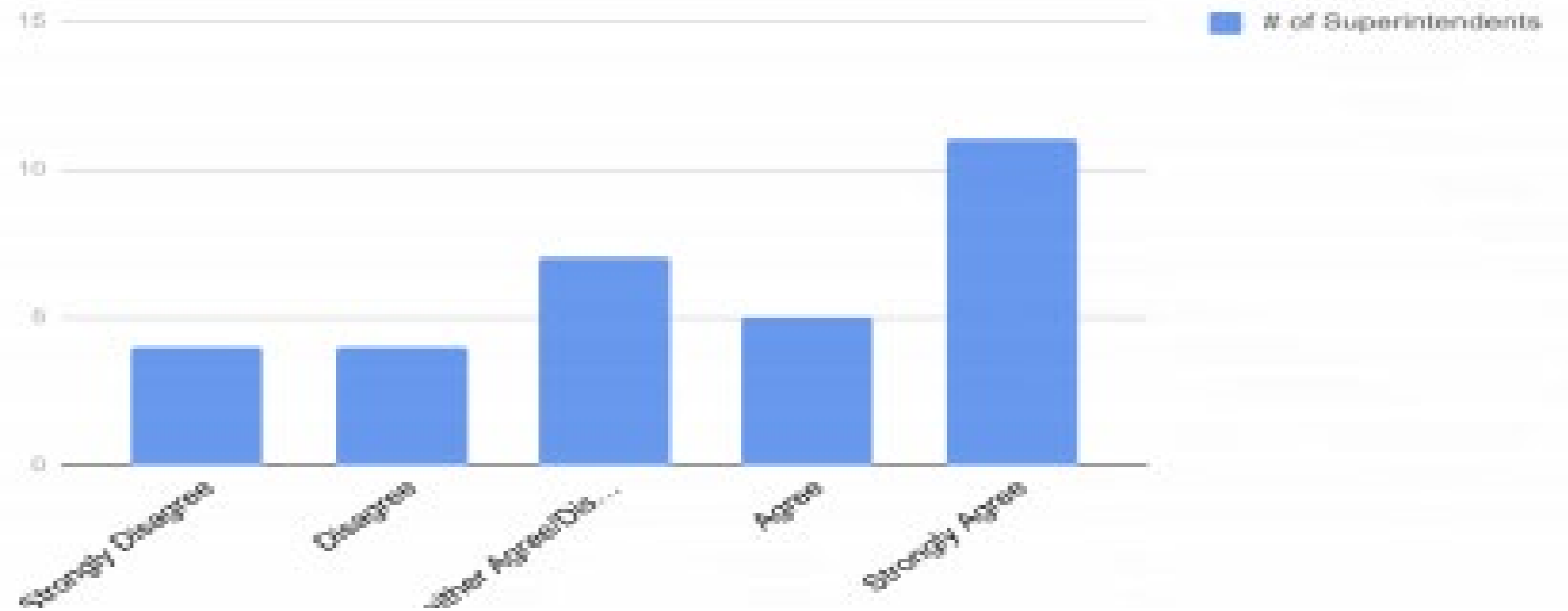
**Total Number of Applications to Superintendent Roles**

Applications	Count	Percentage
0	12	38.7%
1	8	25.8%
2	6	19.3%
3	1	3.2%
4 - 9	2	6.4%
10+	2	6.4%

# Results-Trajectory

## Mentorship

- ▶ No Mentors (6)
  - ▶ Rural (4)



“I was just asking for a mentor. Nobody really had the time, sitting superintendents, women, those are who I reached out to. I went about finding support in other ways.”



# Results-Trajectory

## Mentorship & Pathways

- ▶ Formal (Superintendent Leadership Academy, Phd program, Latin/Latinx Administrator Association, Admin Prep)
- ▶ Informal-Sought on their own, other admin

*What's working well? How can we improve it?*

# Results-Trajectory

## Tapping & Male Allies

- ▶ Tapping (19)
  - ▶ the unintentional SI
  - ▶ Fas-tracked
- ▶ Male Allies (12)

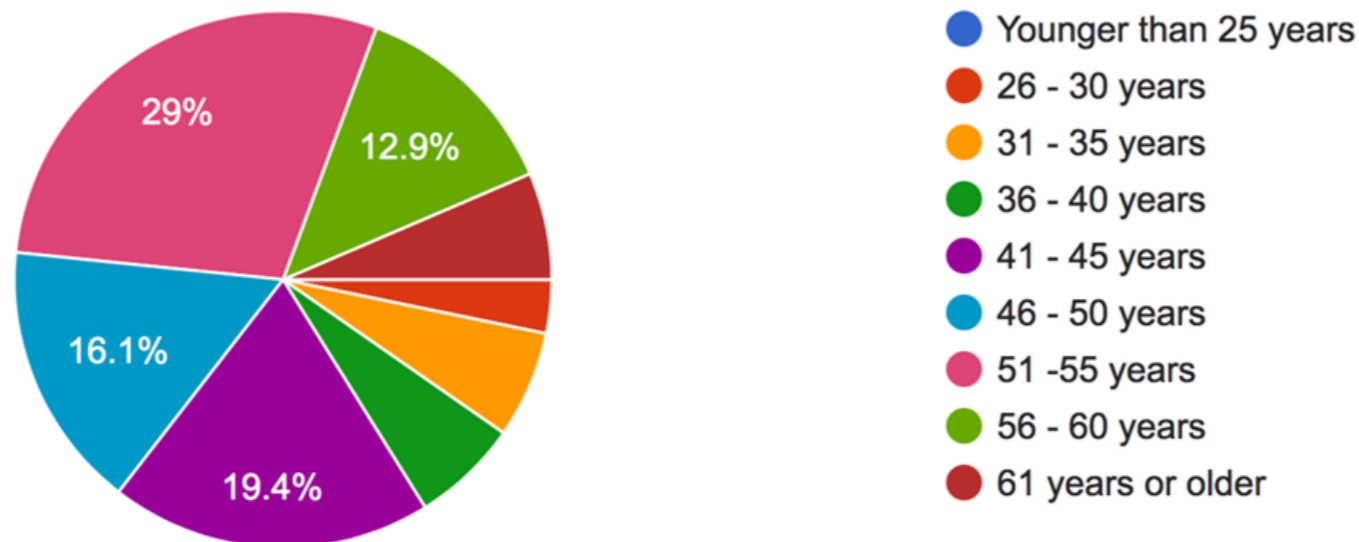
***How do we systematize this equitably?***

# Results-The Maternal Wall

- Age at Hiring
- Work-Flow Processes
- Effects on Retention

“The male administrators were like, ...early morning works best so let's do [meetings] at 6:00 AM. "I'm a single mom. My daycare doesn't open until 6:30 and what am I going to do with my kids?" And I had to say... I'll figure that out. Because if I can't figure that out, ... it's because being a female is a barrier.”

Age at First Superintendency: (N = 31)





# Results-Workplace Dynamics

## Gender Bias

### 1. Exclusion & Ability to Network:

Maintaining Power Through Exclusivity

### 2. Workload

- “I’ve actually had male superintendent colleagues, professional friends of mine go fishing together, come back and tell me not only that they went fishing, but while they were fishing, they decided that,...I should be the facilitator for our X, Y, Z group for the next year.”

# Results-Workplace Dynamics

## Gender Bias

### 3. Double Standards

### 4. Microaggressions and Toxic Situations

### 5. Effects on Leadership

“I'm the first female superintendent in this district... I was hired by an all female board and that was a first for this district. I feel an obligation to be good, not just good but better at my craft than those around me. I'm constantly looking for ways to improve my skill set because I realize if I don't get this right, that people will immediately go to gender, not to the fact that I didn't think through what I should have thought through. There is also a great weight that comes with that, but it also energizes me.”



# Results-Workplace Dynamics

## Systemic Undermining & Compensation

- Systemic Undermining (9)

“I think part of [the barriers] were internal, just not believing that a board would take me seriously or actually hire me. But then also part of them were external, because I believe that that's true, that that was true. It's not that there haven't been female superintendents all along, but I think they've been in pretty specific situations or they've been in, maybe they were ultra-organized, ultra-working much, much more than perhaps a male counterpart. I'm not sure, but I know it wasn't until I took myself seriously.”

- Compensation (12)

## Results-Intersectionality

- Race/Ethnicity
- Sexual Orientation
- Age

Through: covert and overt racism, microaggressions, discrimination, language and family.

*How can we be our authentic selves?*

# Results-Retention

## School Boards

- Greatest Barrier and Greatest Support

“The most important factor right now is school boards. I'm just incredibly worried about the future of my superintendent colleagues because school boards are tricky right now. I think it's the biggest barrier and the biggest support all at the same time, or could be the biggest support. If [I] think back to my beginning, one of the things that helped me the most was the supportive school board I had. That just isn't the case in a lot of places any longer. I think it should be the biggest thing on all of our minds, and we should be trying to figure out what we do about it.”

# Recommendations-Structural & Systemic

## 1. Leadership

- Hiring with an equity lens
  - Oregon School Board Association
  - Coalition of School Administrators
- Compensation
  - Salary Schedule, 3rd party contract negotiations, male allies
  - Pay Equity
- Reconceptualize the superintendency



# Recommendations-Structural & Systemic

## 2. Community

**How can we create a *culture* of equity?**

- Equity Education in K-12
  - Curriculum and Textbooks
  - Experiential Equity Learning
  
- Family Friendly Policies
  
- Board Development
  - OSBA
  - More Research
  - Hiring with equity lens

# Recommendations-Structural & Systemic

## 3. Career Development

**How can we create multiple means of support?**

- Preparation Programs, Organizations, Networks
  - Admin Prep Programs
  
- Intentional Networking/Affinity Groups
  - Isolation & Active Support
  
- Systematic Mentoring