The Leaky Superintendent Pipeline: Gender, Career Pathways, and the Underrepresentation of Women in District Leadership
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Gender Representation in Education Leadership

- Although women comprise approximately 80% of the total educator workforce, they hold just half of all principal positions, and only one in five superintendents is a woman.
- Research suggests women leaders are perceived as being as effective as men, if not even more so. Evidence suggests women leaders may be more child-centered and instructionally focused, they may be more collaborative and better at coalition-building, and women leaders can serve as role models for other educators.
- Possible explanations for unequal representation in leadership include: a lack of interest or aspirational differences, lack of mentoring, encouragement, and role models, differences in experience and career paths, and bias in hiring.

Research Questions
1. To what extent do women hold school and district leadership positions, and has that representation changed over time?
2. What are the most common pathways educators take in ascending to the superintendent, and do they differ between men and women or in different district locales?
3. Upon attaining common pre-superintendency leadership positions, are men and women equally likely to attain the superintendent?

Data: Missouri Public Schools, 1991-2016
- Longitudinal administrative data including all public school educators in the state (N=25,3,786)
- 1,881 educators became superintendents at some point

Estimation

\[
\text{superintendent}_{i,t+1} = \alpha + \psi_{\text{female}} + \beta X_{i,t} + \delta s_{i,t} + \gamma r_{t} + \delta_{t} + \epsilon_{i,t} \\
\text{role}_{i,t+1} = \alpha + \psi_{\text{female}} + \beta X_{i,t} + \delta s_{i,t} + \gamma r_{t} + \delta_{t} + \epsilon_{i,t}
\]

(1) Superintendent: binary variable indicating an educator moved into the superintendency at time t+1 for educator i in school i in district i at time t
(2) Role: binary variable indicating an educator moved into a particular role at time t+1 for educator i in school i in district i at time t
Female: indicator for whether the educator is identified as female
\(X\): vector of educator characteristics (experience, education, race/ethnicity)
\(s\): vector of school and/or district characteristics (enrollment, demographics, achievement)
\(r\): year fixed effect
\(\delta\): district fixed effect

The proportion of women in school and district leadership positions grew until around 2008, when trends began to flatten.

Most superintendents have prior experience as a principal, though experience differs by gender and district locale.

Men are more likely to be promoted to the superintendency from all common prior positions in all locales.

Men are more likely to be promoted at virtually every possible point of promotion throughout school and district leadership.

Main Take-Aways
- Among observationally similar educators, men are more likely than women to be promoted throughout school/district hierarchy
- Systemic inequities in the promotion of men and women educators at all levels may be affecting women educators’ career ambitions and trajectories
- Education leaders and policy makers should work to ensure equitable practices in recruitment and hiring
- Graduate schools preparing educators and future leaders must be thoughtful in student recruitment and training all new leaders for success
- Researchers should continue to examine specific barriers to promotion and also consider contextual differences in career opportunities (e.g., locale differences)

References
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