

**UNDERSTANDING SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT, CHALLENGES, AND
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RECRUITING AND RETAINING SUPERINTENDENTS
OF COLOR IN OREGON**

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Superintendents of Color in Oregon

Tanisha Tate Woodson, Ph.D., Destiny McLennan, Ph.D., Karen Pérez, Ed.D.

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About Education Northwest

Founded as a nonprofit corporation in 1966, Education Northwest builds capacity in schools, families, and communities through applied research and development. We collaborate with public, private, and community-based organizations to address educational inequities and improve students' success. We provide high-quality research, technical assistance, professional development, and evaluation services that address the most pressing education and youth-services needs in our region and across the country. For more than 50 years we have used evidence to help partners solve educational challenges and improve learning.

Contact

Education Northwest
1417 NW Everett Street, Suite 310
Portland, OR 97209
educationnorthwest.org
503.275.9500

About the authors

Tanisha Tate Woodson, Destiny McLennan, and Karen Pérez are researchers and educational practitioners at Education Northwest. Tanisha Tate Woodson, Ph.D., MPH, is a senior advisor who specializes in using culturally responsive and equitable research and evaluation methods. Destiny McLennan, Ph.D., M.Ed., is a qualitatively trained researcher who specializes in using asset-based methods and theories to identify solutions for transforming communities. Karen Pérez, Ed.D., M.Ed. is a bilingual-bicultural educational leader with over 20 years of experience co-constructing transformative system changes.

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Executive summary

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the hostile political climate, and concerns about safety have led to the departure of superintendents and administrators from their districts both in Oregon and across the United States. In summer 2021, the Coalition of Oregon School Administrators (COSA), Oregon Department of Education (ODE), and Oregon School Boards Association (OSBA) commissioned this study to learn more about the lived experiences of current and former superintendents of color in the state of Oregon. Education Northwest, together with members of COSA, ODE, OSBA, and other administrators of color in Oregon, conducted a qualitative study with 16 current and former superintendents of color. This report will assist key stakeholders to better understand the specific experiences and needs of superintendents of color and to identify strategies and next steps for recruiting, hiring, retaining, and supporting them in their journey as superintendents.

This study seeks to address four learning questions:

1. To what extent do superintendents of color feel supported in their leadership role?
2. What are the factors or conditions that contribute to turnover of superintendents of color?
3. What recommendations do superintendents of color offer to improve retention of administrators?
4. What local, state, and district-level actions and policies can be implemented to support the success and retention of superintendents of color?

Key findings

► Systems of support

- Superintendents of color shared mixed feelings regarding the quality of their experiences in superintendent leadership training and graduate-level preparation programs. These programs did not provide the practical skills needed to negotiate contracts (e.g., salaries, terms for dismissal), manage school board and union relationships, and develop safety and security plans.
- Prior experience in various teaching and administrator roles, having a mentor, and participating in affinity groups were cited as the most impactful supports that prepared them for superintendency.

► Challenges superintendents experience

- Superintendents of color in Oregon have a deep commitment to advancing equitable policies and practices that would support underserved groups, including students and teachers of color as well as members of the LGBTQ2IA+ community.
- This commitment was often met with pushback from school board members, cabinet members, unions, and the community, making it difficult to shift practices and policies and creating strained relationships. These challenges, along with unsupportive boards,

unsafe environments, and racial discrimination and bias, made it difficult for superintendents to advance equity and feel secure in their role.

- Superintendents of color, especially women superintendents, reported incidents where their physical safety was threatened. Nonetheless, superintendents of color remained resilient, and continued to leverage social connections and resources to continue in their fight for advancing education equity.

These findings led to the following recommendations for improving the recruitment, hiring, and retention of superintendents of color.

Table 1. Recommendations for recruiting, hiring, and retaining superintendents of color

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RECRUITING AND HIRING SUPERINTENDENTS OF COLOR
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Intentionally recruit and hire superintendents of color.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Superintendents suggest a stronger and more intentional approach to recruiting superintendents of color. One starting place is partnering with hiring and talent acquisition firms (e.g., Promise 54)¹ that focus specifically on finding qualified administrators and superintendents of color. These firms would be trained to facilitate conversations with candidates and school boards about how systemic racism impacts the candidates they bring forward as well as considerations for welcoming candidates, developing contracts, providing mentorship, and more.○ Provide training to school board members on how to support superintendents of color during the hiring process and their transition into the role as well as support and training on developing an equitable performance review process.○ Partner with university professors and department chairs to recruit diverse, qualified educators and educational leaders, with an emphasis on outreach to minority-serving institutions with diverse student populations○ Regularly examine and evaluate applicant demographics with an equity lens, including the extent to which diverse candidates are successfully recruited to apply for superintendent positions, advanced for interviews, and hired.▶ Strengthen organizational capacity for providing mentoring and training support to superintendents of color.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Organizations like COSA and the Oregon Association of Latino Administrators can partner to provide stronger systems of support, training, and preparation for superintendents specifically, not just administrators broadly.

¹ For more information about Promise 54, please visit their website: <https://www.promise54.org/>

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RECRUITING AND HIRING SUPERINTENDENTS OF COLOR

- Organizations like COSA can foster networking opportunities for superintendents to meet other superintendents across the state. These organizations can also help develop and establish affinity networks for superintendents of color.
- Provide funding and resources for mentorship and training programs to pair superintendents of color with mentors who share similar racial, ethnic, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds.

▶ **Develop superintendent pathway programs.**

- Expand grow-your-own programs funded through the Educator Advancement Council to strengthen the pipeline for administrators of color to enter superintendent positions. These efforts should focus on strengthening pathways for potential educational leaders who bring experience living and working in Oregon.
- Partner with local universities and colleges of education to develop grow-your-own programs for educational administration and leverage the political and financial resources these institutions have to offer.

▶ **Update contract language to protect superintendents of color and other educational leaders who advocate for and advance equitable policies and practices.**

- Eliminate the no-cause firings clause currently in many superintendents' contracts.
- Provide counseling, guidance, and support to superintendents of color to understand what components need to be included in their contracts. Include protective language to support them in implementing and advancing state and federal mandates focused on equity.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RETAINING SUPERINTENDENTS OF COLOR

▶ **Improve school board governance and leadership by mandating training and accountability for board members.**

- Board members deeply impact the stability of a superintendent's position and can make it difficult to advance equitable practices that ultimately benefit students. School board members should have to meet explicit requirements to qualify for the position and all board members should receive mandatory training prior to entering their role.
- OSBA could lead this effort by providing more support for local school boards so members understand their role as well as what a school board does and does not do. This would also help inform the public as they make decisions during elections.

▶ **Strengthen school boards' capacity for advancing equity and support school boards and superintendents in their efforts to advance equity.**

- Provide funding for equity consultants or equity advisory groups to work with school districts to put their equity lens and position statements into practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RETAINING SUPERINTENDENTS OF COLOR

- Expand school board membership to include non-voting equity partners that can help inform the board of the impact of their decisions, especially as relates to equity.
- ▶ **Create a safety plan for superintendents of color to feel safe at work.**
 - Superintendents of color encountered instances where their physical safety was threatened. These threats sometimes caused them to consider leaving their role. Superintendents of color need support with developing comprehensive safety plans in collaboration with leaders from ODE, the Oregon Education Association, OSBA, and local law enforcement.
 - Safety plans should consist of tips and resources for creating a safe environment such as restricting public access to a superintendent’s personal phone number and physical address, tips for exiting meetings when a vehicle is surrounded by protesters, and reminders for notifying the police of upcoming protests and events.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS TO DEVELOP STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY AND KEY STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

- ▶ **Support the community in healing after experiencing the loss of a superintendent of color and equity leader.**
 - Short-term coping strategies are needed to help the community heal and move forward after experiencing the loss of a superintendent of color and equity leader.
- ▶ **Support candidates of color in running for school board member positions.**
 - Partner with political action committees and organizations such as the Oregon Futures Lab to support the development of candidates of color running for school board seats.
- ▶ **Build momentum from the ground up.**
 - In collaboration with grassroots and culturally specific organizations, conduct community conversations and listening sessions to organize, mobilize, and facilitate change from within the community while working together to advance equity.
- ▶ **Help community and education leaders become more politically informed and involved.**
 - Organizations like COSA and OSBA play a critical role in shaping our education system. Members of COSA and OSBA need to pay close attention to the board elections for their organizations. These elections are very important since board members have a role in shaping the culture and the structure of the organization.

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Introduction

The student population across Oregon is more diverse today than at any other time in the state's history (Gill et al., 2021). Nearly two of every five students are racially, ethnically, and/or linguistically diverse, and there are 25 school districts in Oregon where students of color make up the majority of the student population.

A deep body of research demonstrates that diversity among school administrators and educators has a positive impact on academic achievement and social and emotional learning for students of color as well as their white peers (Grissom et al., 2021). Districts led by superintendents of color attract a more diverse educator workforce and create processes for welcoming unheard community voices into district decision-making. African American administrators in particular positively influence the academic outcomes of Black students (Ononuju, 2016). In addition to developing goals, harnessing the energy of the staff, and being involved in instructional management, Black administrators have a “commitment to the education of African American children, a compassion for and understanding of their students and the communities in which they work, and a confidence in the ability of all children to learn” (Lomotey, 1989). When Black students are taught by a Black teacher at least once between grades 3 and 5, they are less likely to drop out of high school and more likely to aspire to college and take advanced coursework (Gershenson et al., 2017; Hart, 2020). Similarly, Latinx educational leaders positively impact Latinx student outcomes: They adopt a strengths-based perspective when working with students and families, promote inclusive school environments, and have a broader understanding of the cultural reasons Latinx students might drop out, which enables them to intervene and reduce attrition rates among those students (Hernandez et al., 2014; Martinez et al., 2016; Murakami et al., 2016; Rodela et al., 2019). Studies have also shown that racial matching for teachers and students positively impacts test scores of students of color and improves perceptions of teachers of color held by white students (Clotfelter et al., 2007).

Despite this evidence, data show that efforts to diversify the administrator workforce have not kept pace with the increasing diversity of students and communities. Across Oregon's 197 districts, only 11.7 percent of teachers and 12.5 percent of administrators are racially, ethnically, and/or linguistically diverse (Educator Advancement Council, 2020). This lack of diversity is not unique to Oregon. According to a national study, the average superintendent is a married white male (91.38%) with prior experience as a principal and two to eight years of experience as a superintendent (Tienken, 2021). Nationally, the percentage of female superintendents only increased by 2.6 percent from 2010 to 2020. Further, African American candidates make up only 2 percent of superintendents and 14 percent of the teaching workforce, and Latinx administrators account for only 7 percent of principals, the pool from which district administrators and superintendents are traditionally chosen (Chalmers, 2012; Rodela et al., 2019).

The number of superintendents of color in Oregon is not just stagnant; it is in a “highly concerning free-fall” (Gill et al., 2021). In the 2021/22 school year, 43 Oregon districts—22 percent of all districts in the state—had a new superintendent. After several superintendent departures in spring 2021, less than 5 percent of Oregon superintendents now identify as people of color. This reflects a national trend: Across the United States, superintendents and administrators of color are leaving school districts at an alarming rate (Kingkade, 2021). The myriad contributing factors include racism; discrimination; the impact of the pandemic; union polarization; political controversies; lack of mentoring, networking, and role models; and harsher performance reviews that influence turnover (Hendricks, 2013; National Superintendent Roundtable, 2021; Rodela et al., 2019; Sawchuk, 2021). While some criticism is to be expected with any leadership role, the vile physical and verbal assaults that superintendents have experienced during the pandemic appear to be unprecedented (National Superintendent Roundtable, 2021). As controversy around critical race theory has grown, superintendents of color and female superintendents have faced racist and misogynistic assaults that impact their personal health and safety, as well as the health and safety of their families.

Recognizing Oregon’s urgent need to interrupt these trends, the Coalition of Oregon School Administrators (COSA), the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), and the Oregon School Boards Association (OSBA) collectively commissioned this study to understand the lived experiences of current and former superintendents of color and to examine the difficulties in recruiting, hiring, and retaining superintendents of color within the state. The commissioning organizations will use the findings from this study to identify a set of recommendations for creating an environment that supports superintendents of color in their role.

Learning questions

This study focused on four learning questions to understand the current experiences of superintendents of color in Oregon and to improve their working conditions in the future.

When examining the current conditions experienced by superintendents of color, we addressed the following questions:

- *To what extent do superintendents of color feel supported in their leadership role?*
- *What are the factors or conditions that contribute to turnover of superintendents of color?*

To explore how state leaders and key stakeholders can improve future conditions for superintendents of color, we asked the following questions:

- *What recommendations do superintendents of color offer to improve retention among administrators of color?*
- *What local, state, and district-level actions and policies can be implemented to support the success and retention of superintendents of color?*

Methodology

In collaboration with current superintendents and leaders from COSA, ODE, and OSBA, the study team used a culturally responsive and equitable evaluation framework (Hood et al., 2015) to design and implement a study focused on the experiences of current and former superintendents of color in Oregon. This framework also helped the study team to center issues of equity and apply an action-oriented lens, which resulted in a comprehensive list of recommendations based on the experiences and reflections of the individuals who are most impacted by the study—superintendents of color.

Taking an asset-based approach, the study team also used the *community cultural wealth* framework to focus on the “array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). The model presents six forms of capital that challenge the dominant, deficit-based notions of communities of color and recognize how communities of color use resources passed on from previous generations to thrive and resist racist, white supremacist institutions and social structures (figure 1; Pérez-Huber, 2009; Yosso, 2005). Following this framework, the study team recognized and highlighted ways that superintendents of color have remained successful and resilient even in the face of adversity. Four of the six forms of capitals showed up in our interviews with participants—aspirational capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital.

Figure 1. Six forms of capital defined in the community cultural wealth model

Aspirational capital	One’s ability to maintain their hopes and dreams for the future, despite potential barriers
Linguistic capital	Skills attained through communication in more than one language and/or style
Familial capital	Cultural knowledge nurtured among family and community, expanding the concept of family to more broad understandings of kinship
Social capital	Community resources and networks of people that can provide support in navigating various institutions
Navigational capital	Skills and knowledge used to maneuver through various institutions, mainly those created without communities of color in mind
Resistant capital	Skills and knowledge used to challenge inequality through oppositional behavior

Source: Adapted from Yosso (2005).

Throughout this report, we lift up the ways in which superintendents of color accessed individual and community resources in their paths to, through, and away from the superintendency. In doing so, we hope to elevate and honor the strength and resilience of educational leaders of color while disrupting deficit-based narratives.

Study design

Superintendents of color in Oregon are diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, age, and personal and professional backgrounds. Some have lived and worked in Oregon for most of their careers, while others were recruited from other states. Some are nearing the end of their careers; others are relatively new to leadership positions. Given these varied experiences, it was very important that we capture study participants' voices and stories authentically and develop a deep understanding of their lived experiences. To accomplish this, we designed a qualitative study using in-depth one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

At the start of this project, Education Northwest established an advisory group comprised of educational leaders of color; research scholars; and representatives from COSA, ODE, OSBA, and the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission. This advisory group informed the study process, interview and survey questions, and target sample. As such, this study focuses specially on current and former superintendents of color in Oregon. The advisory team met between June 2021 and early August 2021 to review current literature and newspaper articles regarding the experiences of superintendents of color and the barriers they encounter when advancing equity. We also facilitated a series of conversations with the advisory group to develop the pre-interview survey questionnaire (see appendix A) and the semi-structured interview guide (see appendix B). During the final stages of the collaborative process, we presented preliminary data to the advisory group and facilitated a data sense-making session to identify key recommendations associated with this study (Nelson, 2018).

Interview discussion topics

The areas of focus for this study were determined based on a review of the literature and conversations with the advisory group. Our data collection efforts focused on the following topics:

- Recruitment and hiring
- Formal and informal networks and mentoring and support systems
- Experience with racial discrimination and bias
- Equity leadership and expectations
- Managing relationships with school boards, unions, and other stakeholders
- Recommendations for state and district policy changes and initiatives

To gather additional background information on participants without adding time to the interview, we administered a pre-interview survey questionnaire. Participants completed this survey prior to the 90-minute semi-structured interviews. To accommodate the superintendents' schedules, some interviews

were conducted on the weekend. The interview length was also tailored to superintendents' preferences, ranging from 60 minutes to two and a half hours.

All interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom, recorded, and transcribed. During the first phase of coding, a team of trained qualitative researchers created a coding dictionary using both inductive and deductive codes derived from the data and the interview protocol, which ensured systematic analysis of data aligned with the learning questions. In the second phase of coding, researchers conducted thematic coding whereby we coded each interview, reviewed coding for consistency, and analyzed the data for patterns within each topic area. The themes highlighted in the interviews are described within the findings section of this report.

Study sample

Members of the advisory team identified potential interview participants and helped recruit current and former superintendents of color to participate in the study. In total, we interviewed 16 superintendents: Nine participants (56%) identified as current superintendents, and 10 participants (63%) identified as male. The seven former superintendents included a mix of individuals who had retired, transitioned into a superintendent role in another state, or transitioned into another district leadership role. Three of the former superintendents no longer lived in Oregon. All participants had at least 20 years of experience working in various roles in K–12 education (range of 20–42 years, with an average of 29 years). Thirteen participants (81%) worked in Oregon before taking on a superintendent role. Only five participants (31%) had previously worked in the same district where they became superintendent. Participants who had worked in the district served in varying roles, including district administrators (e.g., assistant superintendents), maintenance workers, teachers, and building administrators. Additional background on the study participants appears in table 2.

Table 2. Characteristics of study participants

Demographic characteristics	Percentage of superintendents
Race/ethnicity ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 69% Latino/a/x or Hispanic • 31% Black or African American • 31% multiracial/multi-ethnic • 19% white^b • 13% American Indian or Alaska Native • 6% Asian • 6% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
Degree received	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% earned an advanced degree <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 50% earned a master’s degree ○ 50% earned a doctoral degree
Number of years current superintendents had been in their position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 44% Less than a year • 11% 1 to 2 years • 33% 3 to 5 years • 11% More than 5 years
Number of years in current district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13% Less than a year • 19% 1 to 2 years • 38% 3 to 5 years • 31% More than 5 years

a. Percentages for race/ethnicity do not add to 100 because participants could select multiple categories.

b. All superintendents who identified as white also identified with one or more other race/ethnicity and are included in the multiracial category.

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Authors’ analysis of participants’ self-reported, pre-interview survey data (n = 16).

Key learnings

We organized key learnings into two areas: *systems of support for superintendents of color* and *challenges that contributed to turnover*. Throughout each area, we center the experiences, voices, and stories of superintendents of color in Oregon and feature their recommendations.

Systems of support for superintendents of color

This section focuses on the types of support that superintendents of color used both before and during their tenure in Oregon. First, we describe the training and preparation that superintendents received from formal leadership training programs and graduate-level education. Then, we discuss the impact of mentorships and, finally, the importance of prior experience for superintendents of color.

Superintendent leadership training and preparation programs provided varying levels of support

Preparing for superintendency tends to occur through formal training programs as well as a mix of formal and informal learning through professional and organizational relationships (Orr, 2006). Sixty-three percent of superintendents reported participating in formal leadership training before their tenure in the form of leadership academies and superintendent and administrator preparation programs that focused on educational leadership and administration. These programs included the COSA New Superintendent Academy, the Association for Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS) Preparation Program, the Harvard Excel Program, the Harvard Urban Superintendent Leadership Program, the Southern Oregon Mentorship Program, and other state and national programs (for a description of these programs, see appendix C).

Superintendents expressed positive experiences with superintendent leadership academies and preparation programs. For some, these programs provided valuable networks with other superintendents and helped establish relationships that superintendents maintained throughout their careers.

I had some really strong support both from COSA and locally, so I got into the superintendent's academy ... and so it was a wonderful experience, and it really it taught me a lot, and the support that [the COSA leadership team] provided was absolutely vital.

– Current superintendent

The relationships and networks superintendents cultivated from their involvement in superintendent leadership and preparation programs often provided a system of support. For example, one current superintendent stated:

It's not that I need any more of the technical know-how. For me, it's been very helpful to be in the conversation with people that are interested in driving work at the system level for kids of color. And so that's my only interest. It's like, I don't need another superintendent's academy, but I do it because of the other benefits that come with it and being in the middle of the conversations. So, I have a massive network. I can call any superintendent in the country of any size [school district] and have a very frank, open conversation.

– Current superintendent

Superintendents shared mixed feelings regarding the quality of their experiences in graduate-level education. A current superintendent mentioned that graduate-level courses varied from being very theoretical to very practical.

It was very hit or miss. Sometimes I would take a course where it was all very theoretical and not very practical, and then I would take a course [where] it was a practicing superintendent [who] was teaching a class, and that was super valuable to me because, you know, we were actually learning things that were happening right now, today in education in our region.

– Current superintendent

Female superintendents of color experienced graduate-level training programs differently than their male counterparts

Overall, female superintendents of color had completed higher levels of education compared to their male peers: All female superintendents in this study had earned a doctorate, compared to only two of 10 male superintendents. One female superintendent described how she was strongly encouraged to obtain a doctoral degree when she initially expressed her desire to become a superintendent. Her mentor, who was also a superintendent of color, emphasized that as a woman of color, she would need to work harder than her peers ('You're going to need two steps up'). On this advice, she completed a doctoral program while working full time and cultivated a work ethic where she often works when no one else does. Although the other five female superintendents did not explicitly say that they were encouraged to pursue a doctoral degree, education levels did vary notably by gender.

Female superintendents also faced some challenges in their graduate programs. For example, one female superintendent described how a white male professor repeatedly directed microaggressions at women of color.

Well, he would treat women so badly in the class, especially women of color. I always noticed that if there was a woman who may be a little overweight or not dressed professionally, then he would dismiss them by saying, 'What are you, the PTA mom?' or may some other dismissive comment. And these women, and other women of color, would come to me crying, saying, 'I think I have to quit this program.' I'd respond, 'You are not quitting this program. We are going to do this program together.'

– Current superintendent

Overall, our findings suggest that superintendent leadership training and preparation programs are an important mechanism for exposing administrators and educational leaders of color to the field and connecting them to people already working in this space in Oregon. Participants did note that both types of programs can be strengthened by increasing their focus on practical strategies such as contract negotiations and building and maintaining successful relationships, particularly with school boards and unions.

Mentors and networks were important sources of support for superintendents of color

Mentorships—one-on-one relationships with others who could provide advice, support, and feedback—deeply impacted the experiences of superintendents in this study. All participants discussed the positive influence that mentors, formal and informal, had on their career and tenure as a superintendent. Superintendents sought out their mentors in times of tension with boards, unions, and the community, as well as when undergoing contract negotiations and turnover (i.e., being fired or quitting). Some mentorships happened formally, such as those established through participation in leadership programs. Others were established informally when superintendents identified their own mentors or were selected as proteges by more senior leaders (described further in the following section). Some mentorships that were initiated through leadership academies and superintendent training programs ultimately grew into more informal relationships and mentorships over time.

Mentors had a noticeable impact on the superintendents of color in this study. One former superintendent said, “It’s all about relationships.” Another superintendent shared that there were “a lot of informal opportunities for connections, meetings, trainings. I feel like I have a multitude of people I can call if I have questions.”

Mentors provided important career advice and support. As a former superintendent pointed out, the potential for termination is a reality for many superintendents, making it important to “talk about your contract ... if you get fired, that contract will save your career or your livelihood.” A current superintendent recalled how a formal mentorship program connected him to a mentor who offered practical advice and support, especially during the early phases of his superintendency.

But, through a [mentoring program] I was assigned a mentor [who] is a [tenured superintendent] ... And he took his job very seriously and I couldn't be more thankful ... Being able to kind of ferret through what a contract might look like, and we were friends ... he helped me with the concept of writing interim language ... I wrote my contract so that if the board wasn't happy with my work as interim superintendent then I could go back to my role as director ... he spent a lot of time here in district with me watching me work with my administrative team, or even sitting in on some of my agenda-setting meetings with board members.

– Current superintendent

Prior experience and strong mentorships helped current superintendents build the resiliency to stay in their current role.

The mentoring and the experience of being an assistant superintendent for six years [allowed me to see] difficult things with staff, difficult things with students, difficult things with parents and families, difficult things with communities ... But you get to that point [where you] understand the mental model of how to work through this. [My personal] drive and also [my] professional growth, or wanting to reach my full potential, [combined with] having a great mentor helped me get to that point of like, 'Oh, I can do this, I'm capable of this.' Had I not had a great mentor or mentors in my life, I might not have ever got to that point.

– Current superintendent

While superintendents described how much they benefited from mentoring relationships, they also noted that having mentors of color would have helped them successfully navigate other complexities that come with the role.

Predecessors provided mentorship and helped prepare superintendents prior to and during their tenure

In a few instances, participants described how their predecessors provided a particularly valuable type of mentorship that bolstered them in their role as superintendent. While one superintendent reported feeling a need to step out of her predecessor's shadow, overall superintendents said that mentorships with their predecessors positively impacted their experiences. Predecessors helped prepare participants before they began in their roles and provided support after participants started. Superintendents called on their predecessors in times of uncertainty around contracts, board management, and concerns regarding safety. Superintendents continuously spoke to the impact their predecessor had in preparing them for their role. One superintendent described an experience in which he accompanied his predecessor throughout the country as an assistant superintendent until taking on his own superintendency. Other superintendents described similar supportive experiences.

I think I got a little bit of [tips and strategies for building relationships with board members] from my predecessor ... Had he not said it's really important to meet with your board members ahead of time, I don't know that I would have seen the importance or value ... So I feel like I have had the most learning from being with folks that have been in positions. The superintendent prior really, I feel like, prepared me to the degree that he could for the job.

– Current superintendent

The superintendent who first hired me was both a support and a mentor for years. I worked for him [as an assistant superintendent] and stayed in contact and worked with him through a number of professional organizations, even when I was a superintendent.

– Former superintendent

Mentorship from predecessors allowed superintendents to learn from their experiences and mistakes and lead the district according to their own vision. These mentoring relationships impacted how superintendents formed relationships with their staff, board members, and community members.

Networks and mentors of color were key sources of support for the specific concerns faced by superintendents of color

Although superintendents of color facilitate their own networks and mentorships, superintendents noted that finding mentors who identified as the same race or gender, or both, was very difficult within Oregon. Often, these types of relationships formed across state lines.

[There's] lots of informal opportunities for connections, meetings, trainings. I feel like I have a multitude of people I can call if I have questions. What I don't have ... I don't have superintendents of color I can call when we're facing challenges that are a little bit different than others. It was interesting because I was talking to an assistant superintendent ... she said, 'Are you going to get a mentor?' I said, 'Yeah, I'm going to get a mentor.' Then she said, 'Well, are you going to get a [person of color]?' I started laughing because I said, 'Who? We're it.'

– Current superintendent

One participant said that having a group of women of color superintendents to connect with regularly created an enduring social connection.

It was us, the women of color superintendents in the state of Oregon, for a while there, and we'd meet at each other's houses, have food. We would go to local places and have tea or coffee or [a] glass of wine. Even when the pandemic happened, we had to do virtual meetings and sit and have a glass of wine and have conversations about what was going on for us, and it was great.

– Former superintendent

A current superintendent with more than 30 years of experience in various K–12 roles recalled how the lack of connections with mentors of color has been an issue of concern for more than two decades.

Back in the early 2000s, even going into 2011, 2014, '15, we didn't really have affinity groups. And I'm not saying that those terms weren't out there. We were just kind of surviving. I'm not saying I was the only, but again, I was trying to do my job and not make it about the color of my skin. It was all about, 'Am I qualified to do this job? Yes or no.' And so, when we talk about back in the day, what supports, I kind of didn't have support. I mean, it was pretty lonely.

– Current superintendent

Another superintendent mentioned the value of support from other superintendents of color and suggested that COSA, ODE, OSBA, and other community organizations help develop related initiatives.

When a superintendent of color does get hired—and there's a whole lot that needs to happen to make sure that that happens way more often—a focused support to help them navigate what it means to be a superintendent of color in the district where most of the folks that they're going to have to interact with aren't going to look like them. And not have the same cultural or background and understanding of where they're coming from ... I do see [that support] coming from multiple places, but I think that COSA could be a kind of a focal point that brings appropriate resources together. I think there are resources that can come from OSBA, state board of education, you guys, but also different community organizations as well.

– Former superintendent

Superintendents also sought out networks of colleagues with similar lived, cultural experiences. They formed networks via various forums and groups, including the Danforth Superintendent's Forum and racial affinity groups like the Oregon Association of Latino Administrators (OALA). Recognizing the importance of these connections, superintendents expressed a desire to pay it forward by mentoring others and leading affinity groups.

A lot of these women know me and have asked me to mentor them. A lot of them call me, 'Can I have coffee with you?' I say, 'I can't have coffee with everyone who wants me to mentor them, but here's my phone number. You need something? You call me. You have an interview? You call me and I will coach you through it ... If they're going to offer you a position, call me before they offer you the position if you need help on the contract.'

– Current superintendent

I've made it a point to pay that forward. So, I'm a mentor for four Latina aspiring superintendents in the [School Superintendents Association] aspiring Latino superintendent group cohort. I've been a mentor for some women teachers who moved up to administration kind of on their journey. I mentored somebody through Oregon ALAS through her leadership journey. So, I just continue, you know, we all just keep paying it forward because it's a cycle. What we put out there comes back to us.

– Former superintendent

When affinity groups did not exist, superintendents used their relationships to create their own systems of support for superintendents of color

Superintendents in this study often had to create their own networks of mentors and systems of support. Informal mentors included predecessors, previous professors, and colleagues at other districts in similar roles who could help superintendents understand the politics of their positions and strategies for building relationships with boards and unions. Further, superintendents of color, particularly women, discussed the importance of having someone to talk to about things outside of the role. They wanted to know more about the dynamics of the community in which they served and where they could go for culturally specific support and resources.

It is our responsibility to reach out to [other women superintendents of color] and pull them up and help them and support them. And we have to understand the role family plays in their life. A lot of the women I have mentored through OALA, they don't take those higher positions because they've got young kids and the cultures in the school districts don't respect that ... I tell other women this now. And actually, the men knew it all along. They just never told us, don't live in the district that you're in. Don't bring your children into that.

– Current superintendent

Superintendents recognize the need for and the benefits of affinity networks. If an affinity group did not already exist, some superintendents used their social networks to create them.

One of the things I've tried to bring along every district I've worked in is affinity groups. Like affinity groups for teachers, affinity groups for administrators. When I was in [redacted], we were able to diversify our leadership group, and it was great. And yeah, graduation rates went up, and we [were able to] close achievement gaps. We did all the right work.

– Former superintendent

While mentoring and supporting others was a clear priority for many superintendents, finding time for this work was challenging. Because of the limited number of superintendents of color locally and nationally, superintendents faced the duality of navigating their own career journeys and demanding schedules while trying to cultivate mentorship programs for leaders of color. Participants described feeling overwhelmed with the number of groups, formal networks, and academies they were expected to join, facilitate, and lead.

Right now, there is a superintendent leadership academy and there are other things that I'm trying to ... I don't want to say they're not helpful. They're helpful, but I feel like that there are things that I've been fortunate enough to learn from my predecessor. I think the information that they're going over is very important. But I feel like that it's things that I have known, and so it feels like a lot of time to give. On top of that, there is also a women's superintendent program that we need to go to as well, and then there is the [Administrators of Color]. So, to some degree, there's all of these people trying to support you, and you'll actually get overwhelmed with the amount of meetings and different groups that you should attend. I'm like, 'I can't take on one more.' Then if you don't go, you feel like you're the jerk that doesn't show up.

– Current superintendent

Prior experience was one of the key factors in preparing superintendents of color for their role

Superintendents said that their prior teaching and administrative roles provided the practical experience they needed to transition into the superintendency. Among study participants, 94 percent of superintendents served as a classroom teacher for at least three years, 88 percent held a building administrator leadership role for more than five years, 60 percent had been a district administrator for at least three years, and 25 percent served as an interim/acting superintendent before taking on the role as a superintendent in their district. Their experience working at these various levels within a district helped them to understand the full spectrum of the K–12 education system. One current superintendent said, “I had the practical experience of doing the different roles in this district, and then I

had some educational prep I went through at [redacted] administrative program.” Additionally, when asked what had been most valuable in preparing for the role as superintendent, one participant said:

I think a high school principal position is the hardest job in public education. But I also think it's the most rewarding job because you are actually the face of the school in the community. Everybody knew me when I was the high school principal ... I had 1,850 students, I had that many families. I went to a lot of activities and athletic events. And the way you are able to make a difference in the lives of students in a classroom to be able to support 145 staff members, licensed and classified folks, I did like that sense of community as a high school principal. But it's a very challenging job. No two days are the same. It's really similar to being a superintendent, I think.

– Former superintendent

A current superintendent shared how the experience of being an assistant superintendent for six years provided them with the foundational skills and experience they needed for the role of a superintendent. As an assistant superintendent, they learned how to build relationships with school board members and teachers and gained a deeper understanding of the operations and policies for supporting facilities, instructional leaders, and a healthy financial budget.

When you are the assistant superintendent, you're already getting comfortable with fiduciary roles and responsibilities. You're getting comfortable with policy, talking to lawyers, working with lawyers, carrying out responsibilities with HR ... You're implementing laws or requirements that are new initiatives from the state ... All these kinds of things you get comfortable with ... Once I do a lot of things for five to seven years, I'm usually like, 'Oh, I'm good at this. What's the next growth opportunity?' So, I got to the point that, by year six, I was ready to be a superintendent.

– Current superintendent

Five participants had worked in their current school district before taking on the role of superintendent. Four of these superintendents had worked in the district for more than five years, which gave them deeper exposure to the district's culture and how it operates. One superintendent said, “I am a known commodity, because I've been in the district for 19 years. The way I look at it is I've actually been on a job interview for 19 years.” Similarly, another current superintendent who spent 20 years in various teaching and administrative roles in their district shared that helping create student improvement plans and strategic plans helped prepare them for the superintendency.

On the other hand, some superintendents described how there was still much to learn as they transitioned to the superintendent role. For example, one current superintendent with many years of experience as a teacher and administrator said that the superintendency was more like running a business than her previous positions.

So there's no preparation. I get into the superintendency and I guess I'm thinking it's sort of like a principal job, or maybe it's going to be sort of like a director job. And it's not at all. You're running a business. I have no idea how to run a business. So the first thing I run into is, my business manager had been making mistakes in the budget for four years. I didn't know these mistakes were being made until the person left the position.

– Current superintendent

Superintendents asserted a need for pipelines for administrators of color in Oregon

While a majority of teachers are women, white males predominantly occupy senior level positions in education in Oregon and nationally (Educator Advancement Council, 2020). To reverse this trend, one former superintendent strongly advocated for leadership training and preparation programs. These programs could increase the number of leaders of color in senior-level leadership positions and subsequently place them on the pathway to be considered for superintendent positions. Ultimately, this approach would disrupt the typical hiring process which historically limited consideration for candidates of color.

I have found that traditional, typical HR processes for hiring folks into senior positions that would get them on a track to the superintendency, oftentimes [these processes] are bent toward the typical person that was already in the system. And you have to be intentional in reaching out and hiring folks of color to get them even in the pipeline to be superintendents. And oftentimes, it's difficult to do because the pushback from sometimes boards, sometimes other senior staff, and staff who see themselves as deserving of that position object. And to be honest, it's often tough for the person of color.

– Former superintendent

Implementing more grow-your-own policies and programs could help recruit and retain administrators of color. Superintendents discussed the need to lift up and develop more teachers and administrators of color in Oregon through pathway programs, mentorships, and trainings. One participant stressed the need to build pathways for people who already live in Oregon since it can be difficult to retain superintendents from out of state.

If you brought somebody from Puerto Rico, or from Japan, here to Oregon, they might work in Oregon for a couple years, but how are they going to assimilate? How are they going to get to know the community? How are they going to make the community their own? ... Oregon does have a lot of qualified [Black, Indigenous, and people of color] folks. What is the pathway for folks to step into executive administrative roles, and then at some point step into an assistant superintendent, or deputy superintendent, or superintendent position? I don't want people to get hired because of the color of their skin, but I certainly want people to get hired because they can do the work. And so that's really where some of the challenges and how we would like to see some things change around policy, around support.

– Former superintendent

Other participants also recognized the value in creating a pipeline for growing administrators within Oregon, noting that the cultural and community context that education leaders gain through working and living in Oregon cannot always be taught.

I mean, if we get situations like we're seeing in Newberg, who's going to want to be in districts where those kinds of things are going on? So I think, first thing is working with folks in the pipeline who are already in Oregon and have some investment in being in Oregon, who know what the issues are here and don't have some maybe unreasonable expectations about what life will be like in Oregon as an administrator or superintendent.

– Former superintendent

You need to get more people of color, concentrate on getting more people of color into teaching positions. I mean, first of all, most superintendents are going to have been classroom teachers. And if you look at the representation in the teaching ranks, it's way off from what we have in terms of students of color. I think we're doing not too bad in terms of building administrators and principals. So, from among those ranks, we ought to be able to start developing folks for superintendency and groups like COSA working with [OALA]. Working with groups like them to develop principals who are ready to move into key central office positions that will put them in good line to move into superintendency ... One of my beliefs is that if we want to keep superintendents in Oregon, we need to, for them to have roots and feel like they have roots here to want to stay.

– Former superintendent

Summary

Networks and mentoring relationships formed through affinity groups, conferences, training programs, and the community were some of the systems of support superintendents participated in during their tenure. Superintendents used their social capital to identify community resources and networks of people that could help them navigate the challenges of leading school districts.

Prior experience and mentorship deeply impacted the ways in which superintendents were able to maneuver through institutions to advance equity and support students. This navigational capital allowed superintendents to create their own systems of support as well as equitable practices and programs.

Superintendents of color used skills and knowledge learned from their families during their tenure. This familial capital allowed superintendents to connect to and establish familial networks—in the home and within the community—that served as forms of support and mentorship.

Challenges and barriers encountered by superintendents of color

This section focuses on challenges that superintendents of color in this study faced during their tenure and how these challenges impacted their tenure and turnover. First, we discuss challenges superintendents faced in advancing equity. We then detail the racist and discriminatory incidents encountered by superintendents of color, followed by the effects of school board and union dynamics on the experiences of superintendents. This section ends with challenges related to their physical safety.

Superintendents of color were committed to advancing equity but faced challenges in their efforts to do so

Among superintendents we interviewed, 81 percent led a district with an equity plan, and 70 percent helped develop or led the development of that equity plan. Still, superintendents faced several challenges related to advancing equity, including receiving pushback, gaining support from other communities of color, and centering conversations on race among cabinet members. Superintendents discussed their district's commitment to advancing equitable policies and practices, or its lack thereof. This commitment revealed itself through hiring practices; programs to advance student success, including dual language programs; and conversations about race and equity.

Superintendents experienced pushback in advancing equity

Superintendents of color encountered challenges in striving to advance equity and offered critiques specific to the Oregon context. For example, one current superintendent said, "I don't see equity in action in the behaviors, policies, and practices from the state-level associations." Furthermore, superintendents recalled being labeled as the "equity person," which made it difficult to collaborate and push forth equitable policies.

We don't have multiple perspectives at the table, and it's just one person who's giving that perspective ... I know that [the board] loved me, but I also know that I was constantly the constant reminder—even just walking in the room—that I'm equity focused or equity driven, and they don't want to give up their power to someone like me ... there was a constant tug of war or constantly having to remind people that I am the superintendent of schools and, yes, that does fall on me to make those decisions.”

– Former superintendent

While equity is often grounded in race, superintendents of color also discussed challenges related to centering gender and sexuality. One superintendent who strove to support transgender staff members and students received pushback from staff members who argued that there were only two genders and obstructed gendered language practices.

You know our staff is amazing, but they do have their head in the sand when it comes to [equity, diversity, and inclusion] work and understanding and respecting and honoring the diversity of our student body. You know, when it comes to racial equity, I think I have people in a better place to start really working on becoming more aware and honoring and supporting all our students, especially our students of color. And the fact that we have such a small number doesn't make it an easier job for them to understand that piece. Where I'm really struggling right now is with our gender equity issues ... People [have] their personal beliefs, bringing those to school and imposing those on kids.

– Former superintendent

Multiple superintendents expressed the importance of using data to counter opponents to equity work.

When I have these evening parent meetings and they come at me very heated, very upset ... I then say, 'Look, I'm just going to show you the data and the evidence. You come to your own conclusions. But I need us to have an honest conversation.' And I'll show them class by class, year after year, student group by student group, what the data says. I go, 'This school that you're upset for me taking an assertive approach to supporting because the teachers are upset, so you're upset. I want to show you what you can count on when your child leaves here in the fifth grade because this is what history tells us.' Well, they stay mad but they don't stay mad at me. They turn very quickly to the other adults who have been in that building, who have sold them a bill of goods. And then suddenly there's this ground-up accountability, which I love.

– Current superintendent

Although superintendents of color experienced pushback, they remained committed to advancing equity for minoritized populations including students, teachers, and administrators of color; people with disabilities; and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/non-binary, queer/questioning, two-spirit, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQ2IA+) community.

Some statewide or state-level efforts to advance equity made it challenging to advance equity within superintendents' individual districts

Some superintendents noted that external efforts to advance equity at the state level or in other parts of the state could make it challenging to pursue equity efforts within their own districts. One current superintendent said, "One of the problems that I see is that we have a lot of equity policy and initiatives that are kind of blanket initiatives." This participant went on to explain how certain state-level policies only work in certain parts of the state, suggesting a need for more specific policies for rural districts and districts with larger minority populations. Another current superintendent suggested that efforts to "appease the masses" and hire an administrator of color in every district can lead to superintendents of color being split up and isolated from each other. This participant suggested it would be helpful if administrators of color were not so siloed and had additional support from another person of color to strengthen their efforts to advance a comprehensive equity agenda.

Gaining support from communities of color posed some challenges for superintendents of color

Superintendents generally reported feeling supported by communities of color and wanted more people of color to fill teaching, administrative, and board roles; however, working with these communities sometimes presented challenges. A former superintendent spoke about receiving pushback from other communities of color while trying to advance equity.

When I wanted to talk about Black Lives Matter, then it all of a sudden became a political thing from Latinos ... I couldn't believe that I was getting pushback from people that looked like me. And then I had to explain what it means to support Black Lives Matter and how this is not a political movement and how this is going to benefit a lot of our kids. You know, to have them use that against me—and that's why I'm saying that I'm so surprised—because I don't know if the white community felt like that, but it was really clear in my group of Latinos who I was getting the pushback from.

– Former superintendent

Another superintendent discussed how the school board, which was predominantly people of color, was not receptive to certain issues.

And my board is mostly people of color. And I'm going to tell you that what I've learned is that they have had a split vote on a lot of things lately. And what I've learned is that I now have to put white people in front to do the presentations to my school board, because when I have a white person that does the presentation, [it's] more like, 'Oh, okay.' But if it's a people of color, they question. So here we are.

– Current superintendent

Centering conversations on racial equity was difficult with members of superintendents' cabinets

Cabinet dynamics presented barriers for superintendents of color trying to advance equity. Two superintendents reported that their cabinet members made it difficult to center conversations on racial equity and advance equitable practices, including hiring more people of color and creating an anonymous racist incident reporting system. In addition, superintendents with predominantly white cabinets said that staff members felt uncomfortable discussing racial issues.

My staff, my cabinet, who was all white—except for [redacted] that I lifted up into the equity role—and all from Oregon for many, many years, and I think all really good people and good intentions, just had so much ... lack of understanding about racial awareness or, like, really what equity truly is or why it's important to do things like hire people of color that's not just checking a box, but truly why it's important to have diverse perspectives at the table and representation in our schools.

– Former superintendent

And even on our cabinet, we had one person when we did a cabinet retreat that was, like, really uncomfortable, and they started kind of trying to shift the conversation to a lot of different detours, like, 'Well, what about this? Or what about this?' And [redacted] did a good job of, like, calling it out in a nice way. I guess she said that a lot of times when we get into conversations about race then someone will bring up something that is kind of connected to it, but it's not really a conversation about race, and that is so they can take a detour because they feel uncomfortable.

– Current superintendent

Superintendents of color were passionate about taking on this level of leadership because they wanted to improve public education for others, especially students of color; impact change; lead efforts to advance education equity; and create a safe learning environment for all students. Although they faced

pushback against efforts to create more equitable learning environments, they persevered and did not abandon their goals and vision for the district.

Superintendents of color regularly faced racial discrimination and bias in the workplace and in the community

Superintendents discussed facing racism throughout their lives as well as in their leadership roles. They encountered racial discrimination and bias from former professors, colleagues, staff members, board members, and community members in their district. One former superintendent shared how race was a contributing factor in their departure from the role of superintendent, as members from their own racial community forced them out of the role. While other superintendents did not say that racism affected their decision to continue in or leave their role, they did underscore its negative effect in their lives. In fact, superintendents regularly experienced racist incidents and had to overcome the resulting trauma to continue their work in the district and community.

So she said, 'Did you get this job because you're [redacted-person of color]?' And I naturally just responded. I normally wouldn't have even entertained it. And I don't even know why it came out of my mouth, but it did. And I asked her, 'Well, are you asking me that question because you're white?' I never answered her question, and she never answered my question. And so she just turned around and walked away. I would still see her because her daughter played basketball. At least for the first three years, anyway, while I was here, I would see her on a regular basis at those games.

– Former superintendent

This man came up to me and he goes, 'Do you mind if I ask you, what are you?' And I kind of wanted to say, 'An octopus, what do you think?' But I knew what he was asking, and I just looked at him, and he finally said, 'So are you Italian?' Nobody ever wants to say, 'Are you Mexican?' because they already have a bias against us. That's my assumption. And I said, 'I'm a Latina.' And he said, 'What does that mean?' And I said, 'Well, I'm Hispanic.' 'Are you from Mexico?' 'No, I'm not from Mexico. I'm from [Southwest state].' And he goes, 'Oh, you're from Mexico proper?' I said, 'No, I'm from [Southwest state]. That's in America. It's one of the United States.' I had to walk away.

– Current superintendent

Other superintendents discussed additional racist encounters they experienced in their community.

I dress differently [on weekends] you know, I wear my sweatshirt, baseball hat, and we're going to stores and running errands. So as we walk, pass different people, they would quickly shut and lock their car doors. This would happen in front of my kids and ... that frustrated my kids.

– Former superintendent

I mean, from the N-word, to threatening to come to my office and blow my head off, to comments about, 'You were only hired because of affirmative action.'

– Former superintendent

Superintendents also recounted experiencing racial bias during the interview and hiring processes for both superintendent and administrative roles.

There was one incident where I had a folder with the list of questions I wanted to ask because I had just left the district as a director leading all the instructional work, and so I had some questions about what had happened in the last year and a half and where were those programs. And apparently a teacher in the group accused me of cheating, so the search consultant called and asked if I had the answers to the interview questions ahead of time. I said, 'I wouldn't even need them. I just left that district. I led everything in that district. I know exactly what questions they're going to ask me, and I know what I need to ask them.' Anyway, I had told him at the beginning if it ever gets to a point where you can tell it's dangerous for me, let me know. He called me one day and he said, 'So remember that question you asked me?' I said, 'Yep, I get it. I'm done. I'm pulling out.'

– Current superintendent

The superintendent made a point of telling me that he just wanted me to know that by no way was I being hired as a token administrator. I said, 'Well, you just tokenized me by saying that.'

– Former superintendent

Another superintendent described facing a racist incident from a board member after being hired.

He had made several statements that I would consider to be borderline racist, including the very first night. He took me to dinner after being named superintendent here and he insulted my grandmother, really ... he said to me, 'Every time you talk about your grandmother, I just can envision the ancient mama character.' And I just politely said, 'Well, if you really knew my grandmother or my family, no one in my family dresses or looks like ancient mama.' That was the best response I could come up with without saying something inappropriate.

– Former superintendent

While superintendents did not say that racial discrimination and bias directly impacted turnover, it did impact other dynamics and challenges—such as gaining support from their community and concerns for their personal safety—that in turn impacted turnover.

Although relationships with school boards and unions are crucial for successfully advancing equity, these relationships presented barriers for some superintendents of color

School board members are elected officials who bear responsibility for setting district policies and budgets as well as hiring, evaluating, and terminating superintendents. At the national level, the average school board member is a white male with a family income of over \$100,000 per year (Bellwether Education Partners, 2019). In addition, the demographics of school board members largely do not match the demographics of students being served.

Overall, superintendents of color in this study reported that school board dynamics impacted their roles. Superintendents mentioned the importance of receiving support from the school board, building relationships with board members, and knowing how to manage the board. This section describes how superintendents engaged with their school board members as well as ways board member turnover impacted superintendent turnover.

Board support varied for superintendents of color

Superintendents had varying levels of support from school board members in their district. The superintendents who felt supported by their board noted how important that support was to the stability of their position. Positive support varied based on timing and hiring, individual board member relationships, and what policies were being mandated and enforced.

I feel supported [by my board]. But again, this is a new role. So my confidence in what I think that support should look like versus what it actually is, there's some unknowns, which cause me a little bit of consternation.

– Current superintendent

The board is supportive of me as long as I can illustrate to them that there's a tangible reward.

– Current superintendent

Another superintendent discussed receiving continued support from their board over the course of their 10-year tenure.

I felt very supported, actually ... up until the last few years, I think I had a very strong and supportive board ... I think the first probably nine or ten years in the position I pretty much had the same board that hired me, at least eight years ... The majority of the board was the board that hired me for most of my superintendency.

– Former superintendent

Additionally, one former superintendent shared, “I did [feel supported] for the most part. And I don't know if that's because I always had someone of color on my board since I've been here.” Some superintendents said that the board generally supported them but challenged them on certain issues that boiled down to individual levels of board support. Nonetheless, superintendents had positive relationships with their boards and felt supported.

So I'd say like again in general, very supported by my board. We've been together for five years. And honestly there's been seven board members, and five of the board members that hired me are still on the board, and even the two new people like me a lot, and we get along really well. And that kind of safety, that kind of relationship, that kind of trust, that kind of like collaboration with each other is what I need to feel pretty good and supported in this role.

– Current superintendent

Another participant described how he leveraged his position to bring more people of color to work in the district.

One of the things I had the board agree to was that there would be times when, for senior-level positions, superintendent would be able to hire people without going through a formal hiring process, if it would advance the district board and superintendent goals of moving forward with diversity. And so, there were a few people, a couple of people and times, where I exercised that in order to bring in a person of color who had potential to move up in leadership.

– Former superintendent

When superintendents felt unsupported by their board, they found it difficult to serve students and advance policies and practices that create equitable learning environments. Unsupportive boards made superintendents feel less secure in their role because the board had the power to terminate their contract.

I've never felt affirmed for who I am and what I bring to my work. And good thing is I don't need it from them, but it would be nice if they recognized it. I get my nourishment from all of the other networks. But I would like [the school board] to sort of recognize that perhaps they're treating me differently or perhaps they're not even recognizing. It's a very surreal thing to have white board members coming at me about the outcomes or the work we're doing for kids of color, and I'm thinking to myself, 'What, but you all have been here for years and years, and I just got here and I'm telling you what I'm doing about it. And we're seeing the evidence moving in the right direction, so I don't understand the scrutiny. Who do you think you're talking to?'

– Current superintendent

Board turnover impacted superintendent turnover

Superintendents discussed ways in which board turnover impacted their ability to advance equity, as well as their stability in their role. Two superintendents said that board turnover led them to search for opportunities elsewhere, particularly when new board members had values that did not align with those of the superintendents.

You can't make change in three years and expect for it to stick around and to make an impact on kids. Yet we know that no superintendent is going to stick around for that much because the board's going to have turnover and they're not going to like us. They're not going to like your policy, or you're going to make somebody upset eventually. If you're truly leading, and in this society, [it] becomes like we have to please everybody.

– Former superintendent

Another participant confirmed this notion, discussing their decision to leave their district.

We had a lot of board turnover, and so I haven't worked with the new board, but that was one of my reasons for also looking outside of [redacted]. You know, I just looked up the people who were coming on and ... I met with each one of them, too, and I did, like, a lot of conversations about 'Why are you interested?' And it seemed like people just had different agendas, a lot of one-off agendas that didn't really have to do with moving equity and achievement. And so I wasn't sure if they would get on the board or not, but I just said, 'I don't know if I really want to do that again,' especially when it's, like, more than four people. And so, yeah, I think that's been a difficult start for the new superintendent there.

– Current superintendent

School boards have the power to shift the trajectory of progress towards equity in a district by discontinuing a superintendent's contract. Recognizing this power, superintendents discussed the importance of training and preparing board members for the critical role they play in the community.

I think what's important is for my school board to get really trained from the School Boards Association so that I can get support from my board. I think any superintendent, the tenure of the superintendent is based on your school board. And right now, I have a divided—even though they're brand new, I'm trying to train them as much as I can, but they have their own self-interest and they don't understand how much I have to put in to get them to be on the same page with me. And I think it's training school boards, because that's our tenure. We either—it makes us or breaks us. I think that would be the support system that I need, is to make sure that board members understand what their role is and how do they support their superintendent.

– Current superintendent

I feel like boards need training as well on how to onboard a superintendent, how to create a great relationship with their superintendent. They need an understanding of their role, their responsibility ... They need to understand or be willing to develop the communication protocol, operating procedure protocol. They need to also get comfortable with how they make decisions or how they take recommendations from the superintendent. And there should be some board development on that kind of relationship and how to make it an effective relationship, and if they don't have any of that will to get training on how to make it a good relationship with our superintendent, then I think that that'll always be a setback as well.

– Current superintendent

A former superintendent also suggested that trainings for school board members should include some cultural competence component, “especially now with everything being so politicized, and it's us-against-them mentality, and of course we are caught in the middle as leaders.”

Superintendents discussed experiencing challenges in relationships between superintendents, board members, and teachers’ unions. They suggested that organizations such as OSBA could lead efforts to guide these stakeholders in supporting and establishing productive relationships.

A lot of times superintendents leave because of really negative relationships with the union. And I mean, it's no fun to have the union beating up on you all the time at a school board meeting, and board meeting members seemingly siding with the union and against their superintendent. So how to work on that? And I think this OSBA has a real responsibility to, and I don't know if train is the right word, board members on how to interact with, be partners with, provide leadership with superintendents. And then even more so, how do you do it, and what does it entail when it's a superintendent of color and are there differences in how you interact and react?

– Former superintendent

As new board members rotated in, they did not always share the superintendent’s vision for the district, which made it difficult to advance equity and accomplish their district goals. This sometimes led superintendents to begin exploring other roles and opportunities outside of their district.

Managing relationships with unions sometimes conflicted with superintendents’ vision for, and efforts to advance, equity

Similar to experiences with school boards, superintendents had varied relationships and experiences with unions in their districts. Generally, superintendents found it difficult to navigate union relationships while still effectively serving students, noting that union interests sometimes conflicted with what superintendents thought was in the students’ best interests. One former superintendent shared, “There's so many things that I was able to do in other places that I felt was necessary or knew that was necessary or knew that would work with students that we couldn't get agreement from our association.” Other participants shared additional challenges related to working with unions.

I think one of my biggest challenges is working with our association and navigating. Just the, some of the demands and some of the work-around with the [memoranda of understanding] and working conditions and, you know, trying to still serve students to the full capacity—that has been one of biggest challenges. One of my biggest learnings is how to navigate and work with association.

–Current superintendent

I think they had their own vision of [making] the job as easy as possible and as comfortable as possible for their members. And that's just the plain truth. I've never seen teacher leadership that just constantly push back against things that we know are right for kids ... simple things such as scheduling to assignments. It was a tug of war. Coming from right-to-work states, it was just mind boggling for me, and having to pay them for every single little thing ... That made it easier for me to accept or entertain opportunities in other places. I just got tired dealing with them. I really did.

– Former superintendent

Superintendents acknowledged that they wish they could pay teachers and staff members more, but unions would often ask for unrealistic salaries and benefits, making them difficult to work with. In this respect, many superintendents felt that the unions ultimately served adults rather than students and that the union vision for the district did not always align with that of the superintendent.

Superintendents of color, especially women, faced threats to their personal safety and the safety of their families

Superintendents of color in Oregon reported that their safety was threatened during their tenure and that this was further impacted by their outspoken commitment to advance equity. One male superintendent stated that safety concerns are prevalent because the superintendency is such a politicized position. Another said that this problem has worsened in recent years due to the divisive political climate. Compared to white superintendents, superintendents of color faced additional threats to their safety because of their race. While both men and women in this study worried about their safety, this concern was most salient among female superintendents of color. One explained, “There is a whole different layer that comes as a female of color when somebody's talking about protesting at your home.” Several female superintendents shared similar experiences.

When it became about my physical safety—and it hadn't really been about my physical safety until the last bit of my career there—and so that physical safety was where I drew the line, and my husband drew the line.

– Current superintendent

The racist situations that we're in right now with [critical race theory] or, like, all of these groups coming at us, it looks very different for me to make public statements or me to come out and say things around these issues that these right-wing groups are bringing forward when it involves race versus a white superintendent and just how that plays out ... it's risky for them in one way and risky for me in a different way ... I might lose my life over it because somebody's going to go do something. So, I don't think there's been a lot of thought or things put into what superintendents of color, the added layers around the safety components that everybody's dealing with, the added layer of race for that. I think we're kind of on our own for that, to figure that out and to maneuver that.

– Current superintendent

People aren't going to understand that I have to circle the block and take a different way home every day. People don't know the stories of intruders I've had in my house ... So, there's a personal safety issue here with being an outspoken leader, right? But if I don't say it, who's going to say it?

– Current superintendent

Physical threats of violence were a major area of concern. Superintendents suggested that there needs to be a team in place, consisting of local law enforcement officials and school leaders, to create and devise a safety plan for leaders in this role.

When something's going sideways, there are a group of people that come in and support you—not verbally. There are people coming in and physically supporting you. Like, they're coming in and they're watching, they're observing ... they're developing the plan with you. This is what we need in place in order for you to feel safe at work. They're going to audit the circumstance, and there are going to be people there that are helping you, not just on the phone ... like the wraparound team. I'm thinking about, like, things that we done for kids in schools that are at risk. What are we doing for adults in schools that are at risk of terrible things?"

– Former superintendent

The physical safety of superintendents of color, particularly women, was a concern and barrier for some participants in this study. The added layers of race and gender presented complexities for women of color that made it difficult to focus on the job. Safety issues could lead superintendents to consider leaving their role, take extra precautions when travelling home, and be concerned for family members.

Summary

While superintendents spoke to barriers and challenges they encountered in their roles, each one also spoke to various successes during their tenure and ways they overcame barriers using their networks, families, support systems, and personal work ethic and aspirations. Throughout their tenure, superintendents remained resilient. One participant spoke to ways that she grounded herself, processed the trauma she experienced, and created coping and self-healing practices through journaling, meditation, and other activities that keep her heart and mind calm.

When faced with barriers, superintendents of color constantly had to remind themselves of their passion, hopes, and dreams for the future. This aspirational capital revealed itself as superintendents discussed their goals to advance equity and their visions for their districts. Regardless of present circumstances, superintendents allowed themselves to dream of possibilities beyond.

And so, as a leader, and as certainly a person of color really trying to, again, lean in on this work, and really try to support our community. And it's exhausting. It's exhausting. By Friday, I'm ready to just curl up and fall asleep and wake up on Monday again. But I've been figuring out how to center myself and how to engage myself with my family to ensure that I have the energy, I have the capacity. Because in order for me to lean in and lead, people are looking to me as the [superintendent] to lead with integrity.

– Current superintendent

Superintendents continuously demonstrated resistance by using their skills, knowledge, and resources to challenge inequality and oppositional behavior. This type of resistant capital allowed superintendents of color to name the threats of racism, white supremacy, sexism, and other inequitable policies and practices as well as to push for, and enforce, change.

Discussion and recommendations

This section of the report discusses the study findings, their implication within the current educational context in Oregon, and related recommendations to recruit, hire, and retain superintendents of color.

Study findings in Oregon's current context

The challenges, experiences, and concerns described by superintendents of color in this study are no different from those experienced by superintendents of color more than a decade ago (Rosilez, 2011). Similarly, the low number of education leaders of color is not a new issue in Oregon; it results from systemic racism that education leaders of color have faced, and continue to face, in the state and across the country. Unfortunately, this means that much work needs to be done.

Oregon is building its muscle and momentum to create positive change for superintendents, administrators, and students of color. After the recent loss of a majority of the superintendents of color in the state, COSA, ODE, OSBA, and local elected officials are coming together to answer the call for improved conditions for superintendents of color as well as for other superintendents working to advance equity. For example, in June 2020, ODE passed the Every Student Belongs Rule, which requires districts to pass policies and procedures to address hate and bias incidents in school in order to support students, staff, and the community.

Health and safety are the cornerstone of education and ... all students are entitled to a high-quality educational experience, free from discrimination or harassment based on perceived race, color, religion, gender, identity, sexual orientation, disability, or national origin, and without fear of hatred, racism, or violence.

– ODE, 2020

ODE also asserted that "All staff and leaders are also entitled to work in environments that are free from discrimination or harassment, and visitors should be able to participate in our school activities without fear for their safety" (ODE, 2020).

While these state-level rules and mandates are important for supporting communities of color in Oregon, elected school boards are currently removing superintendents for enforcing rules and resolutions passed by ODE, the Oregon State Board of Education, and the Oregon Health Authority. Policy mandates that focus on anti-hate and bias, COVID-19 mask requirements, and inclusive curriculum have incited tensions between superintendents and their boards, ultimately leading superintendents to leave their districts. In the last few months alone, four superintendents have been fired by school boards in several Oregon districts, including Adrian School District, Greater Albany Public Schools, and Newberg School District.

As we write this report, we witnessed a tense situation unfold in Newberg School District. In October 2021, the current board voted to remove the district’s anti-racist statement, which had been adopted by a previous board, and to ban rainbow pride and Black Lives Matter flags. The following month, the school board voted to remove the superintendent (Thompson & Miller, 2021). When districts lose an equity leader, the entire community suffers. U.S Representative Suzanne Bonamici noted that this was not an isolated incident.

‘Removing Superintendent Morelock from his post is part of a troubling national trend of extremist school boards ousting experienced, valuable school leaders, which is detrimental to the students they are supposed to serve ... Unfortunately, a few school board members are forcing through these inappropriate, and possibly illegal, changes, which will have long-lasting consequences and threaten student safety.’

– Suzanne Bonamici, as quoted in Thompson & Miller, 2021

Considering these challenges, it is more urgent than ever to find ways to support superintendents of color and to help school boards understand the importance of efforts to advance equity. Education leaders in Oregon are coming together to develop a plan to help leaders of color transition into their superintendency and take on leadership roles to advance policies and practices that promote equity. A short list of related work currently underway in Oregon appears below.

- ▶ ODE is working with the governor’s office, safety officers, COSA, and OSBA to develop a six-pronged approach to address personal and physical safety at work and at home. This will include guidance for conducting online/virtual board meetings, protocols for facilitating public engagement, recommendations for physical space, structured state reporting mechanisms, and training materials for educators and law enforcement.
- ▶ COSA is proposing legislation for the 2022 legislative session to provide employment protections for superintendents who are following state and federal law and implementing equity-focused policies that serve historically underserved or marginalized student populations. As demonstrated by recent events, without these protections, superintendents can be removed from their positions for following legal mandates and protecting students’ physical, mental, and emotional health.
- ▶ The Oregon House of Representatives vowed to take action in the next legislative session by re-introducing Senate Bill 334, the Oregon Board and Superintendent Professional Learning Bill.² This bill aims to strengthen the partnership between boards members and superintendents to service of Oregon students and to improve board members’ and superintendents’ access to

² Originally introduced in 2021, Senate Bill 334 passed out of the Senate Education Committee but never made it out of the Ways and Means Committee. For more information, see:

<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2021R1/Measures/Analysis/SB334>

professional learning and training around educational equity and governance that is ongoing, meaningful, and action oriented.

Recommendations

Although Oregon is making great strides, more work needs to be done. A key conversation point among participants in this study was how to improve the current system to better support superintendents of color now and in the future. This section highlights their recommendations on improving the recruitment, retention, and support of superintendents of color in Oregon. The comprehensive list of recommendations was developed based on findings from this study and conversations with the advisory team.

Recommendations for recruiting and hiring superintendents of color

► Intentionally recruit, hire, and support superintendents of color.

- Superintendents suggest a stronger and more intentional approach to recruiting superintendents of color. One starting place is partnering with hiring and talent acquisition firms (e.g., Promise 54)³ that focus specifically on finding qualified administrators and superintendents of color. These firms would be trained to facilitate conversations with candidates and school boards about how systemic racism impacts the candidates they bring forward as well as considerations for welcoming candidates, developing contracts, providing mentorship, and more.
- Provide training to school board members on how to support superintendents of color during the hiring process and their transition into the role as well as support and training on developing an equitable performance review process.
- Partner with university professors and department chairs to recruit diverse, qualified educators and educational leaders, with an emphasis on outreach to minority-serving institutions with diverse student populations.⁴
- Regularly examine and evaluate applicant demographics with an equity lens, including the extent to which diverse candidates are successfully recruited to apply for superintendent positions, advanced for interviews, and hired.

► Strengthen organizational capacity for providing mentoring and training support to superintendents of color.

- Superintendents recommend that organizations like COSA and OALA partner to provide stronger systems of support, training, and preparation for superintendents specifically, not just administrators broadly.

³ For more information about Promise 54, please visit their website: <https://www.promise54.org/>

⁴ Oregon has three minority-serving four-year institutions: Pacific University, Portland State University, and Warner Pacific University.

- Organizations like COSA can foster networking opportunities for superintendents to meet other superintendents across the state. These organizations can also help develop and establish affinity networks for superintendents of color.
- Provide funding and resources for mentorship and training programs to pair superintendents of color with mentors who share similar racial, ethnic, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds.
- ▶ **Develop superintendent pathway programs.**
 - Invest in expanding grow-your-own programs funded through the Educator Advancement Council to strengthen the pipeline for administrators of color to enter superintendent positions. These efforts should focus on strengthening pathways for potential educational leaders who bring experience living and working in Oregon.
 - Partner with local universities and colleges of education to develop grow-your-own programs for educational administration and leverage the political and financial resources these institutions have to offer.
- ▶ **Update contract language to protect superintendents of color and other educational leaders who advocate for and advance equitable policies and practices.**
 - Eliminate the no-cause firings clause currently in many superintendents' contracts.
 - Provide counseling, guidance, and support to superintendents of color to understand what components need to be included in their contracts. Include protective language to support them in implementing and advancing state and federal mandates focused on equity.

Recommendations for retaining superintendents of color

- ▶ **Improve school board governance and leadership by mandating training and accountability for board members.**
 - Board members deeply impact the stability of a superintendent's position and can make it difficult to advance equitable practices that ultimately benefit students. School board members should have to meet explicit requirements to qualify for the position and all board members should receive mandatory training prior to entering their role.
 - OSBA could lead this effort by providing more support for local school boards so that members understand their role as well as what a school board does and does not do. This would also help inform the public as they make decisions during elections.
 - School boards should receive mandatory training on equity-focused and culturally responsive legislation mandates (e.g., Every Student Belongs, Tribal History/Shared History, Diversifying the Workforce, and equity committee legislation) as well as COVID-19-related mandates before superintendents implement them within districts.
 - Require school board elections to be conducted by zone and stagger elections so that a majority of board seats is not up for election at the same time.

- Provide additional support for school board members of color, especially those who are the lone person of color on their board and often face similar issues as administrators of color.
- Develop a reading guide for school boards to hear public comments. This could serve as a forum for listening to the community regarding racial attacks and experiences with bias, hate, and trauma.
- Explore some mechanisms of accountability for board members. While superintendents are held accountable by boards, unions, cabinets, and the community, boards currently have no system of checks and balances in place.
- ▶ **Strengthen school boards' capacity for advancing equity and support school boards and superintendents in their efforts to advance equity.**
 - Provide funding for equity consultants or equity advisory groups to work with school districts to put district equity lens and position statements into practice.
 - Expand school board membership to include non-voting equity partners that can help inform the board of the impact of their decisions, especially as relates to equity.
- ▶ **Create a safety plan for superintendents of color to feel safe at work.**
 - Superintendents of color encountered instances where their physical safety was threatened. These threats sometimes caused them to consider leaving their role. Superintendents of color need support with developing comprehensive safety plans in collaboration with leaders from ODE, the Oregon Education Association, OSBA, and local law enforcement.
 - Safety plans should consist of tips and resources for creating a safe environment such as restricting public access to a superintendent's personal phone number and physical address, tips for exiting meetings when a vehicle is surrounded by protesters, and reminders for notifying the police of upcoming protests and events.

Recommendations for educational leaders to develop deeper bonds with the community and stakeholders through engagement and support

- ▶ **Support the community in healing after experiencing the loss of a superintendent of color and equity leader.**
 - Short-term coping strategies are needed to help the community heal and move forward after experiencing the loss of a superintendent of color and equity leader.
- ▶ **Support candidates of color in running for school board member positions.**
 - Partner with political action committees and organizations such as the Oregon Futures Lab to support the development of candidates of color running for school board seats.
- ▶ **Build momentum from the ground up.**
 - In collaboration with grassroots and culturally specific organizations, conduct community conversations and listening sessions to organize, mobilize, and facilitate change from within the community while working together to advance equity.

- ▶ **Help community and education leaders become more politically informed and involved.**
 - Organizations like COSA and OSBA play a critical role in shaping our education system. Members of COSA and OSBA need to pay close attention to the board elections for their organizations. These elections are very important since board members have a role in shaping the culture and the structure of the organization.

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Appendix A: Pre-interview survey questionnaire

Participants will respond to these questions using a Google form prior to the interview.

Participant Background

1. Name: _____

2. How do you identify your race/ethnicity? [check all that apply]
 - American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Asian
 - Black or African American
 - Latino/a/x or Hispanic
 - Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
 - White
 - Two or more races
 - Other, please indicate: _____

3. Do you speak any language(s) other than English?
 - Yes
 - No
 - [if yes] Please describe: _____

4. How do you describe your gender? (Check one)
 - Male
 - Female
 - Trans male/trans man
 - Trans female/trans woman
 - Genderqueer/gender non-conforming
 - Different identity (please state): _____

5. Do you think of yourself as (please check all that apply):
 - Straight
 - Gay or lesbian
 - Bisexual
 - Transgender, transsexual, or gender non-conforming

6. What is the highest level of school you have attended or degree you have received?
 - Bachelor's degree

- Master's/graduate-level degree
- Doctorate degree

Current Position

7. What is your current position? [open-ended]

8. How long have you been in this position?

- Less than a year
- One to two years
- Three to five years
- More than five years

9. What district do you work in? [open-ended]

10. Have you worked for this district in any other capacity before taking on this role?

- Yes
- No
- If yes, what was your previous title/role?

11. How long have you worked in this district?

- Less than a year
- One to two years
- Three to five years
- More than five years

12. Have you worked in Oregon before taking on this role?

- Yes
- No

13. Does your district have a plan that focuses specifically on equity?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

14. If yes, what was your involvement in creating the district's equity plan?

- No involvement/It was created before I started this position
- Limited involvement/I assist with refining the already established equity plan
- I helped develop the equity plan for my district

Support

15. How supported do you feel in your current role?

- Not at all
- Somewhat supported
- Supported
- Very supported

16. Who/what encouraged you to become a superintendent? [open ended]

17. Did you participate in any preparation programs or preservice training prior to entering this role (e.g., ALAS preparation program, COSA new superintendent academy)?

- Yes
- No
- If yes, please describe the type of program you attended:

Licensure/Certifications

18. Which of the following Oregon administrator licenses do you hold? [check all that apply]

- Principal
- Professional administrator
- Reciprocal administrator
- Restricted
- Emergency
- Other _____

19. Have you been licensed as an administrator in a state outside of Oregon?

- Yes
- No
- [if yes] Please describe

20. Please share your number of years of experience in the following areas:

	Not applicable	Less than a year	1 to 2 years	3 to 5 years	More than 5 years
Assistant superintendent					
District administrator					
Building administrator					
Classroom teacher					
Paraeducator/instructional assistant					
Other _____					

21. How many years total have you worked in K–12 education?

Appendix B: Superintendents of color interview guide

Hi, my name is [insert name], and I am a [insert title] at Education Northwest. We are a research, evaluation, and technical assistance firm located in Portland, Oregon, that strives to use research, data, and evidence to transform our educational system.

Thank you for signing up to participate in our discussion today. The purpose of this study is to learn about your experience as a [superintendent, former superintendent]. During our conversation, we will discuss your journey of transitioning into the role and the challenges, successes, and support you use in building networks, managing relationships with other key stakeholders, and advancing equity in Oregon. We'd also like to explore recommendations you may have for state and/or district policy changes.

The primary purpose of this study is to use the findings to help improve this experience for superintendents and administrators of color in Oregon. During our conversation, the information you share will be kept confidential and anonymous and will not be associated with your name or identity. To help me stay fully present in the conversation, I would like to record our discussion. Is it okay with you that I record our conversation?

*If yes, **RECORD TO CLOUD.***

If no, use the interview guide to take detailed notes.

Q1: Participant's background

I would like to start our conversation by learning more about you. Could you please tell me a little bit about yourself?

- What were some of the factors that influenced your decision to accept this role?

Q2: Experience with the initial transition into the role—training, preparation, and onboarding systems

Thinking back to when you first started in this position, how was your experience with the initial transition?

- When you first started in this role, how prepared did you feel?
- Reflecting on your prior educational and professional experiences, what was most valuable (or useful) in preparing you for the superintendency?

Q3: Formal and informal networks, mentoring, and support systems

In general, how supported do you feel in your role as a superintendent? If no, why not? If yes, why do you feel that way?

- What have been your sources of formal and informal supports? How has this changed over time?
- Who have been your mentors?
- Is there anything you need to feel better supported in your role?

Q4: Experience with racial discrimination and bias

I would like to know more about any challenges that you have experienced as a leader of color. Could you tell me about any challenges you have experienced in your position? How did you overcome that challenge?

- How have racial discrimination, bias, and/or oppression shaped your experiences as a leader?
 - Probe: How have you overcome these experiences? What skill sets did you rely on to persist through these experiences?
- What support, if any, did you seek to help you with this experience?
- How does your role as a superintendent of color impact your family?
 - Probe: Have you ever felt intimidated, threatened, targeted, and/or believed your personal safety was at risk?

Q5: Equity leadership and expectations

Now I would like to talk more about your district's efforts to advance equity. What is your role in advancing issues of equity within your district?

- Could you describe to me the types of support available to assist you in your equity efforts?
- What are some barriers you have encountered when developing and implementing practices and policies to advance equity?

Q6: Managing relationships with school boards, unions, and other stakeholders

How would you describe your relationships with the school board?

- Could you describe a time when you felt supported by your board?
- Could you describe a time when you did not feel supported by your board?
- How have board elections or board turnover impacted you?
- Do you feel like the board represents the concerns of the community at large? What is their process for gathering community input?
- How would you describe your relationship with the union?
 - What worked well? What work were you able to move forward in partnership with your union?
 - In what ways did the union pose a barrier for the work you were trying to advance?
- What is your vision for the school district?
 - Is your vision shared with the board and the union?

Q7: Recommendations for state and district policy changes and initiatives

What recommendations would you offer to improve Oregon's recruitment, support, and retention of administrators of color?

- What type of local, state, and district actions and policies can be implemented to better support the success and retention of superintendents of color?
- What recommendations do you have related to building an effective school board?
- What recommendations do you have related to managing relationships with unions?

[open-ended question] Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experience as a superintendent?

Appendix C: Superintendents of color training programs

Name	URL	Program description
Association for Latino Administrators Preparation Program	www.alasedu.org/academies	“To recruit and prepare Latin/o/a/x school system leaders to become superintendents of school districts in the United States with an emphasis on Latin/o/a/x- serving school districts having a population of Latin/o/a/x students 20% or higher.” Participation costs \$2,500 and requires membership in the association.
Coalition of Oregon School Administrators New Superintendent Academy	www.cosa.k12.or.us/events/2021-2022-new-supts	“To provide beginning Oregon superintendents an opportunity to create a collaborative learning network focused on key leadership skills and practical strategies to help improve their individual school districts.” This year-long academy costs \$975 and requires participants to be an active member in the coalition.
Harvard Urban Superintendent Leadership Program	www.gse.harvard.edu/doctorate/doctor-education-leadership	Prepares candidates for superintendent and leadership roles with a focus on excellence and equity for all students. Has evolved into the Doctor of Educational Leadership Program.
Southern Oregon Mentorship Program	www.soesd.k12.or.us/mentoring/	Provides culturally responsive mentorship to teachers and administrators during the first two years in their position.