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## The Glass Cliff: An Examination of the Female Superintendency In South Carolina

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THE GLASS CLIFF: AN EXAMINATION OF THE FEMALE SUPERINTENDENCY IN  
SOUTH CAROLINA

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University of South Carolina

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my family. My supportive and loving husband, Tommy, always encourages me to seek new opportunities. My daughter, Hope, and my two sons, Marshall and Ben, continue to inspire me by their curiosity, adventurous nature, and eagerness to debate new ideas.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

South Carolina public school districts are confronted with a series of difficult circumstances and rely more on female superintendents than the national average. The investigation of female South Carolina superintendents was guided by the glass cliff conceptual framework. The glass cliff represents situations where females are promoted over males to risky or precarious leadership positions where the chance of failure is high.

The purpose of this quantitative, non-experimental study was to examine the relationship between the sex of South Carolina public school superintendents to (a) self-reported transformational leadership behaviors and (b) select district indicators indicative of the difficult circumstances confronted by public school districts. The indicators selected for this study were the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) composite indices, identified priority schools, and school district poverty indices. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was selected to obtain self-reported transformational leadership behaviors.

Female South Carolina public school superintendents rated themselves higher on all transformational leadership MLQ subscales than did male South Carolina public school superintendents but not at significant levels. Female South Carolina public school superintendents had significantly lower ESEA composite indices than did male South Carolina public school superintendents. No significant difference was found for priority

schools or poverty indices based on the sex of the superintendent. Implications and recommendations for future research are included.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

School boards depend on superintendents to provide effective leadership to raise student achievement and meet organizational goals under increasing pressures. The stressful nature of the superintendency and the implications for superintendent longevity and turnover are compounded by an increasing frustration with the political environment (Byrd, Drews & Johnson, 2007), allocation of limited budget resources (Blair, 2010; Bowers, 2009; Hohenstein, 2008), difficult school board relations (Hohenstein, 2008; Yoder, 1994), and mounting federal accountability (Blair, 2010). Cultural, political, and gender biases favor men when school boards seek superintendent candidates (Dana, 2009). However, over the last decade, the national percentage of female superintendents increased by 10.9% (Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). As pressures and demands for federal and state accountability increase, schools boards desire superintendent candidates with relationship skills which are stereotypically viewed as female. Superintendent search expert Benjamin Canada reinforced that relationship skills are essential for the superintendency (Thomas, 2011).

A 2010 study completed by the American Association of School Administrators (Kowalski et al., 2011) revealed that women are still underrepresented in the superintendency. Historically, the majority of superintendents were married male white Protestants (de Santa Ana, 2008). Nationally, the number of female superintendents is increasing but women are still marginalized in leadership positions and do not reflect that 75% of teaching positions in the United States are held by females (Katz, 2010). The

national percentage of female superintendents increased from 13.2% in 2000 to 24.1% in 2010 (Kowalski et al., 2011). South Carolina has a higher percentage of female superintendents, 38% (South Carolina Association of School Administrators, 2013), than the national average of 24.1%. The reason for the higher percentage of female superintendents in South Carolina is unclear.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Recent research on female leadership has focused on the glass cliff versus the glass ceiling (Ashby, Ryan, & Haslam, 2007; Barreto, Ryan, and Schmitt, 2009; Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, & Bongiorno, 2011; Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, Kulich, & Wilson-Kovacs, 2009). The glass ceiling approaches the exclusion of women in leadership positions from the point of view of inequality and gender bias. Barreto, Ryan, and Schmitt (2009) give a more precise definition:

The word *ceiling* implies that women encounter an upper limit on how high they can climb on the organizational ladder, whereas *glass* refers to the relative subtlety and transparency of this barrier, which is not necessarily apparent to the observer (p. 5).

Alternatively, the glass cliff means that women are appointed to leadership positions when a company is in a time of crisis or failure (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, Kulich, and Wilson-Kovacs (2009) differentiate the glass ceiling and the glass cliff explaining:

In this research we have demonstrated that women who do pass through the glass ceiling are more likely than men to confront a glass cliff, such that their

leadership positions are more precarious than those of their male counterparts. These positions are consequently associated with greater risk of failure and criticism (p. 156).

Bruckmüller and Branscombe (2010) found that perceived stereotypical female leadership characteristics were believed to be more desirable in crisis situations than male leadership characteristics. The changing leadership roles and organizational practices, closely associated with transformational leadership behaviors, have resulted in a female leadership advantage (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985) is focused on the future rather than present and strengthens organizations by inspiring followers' commitment and creativity (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

The purpose of this quantitative, non-experimental study is to investigate district indicators associated with South Carolina female superintendents. Factors examined were self-reported transformational leadership behaviors, district Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) composite indices, identified priority schools, and school district poverty indices. Since the percentage of female superintendents in South Carolina is higher (38%) than the national average (24.1%), this study uses the premise that school districts with low ESEA composite indices, identified priority schools, and greater district poverty indices will have a higher percentage of female superintendents. The conceptual framework for this study is the glass cliff.

### **Glass Cliff**

The investigation of female South Carolina superintendents was guided by the glass cliff framework. Ryan and Haslam (2005) devised the term glass cliff to represent

women who were promoted to leadership in risky or precarious positions where the chance of failure is high.

Research regarding the glass cliff claimed that women are hired for leadership positions over males in companies facing a crisis (Ashby, Ryan, & Haslam, 2007; Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Women are selected for these risky positions because of stereotypical beliefs regarding female leadership skills. These skills, which are associated with transformational leadership behaviors, include collaboration, mentorship, and empowerment and are viewed as more appropriate to leadership for modern organizations (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, and Bongiorno (2011) hypothesized the *think crisis - think female* connotation may result because females are viewed as more suitable when the leader is expected to manage employees through a crisis or the company has performed poorly.

To better understand the leadership styles of men and women, Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) completed a meta-analysis to gain an understanding of the leadership roles of men and women. Women were found to display more transformational leadership behaviors in the area of individualized consideration because stereotypical feminine roles present women as being more attentive, nurturing, encouraging, supporting, and considerate. Ryan and Haslam (2009) claimed a consistent finding in their research revealed women attain leadership positions ahead of equally qualified men only in situations where there is an increased risk of organizational failure. Because female leadership styles may be seen as more charismatic or transformational, their skills are particularly valuable in times of crisis (Haslam & Ryan, 2008).

## **Transformational leadership**

During the superintendent selection process, school boards place a high priority on candidates who are confident, personable, and can implement strategies to move the district to greater levels of student achievement (Sampson, 2009). Leadership qualities desired by these organizations are changing with additional emphasis placed on individuals who possess adept relationship building skills. Burns (1978) emphasized that power and leadership must be viewed in terms of relationships. Effective superintendents build relationships through respecting the opinions of others, involving those with different ideas and perspectives, and caring about those they lead. Grogan (2000) indicated that leadership depends on the relationships a superintendent develops and maintains. Relationship orientation is viewed as a characteristic of transformational leadership. Transformational leaders are attuned to people's emotions as evidenced through the evaluation and satisfaction of their followers' needs (Northouse, 2010).

Kouzes and Posner (2002) suggest leaders must have the ability to manage their own emotions. The authors stressed emotional intelligence is vital to leadership. In a study that analyzed the relationship of emotional intelligence and transformational leadership, Mandell and Pherwani (2003) identified a significant gender difference exists between male and female managers' emotional intelligence scores. They found females' emotional intelligence scores were higher than males. The researchers claimed their results indicate females may be better managing their emotions and the emotions of others. They determined a significant predictive relationship exists between transformational leadership behaviors and emotional intelligence. The shift to transformational leadership behaviors has been described as the feminization of leadership (Aymen & Korabik, 2010; Eagly & Carli, 2003). As noted in one business



journal, boards search for CEOs who can demonstrate exceptional people skills when working with employees or other stakeholders while sustaining consistent results (Tischler, 2005).

Although there are various instruments that assess transformational leadership, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Avolio & Bass, 2004) is the most widely used instrument to measure transformational leadership (Northouse, 2012). A component of the MLQ provides a self-rater form for leaders. Substantial evidence exists that transformational leadership, as measured by the MLQ, significantly correlates with transformational leadership behaviors (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

### **Statement of the Problem**

To meet the increasing demands of the superintendency, school boards seek candidates whose leadership behaviors promote the realization of organizational goals and increased student achievement during periods of educational reform and system change. Such a period exists in South Carolina. According to KidsCount.org (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013), in 2011, South Carolina ranked nationally as 45<sup>th</sup> in children living in poverty, 42<sup>nd</sup> in teens aged 16 to 18 who were not in school or high school graduates, and 38<sup>th</sup> in unemployment.

The focus of the issues addressed in this study revolves around the fact that South Carolina school districts are confronted with a series of difficult circumstances and rely more on female superintendents than the national average. This study examines the relationship between South Carolina superintendent sex and self-reported transformational leadership behaviors. It examines the relationship between superintendent sex and three measures associated with at-risk school districts: low ESEA composite indices, identified priority schools, and school district poverty.

## **Background of the Study**

Pressure from No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2002), a depressed economy, reduced fiscal resources, increased accountability, revisions of curriculum, increased diversity, and the lack of qualified teachers in critical content areas require that South Carolina superintendents use effective leadership behaviors to promote organizational growth and improve student achievement. Moffett (2011) reported that most superintendents and board presidents believed improving pupil performance was the most important superintendent objective.

In a climate of changing instructional, political, and managerial adversities, South Carolina superintendents strive to improve student achievement under difficult circumstances and an evolving series of accountability challenges. Affirming the strain of the superintendency, Michael Casserly, Executive Director of the Council of the Great City Schools, declared that the superintendency was a high-pressure position under the best circumstances and now the pressure has increased exponentially (Pascopella , 2011). Three indicators of at-risk school districts in South Carolina are low ESEA composite indices, identified priority schools, and school district poverty.

The education goals of NCLB include reducing the gap between low-income and minority students and their peers in graduation and college access by 2020 (U. S. Department of Education, n. d.). In 2012, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) petitioned and received an Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) flexibility waiver from the United States Department of Education (State of South Carolina, 2012). The ESEA waiver replaced the NCLB adequate yearly progress rating of 'Met' or 'Not Met' with a district and school grading scale of A, B, C, D, or F. The waiver overhauled the teacher evaluation process to include student growth and

connections to student learning outcomes (State of South Carolina, 2012). The ESEA waiver established guidelines that determine priority schools. The rationale written in the ESEA waiver asserted that letter grades increased transparency and helped the public understand the rating system.

The ESEA composite index is generated from a complex matrix with categorical weighting to calculate a district or school numerical grade. The numerical grade falls in a range which is used to determine a letter grade. The SCDE's rationale to submit the waiver was that the all or nothing AYP of 'Met' or 'Not Met' resulted in an over-identification of schools and districts needing assistance. Schools and districts were imposed with sanctions or punishments because they did not meet the AYP criteria which required the state to provide financial assistance resulting in a reduction of state resources (State of South Carolina, 2011). Only one school district in South Carolina, Saluda School District One, made AYP in 2011 (State of South Carolina, 2011).

Priority schools, defined in the ESEA waiver, are the lowest 5% of Title 1 schools. Priority schools are identified based on the percentage of students who do not perform at proficient levels or have significant performance gaps between subgroups (State of South Carolina, 2012). These schools are required to work with parents, community members, and district administrators to establish turnaround plans. The turnaround plans must follow the US Department of Education's turnaround principles and address the needs of the student population. Priority schools will hold their status for three years, unless they meet the exit criteria. These schools are required to set aside 20% of their Title 1 funds for efforts related to their turnaround plan (State of South

Carolina, 2012). Priority schools were first identified for the 2012-13 school year by the SCDE.

Poverty negatively impacts student performance. The achievement gap between high-income and low-income students grew to nearly 40% in a 25-year period with family income almost as predictive of a child's achievement level as parental educational (Reardon, 2011). The Southern Education Foundation (2010) defines extreme poverty as a family of four living on an income of approximately \$11,000 per year. South Carolina has 10.3% of children living in extreme poverty which presents enormous challenges for schools (Southern Education Foundation, 2010). Schools and districts with high poverty rates are viewed negatively by the media, the community, and by other educators because of poor academic performance on school report cards (Suber, 2011). The poverty index, a measure for school report card ratings, is calculated by dividing the number of students who receive free and reduced lunch by the average daily membership on the 135<sup>th</sup> day of school. A high poverty index is associated with a greater level of poverty.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to investigate variables associated with South Carolina female superintendents. Factors examined were self-reported transformational leadership behaviors, district ESEA composite indices, identified priority schools, and school district poverty indices. The research questions are:

1. Is there a relationship between the sex of the South Carolina public school superintendents and the self-reported use of transformational leadership behaviors?
2. Is there a relationship between the sex of South Carolina public school superintendents and district indicators associated with at-risk school districts?

## **Significance**

The importance of effective superintendent leadership behaviors, the challenges faced by educational leaders in South Carolina, and the factors associated with more reliance on female superintendents in South Carolina make this study significant.

Women represent 24.1% of superintendents nationally (Kowalski et al., 2011). Gender-specific investigations are important because they help our understanding of factors related to female superintendent leadership.

South Carolina is a critical case (Patton, 2002) because of the South's patriarchal history. If patriarchal beliefs are still prevalent in society, then these beliefs are likely manifested in South Carolina. Political statistics support the generally patriarchal views of South Carolinians. The Southeastern Institute for Women in Politics (n.d.) reported that South Carolina ranked 50<sup>th</sup> nationally in the percentage of women in the state legislature. Historically, South Carolinians have never elected a female U. S. Senator (United States Senate, n. d.). There have been only five female U.S. Representatives with four of them elected upon the death of their husbands (Southern Institute for Women in Politics, n.d.). Nuwer (2000) claimed that, "Regardless of the fact that the South has experienced many historical and political changes, this region has retained one continuous aspect of its culture: it maintains patriarchal attitudes toward women" (p. 449).

Understanding differences in leadership behavior related to sex is important. More women are aspiring to and securing the superintendency in South Carolina. How these women perceive their leadership style is valuable to them, to universities with programs in educational administration, and to South Carolina school boards. Since South Carolina has a higher percentage of female superintendents than other states,

studying their leadership behavior preferences and underlying district variables like accountability ratings, identified at-risk schools, and poverty will provide deeper insight regarding females in the superintendent position.

This study will add to previous knowledge regarding self-reported transformational leadership behaviors of superintendents, how these behaviors are associated with the sex of superintendents in South Carolina, and patterns associated with female superintendent leadership in South Carolina. The proposed research may reveal implications for educators who aspire to district leadership in South Carolina and the district leaders who employ them.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are factors controlled by the researcher and describe the scope and boundaries of a study, the information that was included or excluded, and criteria for the study (Roberts, 2010).

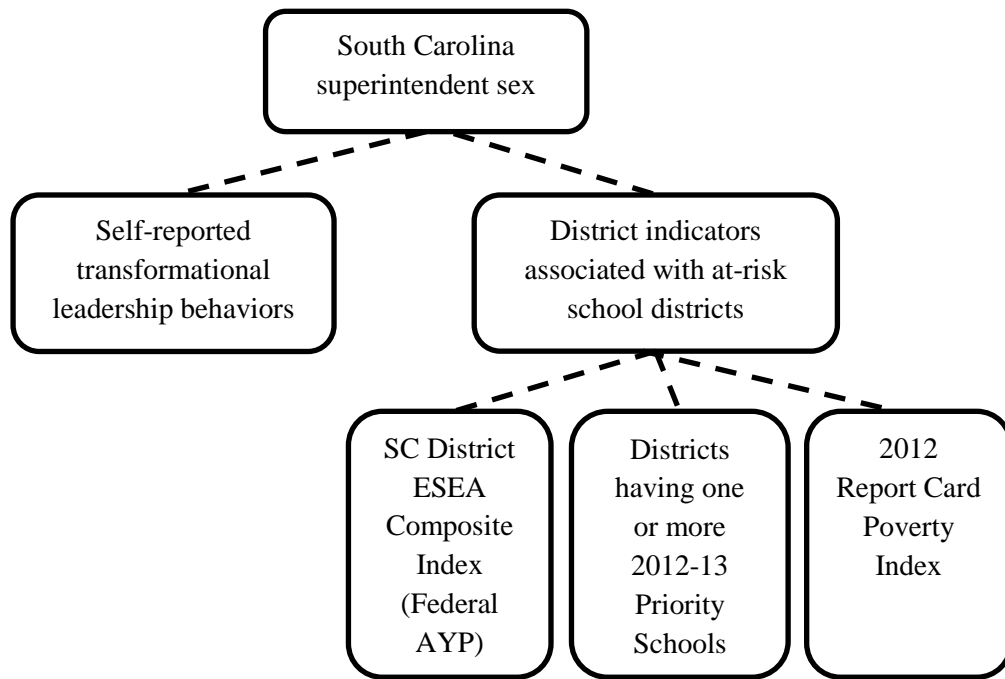
1. This study is limited to practicing, public school district superintendents in South Carolina who responded to an invitation to participate in the study during the 2012-2013 school year.
2. Data for the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice, the South Carolina Public Charter School District, and the Palmetto Unified School District are not included in this study.
3. Three Marion school districts (Marion 1, Marion 2, and Marion 7) were consolidated into one district in April 23, 2012. Data files obtained from the SCDE for the year 2011-12 contained the three Marion districts. This data was included when analyzing the three factors indicative of at-risk districts: the ESEA

Composite Index, identified priority Schools, and the school district poverty index.

4. Because of the consolidation of the three Marion school districts in April 23, 2012, only 81 surveys were mailed to the 2012-13 South Carolina public school superintendents in May 2013.

### **Definition of Terms**

1. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): A NCLB annual measurement of student progress based on standardized tests.
2. Barrier: A barrier is any circumstance or factor that restricts females' leadership advancement in an educational setting (Edgehouse, 2008).
3. Emotional Intelligence: Daniel Goleman's definition of emotional intelligence comprises four fundamental capabilities: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skill (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).
4. Effective superintendent: Based on standards of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the work of R. J. Marzano, the Educational Consultants and Research Associates (ECRA) Group (2010) produced a superintendent assessment that represents six behaviors of effective superintendents. These are vision and values, core instructional competencies, instructional leadership, community and relationships, communication and collaboration, and management.
5. Leadership: Bass defines leadership as encouraging followers to act on the goals held by the leaders and followers (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).



**Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework.** The conceptual analysis of the relationship between South Carolina superintendent sex and self-reported transformational leadership behaviors and district indicators associated with at-risk school districts.

## Organization of Dissertation

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One contains the purpose of the study, the statement of the focus, the background of the problem, research questions, significance, conceptual framework, delimitations, and definition of terms. Chapter Two includes a review of literature and research related to (a) a historical review of female superintendents, (b) superintendent longevity and differences in longevity based on gender, (c) barriers to gender equality, and (d) the full range leadership model and the relationship between gender and transformational leadership. Chapter Three explains the research methods, research instrument, validity and reliability of the research instrument, participant selection, process of data collection, and data analysis. Chapter Four provides



descriptive data analysis. In Chapter Five, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research are presented.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

*The quality of all our lives is dependent on the quality of our leadership.*  
Warren Bennis

The review of literature situates this study in the existing knowledge regarding female superintendents and provides a tool to examine the relationship between female superintendents in South Carolina and the challenges of the districts they lead. The relevant literature is divided into four sections.

First is a review of the historical representation of females in the superintendency. This literature helps position the current representation of female South Carolina superintendents within a historical perspective.

Second, superintendent longevity and gender differences in longevity are presented. The literature regarding instability in superintendent tenure, job pressures, and longevity provides insight into potential opportunities for female leadership.

Third, barriers to gender equality are included through an examination of the glass cliff, females' access to the superintendency, and variations in career paths based on gender. The organization of this section will help broadly situate the challenges faced by females who seek the superintendency.

Fourth, the review of literature ends with the full range leadership model. Transformational leadership is one of the behavioral leadership styles of the model. The relationship between transformational leadership and gender is examined. Literature

from recent studies illustrates the need for further research concerning the representation of female superintendents in South Carolina.

The review of literature provides the foundation for studying female South Carolina superintendents and the districts they serve. This review also provides a background to better understand the pressures and the challenges encountered by female superintendents in South Carolina.

### **Historical Female Superintendent Representation**

When she became the superintendent of Chicago schools in 1909, Ella Flagg Young was the first female superintendent of a large-city school district. When elected as president of the National Education Association (NEA) in 1910, she optimistically proclaimed that soon more women than men would serve in executive school leadership positions (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Although women made modest gains in educational leadership during the first portion of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ella Flagg Young's prediction has yet to be realized.

Tallerico and Blount (2004) described the composition of the superintendency by sex in three distinct periods. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the authors affirmed the superintendency was a male occupation. From 1910 to 1970, the number of female superintendents increased from 9% in 1910 to a high of 11% in 1930, and then declined to approximately 3% in 1970. Between 1970 and 1998, the percentage of female superintendents increased to approximately 10% (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). Nationally, during these three historical periods, the percentage of female superintendents ranged from a high in 1930 of 11% to a low in 1970 of 3%.

The first period, prior to 1910, reflected that society was segregated by sex and paralleled the sexual separation found in other work (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). Tyack

and Hansot (1982) described this period as one where the feminization of teaching was closely connected to educational bureaucracy and mirrored the power given to men in society. Men were viewed as leaders with authority and women were seen in the role of teachers whose primary function was cooperation and service (Tallerico & Blount, 2004).

The second period occurred from 1910 to 1970. In the early portion of this period, the number of female superintendents increased. The increase in female superintendents was attributed to the suffrage movement and superintendents were elected to the office (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). In the early twentieth century, women were securing a greater number of supervisory positions (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). States west of the Mississippi allowed women to vote in local elections which resulted in a greater number of female county superintendents in the West (Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

However, from 1930 to 1970, the number of female superintendents actually decreased. States implemented special training and credential requirements and the predominately male educational administration professors recruited and sponsored primarily males (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Tyack & Hansot (1982) acknowledged that, “the sponsor system was not called the ‘old-boy’ network by accident” (p. 192). This system of sponsorship:

placed a premium on similarity of opinions and background characteristics and probably did much unconsciously to insure that the top positions in public education rarely went to women, to minorities, or to others deviating from the male, white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant norm (p. 143).

Other factors contributed to the decline of female superintendents. After World War II, the GI bill provided financial support for predominately males to attain advanced

degrees (Tallerico & Blount, 2004) and schools initiated aggressive campaigns to recruit men for the classroom with plans to promote them into administration (Blount, 1999). Women also had fewer opportunities to become school superintendents because districts consolidated during the 1950s (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). By 1970, the superintendency mirrored extreme occupational sex segregation (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). School administration was structured and maintained for men in education to surround and judge themselves by other men (Blount, 1999).

During the third period from 1970 to 1998, the 3% to 10% increase in female superintendents was attributed to the feminist movement, increased career opportunities for women, and the recruitment of females to leadership positions (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). However, gains for female superintendents were inconsistent. Even in a liberal state such as Wisconsin, no female superintendents were hired between 1970 and 1975 (Tyack and Hansot, 1982).

In the most recent 2010 American Association of School Superintendents (AASA) study, Kowalski et al. (2011) found a significant increase in the percentage of female superintendents. The number of female superintendents rose from 13.2% in 2000 to 24.1% in 2010. Although approximately one-fourth of superintendents nationwide are female, that number remains far below Ella Flagg Young's hopeful 1910 prediction.

While various reasons are presented to explain the historical fluctuation in the percentage of female superintendents, the fact remains that the current percentage of female South Carolina superintendents is 13.9% higher than the national average (Kowalski et al., 2011; South Carolina Association of School Administrators, 2013).

## **Superintendent Longevity**

In the current political climate of accountability and educational reform, superintendents not only strive to increase student achievement but must also navigate the politics of the position to maintain their jobs. Both female and male superintendents express they feel stressed from increased demands, complex problems, and complicated and ambiguous expectations (Orr, 2006).

Leadership ability has less impact when there is rapid turnover in the superintendent's office (Pascopella, 2011). Superintendent turnover creates an insecure atmosphere that lacks consistency in instructional initiatives as well as evaluations of district office personnel and principals. Speaking out regarding the lack of superintendent longevity, AASA Executive Director Dan Domenech explained that even three years in the superintendency is inadequate to create reforms and initiate programs which impact student achievement (Pascopella, 2011).

Superintendents are being asked to do more with less. Increased accountability, in addition to the aging of experienced superintendents, has created a shortage in qualified candidates for the superintendency. Interim superintendents are in high demand, yet the exact number of interim superintendents is hard to ascertain (Black, 2009). In 2007, superintendent longevity was 5 to 6 years (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2007). A study by the Council of the Great City Schools (2010) reported that superintendent tenure expanded from 2.33 years in 1999 to 3.64 years in 2010. Research indicates the academic environment is impacted by frequent superintendent turnover (Libka, 2012; Plotts, 2011; Scherz, 2004; Sybrant, 2012). Stability in district leadership makes a difference.

Some recent studies have examined factors contributing to reduced superintendent longevity. Mid-west principals and superintendents reported they were living in survival mode where cutbacks forced them to focus on fundamental processes and nothing more (Ginsberg & Multon, 2011). Reporting on a 2012 Public School Superintendent Salary & Career Report by the District Administration Leadership Institute, Solomon (2012) attributed superintendent dissatisfaction to under-funded mandates, difficulty in reducing academic achievement gaps, negotiating politics, extremely long work hours, and managing job cuts. Many superintendents acknowledged that the job was becoming untenable, and retirement or other avenues of work were more appealing (Ginsberg & Multon, 2011).

In a quantitative study of Texas superintendent turnover, the average tenure of the 145 participants was five years (Byrd, Drews & Johnson, 2007). The average tenure for female participants was 6.2 years while the average male tenure was 4.8 years. Superintendents expressed increased political pressures as the primary factor in professional instability. As the ratings of the role politics played in career instability increased, longevity decreased. Problems working with the board president, the inability of the board to make decisions, and superintendent and board relations were statistically significant factors in determining Texas public school superintendent tenure. The results of this study reinforced the importance of good relationships with the school board and, especially, the board president.

Another Texas superintendent study found statistically significant relationships existed between longevity and superintendents' perceptions of inadequate funding and personnel challenges (Trevino, Braley, Brown & Slate, 2008). The less time South Texas

superintendents served in their district, the more likely they were to report that economic and personnel challenges were important concerns. These researchers noted that the number of female superintendents was low, as would be expected.

Recent studies of South Carolina superintendents and longevity addressed its relationship to change style preferences (Melton, 2009), characteristics of school districts (Anderson, 2009), accountability (Greer, 2011), and reasons for superintendent turnover (Goodman, 2012).

Change style preferences and their relationship to superintendent longevity and student achievement was researched through a mixed methods study by Melton in 2009. Melton defined change style preferences as how one's personality relates to an approach to change. Although no significant relationships were found, follow-up interviews revealed that South Carolina superintendents shared similarities in systems thinking and transformational leadership. Superintendents interviewed generally expressed transformational leadership behaviors when discussing employee motivation, collaboration, and relationships.

Anderson (2009) defined successful school districts in South Carolina as those that sustained performance ratings of Average, Good, or Excellent during the study's seven-year period. Struggling school districts, those with lower absolute ratings, suffered from difficult circumstances. More challenged school districts had higher levels of poverty, lower teacher retention rates, and smaller student enrollments. Anderson emphasized that struggling districts were forced to confront more complex instructional needs with less experienced teachers. Of the successful South Carolina school districts,



76% had stable superintendent leadership. Only 26% of challenged districts maintained superintendent stability.

A quantitative study by Greer (2011) examined South Carolina superintendent longevity since the implementation of NCLB. Greer found that greater superintendent longevity was associated with improved accountability levels. Of the 16 schools identified as challenged-based on their 2006 report card, no principal or superintendent remained in place by 2010-2011.

Analyzing shorter superintendent longevity in South Carolina, Goodman (2012) concluded that 54.8% of South Carolina superintendents remained in their position for three years or less. The average longevity of South Carolina superintendents between 2000 and 2010 was 3.1 years. Results of superintendent interviews found that 53% of South Carolina superintendents believed inadequate funding inhibited success. South Carolina superintendents sometimes moved from low performing smaller districts to high performing larger districts for salary increases and job security. However, through interviews, superintendents revealed that school board relationships were the most important factor determining superintendent longevity. Goodman's study noted that small, underperforming districts often suffer because of the challenges superintendents must overcome to be successful.

In the 2010 AASA study, 32.7% of superintendents indicated they served as a superintendent five years or less (Kowalski et al., 2011). Information reported by gender revealed that 7% of female superintendents had one year of experience and 36.2% of the female superintendents had 2 to 4 years of experience. Of the male superintendents, 5.7% had one year of experience and 24.2% had 2 to 4 years of experience. In this study,

43.2 % of female superintendents had four years or less experience while only 29.9% of male superintendents were in the same group. The experience level of female superintendents was decidedly less than male superintendents.

Superintendent success depends on the ability to motivate people, improve curriculum, and manage finances to support student learning. Small school districts have the greatest superintendent turnover rate, meaning that superintendents often lack the tenure necessary to make a substantial difference in their district and student achievement (Scherz, 2004).

Together, these studies indicate that superintendent longevity is influenced by economic factors, personnel issues, and school board relationships. As reported by Kowalski et al. (2011), 50.7% of superintendents plan to leave the superintendency by 2015 which forecasts the probability of substantial turnover. The potential for superintendent turnover may have a considerable impact on the opportunity for females to successfully secure a superintendency if female candidates overcome barriers to advancement.

### **Barriers to Gender Equality**

Although obstacles are often difficult to see, the barriers to gender equality influence females' access to leadership positions. Women who fail to recognize barriers to their advancement will have difficulty overcoming them (Schmitt, Spoor, Danaher, & Branscombe, 2009). Because of the breadth of gender inequality, it is useful to consider three major barriers to gender equality in the superintendency. These barriers are the glass cliff, access to the superintendency, and career paths. Due to the often hidden force of gender discrimination, each one of these topics is important for placing the study of female South Carolina superintendents within a larger context.

The first barrier is the glass cliff. Gender discrimination has been described by many terms, but one of the most common is the glass ceiling. The glass ceiling was first used in a *Wall Street Journal* article by Hymowitz and Schellhardt in 1986 (Barreto, Ryan, & Schmitt, 2009) and represents the phenomenon whereby men dominate upper levels of management. Researchers have used the glass ceiling as a metaphor to explain the underrepresentation of women in management and leadership positions by unseen barriers founded in stereotypical beliefs (Barreto, Ryan, & Schmitt, 2009). Other researchers and writers have coined different terms to represent gender discrimination. In 2005, the glass cliff was first used by Ryan and Haslam to represent a “new and subtle form of gender discrimination” (Barreto, Ryan, & Schmitt, 2009, p. 10) where women are hired in high-risk leadership positions associated with criticism and potential failure.

The 2005 Ryan and Haslam study was in reaction to an article which claimed that poor company performance was caused by women board members. Ryan and Haslam believed that it was because of the company’s poor performance that women rather than men were appointed to the board. Their archival study of prominent companies found that women were more likely to attain leadership positions in companies with financial downturns or deteriorating performance.

Extending the research of the glass cliff, Ashby, Ryan, and Haslam (2007) sought to determine if women attorneys were more likely to be selected to take on problematic legal cases. They found that females were more likely to be appointed as lead counsel on a high-risk legal case than male candidates. In addition, female attorneys were seen to have better leadership skills for high-risk cases. When a case was low-risk, gender was not a factor in deciding who to appoint. The researchers claimed evidence suggests that

women are more transformational in their leadership styles and possess the skills needed to handle change and crisis.

Gender inequality is often represented by the saying *think manager-think male* (Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, & Bongiorno, 2011). What is seen as acceptable managerial behavior for men is often viewed as unacceptable for women. Ryan and Haslam (2007) defined an alternative glass cliff connotation as *think crisis - think female*. Three studies by Ryan et al. (2011) further examined the glass cliff phenomena by investigating perceptions that women may be more suitable leaders in times of crisis. Their study revealed that feminine characteristics were more desirable under conditions of poor company performance such as managing people, taking responsibility for poor company performance, or silently enduring the crisis in the background (Ryan et al., 2011). The opposite was found when the managers were expected to improve performance or be spokespersons (Ryan et al., 2011). The authors claimed that when a scapegoat was needed, there was a clear preference for female traits.

There are mixed opinions as to why women accept difficult leadership positions. To determine if women accepted glass cliff positions without evaluating the circumstances, Rink, Ryan, and Stocker (2012) found that women and men understand the resources available for the positions, and that stereotypical beliefs influence the type of positions women and men accept.

The literature on the glass cliff has focused on female leadership in the business environment. However, although no studies were found citing female superintendents and the glass cliff, there is evidence that female superintendents are aware of this type of discrimination. One female administrator jokingly commented that women should go

“where things are in so much trouble that nobody will notice that you are a woman” (as cited by Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 233).

The second barrier is females’ access to the superintendency. Research regarding females’ access to the superintendency has taken various approaches including perceptions of gender bias (Garn & Brown, 2008), self-imposed barriers (Derrington & Sharratt, 2008), the influence of mentoring (Promisee-Bynum, 2010), limited networking and negotiating skills (Montz & Wanat, 2008), and access influenced by marketing constraints (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). Through an examination of females’ access to the superintendency, the uniqueness of the higher proportion of female South Carolina superintendents becomes evident.

Barriers for aspiring female superintendents include both gender bias and self-imposed barriers. Gender inequity is prevalent within the career cycle for women in leadership (Mullen, 2009). While there is greater diversity in national superintendent population as more females and minorities hold the previously male-dominated superintendent position, gender bias remains a barrier for aspiring female superintendents (Garn & Brown, 2008; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006; Wallin & Crippen, 2007). When females are employed as superintendents, they are more likely to be in smaller districts that have financial difficulties, community controversy, or declining enrollment (Montz & Wanat, 2008).

Gender bias remains a factor in superintendent searches. Beliefs still prevail that females lack assertiveness, self-confidence, desire for power, and motivation to aspire to the superintendency (Newton, 2006). Even females sometimes fail to support other females in leadership positions because they believe females lack a public presence or do

not lead like men (Dana, 2009). Alternatively, females perpetuate gender bias by remaining silent when they feel ignored, degraded, or treated unfairly and change jobs instead of voicing their concerns (Bañuelos, 2008).

Some females perceive barriers to the superintendency. Derrington and Sharratt (2008) used questions from a 1993 study and replicated the study in 2007. Their findings revealed females think immovable barriers still exist that prevent them from securing a superintendency but barrier rankings changed during this time period. Sex role stereotyping and sex discrimination were ranked as the top barriers in 1993, but self-imposed barriers rose to the top in the 2007. The primary self-imposed barriers were family obligations and unwillingness to relocate. Many females are unwilling or unable to resolve responsibilities of child-rearing, homemaking, or caring for elderly parents. Katz (2008) found female superintendents described gendered differences to include a greater focus on establishing relationships, lack of networking skills, few trusted friends, longer work hours, and a heightened work ethic because females feel they must be perfect. Many females overcome barriers because family and community members encourage them to maximize their potential by seeking further education to expand their careers choices (Lane-Washington & Wilson-Jones, 2010).

The old boys' network is identified as a barrier for aspiring female superintendents (McDonald, Lin, & Ao, 2009; Montz & Wanat, 2008; Ryder, 2008; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). The old boys' network gives men a network of informal friendships that excludes females (Montz & Wanat, 2008). Social and professional networks provide vital information to aspiring superintendents about job openings and are crucial because potential applicant names are passed on to search committees (de

Santa Ana, 2008; McDonald et al., 2009). Although female leadership opportunities have improved, females receive less information and remain more isolated because they are not members of networks. To alleviate the network gap for females, researchers suggest veteran female leaders create formalized networks for aspiring female leaders (Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Sherman, Muñoz, & Pankake, 2008).

Recruitment language and established networks influence female and minority job access. When seeking superintendent candidates, school boards often favor men over women because of gender bias, cultural beliefs, or political views (Dana, 2009).

Language used in superintendent recruitment messages significantly influences job attraction ratings (Newton, 2006). There remains a white male advantage to job access information because the white male advantage is at its strongest in the highest levels of management (McDonald et al., 2009).

Females are underrepresented in the superintendency. Many women feel gender and social barriers persist, with their chances of obtaining a superintendency remaining significantly lower than men (Peckham, 2007).

The third barrier, career paths, further weakens many opportunities for females to attain the superintendency. Female career paths to the superintendency are more complicated than male career paths. Many females' career choices lead them into areas of curriculum and instruction, district office experience (Edgehouse, 2008), or assistant superintendent positions prior to becoming a superintendent (Pascopella, 2008).

Numerous researchers have studied female superintendents' career paths (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Edgehouse, 2008; Koenig, Mitchell, Eagly, & Ristikari, 2011; Mullan, 2009;

Tallerico, 2000). Few research studies addressed male career paths to the superintendency (Maienza, 1986; McDonald et al., 2009; Miller, 2008; Newton, 2006).

In a study of Texas superintendents whose participants were 91% male, the most common superintendent career path was secondary teacher, secondary principal, and superintendent (Farmer, 2005). Farmer specified that the position cited as key for superintendent preparation, no matter the district size, was the secondary principalship. Similarly, in a national sample, the typical career path for a male superintendent was secondary teacher, athletic coach, assistant secondary principal, secondary principal, and superintendent (Kim & Brunner, 2009). Many males move directly from a secondary principalship to the superintendency, skipping central office employment (Kim & Brunner, 2009).

Glass, Bjork and Brunner (as cited by Glass, 2006) pointed out that over 70% of superintendents previously held a secondary school principalship which gave them extra opportunities to work with budgets, manage facilities, and participate in personnel activities. However, the National Center for Educational Statistics reported 59% of elementary principals were female as compared to 29% holding secondary principalships (Aud, Hussar, Kena, Bianco, Frohlich, Kemp, & Tahan, 2011). Secondary principalships allow for greater visibility and access to district-wide activities (de Santa Ana, 2008). The background experience for most females who obtained a superintendency included a secondary principalship (Brunner & Kim, 2010). The lack of a secondary principalship experience reduced the chances that female candidates would advance directly from a principalship to the superintendency.



Female superintendents' career paths often involve district office positions. In a Texas study, female superintendents were more likely to follow a director career path to the superintendency more often than males (Farmer, 2005). However, positions in curriculum and instruction, without a secondary principalship, result in school boards who are not confident that these female candidates have the ability and experience to manage budgets and finances (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Dana, 2009). The low number of practicing female superintendents may signal the prevalence of gender-biased career access (Brunner & Kim, 2010). Brunner and Kim argued, however, that women's career paths give them additional experience in areas of curriculum and instruction which actually better prepares them for the superintendency.

In a 2010 quantitative study, Styles examined the career paths, skills necessary for career advancement, and barriers of female South Carolina superintendents. Career paths varied, but the most common path was teacher, principal, and central office/curriculum. Only 10.7% of female respondents moved directly from a principalship to the superintendency. Additionally, 79.3% of female superintendents held only one superintendent position with 62% being appointed to the superintendency in their same district. Skills viewed as most essential to career advancement were relationships, interpersonal skills, and being responsive to parents and the community. Improving instruction was ranked as the most important superintendent skill at 82.7%. Female superintendents perceived their school boards hired them to be change agents. As noted by Styles (2010), this perception was different from the 2003 AASA study which found that female superintendents believed they were hired to be instructional leaders. Styles

stated that since female South Carolina superintendents view their primary role as change agents, there may be a shift in the way female superintendents perceive their roles.

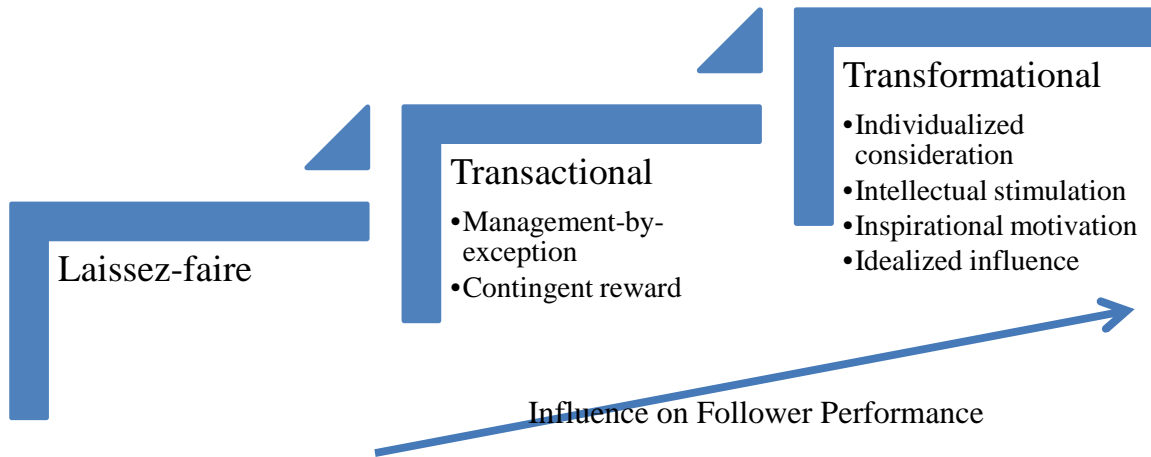
### **Full Range Leadership Model**

Transformational leadership is one component of the full range of leadership model described by Avolio and Bass (Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003).

Based on the relationship between the leader and the follower, the model places leadership behaviors on a continuum from laissez-faire to transactional then to transformational leadership (Bass, 1999). Laissez-faire leaders avoid action.

Transactional leaders use rewards or punishments. Transformational leaders emphasize follower development (Hogg, 2010).

Particular behaviors are associated with each one of the three leadership styles in the full range model. These leadership behaviors are assessed by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999). The literature describes the full range leadership model starting with laissez-faire leadership on the low end of the continuum, progressing to transactional, and concluding with transformational leadership at the upper end of the continuum (Figure 2.1). The influence on follower performance increases from the lower to the upper end of the continuum.



**Figure 2.1 The Full Range Leadership Continuum.** Adapted from Kirkbride (2006).

The lowest level of the full range leadership model is laissez-faire leadership. These supervisors fail to utilize leadership behaviors, avoid making decisions, and abdicate duties (Avolio & Bass, 2002). This results in employee ineffectiveness, dissatisfaction, and conflict (Bass, 1999). Laissez-faire leadership is characterized by passiveness, avoidance of decision-making, or failing to take corrective action until a problem becomes worse (Bass, 1999). Laissez-faire leaders reject employee management duties (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

Promoting a more sinister view of laissez-faire behaviors, Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, and Hetland (2007) argued that laissez-faire leadership is a destructive, counterproductive leadership behavior which is better described as zero leadership. Laissez-faire behaviors create stressful work environments characterized by significant role stress and social conflict. Because workplace stressors are not handled, bullying and high levels of psychological anxiety occur (Skogstad et al., 2007).

Transactional leadership behaviors fall in the middle of the full range of leadership continuum. Transactional leadership behaviors are characterized by punishment or rewards based on the follower's performance (Avolio & Bass, 2002; Bielenia, 2011) and built on equitable exchange (Seyranian, 2010). Transactional leaders construct their reputation centered on subordinates' self-interest and often fail because they cannot deliver rewards (Bass, 1985). Transactional leadership behaviors are either classified as management-by-exception or contingent reward.

Although management-by-exception leadership may be necessary in some situations, it is the least effective of transactional behaviors. These leaders take punitive action if followers do not meet expectations (Avolio & Bass, 2002). This leadership style may be either active or passive. In the active form, the leader actively monitors followers looking for mistakes, errors, or deviations from standards and takes disciplinary action (Avolio & Bass, 2002). Active management-by-exception leaders constantly monitor subordinates through observation (Bielenia, 2011).

In the passive form, the leader waits for followers to make errors or mistakes and then takes corrective action (Avolio & Bass, 2002). Leaders who exhibit the passive form only intervene when something goes wrong (Bass, 1985; Bielenia, 2011). Often, these leaders believe poor performance is related to the follower's lack of ability, so they often distort their feedback making it more positive than it should be (Bass, 1985).

Another transactional leadership behavior, contingent-reward, incentivizes employees, through follower self-interest, to perform (Avolio & Bass, 2002). Using contingent reward behaviors, the leader assigns or gets follower consensus on required tasks and promises rewards or actually rewards the follower for successfully

accomplishing the duties (Avolio & Bass, 2002). Contingent reward behaviors are perceived as a task-oriented approach because the focus is on goal attainment (Bielenia, 2011). Contingent reward leadership is relatively effective as long as the leader awards the incentive (Bielenia, 2011).

On the upper end of the end of continuum of the full range of leadership model is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is a behavioral theory. Behavioral theories focus on identifying effective leadership behaviors that can be taught (Kirkbride, 2006; Tichy & Devanna, 1986; Warrick, 2011). Drucker (2006) professed that leadership effectiveness can be learned.

The initial concept of transforming leadership was presented by James Burns in 1978, and by the mid-1980s Bernard Bass extended his model to transformational leadership (Hogg, 2010). The transformational leader promotes higher quality, increased innovativeness, and enhanced follower development (Bass, 1985) which greatly influences follower's job satisfaction (Bass, 1999). Transformational leaders earn the trust and confidence of members of their organization, are innovative, are mentors, empower others, and encourage those around them (Bass, 1999; Eagly, 2007).

Transformational leaders create relationships that move followers beyond their own self-interest by inspiring, influencing, and developing their leadership abilities (Bass, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Walumbwa, Avolio, and Hartnell (2010) emphasized that transformational leaders increase group motivation, confidence, and performance by affirming mission, collaboration, and encouraging the alignment of individual goals with collective goals. These leaders inspire employees to develop innovative solutions, create vision, display moral maturity, be mentors, cultivate their intellectual growth, and exceed

their own expectations (Avolio, 2011; Hobb, 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Vinkenburgh, van Engen, Eagly, & Johannensen-Schmidt, 2011). Transformational leadership has a significant impact on employees' work engagement and organizational knowledge creation (Hoon Song, Kolb, Hee Lee, & Kyoung Kim, 2012).

Empirical research on effective schools identified transformational leadership as a critical factor in organizational effectiveness and student engagement (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). These leadership behaviors improve human behavior, generating a transforming effect (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Northouse (2010) identified transformational leaders as ones who are:

Recognized as change agents who are good role models, who can create and articulate a clear vision for an organization, who empower followers to meet higher standards, who act in ways that make others want to trust them, and who give meaning to organizational life (p. 200).

Avolio (2011) described the four components of the transformational leadership model as the four I's: individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. The first component, individualized consideration, means the manager is responsive to the individual's need for growth and achievement and serves as a mentor, teacher, and counselor (Avolio, 2011). Using individualized consideration, the leader is aware of the follower's aspirations, provides support, and delegates duties which promote individual growth (Bass, 1999). The leader focuses on the uniqueness of each person and gives some attention to everyone (Bielenia, 2011).

Leaders display intellectual stimulation, the second component of transformational leadership, when they question assumptions, ask followers to use

intuition, encourage innovation, and stimulate new thinking (Avolio, 2011; Bass, 1985). Leaders who exhibit intellectual stimulation draw followers into problem-solving activities and decision-making processes (Bielenia, 2011). Jandaghi, Matin, and Farjami (2009) asserted that intellectual stimulation encompasses advocating nontraditional thinking to resolve traditional problems.

The third component of transformational leadership, inspirational motivation, is displayed when leaders present an optimistic view of the future and are the first to act even if their action presents a risk to themselves (Avolio, 2011). Leaders who use inspirational motivation are enthusiastic when discussing work that has to be done, are confident that the task will be accomplished, and readily take on challenging problems (Jandaghi et al., 2009). Inspirational motivation is attributed to the leader when emotional bonds are developed with followers that result in employee engagement and commitment to organizational goals (Bielenia, 2011).

The final component, idealized influence, was originally termed charisma by Avolio and Bass in 1991 (Bass, 1999). Bass (1999) described idealized influence as incorporating power over ideology, ideals, and significant issues. Leaders who display idealized influence “set examples for showing determination, displaying extraordinary talents, taking risks, creating in followers a sense of empowerment, showing dedication to the cause, creating a sense of joint mission, dealing with crisis, using radical solutions, and engendering faith in others” (Avolio, 2011, p. 71). Idealized influence behaviors are demonstrated when leaders are self-aware and influence the entire organization by modeling behavior and pursuing self-improvement (Bielenia, 2011).

As a final point, leaders benefit when they understand their own leadership style which helps them become more effective when leading others (Manz & Sims, 1991; Pearce; 2007). Since superintendents face many challenges related to instructional needs and fiscal shortfalls, understanding their own leadership behaviors is important to enhancing their strengths and addressing their weaknesses in order to maximize their followers' leadership abilities and performance. If transformational leadership behaviors motivate followers to achieve more, then these leaders are well-positioned to set the stage for educational improvement despite difficult circumstances.

With increasing social, political, economic, and managerial adversities faced by school districts, it is important to study superintendents' transformational leadership behaviors. Superintendents are responsible for motivating all stakeholders to move beyond their own self-interests to achieve their maximum potential. The need for transformation has placed more emphasis on democratic, relationship-oriented, participatory, and considerate leadership (Bass, 1985). The presence of a single transformational leader increases the potential success of an organization (Warrick, 2011).

### **Gender and Transformational Leadership**

Numerous research studies regarding gender and transformational leadership behaviors have been conducted (Duehr, 2006; Eagly, 2007; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Lopez-Zafra, Garcia-Retamero, & Berrios Martos, 2012; Mak & Kim, 2009; Mandell, & Pherwani, 2003). A meta-analysis by Eagly (2007) found that female leaders were more transformational than males and exceeded men in supporting and encouraging others. Eagly et al. (2003) reported their study revealed that femininity predicted contingent reward. High transformational leadership scores correlate positively



with contingent reward. Acknowledging that female and male leadership styles differ, Lars Bjork (as cited by Dana and Bourisaw, 2006) indicated that female leadership is characterized by collaboration, instructional leadership, a transformational approach, and determination to improve student achievement.

School boards look for candidates who have effective leadership skills, strong communication skills, are sound managers of resources, are global/systems thinkers, imagine the future, promote innovation, are collaborative, and focused on student achievement (de Santa Ana, 2008; Eadie, 2008a; Eadie, 2008b; Glass, 2006; Reed & Patterson, 2007). Female leaders possess these qualities, have effective leadership styles, and are frequently associated with successful business organizations (Eagly, 2007). Democratic and participative leadership styles are more common among women than men (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Citing the work of Duehr and Bono (2006), Koenig et al. (2011) asserted that:

because some of the elements of transformational leadership, especially the mentoring and empowering of subordinates, appear to be aligned more with the feminine than the masculine gender role, findings suggest that transformational leadership is in general androgynous or even slightly feminine (p. 637).

According to Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and van Engen (2003):

The causes of this sex difference may lie in several factors: (a) the ability of the transformational repertoire (and contingent reward behaviors) to resolve some of the incongruity between leadership roles and the female gender role, (b) gender roles' influence on leadership behavior by means

of the spillover and internalization of gender-specific norms, and (c) the glass ceiling itself, whereby a double standard produces more highly skilled female than male leaders. (p. 587).

Bjork (2000) described female leadership styles as more collaborative and democratic. Female leaders promote high levels of job satisfaction and serve as change agents deeply invested in reform and developing common visions. Finding a significant relationship between Illinois superintendents' emotional intelligence and transformational leadership behaviors, Wolf (2010) specified that female superintendents scored higher on transformational leadership than male superintendents.

Of particular interest for this study, Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) reasoned that "transformational leadership is also more likely to emerge in times of crisis or excessive turbulence" (p. 185). Transformational leaders, in the difficult reality of schools today, encourage, support, and promote a common sense of purpose.

In a mixed-methods study, Redish (2010) investigated self-perceived South Carolina superintendent leadership practices delineated by race. Using the Leadership Practices Inventory published by Kouzes and Posner (2002), Redish found no significant relationship between self-perceived leadership practices and superintendent longevity, years of experience in their current position, district size, or race. However, through interviews, Redish inferred that superintendent responses initially seemed transformational. After additional follow-up questions, Redish determined that superintendents' self-perceived leadership practices were actually transactional.

More limited research has been conducted regarding transformational leadership behaviors of practicing South Carolina superintendents. No studies were conducted that

use the MLQ to study the transformational leadership behaviors of South Carolina superintendents.

### **Summary**

The literature regarding historical female superintendent representation, superintendent longevity, barriers to gender equality, and transformational leadership provide comparative information for the context of this study. South Carolina employs a greater percentage of female superintendents despite many barriers to female leadership. Substantial research reveals an underrepresentation of female superintendents. Females contend with challenges that men do not face, especially in roles that are traditionally held by males (Eagly, 2007).

Examination of the history of female superintendents in the United States and current research on barriers illustrates the difficulties women face as they aspire to the superintendency. The literature served to support the analysis of the conditions encountered by female superintendents in South Carolina.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Methodology**

This chapter describes the methodology and procedures that were used to conduct research pertaining to female South Carolina superintendents. This chapter includes the: (a) research questions; (b) research design; (c) population and sample; (d) instrumentation; (e) data collection procedures; (f) data analysis procedures; and (g) reliability and validity.

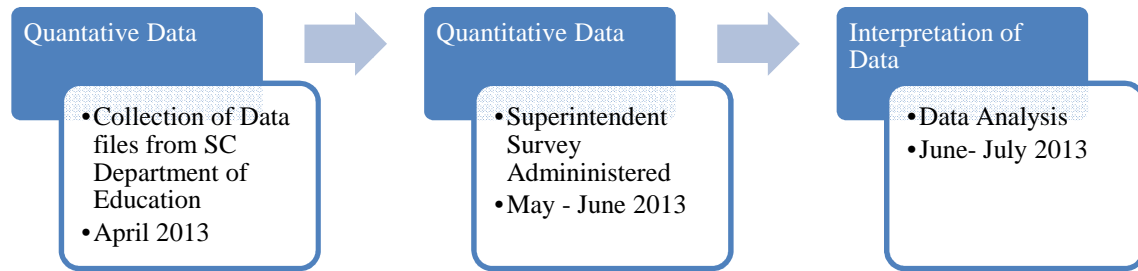
The purpose of this study is to investigate issues associated with South Carolina female superintendents. It examines the relationship between South Carolina superintendent sex and self-reported transformational leadership behavior through the administration of a subset of the MLQ. Further, it will examine the relationship between South Carolina superintendent sex and three school district indicators that are indicative of an at-risk district characteristics.

### **Research Questions**

1. Is there a relationship between the sex of the South Carolina public school superintendents and the self-reported use of transformational leadership behaviors?
2. Is there a relationship between the sex of South Carolina public school superintendents and district indicators associated with at-risk school districts?

## Research Design

A quantitative, non-experimental design was chosen for this study. Quantitative data was collected from practicing South Carolina superintendents through the use of a survey. Figure 3.1 provides the timeline for the proposed research.



**Figure 3.1 Sequential Design and Timeline**

## Population and Sample

The MLQ survey sample group was practicing South Carolina public school superintendents for the academic year 2012-13. The data and superintendent contact information for this inquiry was collected from the South Carolina Association of School Administrators (SCASA) (South Carolina Association of School Administrators, 2013) superintendent list and the South Carolina Department of Education (2012). The South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice, the South Carolina Public Charter School District, and the Palmetto Unified School District were not included in the survey sample.

Specific data files from the South Carolina Department of Education include the 2012-13 Priority Schools, the 2012 Report Card Poverty Index, and the District Data File 2012. Marion 1, Marion 2, and Marion 7 were consolidated after the publication of these data files, so the survey portion only included 81 school districts. Using the SCDE files,

data for 83 districts were analyzed by superintendent sex and district indicators associated with at-risk districts.

### **Instrumentation**

Various instruments are available that measure self-perceptions of transformational leadership. With the ever increasing demands of district leadership, effective school leaders often utilize these tools to help them become more cognizant of their leadership strengths and limitations.

Instruments reviewed and considered were the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) (Kouzes & Posner, 2002), the Global Transformational Leadership Scale (GTL) (Carless, Wearing & Mann, 2000), and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Two of these instruments, the LPI and the MLQ, have been widely used by researchers, as reported in dissertations and academic journals, to obtain transformational leadership self-perception data. The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) is used to measure the frequency of transformational leadership behaviors (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Kouzes and Posner proposed that clarifying personal values starts with becoming self-aware. The LPI consists of five leadership practices: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart.

The first organizational scholar to develop an instrument to measure transformational leadership was Bernard Bass (Conger, 1999). Similar to the LPI instrument, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) provides a self-rater form for leaders. The MLQ contains 45 items rated on a five-point Likert scale. It is designed to measure leadership across the full range leadership continuum with leadership styles falling into three primary categories. These categories are laissez-faire, transactional, and

transformational leadership behaviors. The MLQ self-rating form measures perceptions of leadership.

The MLQ instrument was selected to obtain self-reported transformational leadership behaviors because the MLQ is the most extensively used instrument to assess transformational leadership behaviors (Northouse , 2012). The MLQ has been used in numerous research programs and doctoral dissertations (Avolio & Bass, 2004). A subset of 20 questions from the MLQ Leader Form 5x-Short designed to measure transformational leadership with one additional demographic question regarding superintendent sex constitute this study's superintendent survey. Permission to use a subset of the MLQ was obtained from MindGarden. The MLQ instrument is copyrighted and available at [www.mindgarden.com](http://www.mindgarden.com). Bass and Riggio (2006) argued that substantial evidence indicates that the MLQ measures transformational leadership. The MLQ uses a five-point Likert scale with 0 meaning "Not at all", 1 meaning "Once in a while", 2 meaning "Sometimes", 3 meaning "Fairly Often", and 4 meaning "Frequently, if not always."

The 20 question subset of the MLQ assesses the five leadership dimensions associated with transformational leadership. The five dimensions are Idealized Influence Attributed, Idealized Influence Behavior, Individual Consideration, Inspirational Motivation, and Intellectual Stimulation. Since the MLQ is a copyrighted instrument, permission by Mindgarden, Inc. to use the instrument and five sample MLQ questions are included in Appendix C.

## **Reliability and Validity of the MLQ**

The MLQ has had many revisions and refinements to strengthen its reliability and validity (Northouse, 2010). Reliability is determined by results that are consistent through multiple tests (Kirk, 2008). Validity is the extent to which the instrument measures what it was designed to measure (Kirk, 2008). Through a comprehensive evaluation of reliability and validity, Antonakis, Avolio, and Sivasubramaniam (2003) specified the MLQ (Form 5X) assesses the full range model of leadership and the supporting theory. The authors conclude that the MLQ is a valid and reliable instrument which satisfactorily measures the nine components of the full range theory of leadership.

Extensive research was conducted to study transformational leadership as assessed by the MLQ (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Since the original 1985 version, several revisions and refinements have been completed. According to Avolio and Bass (2004), reliabilities for the six leadership factor scales in a replication study ranged from .64 to .92 and were consistent with previous research. Except for management-by-exception, estimates of internal consistency for all scales were above .70 (Avolio & Bass, 2004). In addition, the authors report their results suggest that the MLQ instrument can be expected to function similarly for both males and females.

Further supporting the reliability and validity of the MLQ, Avolio and Bass (2004) found that data on key aspects of organizational culture correlated with MLQ ratings of leadership. Managers who received higher transformational leadership ratings were viewed as more innovative, less bureaucratic, and willing to take risks (Avolio & Bass, 2004).



## **Data Collections and Procedures**

Approval for collection was obtained from the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (Appendix D). Using the SurveyMonkey online survey software, each superintendent received an email explaining the purpose of the study and to solicit their participation (Appendix B). The email document was comprised of a request for participation in the study and assurances of superintendent participant confidentiality. Instructions were provided for completing the survey. Completing the consent form by typing their name or district name served as an electronic signature. After completing the consent form, superintendents were taken directly to the MLQ survey and the added demographic question. When responses were received, the researcher downloaded the data from SurveyMonkey for analysis. Superintendents were asked to respond to the survey within a two-week period.

The researcher chose to survey superintendents through SurveyMonkey because of its ability to obtain digitized data, meet time constraints, and offer a convenient survey response system for the participating superintendents. The 20 MLQ survey questions that measure self-reported transformational leadership behaviors include four items for each of the five leadership dimensions of transformational leadership.

Extensive evidence supports transformational leadership, as measured by the MLQ, significantly correlates with measures of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Responses to the MLQ survey and the demographic question were analyzed to determine if a relationship exists between superintendent sex and self-reported transformational leadership behaviors which is research question 1.

To analyze research questions 2, 3 and 4, three data files were downloaded directly from the SCDE and compiled into one MS Excel file. The files were the 2012-

13 Priority Schools, the 2012 Report Card Poverty Index, and the District Data File 2012. Since these files contained information regarding all South Carolina public school districts but not superintendent sex, the SCASA website was utilized to determine the sex of each district's superintendent. The SCASA website provides superintendent names with their pictures. For SCASA members, there is a downloadable superintendent database which contains a list of districts, superintendent names, mailing addresses, and email addresses.

Table 3.1 provides information on the variables, the type of data, and the statistics for analysis for each research question.

**Table 3.1 Purpose of the Study**

| Questions  | Variables   | Source of Data   | Statistics  |
|--|---|--|---|
| Is there a relationship between the sex of the South Carolina public superintendents and the self-reported use of transformational leadership behaviors? | Independent:<br>Superintendent sex<br><br>Dependent:<br>Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) score  | Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) results<br><br>Demographic Data   | Independent <i>t</i> -test for South Carolina Superintendent sex and Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) subscale results<br><br>Descriptive statistics  |
| Is there a relationship between the sex of South Carolina public superintendents and district indicators associated with at-risk school districts?       | Independent:<br>Superintendent sex<br><br>Dependent:<br>ESEA Composite Index 2011-12<br><br>Number of priority schools<br><br>2012 District Poverty Index | SCASA District Superintendent List 2012-13<br><br>SC Department of Education District Performance file 2012<br><br>SC Department of Education 2012-13 Priority Schools File<br><br>SC Department of Education 2012 Report Card Poverty Index | Independent <i>t</i> -test for South Carolina Superintendent sex and ESEA Composite Index<br><br>Pearson's chi-square statistic for South Carolina superintendent sex and districts with one or more priority schools and no priority schools<br><br>Independent <i>t</i> -test for South Carolina Superintendent sex and Poverty Index<br><br>Descriptive Statistics |

**Purpose of the Study.** This study examines superintendent sex to self-reported transformational leadership behaviors and district indicators associated with at-risk school districts.

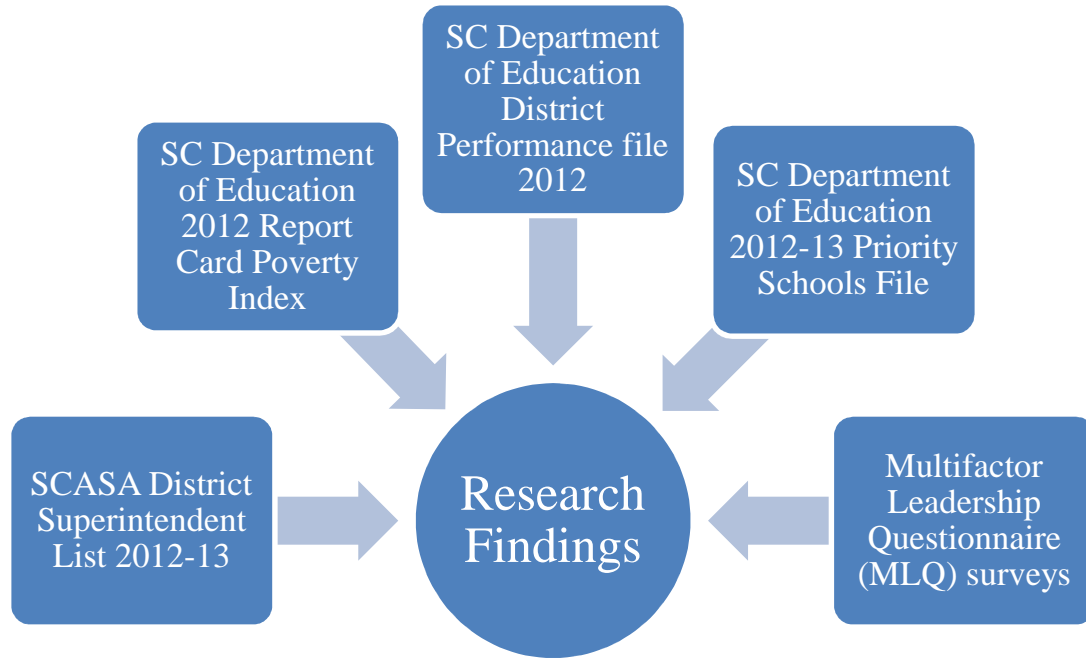
## **Analysis of Data**

Descriptive statistics and independent sample *t* test statistics with unequal variances were used to explore if a relationship between the sex of the South Carolina public superintendents and the self-reported use of transformational leadership behaviors exists (research question 1). Independent *t*-tests are appropriate when the elements selected in one sample are not influenced by the selection of elements in the other sample (Kirk, 2008).

Descriptive statistics, independent sample *t* test statistics with unequal variances, and the Pearson's chi-square statistic were used to determine if a relationship between the sex of South Carolina public superintendents and the three district indicators indicative of at-risk school districts (research question 2). Independent sample *t*-tests were appropriate for analyzing the ESEA composite index and the poverty index. The Pearson's chi-square statistic was used to analyze superintendent sex and districts with priority schools based on the categories of no priority schools and at least one priority school. Pearson's chi-square statistic is appropriate to analyze the independence of two variables where each variable has two or more categories (Kirk, 2008). All statistics were analyzed using MS Excel and SPSS version 19 statistical software.

## **Validity of Data Collection**

Three data points were used to collect multiple forms of data that may be indicative of high-risk school districts. Data files from the SCDE that were used are the 2012 District Performance file, 2012-13 Priority School file, and 2012 Report Card Poverty Index. An online survey was sent to superintendents to determine their self-reported transformational leadership behaviors. Figure 3.2 provides a model of the sources of quantitative data for this study.



**Figure 3. 2 Sources of Quantitative Data**

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the research methodology used for this study. The research is designed to protect the participants' anonymity. A description of the research design, procedures for participant selection, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures were described. The following chapter outlines the findings for this research.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

This chapter reports the results of this quantitative, non-experimental study. The data analyzed consisted of responses to an online survey by 2012-13 South Carolina public school superintendents and existing data published by the South Carolina Department of Education for the 2011-12 academic year. The purpose of the study was to determine the relationship of the sex of South Carolina superintendents to (a) their self-reported transformational leadership behaviors and (b) three measures indicative of at-risk districts. Data was analyzed using MS Excel and SPSS version 19 statistical software. The analysis of data is organized in four sections which are the research questions, limitations, results, and findings.

### **Research Questions**

This study investigated variables associated with South Carolina female superintendents. Factors examined were self-reported transformational leadership behaviors, district ESEA composite indices, identified priority schools, and school district poverty indices. The research questions were:

1. Is there a relationship between the sex of the South Carolina public school superintendents and the self-reported use of transformational leadership behaviors?

2. Is there a relationship between the sex of South Carolina public school superintendents and district indicators associated with at-risk school districts?

### **Limitations**

1. The use of self-reported information is a limitation. The study is dependent on honest and accurate responses from the participants.
2. Female superintendents may be more willing than male superintendents to participate in the survey because of the focus of the study.
3. Other leadership styles and associated inventories can measure leadership behavior.
4. Despite measures to encourage superintendent participation, district spam software may have filtered out the Letters of Invitation and Consent emails.
5. Other indicators of at-risk school district status may provide more insight into the challenges faced by South Carolina public school superintendents.

### **Results**

Research question 1 explored the relationship of the sex of South Carolina public school superintendents and self-reported transformational leadership behaviors. Of the 81 surveys emailed to South Carolina public school superintendents, 41 were completed for a return rate of 51%. Of the 41 respondents, 25 (61%) were male and 16 (39%) were female.

This section presents the results from the survey responses to the 20-question subset of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Form 5X-Short) used to measure self-reported transformational leadership behaviors. There are five transformational leadership subscales as measured by the MLQ using a 5-point Likert

scale ranging from 0 to 4. The transformational leadership subscales are Idealized Influence-Attributed, Idealized Influence-Behavior, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration.

The subscale score is an average of four questions from the MLQ. For instance, a low score indicates a self-report that the leaders possess little of the Inspirational Motivation leadership attribute while a high score indicates that the leaders possess more of the Inspirational Motivation attribute.

Results from a two-independent sample *t*-test of unequal variance indicated that there is no significant difference between male and female groups on the MLQ transformational leadership subscales. Data presented in Table 4.1 represents the results of the 20-question subset of the MLQ by the sex of the superintendents.

**Table 4.1 Transformational Leadership Subscales**

*Results of Descriptive Statistics and t-test for Transformational Leadership on the MLQ-5x Subscale by Superintendent Sex*

| MLQ Subscale                   | Male |      |    | Female |      |    | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------------------|------|------|----|--------|------|----|----------|----------|
|                                | Mean | SD   | n  | Mean   | SD   | n  |          |          |
| Idealized Influence Attributed | 3.50 | 0.46 | 25 | 3.56   | 0.49 | 16 | -0.43    | .67      |
| Idealized Influence Behavior   | 3.65 | 0.37 | 25 | 3.81   | 0.23 | 16 | -1.75    | .09      |
| Individualized Consideration   | 3.42 | 0.40 | 25 | 3.56   | 0.38 | 16 | -1.12    | .27      |
| Inspirational Motivation       | 3.71 | 0.40 | 25 | 3.73   | 0.28 | 16 | -0.20    | .85      |
| Intellectual Stimulation       | 3.37 | 0.55 | 25 | 3.55   | 0.40 | 16 | -1.20    | .24      |

The subscale mean scores for the superintendents ranged from 3.37 to 3.81 (on a scale of 0 to 4). Idealized Influence and Inspirational Motivation are the most satisfying and effective transformational components on the MLQ scale (Avolio, 2011). According to Kirkbride (2006), Idealized Influence is the most influential component. In this study



sample, the highest self-reported MLQ subscale for females was Idealized Influence Behavior ( $M=3.81$ ). The highest self-reported MLQ subscale for males was Inspirational Motivation ( $M=3.71$ ).

Female South Carolina public school superintendents' ratings did not differ significantly from male South Carolina public school superintendents on any transformational leadership subscale of the MLQ. Although differences were not at significant levels, the  $t$  statistic indicates that, overall, female South Carolina superintendents rated their transformational leadership behaviors higher on all subscales of transformational leadership than male South Carolina public school superintendents.

Research question 2 examines the relationship between the sex of South Carolina public school superintendents and three school district indicators indicative of at-risk school districts. The indicators are the ESEA composite index, the district poverty index, and identified priority schools. Data files from the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) used to obtain the indicators were the 2012 District Performance file, 2012 Report Card Poverty Index, and 2012-13 Priority School file. Of the 83 South Carolina public school districts analyzed, 50 (60%) were led by male superintendents, and 33 (40%) were led by female superintendents. Table 4.2 provides descriptive statistics for two indicators, the ESEA composite index and district poverty index, based on superintendent sex.

**Table 4.2 ESEA and Poverty Indices***Descriptive Statistics for Two District Indicators by Superintendent Sex*

| District Indicator     | Male <sup>a</sup> |      |      |      | Female <sup>b</sup> |      |      |      |
|------------------------|-------------------|------|------|------|---------------------|------|------|------|
|                        | Mean              | SD   | Min  | Max  | Mean                | SD   | Min  | Max  |
| ESEA Composite Index   | 83.8              | 12.5 | 39.5 | 96   | 76.1                | 17.4 | 31.2 | 94.4 |
| District Poverty Index | 75.8              | 14.4 | 27.8 | 98.2 | 80.6                | 12.8 | 51.1 | 97.9 |

Note: <sup>a</sup>n= 50; <sup>b</sup>n=33

The ESEA composite index, which replaces the federal AYP, shifts the focus from minimum proficiency to identifying performance gaps for all students by subgroups. Low ESEA composite indices reflect that students are performing considerably below state student performance expectations (State of South Carolina, 2012). Female South Carolina public school superintendents had significantly lower ESEA composite indices than male South Carolina public school superintendents,  $t(54) = 2.21$ ,  $p=.03$ , two-tailed.

The district poverty index, a measure for school report card ratings, is calculated by dividing the number of students who receive free and reduced lunch by the average daily membership on the 135<sup>th</sup> day of school with a higher index associated with a greater level of poverty. Of the 83 school districts, the overall mean school district poverty index was 77.7 (SD =13.8). The mean of 80.6 was higher for female superintendents (SD = 12.7) than the mean of 75.8 for male superintendents (SD=14.4). Female South Carolina public school superintendents district poverty indices did not significantly differ from male South Carolina public school superintendents,  $t(74)= 1.58$ ,  $p=.12$ , two-tailed.

Presented in Table 4.3, Pearson's chi-square statistic revealed a near significant difference existed between the school districts with one or more priority schools and districts without priority schools categorized by the sex of the superintendent.

**Table 4.3 Priority Schools***Public School District Priority School Data by Superintendent Sex*

| District Data                | Male | Female | Test<br>Statistic | df | <i>p</i> |
|------------------------------|------|--------|-------------------|----|----------|
| At least one priority school | 10   | 13     | $\chi^2 = 3.73$   | 1  | .053     |
| No priority schools          | 40   | 20     |                   |    |          |

Female South Carolina public school superintendents led 13 school districts which had one or more priority schools ranging from a low of 0 to a maximum of 12 priority schools. Male superintendents led 10 districts with one or more priority schools ranging from a low of 0 to a maximum of 4. Districts with priority schools led by female South Carolina public school superintendents did not differ significantly from districts with priority schools led male South Carolina public school superintendents.

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to determine if a relationship existed between the sex of South Carolina public school superintendents and (a) self-reported transformational leadership behaviors and (b) three district indicators that reflect at-risk status. Descriptive statistics, two independent sample *t*-test statistics, and Pearson's chi-square were used to address the research questions. The major findings were:

1. South Carolina public school superintendents' self-reported transformational leadership scores had a mean of 3.59 out of 4 for all five of the transformational leadership subscales: Idealized Influence-Attributed, Idealized Influence-Behavior, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. The standard deviation for each subscale ranged from .23 to .55 suggesting consistency among superintendent responses in each MLQ

transformational leadership subscale. Overall, the results of the superintendent survey suggests that South Carolina public school superintendents rated themselves as using high measures of transformational leadership behaviors regardless of their sex. Female superintendents rated themselves higher than male superintendents on all transformational leadership subscales.

2. There was a significant relationship between the school district ESEA composite index and superintendent sex. Female South Carolina public school superintendents had significantly lower ESEA composite indices than did male South Carolina public school superintendents.
3. There was no significant relationship between district poverty indices and superintendent sex.
4. There was no significant relationship between school districts without priority schools and school districts with at least one priority school based on superintendent sex.

Chapter 5 explores the connections between the sex of the participants, their self-reported transformational leadership behaviors, and the three indicators associated with at-risk district status. Supporting literature is used to complete the final analysis of the findings and support the conclusions and recommendations from this study.

## **CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter provides a summary of the study and discussions and conclusions drawn from the research findings presented in Chapter 4. Recommendations for future research are also presented.

### **Summary of Study Design and Results**

The purpose of this quantitative, non-experimental study was to examine the relationship between the sex of South Carolina public school superintendents to (a) self-reported transformational leadership behaviors and (b) select district indicators indicative of the difficult circumstances confronted by public school districts. The indicators selected for this study were the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) composite indices, identified priority schools, and school district poverty indices.

As noted in Chapter 1, the conceptual framework for this study was the glass cliff. After surpassing the barrier of the glass ceiling, women who attain leadership positions are more likely to face a glass cliff where their leadership positions are more precarious than males (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, Kulich, and Wilson-Kovacs, 2009). Perceived stereotypical female leadership characteristics which are closely associated with transformational leadership behaviors (Eagly & Carli, 2003) were believed to be more desirable in crisis situations than male leadership characteristics (Bruckmüller and Branscombe, 2010). Since transformational

leadership is focused on the future rather than present, the organization is strengthened by inspired follower commitment and creativity (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Females' perceived leadership skills are viewed as especially valuable in times of crisis (Haslam & Ryan, 2008).

A review of previous research through ProQuest Dissertations and Theses found only three dissertations (Bruckmüller, 2007; Chambers, 2011; Wilson, 2010) that examined the glass cliff. This is not surprising since the term was first introduced by Ryan and Haslam in 2004. Each of these studies analyzed the perceived suitability of leadership and the role that gender played in the selection of leaders. The glass cliff conceptual framework for the current study was used to provide an overarching construct to examine the relationship of the sex of South Carolina public school superintendents and self-reported transformational leadership behaviors and district indicators that are indicative of at-risk status. Although likely not a purposeful reason for superintendent selection, the concept of the glass cliff provides a thought-provoking basis to reflect on female superintendent leadership in South Carolina.

To determine self-reported transformational leadership behaviors (research question 1), data was collected through an online survey using a 20-question subset of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Of the 81 surveys emailed to South Carolina public school superintendents, 41 were completed for a return rate of 51%. Survey responses were analyzed to determine the self-reported transformational leadership behaviors by the sex of the superintendent based on the subscales of Idealized Influence-Attributed, Idealized Influence-Behavior, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration.

To examine the relationship between South Carolina superintendent sex and three school district indicators that reflect difficult circumstances (research question 2), data files were downloaded directly from the SCDE and compiled into one MS Excel file. The files were the 2012-13 Priority Schools, the 2012 Report Card Poverty Index, and the District Data File 2012. Since these files contained information regarding all South Carolina public school districts but not superintendent sex, the SCASA website was utilized to determine the sex of each district's superintendent. Data for 83 South Carolina public school districts was analyzed.

MS Excel 2010 and SPSS statistical software were used to analyze the responses of superintendents based on sex. In Chapter 4, the results were presented using descriptive statistics, two independent sample *t*-test statistics, and Pearson's chi-square.

**Research question 1:** Is there a relationship between the sex of the South Carolina public school superintendents and the self-reported use of transformational leadership behaviors?

Using two independent sample *t*-tests of unequal variance, no significant relationship was found between the sex of South Carolina public school superintendents and the self-reported use of transformational leadership behaviors for each of the five transformational leadership MLQ subscales. Female South Carolina public school superintendents rated themselves higher on all transformational leadership MLQ subscales than did male superintendents but not at significant levels.

**Research question 2:** Is there a relationship between the sex of South Carolina public school superintendents and district indicators associated with at-risk school districts?

Signifying the challenges faced by South Carolina public school districts, three district indicators selected as representative of difficult circumstances were the ESEA composite indices, identified priority schools, and district poverty indices. A two independent sample *t*-test of unequal variance revealed that female South Carolina public school superintendents had significantly lower ESEA composite indices than did male South Carolina public school superintendents. Based on the sex of the superintendent, the Pearson's chi-square statistic indicated that no significant difference existed between school districts with at least one priority school and districts without priority schools. A two independent sample *t*-test of unequal variance found no significant difference between the district poverty indices of female South Carolina public school superintendents and male South Carolina public school superintendents.

## **Discussion**

Some argue that females in the U. S. are viewed as leaders, but the small percentage of female public school superintendents and the lack of female political leadership are contradictory to this statement (Grogan, 2005). The impetus for this study was the paradox that South Carolina relies on a higher percentage of female public school superintendents than the national average in a time when school districts are faced with a series of difficult circumstances. At the same time, there remains a substantial deficit in female political state legislative leadership in South Carolina. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, as of February 2013, South Carolina was tied with Alabama for the second lowest representation of female state legislators only ranking higher than Louisiana (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2013).

Why is there less female legislative representation in South Carolina while more females serve as public school superintendents? The answer may lie in confidence and



leadership behaviors. Few women have political experience. The nature of a political leader requires them to talk about what they can do, promote themselves as being better than their opponent, and challenge opposing views to maintain the party line. There seems to be less consensus building and collaboration between political parties to work together for the common good. Few women are attracted to this type of self-promotion, especially in Southern states. None of these behaviors are related to transformational leadership. However, women know and understand education because 75% of teachers are female (Katz, 2010). Even though fiscal and accountability challenges are increasing, women have experience in education, connect with children, and most I know with want to work together to improve student learning. Women feel confident in their ability to create consensus, to collaborate and include others in the decision-making processes, and work for a common goal – all behaviors associated with transformational leadership. It may be that women in South Carolina believe they can make a difference in children's education and are willing to accept challenging situations.

The glass cliff theory provided a unique lens through which to consider factors associated with female South Carolina public school superintendents. Previous studies regarding the glass cliff claimed that women were hired for leadership positions over males in companies facing a crisis, when there is history of company failure, in situations of minimal support measures, or a lack of resources (Ashby, Ryan, & Haslam, 2007; Ryan & Haslam, 2005, Ryan & Haslam, 2009) but admit their research does not account for other variables. These authors contend that women are selected for these risky positions because of stereotypical beliefs regarding female leadership skills. These skills, which are associated with transformational leadership behaviors, include collaboration,

mentorship, and empowerment and are viewed as more appropriate to leadership for modern organizations (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to determine if a relationship existed between the sex of South Carolina public school superintendents and (a) self-reported transformational leadership behaviors and (b) district indicators indicative of at-risk status.

As displayed in Table 5.1, the percentage of male and female South Carolina public school superintendents who responded to the invitation to participate in the survey portion of this study was similar to the percentage of male and female public school superintendents in South Carolina.

**Table 5.1 Population Sample**

*Percentage of Superintendents for Analysis of Research Question 1 and Research Question 2*

| Superintendent Sex | Research Question 1:<br>Transformational<br>Leadership Survey<br>Participants |            | Research Question 2:<br>2012 SCDE District<br>Data File |            |
|--------------------|---|------------|---|------------|
|                    | N   | Percentage | N   | Percentage |
| Male               | 25  | 61%        | 50  | 60%        |
| Female             | 16  | 39%        | 33  | 40%        |

*Note.* Not included in the analysis are the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice, the South Carolina Public Charter School District, and the Palmetto Unified School District

### **Self-reported transformational leadership behaviors**

For research question 1, no significant relationship was found between the sex of South Carolina public school superintendents and the self-reported use of transformational leadership behaviors for each of the five transformational leadership MLQ subscales. The lack of significance may indicate a shift in superintendent leadership skills or may be a result of self-rater bias. Even though not at significant

levels, it is noteworthy that female South Carolina public school superintendents rated themselves higher than males on all transformational leadership behavior subscales. This is consistent with previous research (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003; Floit, 1997; Paternoster, 2006; Wolf, 2010).

The lack of statistical significance between the sex of the South Carolina public school superintendents and the five transformational leadership MLQ subscales may suggest school boards are appointing superintendents with more democratic leadership skills. Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) asserted that, in times of crisis and upheaval, transformational leadership behaviors are more likely to be the skills desired in leaders. When organizations are stable, transactional leadership behaviors which use rewards and punishments are more suitable, but in situations of rapid change, transformational leadership behaviors are needed to mobilize employee commitment (Kirkbride, 2006). The two highest self-reported transformational leadership MLQ subscales for male and female South Carolina public school superintendents are presented in Table 5. 2.

**Table 5.2 Highest Rated Subscales**

*Two Highest Self-reported Transformational Leadership MLQ Subscale Means by the Sex of the Superintendent*

| MLQ Subscales                | Means |        |
|------------------------------|-------|--------|
|                              | Male  | Female |
| Idealized Influence Behavior | 3.65  | 3.81   |
| Inspirational Motivation     | 3.71  | 3.73   |

Of the transformational leadership MLQ subscales, Idealized Influence has the most impact on follower performance followed by Inspirational Motivation (Kirkbride, 2006). Because the leader serves as a role model, leaders who exhibit behaviors associated with Idealized Influence are seen as trustworthy, honest, and possessing high

morality (Kirkbride, 2006). Consistent with Kirkbride's findings, Avolio (2011) also specified that Idealized Influence and Inspirational Motivation are the most satisfying and important transformational subscales. Leaders who exemplify Inspirational Motivation behaviors project a vision that raises expectations and creates a common sense of purpose thereby motivating followers to achieve more than they thought they could accomplish (Kirkbride, 2006). Since Idealized Influence Behavior and Inspirational Motivation were the two highest self-reported transformational leadership MLQ subscales in this study, it appears school boards are hiring males that exhibit more democratic, participative leadership skills. This may also be creating greater opportunities for females to attain a superintendency since their skills are generally viewed as more collaborative and inclusive (Bjork, 2000). Because South Carolina school districts are confronted with extensive poverty as well as fiscal and accountability issues, the higher percentage of female superintendents than the national average might support an awareness that a different skill set is needed for superintendent leadership in difficult situations.

Another possible reason for my finding may be self-rater bias. Previous research studies regarding self-reported transformational leadership behaviors have inconsistent findings. Inflated self-reports are problematic (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) and are commonly referred to as the halo effect, leniency bias, egocentric bias, or a tendency for self-enhancement. Naturally biasing their responses, study participants often over-report behaviors they believe to be appropriate while under-reporting behaviors viewed as inappropriate (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002). Studies have mixed results regarding the tendency for over-estimation or under-estimation of self-ratings by gender. Jones and Fletcher (2003) found that males tended to inflate their self-ratings compared to females.

Men were found to give themselves higher self-ratings of transformational leadership than females (Moshavi, Brown, & Dodd, 2003). However, Van Velsor, Taylor, and Leslie (1993) found that women were not more likely than men to underrate their leadership competencies. Redish (2010) held that South Carolina public school superintendents self-reported using more transformational leadership behaviors in a survey, but she found they actually exhibited more transactional behaviors in interviews. As the stakes get higher and with school board pressure to obtain results, superintendents may default to more transactional behaviors.

In this study, both male and female South Carolina public school superintendents self-reported higher ratings for all five transformational leadership MLQ subscales than a normative 2004 sample by Avolio and Bass (2004). The lack of statistical significance between the sex of the superintendent and the five transformational leadership MLQ subscales as well as the inflated ratings may result from a combination of self-rater bias and superintendents genuinely believing they utilize transformational leadership behaviors. High self-reported transformational leadership behaviors may imply that superintendents used more transformational leadership behaviors in their previous roles as principals or other district office leadership positions and believe they still do.

Though not at significant levels, female South Carolina public school superintendents rated themselves higher on all transformational leadership MLQ subscales than did male superintendents. These findings are consistent with previous studies that assert female leaders use more transformational leadership behaviors than males (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003). Using the MLQ to assess transformational leadership behaviors, Floit (1997) found women scored significantly

higher than men for the subscales Idealized Influence Behavior, Idealized Influence Attributed, and Inspirational Motivation. Female college presidents scored significantly higher than males on all transformational leadership MLQ subscales with the exception of Individualized Consideration (Paternoster, 2006). Female Illinois superintendents scored higher on transformational leadership than male superintendents (Wolf, 2010). Because female South Carolina public school superintendents rated themselves higher on all transformational leadership MLQ subscales, they may perceive their leadership skills provide a more supportive environment that encourages employees to higher levels of achievement even in difficult circumstances.

If females do use more transformational leadership skills, then they are positioned to fulfill the demands of modern organizations through democratic and inclusive practices that motivate follower commitment. To reach their full leadership potential, the appropriate fit is important for transformational leaders (Guay, 2013). The transformation of public education may depend on school boards understanding and identifying precisely which leadership skills are needed for their unique set of district circumstances and matching those needs to appropriate superintendent candidates. Equally important is candidates' self-awareness regarding their own skills.

### **Indicators of at-risk district status**

Research question 2 addressed the relationship of the sex of South Carolina public school superintendents and indicators of at-risk district status. The three district indicators selected as representative of difficult circumstances confronted by South Carolina public school districts were the ESEA composite indices, identified priority schools, and district poverty indices.

As explained in Chapter 1, South Carolina was granted a flexibility waiver to replace the federal AYP with the ESEA composite index. The argument by the SCDE for requesting this waiver was that letter grades increased transparency and helped the public understand the rating system (State of South Carolina, 2012). The ESEA composite index is generated from a complex matrix designed to use multiple measures to assess disaggregated student performance and identify performance gaps. Findings from this study revealed that female South Carolina public school superintendents led districts that had significantly lower ESEA composite indices than districts led by male South Carolina public school superintendents. School districts with lower ESEA composite indices do not meet or are substantially below the state's student performance expectations (State of South Carolina, 2012).

Because this study's significant finding that female South Carolina public school superintendents serve lower performing districts in more precarious circumstances, the results for this indicator appear to align with the glass cliff framework. However, as noted in Chapter 2, superintendents have a high turnover rate in South Carolina, averaging about 3.1 years. They often leave smaller, lower performing districts to move to larger, higher performing districts for better salaries and more job security (Goodman, 2012).

Since South Carolina superintendent turnover is higher than the norm, there may be greater opportunities for females to attain a superintendency in South Carolina, especially in small, rural districts. In the Southern states, disadvantaged children are often substantially concentrated in small rural districts with mothers who are poor and less educated (Fram, Miller-Cribbs, & Van Horn, 2007). Regardless of whether school

boards intentionally hire females when their districts have greater challenges, female South Carolina superintendents believe they are hired to be change agents (Styles, 2010). If stereotypical female leadership skills are perceived to be more desirable in crisis situations (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010), then female South Carolina public school superintendents may be seen as having leadership skills necessary to transform their districts and improve future performance.

There were no significant findings for the second and third at-risk indicators. A near significant difference was found between the sex of the superintendent and school districts with at least one priority school and districts without priority schools. Priority schools, as defined in the ESEA flexibility waiver, are the lowest performing 5% of Title 1 schools. First categorized in the 2012-13 academic year, priority schools are identified based on the percentage of students who do not perform at proficient levels or have significant performance gaps between subgroups. The SCDE suggests interventions to address the weaknesses of these schools and requires them to offer supplemental educational services to increase academic performance by setting aside 20% of their Title 1 funds to provide these services (State of South Carolina, 2012). School eligibility for Title 1 is determined by one or more measures such as the number of children in poverty, children eligible for free or reduced lunch, and/or children eligible for Medicaid (South Carolina Department of Education, 2013).

There was no significant difference between the sex of the superintendent and the district poverty indices. The poverty index, a measure for school report card ratings, is based on the number of students who receive free and reduced lunch. A high poverty index is associated with a greater level of poverty.



The priority schools and district poverty indices are closely related because both are based on measures of children living in poverty. Poverty is wide-spread in South Carolina. The Kids Count data project (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013) reported the Economic Well-Being category for South Carolina's children dropped from 34<sup>th</sup> in the nation to 44<sup>th</sup> in one year (Children's Trust of South Carolina, 2013). The lack of significance between the sex of South Carolina public school superintendents and these two indicators, priority schools and poverty indices, may reflect the wide-spread poverty across South Carolina.

## **Conclusions**

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between South Carolina superintendent sex and self-reported transformational leadership behaviors as well as the relationship between superintendent sex and three measures associated with at-risk school districts: low ESEA composite indices, identified priority schools, and school district poverty. Two research questions guided the study, one using a sample population of South Carolina superintendents for the academic year 2012-2013 and the second using data obtained from 2012 SCDE accountability files.

Analysis of the data revealed female South Carolina public school superintendents self-reported higher levels of transformational leadership behaviors than male South Carolina public school superintendents although not at significant levels. Analysis also found that one district indicator of the difficult circumstances districts confront, the ESEA composite index, did reveal that South Carolina public school districts led by female superintendents have significantly lower ESEA composite indices than those led by male superintendents. Districts with lower ESEA composite indices have poorer student performance and wider achievement gaps.

This study makes several contributions to practicing school leaders. First, the finding that South Carolina public school superintendents rated themselves as using high measures of transformational leadership behaviors regardless of their sex may indicate that school boards are hiring male and female superintendent candidates who exhibit skills aligned with transformational leadership. These skills, closely associated with the feminization of leadership (Aymen & Korabik, 2010; Eagly & Carli, 2003), focus on collaboration, follower commitment and growth, and change. Since South Carolina has a higher percentage of female public school superintendents than the national average, this higher percentage of female superintendents may signal that school boards, whether intentional or not, are hiring female candidates to provide more collaborative, democratic district leadership. Second, although only one out of three district indicators indicative of at risk-status was significant, this study presents a thought-provoking context in which to examine female South Carolina public school superintendent leadership. Further analysis may provide a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding selection of female South Carolina superintendents and why South Carolina has a higher percentage of female superintendents than the national average. Perhaps relevant to the circumstances of many female South Carolina public school superintendents, Bruckmüller and Branscombe (2010) claim, “Our findings indicate that women find themselves in precarious leadership positions not because they are singled out for them, but because men no longer seem to fit” (p. 449).

Public school districts are struggling with a set of evolving challenges and will need superintendents who possess skills that allow them to work effectively with internal and external stakeholders to increase student success. Recent reports continue to show

that children in South Carolina live in difficult circumstances (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013). Complicating matters, school inequity funding remains a significant issue as seen by the ongoing battle in the South Carolina Supreme Court case Abbeville County School District, et al. v. The State of South Carolina, et al., (Abbeville, 1999). As difficult circumstances continue to be part of educational dialogue in South Carolina, the importance of school district leadership will remain a focus for school boards, communities, and parents. Studies such as this add to the knowledge of leadership and circumstances South Carolina school boards face when selecting their district leaders.

### **Implications and Recommendations for Future Research**

Public school districts are faced with increasing fiscal and accountability challenges (Blair, 2010; Bowers, 2009; Hohenstein, 2008). Yet, often the old leadership paradigm continues because school boards “want to hire results driven superintendents who conform to a leadership style not associated with transformational leadership behaviors” (Grogan, 2005, p.26).

Since leadership is the driving force of any organization that needs to implement change (Onorato, 2013), superintendents must develop relationships within the organization and community that will elevate expectations and create a sense of purpose in order to improve student achievement. Though this study found no statistical significance between the sex of South Carolina public school superintendents and self-reported transformational leadership behaviors, it could serve as a starting point for school boards to contemplate the leadership skills that best match their districts’ needs. The study is intended to serve as a springboard to assist female candidates, as well as school boards, in becoming aware of leadership behaviors and potential biases associated with the selection of female superintendents.

Based on the findings of this study, future researchers may want to consider the following recommendations:

1. Conduct a similar study using another instrument that measures leadership behaviors other than transformational leadership.
2. Conduct a similar study that includes not only self-reported behaviors but rater perceptions of South Carolina superintendent leadership.
3. Analyze the possible impact of other variables that are associated with at-risk school districts and the sex of the superintendent.
4. Conduct a study that analyzes the longevity of South Carolina superintendents based on at-risk district indicators and the sex of the superintendent.
5. Analyze the representation of South Carolina female superintendents in the counties represented in the lawsuit Abbeville County School District, et al. v. The State of South Carolina, et al. (Abbeville, 1999).
6. Conduct a qualitative study interviewing school board members to determine why particular females were selected for the superintendency and what leadership skills they view as essential for the superintendency.

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## **APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTION**

Please provide the demographic information requested. This information is confidential and will be used only to analyze the data collected for this study.

What is your gender?

- a. Male
- b. Female



## **APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INVITATION AND CONSENT**

Letter of Invitation and Consent (electronic distribution)

Dear Superintendent,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of South Carolina in Educational Leadership under the direction of Dr. Ed Cox. For my dissertation research, I am examining the relationship between the sex of South Carolina superintendents and self-reported transformational leadership behaviors. Further, I will examine the relationship between the sex of South Carolina superintendents and three measures that may be indicative of at-risk school districts: the ESEA Composite Index, identified Priority Schools, and the school district poverty index. As you know, South Carolina school districts are faced with many challenges and it is precisely because of your leadership position that I am asking you to participate in this study.

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to complete a 20-question subset of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire with one additional demographic question. Completing this survey will take less than 6 minutes. Participation in this study is voluntary.

There are no known risks for participating in this survey except a slight risk of breach of confidentiality, which remains despite steps that will be taken to protect your privacy. The only place your name or district will be recorded is in the survey file. This information is necessary so I may send follow-up emails to superintendents who do not respond to the first request.

Please respond to this survey by May 31, 2013. I will send one follow-up email if you do not take the survey by June 1.

When you click on the link below, you will be directed to the survey. To participate, please type your name or district name and answer the 21 survey questions.

**<https://www.surveymonkey.com/xxxx>**

If this link does not work, please copy and paste the link in to the address bar of your Internet browser.

I understand your time is valuable and truly appreciate you participating in this study. If you have any questions, contact me by email [xxxxxx@email.sc.edu](mailto:xxxxxx@email.sc.edu) or (xxx) xxx-xxxx. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Blanche B. Bowles

Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership and Policies

University of South Carolina

**IMPORTANT:** *The contents of this email and survey link are confidential. They are intended for the named recipient only.*

## APPENDIX C: PERMISSION AND SAMPLE QUESTIONS

For use by Blanche Bowles only. Received from Mind Garden, Inc. on May 15, 2013



To whom it may concern,

This letter is to grant permission for the above named person to use the following copyright material;

Instrument: ***Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire***

Authors: ***Bruce Avolio and Bernard Bass***

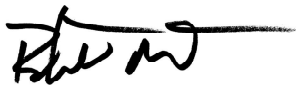
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for his/her thesis research.

Five sample items from this instrument may be reproduced for inclusion in a proposal, thesis, or dissertation.

The entire instrument may not be included or reproduced at any time in any other published material.

Sincerely,



Robert Most  
Mind Garden, Inc.

[www.mindgarden.com](http://www.mindgarden.com)

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## Five Sample Questions from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (5X-Short)

This questionnaire is to describe your leadership style as you perceive it. Please answer all items on this answer sheet. **If an item is irrelevant, or if you are unsure or do not know the answer, leave the answer blank.**

Forty-five descriptive statements are listed on the following pages. Judge how frequently each statement fits you. The word “others” may mean your peers, clients, direct reports, supervisors, and/or all of these individuals.

Use the following rating scale:

|                           |                      |                |                   |                         |
|---------------------------|----------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Not at all<br>always<br>0 | Once in a while<br>1 | Sometimes<br>2 | Fairly often<br>3 | Frequently, if not<br>4 |
|---------------------------|----------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------|

1. I talk about my most important values and beliefs ..... 0 1 2 3 4
2. I talk optimistically about the future..... 0 1 2 3 4
3. I spend time teaching and coaching ..... 0 1 2 3 4
4. I treat others as individuals rather than just as a member of a group..... 0 1 2 3 4
5. I display a sense of power and confidence ..... 0 1 2 3 4

## APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL



### OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

May 13, 2013

Mrs. Blanche Bowles  
College of Education  
Education Leadership & Policies  
Wardlaw  
Columbia, SC 29208

Re: **Pro00025976** Study Title: *The Glass Cliff: An Examination of the Female Superintendency in South Carolina*

FYI: University of South Carolina Assurance number: FWA 00000404 / IRB  
Registration number: 00000240

Dear Mrs. Bowles:

In accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2), the referenced study received an exemption from Human Research Subject Regulations on **5/13/2013**. No further action or Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight is required, as long as the project remains the same. However, you must inform this office of any changes in procedures involving human subjects. Changes to the current research protocol could result in a reclassification of the study and further review by the IRB.

Because this project was determined to be exempt from further IRB oversight, consent document(s), if applicable, are not stamped with an expiration date.

Research related records should be retained for a minimum of three years after termination of the study.

The Office of Research Compliance is an administrative office that supports the USC Institutional Review Board. If you have questions, please contact Arlene McWhorter at arlenem@sc.edu or (803) 777-7095.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Johnson IRB Manager

cc: Edward Cox