

Effects of Mentorship on Assistant Superintendents and their Emotional Intelligence, Challenges, and the Desire to become a Superintendent

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine mentorship and its effect on assistant superintendents' emotional intelligence, challenges, and the desire to become a superintendent. The 149 participants surveyed in this study were assistant superintendents in Nassau and Suffolk Counties in Long Island, New York and Westchester County, New York. An independent sample t-test between assistant superintendents who have a mentor that were superintendents versus assistant superintendents that do not have a mentor was performed, followed by an item by item frequency analysis. The results show that assistant superintendents who have a mentor are more willing to take on the challenge to be a superintendent. An item by item analysis shows that assistant superintendents have 20% more value in the importance of items challenge and social networking.

Introduction

Future superintendents will benefit from receiving mentoring. For example, assistant superintendents can receive emotional and intellectual support to successfully navigate work related challenges by being mentored. The Council of School Superintendents Snapshot (2012) discussed three trends with the superintendent's position: Expanding performance expectations driven by economic and global considerations, pattern shifts in the educational delivery system driven by opportunities granted by technologies and new models reflecting new ideologies and constraints driven episodically by the recession. The influence of each of these trends on the public education system is at the center of the added constraints of the leaders in education. To better understand the leaders, the pressures they face, the environment in which they work - examination of the literature suggests that mentoring from fellow professionals provide preparation and the confidence and motivation to apply for a superintendent's position (Fale, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to learn if and how mentorship affects assistant superintendents' emotional intelligence, challenge of the position, and their desire to be a superintendent. Emotional support centers on balancing professional and personal domains, which align with their emotional intelligence (self-confidence, self-image, fear of failure). Intellectual support is centered upon professional goal setting, constructive criticism, and strategies for improvement and reflection that are on par with the challenge of the position (personal challenge, professional challenge). The desire to be a superintendent (willing to be in a social network and willing to become a superintendent) lends to support given by the superintendent to the assistant superintendent which leads to an increase in confidence and ultimately aspiring to lead a school district.

Theoretical Framework

This study has significance for the field of education and others, offering current assistant superintendents and aspiring superintendents a viewpoint into an area of increasing importance - mentoring. Large numbers of retirements, increased expectations, and mounting political pressures have resulted in a reduced talent pool for school superintendents (Kamler, 2009). The recruitment and professional development of school superintendents hinge on the attractors and barriers. The Council's Snapshot (2012) identified what preparation or experience would give individuals the confidence and motivation to aim for the superintendent's position. The top five influences are on-the-job experience, mentoring from associate professionals, academic preparation, encouragement from colleagues and encouragement from family.

Emotional Intelligence

It is important that assistant superintendents who are considering becoming superintendents are aware of who they are, both as a leader and an individual. Emotional Intelligence begins with knowing oneself including emotions, personal values, biases, perceptions, strengths, weaknesses, and career goals (Goleman, 1995). An assistant superintendent who has emotional intelligence will adapt to changes that may occur without disrupting the culture and climate of the school district. They also have the ability to display control and make appropriate decisions despite how difficult a situation may be. They are also reflective, which allows for an autopsy of decisions that are made to ensure that growth is occurring daily (Kouzes & Posner, 2011).

Leaders with low emotional intelligence are often described as aggressive, confrontational, and demanding. Leaders with high emotional intelligence are described as assertive, ambitious, patient and charming. Emotional intelligence is a skill that can be taught but it requires honesty, commitment and practice. Emotional intelligence can affect our relationship with the staff as well as decision making. Leaders with high emotional intelligence are more effective at completing their roles and responsibilities including delineating tasks, communicating with staff, making decisions, judging the emotions of the staff and resolving conflicts (Kouzes & Posner, 2011).

Personal and Professional Challenge

The personal challenges include the willingness to give up time spent outside the office. Accepting a superintendent's position may interfere with an individual's personal life (Brunner, 2008). Some choose to remain single to avoid potential conflict that could follow if they had a family or other duties. The professional demands placed on a superintendent include hard deadlines, long hours and an abundance of public duties (Blount, 2004). Missing a deadline or failure to attend public duties can lead to an adverse rating and ultimately a removal (Grogan, 2008).

Increased professional responsibilities can leave little time for personal obligations including birthdays, holidays, events and favors. Superintendents are often forced to choose between professional obligations or family obligations (Blount, 2004). It can also interfere with making healthy lifestyle choices including sufficient sleep, eating well and exercising regularly. Superintendents are often forced to choose the job responsibilities over themselves and their family. When a superintendent believes that they are not balancing their personal lives well they often feel guilt and stress. Males often receive support from their wives or significant other while females receive very little to no support from their husband or significant other (Grogan, 2008; Derrington, 2009).

Desire to be a Superintendent

Assistant superintendents who plan to take on a superintendent's position have to possess a desire to lead a district because of the personal sacrifice involved. Superintendents are expected to be available 24 hours a day seven days a week. Although this sounds unrealistic, in many districts the work demands and accountability are high and therefore need a commitment that surpasses the average position. Holding the superintendent's position often competes with their personal lives because of time constraints.

Some assistant superintendents may seek a superintendent's position because they desire the power and prestige that is associated with the position. Many assistant superintendents have worked diligently throughout their career and believe that holding a superintendent's position will be the highest reward that culminates their efforts. Holding a superintendent's position allows an individual to be a part of an elite social network. Membership in this group enables superintendents the opportunity to communicate and discuss decision-making topics with their peers.

Assistant superintendents that have been mentored by their own superintendents have an increased desire to pursue an available superintendent position. School districts that make the development of new leaders a top priority recognize that mentoring is a critical component of leadership development (Johnston, 2013). Superintendents are viable candidates to mentor assistant superintendents because they have a wealth of knowledge to share. Experience and expertise develops from years on the job and a willingness to accept new challenges.

Methodology

A survey was developed based on a thorough examination of research literature regarding internal barriers, external barriers, motivators, stressors, and discriminatory acts assistant superintendents would encounter on the route to the superintendence and their willingness to pursue the position as superintendent (Hunter, 2013). The survey was comprised of 68 closed-ended items and one open-ended question.

The original data was separated into three groups, to contrast assistant superintendents who had a mentor that was a superintendent (24) versus assistant superintendents who had no mentor (81); the remaining (44) people had a mentor that was not a superintendent but a fellow professional, and they were not part of this study. The researchers randomly sampled 24 assistant superintendents from the 81 who had no mentor. A t-test was performed to learn the differences between groups who had a mentor (24) versus the group with no mentor (24).

The survey was conducted in Suffolk and Nassau Counties, Long Island, and Westchester County, New York. Data was collected using a 68 item survey that was developed by Hunter, (2012) and approximately 75% (n = 149) usable surveys returned by assistant superintendents were a sample of the overall population.

From author's survey the researchers selected items that represented the following three variables: Emotional Intelligence (reliability= 90.6%), Challenges - Personal and Professional (reliability= 83.1%), and Desire to become a Superintendent (reliability= 66.6%) (See Table 1).

The first variable was Emotional Intelligence which encompassed self-confidence, self-image and fear of failure. The second variable was Challenge which involved personal challenge, professional challenge and the desire to be in leadership. The third variable was Desire, the willingness to be a part of a social network of superintendents and the willingness to pursue a position as a superintendent.

To answer the research question, is there a mean difference between mentor and no mentor groups in the variables Emotional Intelligence, Personal and Professional Challenges and Desire to become a Superintendent?

Table 1: Table of Items	
Number	Item Description
Emotional Intelligence	
Question 1	Self-Confidence
Question 2	Self-image
Question 3	Fear of Failure
Challenge	
Question 4	Personal Challenge
Question 5	Professional Challenge
Question 6	Desire to be in leadership
Desire	
Question 7	Willingness to be a part of a social network
Question 8	Willingness to pursue a job as a superintendent
Question 9	Lack of desire to lead a district

Table 2:						
t-test /Group Statistics						
		M	SD	t	df	p
Mentor	Yes, the Superintendent in My District Mentored Me	6.69	2.78	1.23	45.00	.224
	No, I Did Not Have a Mentor	5.66	2.92	1.234	44.99	.224
Challenge	Yes, the Superintendent in My District Mentored Me	13.13	2.71	1.75	45	.086
	No, I Did Not Have a Mentor	11.41	3.84	1.77	41.46	.084
Desire	Yes, the Superintendent in My District Mentored Me	11.39	2.517	.405	45	.688
	No, I Did Not Have a Mentor	11.04	3.32	.407	42.73	.686

The researchers found that there is a mean difference between mentor and no mentor group in the variable Challenge. A p-value of .086 was found to be more than 0.05; the result would be considered approaching statistical significance.

In order to determine if a causal relationship exists among the variables between assistant superintendents, data was separated into three groups to contrast assistant superintendents who had no mentor (81) versus assistant superintendents who had a mentor that was a superintendent (24) and assistant superintendents who had a mentor who was not a superintendent but fellow professional (44).

Results

Research Question: Is there a mean difference between mentor and no mentor groups in the variables Emotional Intelligence, Challenge and Desire?

A t-test was performed and the variable personal and professional Challenges for assistant superintendents with a mentor is approaching significance (.086). Item and analysis with and no mentor is presented in **Table 2**.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare mentorship for assistant superintendents and assistant superintendents with no mentor. No significant differences were found in the other variables. There was an approaching significant difference in the scores for assistant superintendents with mentor-superintendents. Personal and professional - Challenge (M=13.13, SD=2.71), and assistant superintendents with no mentor personal and professional - Challenge (M=12.32, SD=2.71); $t(45) = 1.75, p = .086$. No significant differences. These results suggest that assistant superintendents with mentors have an effect on Personal, Professional Challenge and the desire to be a superintendent. Specifically, our results suggest that when assistant superintendents have mentors, they are more willing to accept the responsibility of leadership.

An item by item frequency analysis is presented in **Table 3**.

The personal and professional Challenge variable for the mentor group is 20% higher than the no mentor group (Q4 and 5) and Desire to be a Superintendent (Q6). The Desire to be a Superintendent variable is 20% more significant for the mentor group. The no mentor group is 20%

Table 3: Frequency Table						
	Mentor			No Mentor		
	No Importance & Of little Importance	Somewhat Important	Important & Very Important	No Importance & Of little Importance	Somewhat Important	Important & Very Important
Emotional Intelligence						
Q1 - Self Confidence	65.2	26.1	8.7	70.8	16.7	12.5
Q2 - Self Image	65.2	26.1	8.7	79.2	8.3	12.5
Q3 - Fear of Failure	56.5	26.1	17.4	70.8	20.8	8.4
Challenge						
Q4 - Personal Challenge	4.3	13	82.7	16.7	20.8	62.5
Q5 - Professional Challenge	4.3	8.7	88	16.7	16.7	66.6
Q6 - Desire to be a leader	4.3	4.3	91.3	12.5	4.2	83.3
Desire						
Q7 - Willingness to be part of a social network	13	4.3	82.6	20.8	12.5	66.7
Q8 - Willingness to pursue a job as Superintendent	34.8	13	52.1	41.7	20.8	37.5
Q9 - Lack of desire to lead a district	13	17.4	69.6	13	4.2	87.5

higher in their willingness to be part of a social network, and how willing they are to pursue a job as a superintendent. Last, 30% more assistant superintendents in the no mentor group lack the desire to lead a district.

Discussion and Implications

This study examined mentorship and its effect on assistant superintendents and the following variables: Emotional Intelligence, Challenge, and the Desire to Become a Superintendent. The relationship between Mentorship, Emotional Intelligence, Challenge and the Desire to become a Superintendent are evident in the Challenge variable which examines assistant superintendents' Personal Challenge, Professional Challenge and Desire to be a Superintendent. A total of 149 assistant superintendents in Nassau and Suffolk Counties in Long Island, New York and Westchester County, New York were surveyed. An independent sample t-test between assistant superintendents who have a mentor that were superintendents or a fellow professional versus assistant superintendents that do not have a mentor was performed and shows that those who had a mentor-superintendent or fellow professional had the willingness to be in leadership.

Results of an item frequency analysis showed that assistant superintendents who have a mentor-superintendent or fellow professionals are more willing to take on the challenge of a Superintendents' position. An item by item analysis showed that 20% of the assistant superintendents valued the importance in the items listed as challenge and social networking.

A strong sense of self-confidence and self-image allows a leader to adapt to changes that may occur without disrupting the culture and climate of the school district. Emotional Intelligence begins with knowing one-self including emotions, personal values, biases, perceptions, strengths, weaknesses, and career goals. Assistant superintendents who employ Emotional Intelligence have the ability to control themselves and make appropriate decisions despite how difficult a situation may be (Goleman, 1995).

District leaders are faced with many challenges and it is their duty to ensure that students are able to compete in a global market. Superintendents are viable candidates to mentor assistant superintendents because they have a wealth of knowledge to share. Experience and expertise develops from years on the job and a willingness to accept new challenges.

Assistant superintendents are often excited to meet the new challenges that are ahead because of their strong desire to lead a district. While this self-confidence is admirable, others who are just as qualified are hesitant to apply because they have weighed the role and responsibilities against professional and personal satisfaction and have deemed it unbalanced.

Assistant superintendents may also desire to hold the superintendent position to have greater impact and the ability to initiate change within a school district as compared to other positions. Assistant superintendents who plan to take on a superintendent's position have to possess a desire to lead a district because of the personal sacrifice involved.

There are a large number of qualified potential candidates that are available to apply for the position of superintendent but the pool remains very limited. Recommendations made by the Council of Superintendents (2012) are to focus on effective leaders who can provide the new generation of superintendents or aspiring superintendents a view of how to balance work effectively. Include strategies of how effective leaders manage the increasing demands of the superintendency and other life roles. Provide opportunities for informal guidance and mentorships to new superintendents. The increased accountability that has been placed upon Superintendents has led to highly qualified candidates questioning the professional and personal benefits of holding the Superintendents' position.

The findings of this research suggest that assistant superintendents are the main candidates for the position of superintendent because they work directly with the superintendent and have access to their knowledge. Mentoring by a superintendent or other fellow professionals can have a great impact on assistant superintendents and their future.

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