STILL MISSING IN ACTION: THE PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ABOUT THE BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES IN ASCENDING TO THE SUPERINTENDENCY IN NORTH CAROLINA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A Dissertation
by
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Submitted to the Graduate School
Appalachian State University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2010
Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership
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Abstract

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In North Carolina, women represent the largest number of teachers and a large percentage of building and district level administrators, but remain underrepresented in the superintendent position. The African American female’s presence in the top administrative position is almost non-existent. Nationally the situation is quite similar. In order to begin to understand the phenomenon of African American women missing in action from the superintendent role in North Carolina public schools, it is important to examine the constructs that obstruct their ascension to the position. What are their perceptions of their barriers and challenges encountered in route to the superintendency? Why were there only two African American female superintendents serving in North Carolina schools during the 2007-2008 school year? What are the lived experiences of district level administrators that helped them ascend to their current positions? What is preventing them from exiting the pipeline to the superintendency? This study draws upon literature that examined the historical perspective of women, particularly Black women in education, along with early
personal and professional experiences and influences; institutional, cultural and societal barriers; the selection process and formal and informal networks and support systems.

This qualitative study examined the phenomenon of small numbers of African American women ascending to the superintendency in North Carolina through the perceptions of barriers and challenges encountered in route to the position by ten African American female district administrators. This study also sought to draw on Black feminist theory explanations for the under representation of African American women in the superintendency. This theoretical model analyzes the impact of gender and racial discrimination or what is more commonly referred to as the “double whammy.”

The findings indicate that North Carolina public school administration is a reflection of historical, institutional, cultural and political constructs and practices that determine the destiny of the African American female. Implications for educational leadership training institutions, North Carolina legislators, Boards of Education and other African American female administrators are identified. Recommendations for further research are discussed.