

The Superintendent Research Project

Pandemic Leadership Transitions

DATA ANALYSIS

January 2022

Introduction

Covid-19 has impacted every facet of the American education system in some capacity. The purpose of this **ongoing research** is to explore how the pandemic may have increased turnover and exacerbated inequities rooted in discrimination that historically exists in superintendent hiring practices.

Our analysis found that **the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on female leaders** across the 500 largest public school districts in the U.S. Despite the education workforce being dominated by women, inequities continue to persist at the superintendent level and the top jobs are still going disproportionately to men. Further research is needed to determine the impact and implications that these extreme rates of turnover in leadership may have on this generation of students.

Methodology & Data

➤ **Sample Size**

Drawing from The National Center for Education Statistics, we identified the 500 largest school districts in the country and began to identify the superintendent in each district. Since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, 186 (37%) of the 500 largest school districts in the country have undergone or are currently undergoing leadership changes.

➤ **Data Quality**

We have used hyperlinks to cite specific evidence (e.g., news articles or voter records) where possible, and noted the date we completed the analysis given the reality of ongoing resignations, appointments, and interim-to-permanent conversions. The data included here was collected and verified between January 14 and January 22, 2022. Transitions that were announced, but had not officially occurred during that time period, will therefore not be reflected in the data.

➤ **Data Backup** - [Pandemic Leadership Transition Data](#)

Pre-Pandemic Landscape

- For decades, **women have climbed an uphill battle** when it comes to serving in leadership positions in an American education system built by and for men in a very different era.
- Women make up **the vast majority of the workforce in schools** - [76% of teachers are women](#) - but the number of women drops to [less than one-third](#) at the superintendent level.
- The problem isn't unique to education. The challenges women face in rising to the tops of [companies](#), [government](#), and other organizations is well-documented.
- [Research](#) has shown that women in leadership are perceived by their colleagues as equally effective and just as competent as their male counterparts. And [research](#) collected during the pandemic suggests that across multiple sectors, women are actually more effective [than men] at leading during a crisis.

Key Findings of ILO Group's Analysis

Pandemic-Era Superintendent Transitions by Gender

- Since March 2020, 186 (37%) of the 500 largest school districts in the country **have undergone or are currently undergoing** leadership changes.
- **154 (83%) of those 186 districts have completed their transitions and appointed a new superintendent.** The other 32 districts have either appointed an interim superintendent or are in the process of finding a replacement.
- **In the 154 districts that have completed their transitions:**
 - **70%** of newly appointed superintendents have been men.
 - The cumulative proportion of male leaders in these districts increased from **65% to 69%**.
 - Of the 51 female superintendents who left during the pandemic, 39 (**76%**) **were replaced by men.**
- Based on our analysis, this data reflects **a decrease in the proportion of women being appointed superintendents since the start of the pandemic** in districts in which a transition has occurred.

Insights & Potential Implications

- The **disparity between men and women leading our nation's largest school systems** isn't just unfair - it also deprives millions of children of the leadership talent of so much of the pool.
- The problem exists in part because of **societal factors**: stereotypes about the capabilities of women and definitions of leadership predicated on traits associated with men, and existing networks that favor men. It's also driven by **structures under the control of school systems**: skewed pipelines that favor men, bias in hiring processes, and a job description that makes it very hard on women who typically take on a disproportionate share of family and elder care-taking responsibilities.
- As we work toward helping a generation of children **recover from the pandemic**, it's critical that we tap into the full range of talent to lead our education systems, and that our education leaders better **reflect the diversity of the systems they represent**.

Potential Solutions

Our nation's public school systems, school boards, mayors, and governors can begin to **shift the gender balance at the very top levels of education leadership** by:

- **Setting clear, public goals** for greater gender equity at the superintendent level—and demanding that search firms and school boards commit to work toward those goals and be transparent about progress at state and county levels, update Federal reporting to ensure State Equity Plans include progress monitoring, and launch a Taskforce focused on this issue;
- **Intentionally grooming more women for leadership positions**, especially women of color, by providing them with not only mentors but active sponsors, and by building networks among them; and
- **Providing greater coaching support and advancing contracts with family-friendly structures and policies.**

About ILO Group

| A women-founded education strategy and policy firm, [ILO Group](#) partners with education leaders, their teams, and education-focused organizations to move their visions forward and accelerate student outcomes with a particular focus on our nation's PK-12 education recovery.

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