



Superintendent Job-Seeking Behaviors: Types of Positions Sought and Reasons for Seeking

SUMMARY: The proportion of superintendents seeking out new positions is greater than the national average superintendent attrition rate. While the majority of job-seeking superintendents are looking for other superintendent positions, many are seeking out positions outside K-12 education or desire to shift to an assistant superintendent role, primarily due to politics, stress, and school board tensions. There are no differences in job-seeking behaviors across superintendent demographics.

Superintendent departure from a district can have impacts on district stability and performance. Superintendent transition processes that are not intentional and thoughtful can create public perceptions of instability, lower morale, and upend district cultureⁱ, and “disturb the equilibrium of normal activities”ⁱⁱ. Beyond disruptions to district culture and stability, superintendent attrition sometimes requires districts to expend district resources on severance packages to the departing superintendents and cover superintendent search costs.

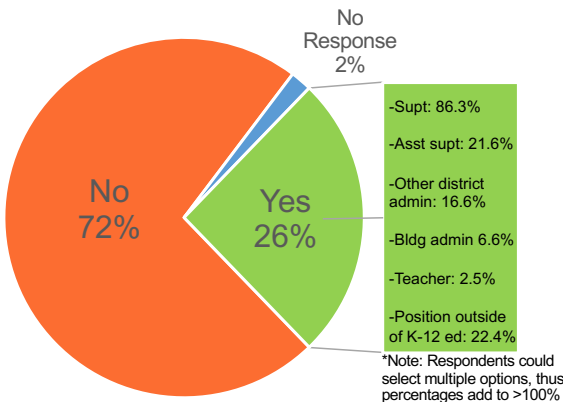
A recent study, drawing on data collected via a nationwide survey of superintendents, sought to understand superintendents’ experiences as they led districts through challenging circumstances and politicsⁱⁱⁱ. One portion of the survey focused on superintendents’ active job-seeking behaviors within this context.

The proportion of superintendents that have actively sought out a new position during the last two years (26%; 19% of which were currently sitting superintendents) is substantially higher than the superintendent attrition rates from the last two years (16.9% after the 2020-21 school year and 17.1% after the 2021-22 school year)^{iv}. For teachers, stated intentions to leave a current position is a largely inaccurate measure of turnover^v. Given the gap between the proportion that sought out a new position and the actual superintendent attrition rate, one should be similarly cautious regarding superintendents.

Yet, understanding the extent to which superintendents are actively seeking out

other positions, and the type of positions they are seeking, is valuable information—as it may provide insight into superintendent job satisfaction or whether they are pursuing new opportunities for professional growth.

Figure 1
Have you actively sought a new position in the last two years?



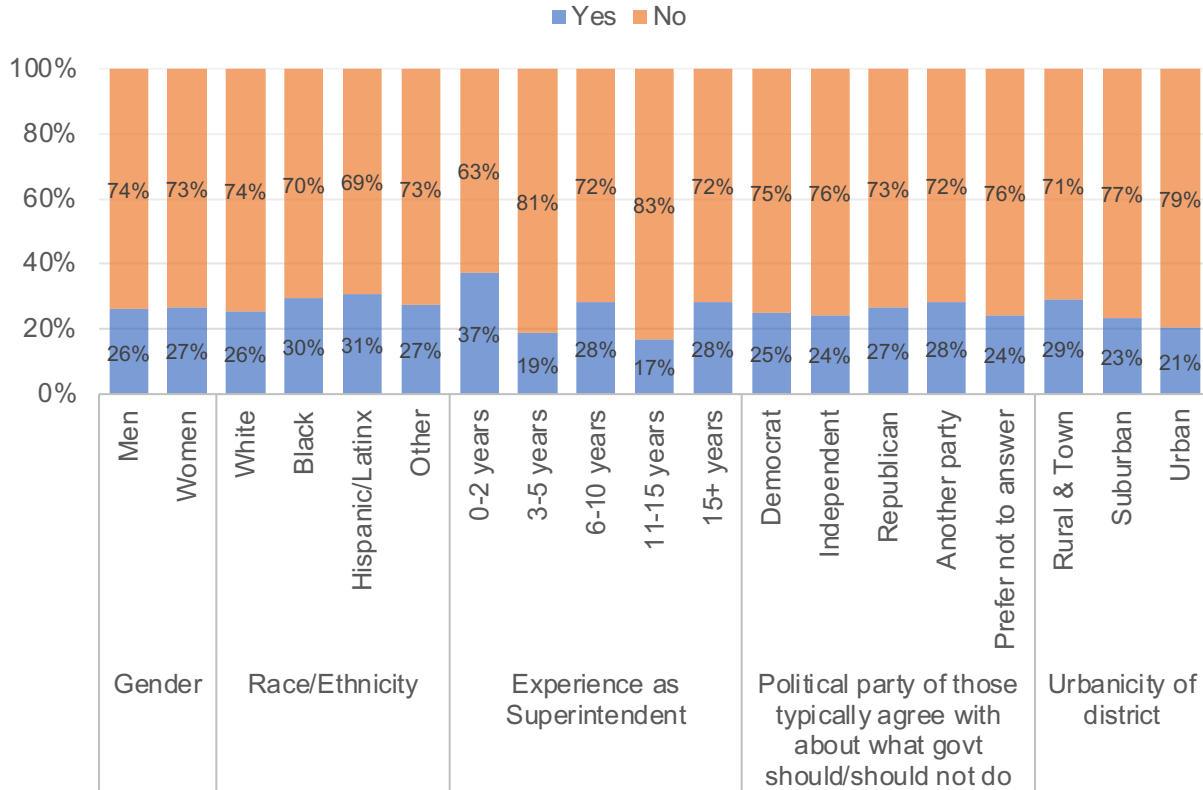
As shown in Figure 1, one-quarter of our respondents actively sought out other positions, the large majority of whom sought out other superintendent positions. Of those who sought other positions, about one-quarter looked to positions outside K-12 education. Additionally, about one-in-five superintendents sought out assistant superintendent positions. Among those that sought out assistant superintendent positions, 20% were individuals new to the superintendency that sought out both a superintendent and assistant superintendent positions and 80% were sitting superintendents seeking to shift to an assistant superintendent position. Of sitting superintendents seeking out

an assistant superintendent position, 46% cited school boards and local politics, and another 17% cited stress as the motive for searching.

Figure 2 shows job-seeking across superintendent demographics. No statistically significant differences in position-seeking were found across superintendent gender, race/ethnicity, political party affiliation, or district locale. Superintendents with fewer years of experience were significantly more likely to seek out a new position. Upon further analysis, it was identified that nearly all superintendents in this category moved into a superintendent position within the last year—indicating that this significant difference is not indicative of young superintendents jumping shift right after arriving at a district, but rather an artifact of superintendent survey respondents who just moved into the position with 0-1 years of superintendent experience.

These findings suggest that challenging and divisive politics regarding schools and pandemic-related stresses are taking a direct toll on superintendents' job satisfaction, which is in some cases impelling them to seek out new/different positions in or beyond education. Local and state-level policymakers may therefore wish to focus on superintendent well-being and doing their best to foster more favorable conditions for leaders and educators.

Figure 2
By superintendent gender, race, experience, political party, and district urbanicity: Have you actively sought a new position in the last two years?



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ⁱ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0013161X960321003>
ⁱⁱ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/00346543055001087>
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