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The American Superintendent

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The American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study released today revealed superintendents of America's public schools are more likely than they were 10 years ago to be women, to be older and to be drawing a pension while working full-time. And nearly half are planning to retire in the next five years.

Theodore Kowalski, educational administration professor and Kuntz Family Chair in Educational Administration, served as lead author with four others for the study. The work is one in a series of studies conducted every 10 years since 1923 and provides a national perspective about the roles and responsibilities of contemporary district superintendents.

"Given superintendents' importance to society and the demanding nature of their position, the decennial studies provide insightful information for both public policy and professional development," Kowalski said. "Not surprisingly, these studies are considered to be the most cited references in school administration literature."

The 180-page study is based on a survey of nearly 2,000 school superintendents employed in school districts across the United States. The work examines historical and contemporary perspectives on the superintendency, the characteristics and demographics of superintendents and their districts, superintendents' professional experiences, their relationships with their school boards, the nature of the superintendent role itself, and the social and political climate in which superintendents work.

"This is a landmark study," said Daniel A. Domenech, AASA executive director. "Today in this country, education is a hot topic. This report provides a clear view of how a key group of educators can make education work. We can use this data and its conclusions to improve the quality of our leaders."

Among the key findings:

- The work portfolio of America's superintendents is increasingly diverse, encompassing not only student achievement, but the diversification of student and staff populations, the explosion of technology, expanded expectations from the government, the school board and the community, and the globalization of society.
- The percentage of female superintendents has increased substantially since 1992. In this study, nearly one in four respondents (24.1 percent) was a woman. In 2000, the percentage was 13.2.
- Non-minority group respondents more often became superintendents before the age of 46 than did their peers in the minority group. Minority group respondents were more than twice as likely as their peers in the non-minority group to report they had encountered discrimination in their pursuit of the superintendency.
- The level of job satisfaction expressed by superintendents remains very high. A high percentage would again seek to occupy the same position if given the chance to re-live their careers.
- Only about half (51 percent) of the respondents said they planned to still be a superintendent in 2015 — a finding suggesting the probability of substantial turnover in the next few years.

The work is a collaboration of five authors:

Theodore J. Kowalski is the Kuntz Family Endowed Chair and professor of educational administration at the University of Dayton.

Robert S. McCord is an associate professor in the department of educational leadership at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where he co-directs the Center for Education Policy Studies.

George J. Petersen is professor and dean of the school of education at California Lutheran University.

I. Phillip Young is a professor of education at the University of California-Davis and is co-director of a joint doctoral program between UC campuses and the California State University-Fresno.

Noelle M. Ellerson is assistant director of policy analysis and advocacy at the American Association of School Administrators,

conducting research and analysis supporting AASA's advocacy work for public education.

Education leader Pearson sponsored the study, which is published by Rowman & Littlefield Education. Copies may be purchased at www.rowmaneducation.com (url: <http://www.rowmaneducation.com>) or by calling R&L Customer Service, 800-462-6420.

The American Association of School Administrators, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders across the United States. AASA's mission is to support and develop effective school system leaders who are dedicated to the highest quality public education for all children. For more information, visit www.aasa.org (url: <http://www.aasa.org>).

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