

Oregon Superintendents of Color Study

Understanding the lived experiences of current and former superintendents of color in Oregon

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Why is superintendent
diversity in Oregon important?



Diversity among staff members, educators, and administrators positively impacts all students

Students of color

- Achieve higher test scores
- Are less likely to drop out of high school
- Are more likely to aspire to college and take advanced coursework

Educators of color

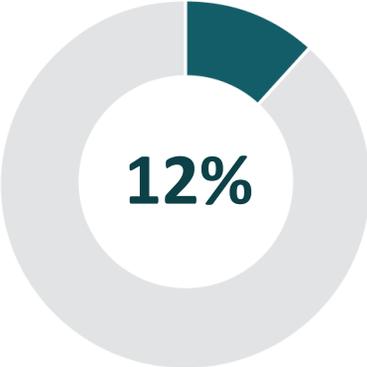
- Adopt a strengths-based perspective when working with students
- Promote a more inclusive learning environment
- Improve perceptions of teachers of color held by white students



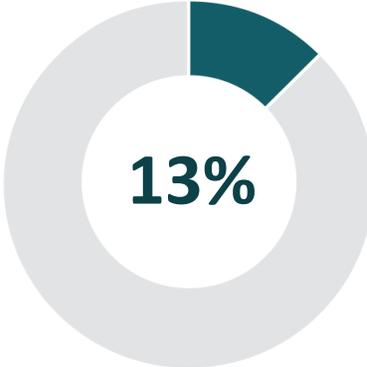
Efforts to diversify the administrator workforce have not kept pace with the increasing diversity of students and communities



students



teachers



administrators

Percent who are racially, ethnically, and/or linguistically diverse



superintendents

Oregon superintendents now identify as people of color



“The number of superintendents of color in our state is not just stagnant, it is in a highly concerning free-fall”

Recognizing Oregon’s urgent need to reverse these trends, the Coalition of Oregon School Administrators, the Oregon Department of Education, and the Oregon School Boards Association collectively commissioned this study:

- One of the first research studies in the United States to document and examine the experiences of superintendents of color across races and cultures at a statewide level
- One of the largest qualitative interview studies of superintendents of color



How was this study conducted?



The Study Research Questions



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Guiding Research
Questions

1. To what extent do superintendents of color **feel supported** in their leadership role?
2. What are the **factors or conditions that contribute to turnover** of superintendents of color?
3. What **recommendations** do superintendents of color offer to improve retention among administrators of color?
4. What **local-, state-, and district-level actions and policies** can be implemented to support the success and retention of superintendents of color?

The Study Key Topic Areas



Key topic areas

1. **Recruitment and hiring**
2. Formal and informal **networks, mentoring, and support systems**
3. **Experience with racial discrimination and bias**
4. **Equity in leadership** and expectations
5. **Managing relationships** with school boards, unions, and other stakeholders
6. **Recommendations** for state, school board and district policy changes and initiatives



Who participated in the study?



16 Superintendents of Color Participated in the Study

Characteristics
63 percent identified as male
38 percent identified as female
56 percent were current superintendents
44 percent were former superintendents

69%

Latino/a/x or Hispanic

13%

American Indian or Alaska Native

31%

Black or African American

6%

Asian

19%

White

6%

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander



What did we learn?



Key Findings

1. The leadership training and preparation varies widely in both quality and quantity
2. Mentors and networks are the most important sources of support for superintendents of color
3. School board support is often inconsistent, unreliable, and transactional
4. Board turnover often has a direct impact on superintendent turnover
5. Superintendents of color regularly face racial discrimination and bias that affects their safety
6. Superintendents of color face threats to their personal safety and the safety of their families



The leadership training and preparation superintendents of color receive varies widely in both quality and quantity

Approximately 63 percent of superintendents received some form of training and preparation before and during their tenure

- COSA New Superintendent Academy
- Harvard Excel Program
- Graduate school programs
- ALAS Superintendent Leadership Academy



Mentors and networks are the most important sources of support for superintendents of color

- Prior experience and strong mentorships helped current superintendents build the resiliency to stay in their current role
- Predecessors helped prepare superintendents prior to and during their tenure
- Superintendents often had to rely on existing relationships to create their own systems of support



Mentors and networks are the most important sources of support for superintendents of color



*One of the things I've tried to bring [to] every district I've worked in is **affinity groups**—affinity groups for teachers, affinity groups for administrators. When I was in [redacted], we were able to diversify our leadership group, and it was great. And yeah, **graduation rates went up**, and we [were able to] close achievement gaps. We did all the right work."*



School board support for superintendents of color is often inconsistent, unreliable, and transactional



The board is supportive of me as long as I can illustrate to them that there's a tangible reward."



School board support for superintendents of color is often inconsistent, unreliable, and transactional



*I've never felt affirmed for who I am and what I bring to my work ... It's a very surreal thing to have **white board members coming at me about the outcomes or the work we're doing for kids of color**, and I'm thinking to myself, 'What, but you all have been here for years and years, and I just got here and I'm telling you what I'm doing about it. And **we're seeing the evidence moving in the right direction**, so I don't understand the scrutiny.'*"



Board turnover often has a direct impact on superintendent turnover



*We had a lot of board turnover, and so I haven't worked with the new board, but **that was one of my reasons for also looking outside of [redacted]**. You know, I just looked up the people who were coming on and ... I met with each one of them, too, and I [had] a lot of conversations about 'Why are you interested?' And **it seemed like people just had different agendas, a lot of one-off agendas that didn't really have to do with moving equity and achievement**. And so, I wasn't sure if they would get on the board or not, but I just said, 'I don't know if I really want to do that again,' especially when it's, like, more than four people. And so, yeah, I think that's been a difficult start for the new superintendent there."*



Superintendents of color regularly face racial discrimination and bias that affects their safety



I mean, from the N-word, to threatening to come to my office and blow my head off, to comments about, ‘You were only hired because of affirmative action.’”



Superintendents of color regularly face racial discrimination and bias that affects their safety



A teacher in the group accused me of cheating, so the search consultant called and asked if I had the answers to the interviews ahead of time. I said, 'I wouldn't even need them. I just left that district. I led everything in that district. I know exactly what questions they're going to ask me, and I know what I need to ask them.' Anyway, I had told him at the beginning if it ever gets to a point where you can tell it's dangerous for me, let me know. He called me one day and he said, 'So remember that question you asked me?' I said, 'Yep, I get it. I'm done. I'm pulling out.'



Superintendents of color, especially women, face threats to their personal safety and the safety of their families

- Further impacted by their outspoken commitment to advancing equity
- Physical threats of violence were a major area of concern
- The added layers of race and gender presented complexities for women of color that made it difficult to focus on the job



Superintendents of color, especially women, face threats to their personal safety and the safety of their families



There is a whole different layer that comes as a female of color when somebody's talking about protesting at your home."



People aren't going to understand that I have to circle the block and take a different way home every day. People don't know the stories of intruders I've had in my house ... So, there's a personal safety issue here with being an outspoken leader, right? But if I don't say it, who's going to say it?"



What actions could help address the most pressing issues impacting superintendents of color in Oregon?



Develop pathway programs and increase mentorship and support to improve recruitment, hiring, and retention

- Invest in expanding "grow-your-own" administrator programs; partner with local universities and colleges to develop these programs and leverage the political and financial resources they have to offer
- Strengthen organizational capacity for providing mentoring and training support to superintendents of color
- Update contract language to protect superintendents of color and other educational leaders who advocate for and advance equitable policies and practices



Improve school board governance and leadership by mandating training and accountability for board members



Provide mandatory training on equity-focused and culturally responsive legislation



Strengthen school board members' capacity to advance equity;
support school boards and superintendents in their efforts to
advance equity



**Provide funding for equity consultants
or equity advisory groups**



Create a statewide safety plan that specifically addresses the health and safety of superintendents of color

Directly address harassment, intimidation, and threats of violence

Ensure the safety plan addresses a broad range of superintendent identities

Promote stronger and more responsive partnerships between local school districts and local law enforcement

Support individuals who are considering engaging legal counsel



Thank You

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Superintendent Stories

