THE ASCENDANCY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES TO THE SUPERINTENDENCY IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Tonia M. Taylor

ABSTRACT

Superintendents need to increase the performance of a diversity of students and meet the high expectations of multiple accountability systems. Effective leadership by the superintendent is necessary to revitalize the educational systems of the 21st century. Thus, no task of the local school board is more important than selecting a superintendent of schools. It is crucial when making that selection that every candidate undergoes rigorous screening for qualifications and other factors that may be important to the district. It is equally important to select diverse individuals to lead today’s public schools. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the meaning of the experiences of four African-American male superintendents in Virginia in their ascension to the superintendency. The research utilized purposeful sampling to conduct semistructured interviews with four African-American male superintendents in Virginia. Additionally, another four participated in a survey. The research question that guided this study was: What are the experiences of African-American male superintendents in the Commonwealth of Virginia in pursuing and obtaining the superintendency? Four predominant themes arose from the interviews with the superintendents. These themes represented an overall analysis of the superintendents’ experiences in pursuing the position and included (a) demonstrating integrity to others opened doors of opportunities, (b) having external support before and throughout the pursuit intensified participants’ resolve to reach the top and made the pursuit smoother, (c) race affected the pursuit in both positive and negative ways from beginning to end, and (d) gaining essential professional experience before pursuing the superintendency helped ensure potential
employers viewed participants as prepared and capable. Nine subthemes were identified within the four themes: (a) showing integrity with a commitment to do what was “right,” (b) using integrity as a guide when making tough decisions showed consistency, (c) networking with others, (d) having mentors who supported and encouraged, (e) belief in a higher power provided strength, (f) race issues prevalent during the pursuit of advanced graduate studies, (g) dealing with conflict and apparent jealously of members of the African-American community, (h) obtaining a variety of leadership experiences, and (i) the importance of educational experiences.