

The background of the slide is a photograph of a classroom. On the left, there are rows of wooden desks and black chairs. In the background, there are large windows with white frames. On the right side, a large world map is visible on the wall. A large, semi-transparent blue rectangle is overlaid on the center of the image, containing the title text. The bottom right corner of the blue rectangle is folded over, revealing an orange triangle underneath.

# FILLING THE PIPELINE: THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF EFFECTIVE SUPERINTENDENT SPONSORSHIP

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# THE CURRENT STATE OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

## Qualified Candidates Choosing Leadership



Fewer candidates express interest in entering school and district leadership, even if they already have the necessary credentials.

## Leadership Turnover and Leaving the Profession



District leaders are leaving the position much earlier than in the past. School and district administrators are leaving the education field entirely, and tenures are shorter than ever.

## Positional Experience Vacuum



High turnover creates a lack of veteran leaders with experience to share. Some regions have no one with many years of service in the superintendency to guide those new to the role.



**FILLING THE LEADERSHIP PIPELINE  
WITH THE MOST PROMISING  
CANDIDATES IS THE KEY TO  
REALIZING POSSIBILITIES AND  
STABILIZING OUR PROFESSION.**

**Superintendent  
sponsorship and  
mentoring is  
more important  
than ever.**



HOW DID YOU GET  
YOUR FIRST  
SUPERINTENDENCY?

(THE REAL ANSWERS!)





# SPONSORSHIP VS ENDORSEMENT

## The ticket and the closed door

- What is endorsement and what does it look like in the process of entering school and district leadership?
- What is different about sponsorship?
- What does it mean to be sponsored in our profession?
- Who really gets the interviews and why?



# EXAMPLES OF SPONSORSHIP AND STORIES OF SUCCESS

When has it worked  
and how?





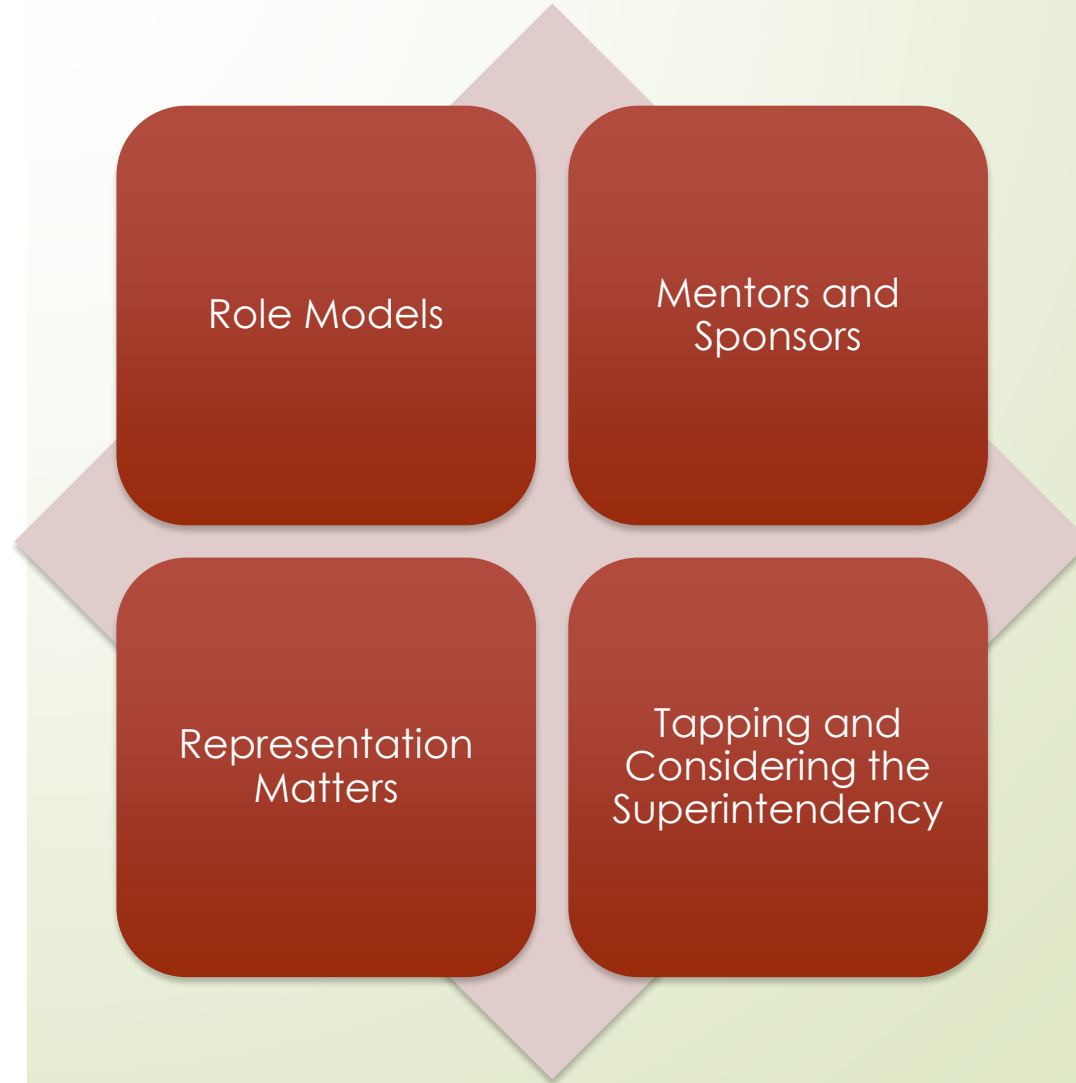
# THE RESEARCH ON “TAPPING” POTENTIAL LEADERS

Do superintendents make this a priority?

- Studies show that potential school leaders are much more likely to enter programs and positions when they are overtly encouraged to do so.
- Many superintendents share that their former superintendents were not the ones to “tap” them on the shoulder.
- Superintendents who do “tap” promising leaders have enormous influence.
- Groups underrepresented in the superintendency respond most strongly to overt encouragement.



# MENTORS, SPONSORS, AND REPRESENTATION MAKE THE DIFFERENCE





# MENTORING MAKES THE ROLE SUSTAINABLE:

*GETTING THE LEADERSHIP ROLES DOESN'T MEAN  
PEOPLE WILL STAY*

WHAT HAS HELPED YOU STAY?

## TWO TYPES OF MENTORS

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### STRUCTURED: ORGANIZED

Elevated their confidence in knowledge, skills, and opportunities

*I never pictured myself a superintendent until they put that idea in my head. They visualized it for me. They said, “You can do this.” They gave me great feedback and pushed me to push myself.*

Kuss-Cybula, M. (2024). *The impact of mentorship on attracting and sustaining female superintendents in Washington*. Western Washington University ETD.

### UNSTRUCTURED: ORGANIC

Allowed the mentee to see themselves as an educational leader and gave them the courage to pursue career advancement.

Messages of affirmation in action, “I see you.”  
It’s the belief and words in action together.



# WHAT DOES CURRENT RESEARCH SAY HELPS POTENTIAL LEADERS MOST?

Mentoring and endorsements from sponsors are key to accessing superintendency

Engagement with other similar leaders helps in the development of a professional persona.

Being “tapped” by a superintendent made a very significant impression, just as it did when a potential leader was not “tapped”.

The glass ceiling can include presuppositions regarding readiness to advance due to family obligations. Potential leaders must be clear that they are ready.

Beware of the glass cliff phenomena. Carefully analyze career opportunities for risk.

Colvard, I. L. (2023). *Thriving in the Superintendency: Female District Leaders Share Their Journeys*. ProQuest Dissertations.

HOW WERE YOU MENTORED?

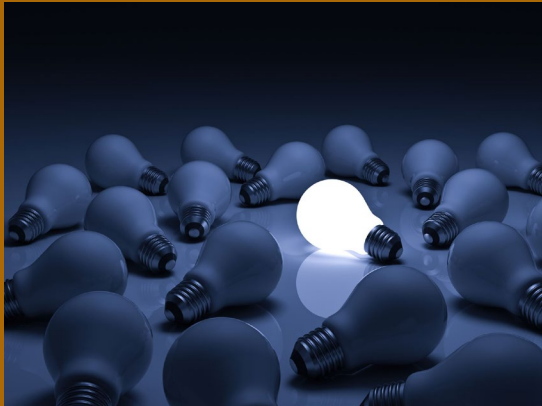
ARE YOU STILL MENTORED?

HAVE YOU INTENTIONALLY MENTORED  
ANYONE, AND IF SO, WHY?





# CONSTRUCTING SOLUTIONS TOGETHER: NEXT STEPS WE CAN MAKE HAPPEN



Identify characteristics of the most promising leaders.

What opportunities are important for role preparation?

Are there people ready now or do we hold them back?  
Why?

Informal and formal mentoring: Involvement, mentee voice and active encouragement. How can you plug in?

Choose carefully, but sponsor aggressively! What does it look like to actively advocate for someone?

# SUPERINTENDENTS HOLD THE KEYS TO TOP LEADERSHIP ROLES



Our legacies and responsibilities include setting schools up for the future. Leadership matters. Let's bring the best and brightest to the table!