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Advancing Women In Leadership

Exploratory Study Regarding the Status of Women's Educational Administrative Support Organizations

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Women's support organizations should serve as vehicles for the growth of women at initial administrative career stages as well as for women in top level positions.

Demographic projections for the 1990s suggest that 45% of all net additions to the U.S. labor force will be females (Cox, 1993); however, only about 1% are likely to be in top management positions (Levine, 1987). The numbers of women in school leadership positions reflect similar low percentages. The number of female principals has risen from 13% in 1977 to 34% in 1993, with most of these at the elementary school level (Montenegro, 1993). Percentages of female deputy and associate superintendents rose in number from 5% in 1977 to 24% in 1993, while the number of superintendents has risen from 2% in 1981 to 7% in 1993 (Montenegro, 1993).

Low incidents of women in mid to upper school executive positions create problems of isolation, which are manifested by a lack of association with other women colleagues and a lack of both companionship and perspective. These women often find themselves as "lone women," part of a male dominated culture that does not value or support their leadership attempts (Schmuck, 1995). Women in middle to upper educational management positions need opportunities to meet with others in similar positions (Levine, 1987).

Ely (as cited by Nichols, 1993) found that women were more serious about their work, more satisfied and more self-confident when there were significant numbers of women in similar positions. She discovered that women view themselves differently when there is a critical mass of female administrators in an organization. Based on these studies, it may be assumed that support groups for women administrators are critical. Without such support groups, women leaders may have limited opportunities to interact with women colleagues and limited access to women who may effectively serve as mentors, confidants, role models, and sponsors.

Brown and Merchant (1993) cited four related barriers for women seeking administrative positions: "(1) absence of role models for women, (2) lack of support and encouragement from others, (3) lack of sponsorship within and without the organization, and (4) lack of a supportive network" (p. 88). Brown and Irby (1995) reported findings of research collected over three consecutive years from aspiring or new women administrators enrolled in a "Women in Leadership" course; the findings were that these women exhibited lack of self-confidence and expressed naive perceptions regarding career advancement and networking. Interestingly, Brown and Merchant (1993) identified three components of successful support systems for women: networking, mentoring, and learning from the experiences of others (Brown and Merchant, 1993). If support systems inclusive of these components were available, then it might be possible for women new to the educational administrative ranks to enhance their feelings of self-confidence, their awareness of career advancement techniques and their skills in networking. Of course, it is assumed that women would gravitate toward support organizations which would supply those components.

The purpose of this paper is to (a) discuss the need for and the future of women's educational administrative support organizations, (b) report our study on the national status of such support groups, and (c) share activities determined to be central to supporting women administrators.

Need for Women's Support Organizations from An Emotional Perspective

The issues of care, connectedness, relationships, support, and self-esteem all point to a need for support organizations. Women are socialized to care for others throughout their lives; with this connectedness an integral aspect of a woman's identity development (Gilligan, 1977), women come to know themselves primarily through their relationships with others (Gilligan, 1982; Hancock, 1981). Levine (1987) proposed that women in middle management spend a great deal of time supporting others, but rarely think about taking care of themselves. Furthermore, Yahne and Long (1988), in a counseling study on women's self-esteem issues, suggested that women struggle with a wide range of self-esteem related issues. Even achieving women with professional accomplishments have been shown to experience the "impostor phenomenon". This experience is described as attributing success to factors other than one's own abilities and include the fear of being discovered as a phony (Clance & Imes, 1978). The issues of care, connectedness, relationships, support, and self-esteem all point to a need for support. These studies, combined with the idea that one's social identity is derived from membership in various groups (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), including those that are work related, provide evidence of the need for a structured support group for women.

Women who participated in a counseling support group designed to address women's issues showed a significant increase in self-regard (Yahne & Long, 1988). Levine (1987) investigated the relationship of a small, informal peer support group, of which she was a member, made up of professional women educators at similar levels of management from different organizational contexts and found that they offered an array of benefits. She listed some of these benefits as: "(1) discovering a new way of looking at a problem, (2) benefiting from one another's failures or successes, (3) willingness to serve as resources to help one another form new professional relationships, (4) the importance of professional contacts to offer and receive support, and (5) meeting other dynamic women educators in a wide range of management positions." Levine noted that taking care of our own needs releases a hidden store of energy for both home and work. She further proposed that a small peer support group for women in middle management positions is an important idea that can make an enormous difference. The group serves as a "mechanism for broadening perspectives, generating alternative solutions to managerial problems, and enhancing professional and personal esteem" (p.75).

According to Stamler, Christiansen, Payne, Staley, and Johnson (1988), the University Counseling

Service of the University of Iowa developed an idea for a group of professional staff women that combines both professional research activities and support functions. This combination was determined to be very successful because it provided personal support for multiple-role women while enhancing their professional growth through the production of scholarly works. In view of these reports, it would appear that women's support groups designed to meet the needs of women in educational leadership are needed.

Need for Women's Support Organizations from a Gendered Perspective

Why do women need support specifically from other women, as opposed to simply belonging to a mixed gendered administrators' support group? Jackson, Stone, and Alvarez (1992) noted that women are more likely to categorize themselves using their gender when the audience is mostly male. Under these conditions, women's social identities become the most salient aspects of their self-systems, which in turn blurs their individuality (Gardner, Van Eck Peluchette, & Clinebell, 1994). Grogan (1996) discussed these issues in a more philosophical way. She points out that the control of knowledge in various fields rest with the authority societies offer to professional organizations, academic disciplines, or various institutions, and that there is constant conflict emanating from those sources of knowledge in a structuring way. She further suggests that what ensues is alliances between groups and supporting arguments that always force those who differ to be moved to the side. Those differences further isolate the less powerful and provide the dominant groups more strength that perpetuates societal rules and regulations. Women's different experiences often bring them into conflict with the dominant establishment and, having less power, they are often compelled to conform to the hegemonic view.

Men learn the rules and cultural expectations society has for them at an early age. The value of competition is acquired in team sports where they learn to win at all costs, to play with pain, to compete ruthlessly, and to be loyal to their teams. Women, on the other hand, learn to share, to show compassion, and to be nurturing. Therefore, it is likely that when women join male dominated organizations, they are unaware of societal parameters which will determine their success (Robbins & Terrell, 1987). Studies indicate that women need time to grow together professionally and to learn from other women. Schmuck (1995) suggested that ". . . there is something special and celebratory for same sex members of all races and ethnic groups to come together; perhaps one of the most compelling and powerful experiences that women have in the conferences and workshops for women is the camaraderie, the shared unspoken assumptions, and the revelation of one's experience which is understood" (p. 216).

Future of Women's Support Organizations

Brown and Irby (1995) stated that women's support organizations should serve as vehicles for both the growth of women at initial administrative career stages as well as for women in top level positions. Because the needs of women at diverse career stages vary greatly, support organizations should carefully assess the needs of members or potential members and strategically plan for meeting those needs (Irby, 1997).

Schmuck (1995) shared four specific recommendations for the future of advocacy groups for women school administrators: (1) women advocacy groups in educational administration should no longer have as a primary goal a woman's personal desire for career entry and advancement, (2) women advocacy groups should assist in refocusing the school's concerns on the child's welfare of our children, (3) women advocacy groups in educational administration would do better to address the problems of practicing women administrators who often find themselves as the "lone" woman, or alone in a male dominated culture, (4) women advocacy groups in educational administration should concentrate, and even celebrate, the values of caring, calling for democracy, and collaboration.

National Status of Support Groups for Women

The purpose of our study was to: (1) determine which American Association of School Administrators (AASA) state level organizations have women's affiliates or subsidiary organizations, and (2) to determine from those existing state level AASA organizations what types of supportive activities are provided for their members. In addition, 41 state level women's advocacy groups, identified by Schmuck (1995), were contacted to determine what types of supportive activities are provided. The research questions for this study were: (1) what support networks and organizations are currently available to women in educational administration as determined from AASA state level organizations and from the Schmuck (1995) listing of women's support organizations, and (2) what services are provided through these organizations.

Methodology

After the initial research question was developed, the AASA Women's Caucus was contacted to secure a listing of all AASA state level affiliate women's groups. However, once it was determined that this group did not hold such a list, then two questionnaires were developed for this study. The initial questionnaire was distributed to the fifty-one United States AASA state-level executive directors. They were requested to provide information as to whether their respective state organizations had a separate division, chapter or affiliate group that dealt with specific issues affecting women in educational administration. These 51 AASA organizations included 49 states. Hawaii was not listed as having a state organization. Three states were listed with two state-level AASA organizations per state, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. A second in-depth survey was then sent to AASA state level organizations that responded positively. This survey requested the following information regarding each identified separate women's affiliate group:

- Ô number of members
- Ô how long the organization has been in existence
- Ô frequency of conferences and workshops
- Ô topics included in conferences and workshops
- Ô board members and meetings
- Ô local/regional groups
- Ô publications
- Ô job banks
- Ô internet web sites
- Ô other supportive activities provided to the women in the organization.

In addition, the in-depth survey was sent to forty-one other state level professional organizations for female school administrators as indicated in the Schmuck (1995) listing. If responses to the in-depth survey were not received from the AASA organizations or from the other groups listed, phone calls were made requesting the survey information. Telephone attempts were logged with the types of responses received. The answers and information from the in-depth surveys were developed in a file on SPSS for Windows. Open-ended responses were recorded and analyzed qualitatively.

Results

Fifty-two questionnaires were returned, a 100 % return rate, from the AASA state level executive directors. Of the 52 AASA organizations responding, only nine indicated having any type of women's affiliate or support group currently in place. Nine in-depth surveys to the contact person designated by the AASA state director were then mailed. Three of these in-depth surveys were returned. Additional

phone contacts were made to gather the information. Consequently, all state level women's affiliate groups were contacted for information. Those states reporting a AASA state level women's support group were: Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Kansas, Mississippi, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Texas.

Table 1
Listing of American Association of School Administrators State Level Organizations Reporting Women's Affiliate or Associated Support Groups

State	Women's Support Group and Contact
Idaho	Northwest Women for Educational Action Marilyn Reynolds 2311 E. Lanark Meridian, ID 83642
Iowa	Women in Educational Leadership Donna Hennington Keota Community Schools Keota, IA 52248
Kansas	Kansas Association of School Administrators Women's Caucus Patricia Stephens P.O. Box 158 Clearwater, KS 67026
Kentucky	Kentucky Institute for Women in School Administration Toni Wilson 1211 Louisville Road Frankfort, KY 40601
Oregon	Northwest Women in Educational Administration Wanda Monthly Oregon Department of Education 255 Capital Street, NE Salem, OR 97310-0203
Mississippi	Mississippi Association for Women in Educational Leadership Sara Smith HCC Box 1263 Raymond, MS 37154
Pennsylvania	Women's Caucus of Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators Carol Saylor Manheim Central School District 71 N. Hazel Street Manheim, PA 17545-1500
Texas	Texas Council of Women School Executives Ann Halstead, Executive Secretary 406 East 11th Street Austin, TX 78701-2617
Wisconsin	Wisconsin Women Superintendent's Group Rosa Smith Beloit School District

Of the 41 other listings from Schmuck (1995), seven in-depth surveys were returned. Three of those are cross-referenced with the AASA contacts. Telephone contacts were attempted with all 34 remaining organizations. Of these 34 organizations, five telephone numbers were inoperable and seven of the listed contact persons had moved with no forwarding address or telephone number. Eight contacts supplied fax numbers, and in-depth surveys were faxed immediately. Two of those organizations' surveys were returned by fax. One was determined to no longer be in existence; one was determined as a support group, but not a formal organization, while the remaining 12 did not return phone messages. One support group was determined to be an umbrella organization for seven state level organizations. The treasurer and president of that organization were contacted and responded via telephone to the in-depth survey.

Of the total number of potential in-depth survey respondents, only 15 surveys were completed, with one being from the umbrella organization. Those organizations responding from the Schmuck (1995) list were Women In Educational Administration (CA), Network of Women Administrators (CT), Network of Women School Executives (IN), Women in Educational Administration (NE), PASA Women's Caucus (PA -- Cross-referenced with AASA response), Iowa Women in Educational Leadership (IA -- Cross-referenced with AASA response), NY State Association for Women Administrators (NY), Northwest Women in Educational Administration (OR -- Cross-referenced with AASA response) and Utah Women Educational Administration Association (UT). The NorthEast Coalition of Educational Leaders, Inc. (NECAL) represents the following states: Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and Connecticut. According to NECAL, each of those states has a women administrator's support group.

Table 2
Schmuck's (1995) List of Contacted State Level Organizations Reporting Women's Educational Administration Support Groups

State	Women's Support Group and Contact
California	Women in Educational Administration Barbara Peterson University of La Verne Department of Educational Management 1950 Third Street La Verne, CA 91750 714-759-7733
Connecticut Maine Massachusetts New Hampshire New Jersey Rhode Island Vermont	Northeast Coalition of Educational Leaders, Inc. Barbara Jordon 244 Fort Hill Road Gorham, ME 04038 207-725-4391
	Network of Women Administrators Martha McCarthy

Indiana	Educational Leadership & Policy Studies Wendell W. Wright Education Building 201 N. Rose Avenue, #4228 Bloomington, IN 47405 812-856-8360
Missouri	The Leadership Academy Judy English 205 Jefferson Street P.O. Box 480 Jefferson City, Missouri 65102 573-751-1370
New York	New York State Association of Women Administrators Ann O'Brien-Carelli CASDA-LEAD SUNY 135 Western Avenue, Husted 211 Albany, NY 12222
Utah	Utah Women in Educational Administration Association Mary Peterson Utah State Office of Education 250 East 500 South Salt Lake City, UT 84111
*Illinois	Illinois Women's Association Diane Ashby Illinois State University Campus Box 5900 Normal, IL 61790-5900 309-438-5422

(*Data submitted after study was complete, but not included in the discussion.)

Of the 15 state level organizations reporting, the rounded mean for membership is 142. The number of members for individual organizations ranged from 20 to 300. The largest state organizations in terms of membership reported are Missouri and Texas. Length of existence for organizations ranges from "just formed" to a 20 year anniversary for one organization. The rounded mean for years in existence for the reporting organizations is 11.

Two of the organizations do not hold conferences, while four of the organizations meet semi-annually and the remaining nine meet annually. Out of the 15, three do not conduct specific workshops for members. Other workshop numbers range from 1 to 10 per year. Topics in the conferences and workshops include a wide range of information: self-renewal, preparing for promotion, dealing with conflict and stress, mentoring, networking, changing demands for leaders, leadership styles, student assessment, career paths of female superintendents, sexual harassment, issues in administration, communication skills, teaching and learning, moral leadership, Workforce 2000, women school executives, and interviewing skills and techniques.

The 15 organizations also reported the number of executive board meetings held annually. The number of meetings ranged from none to 12 meetings a year, with a rounded mean of 4. Twelve groups reported having no men on their executive board. One group reported having two men and another three groups reported having one man on their board. The number of women on the executive boards ranged from none to 35 women, with a rounded mean of 11. Information was gathered concerning local and regional

affiliate groups. Seven of the 15 have some form of regional affiliated groups. Eight reported having no regional affiliations.

Organizations were asked to report on the types and frequency of publications. Publications included newsletters, journals and books. Four reported no newsletter publication. Five publish a newsletter semi-annually. Two publish a newsletter three times a year, while two publish quarterly. One organization publishes 10 monthly newsletters, and one publishes 12. No organization reported publication of a journal; however, three reported sharing information in the state level AASA organization. One of the 15 reported the publication of a book.

Organizations were asked to report on other information sources for their members, including job banks and Internet web sites. Job banks were offered by four, while 11 offered none. Internet web sites were reported by four, with 11 reporting no sites at this time. At least three organizations were contemplating a website.

The survey concluded by asking what other supportive activities are provided to the women in the organization. Responses included: resume preparation, mock interviews, networking directory, access to national organizations, sponsoring activities at state level education meetings, mentoring and placement assistance. Two state organizations reported offering scholarships.

One of the surveys included information from the NorthEast Coalition of Educational Leaders, Inc. This information revealed that the NECEL covers seven states with a conference biannually. State workshops for NECEL are held annually. A newsletter is published monthly with a journal, Voices, published semi-annually. Services to members include a job bank with other support services being mock interviews and resume review service. The NECEL is currently producing a web site.

One of the executive directors from one state that did not report a separate women's support group wrote a follow-up letter and stated that his AASA organization believed in full inclusion as demonstrated by the number of women administrators holding leadership positions in the association. However, this state organization does sponsor a Women's Caucus Breakfast at their annual convention.

Conclusions

The researchers requested information from organizations that advocate for women administrators and executives. Researchers contacted over 100 reported organizations. After repeated attempts by mail, phone and fax, only 15 replied to the in-depth questionnaire. Therefore, the results of this study can only be suggestive rather than definitive. Sharing of information by these groups would be extremely beneficial to others interested in such groups. We can suggest that support organizations and groups for women administrators need to continue to grow and flourish. Although limited in scope, the research indicates that organizations for women administrators are attempting to serve women executives.

The researchers make five recommendations for increasing support to women administrators. The first recommendation would be for the AASA to publish and provide an updated directory of women's administrative support organizations. This directory could be printed in an AASA publication or accessed through the Internet. Also, a recommendation is made to encourage women's administrative support organizations to form coalitions and collaborate with other state agencies and organizations. The third recommendation is for women's support organizations to publicize information about membership, meetings and networking opportunities. The next recommendation is for these organizations to become actively involved in promoting activities that would allow women administrators networking opportunities and career advancement. The final recommendation called for continued research in regard

to support groups and activities for women administrators. In particular, research on whether or not these groups are meeting the needs of their women members should be conducted. Additionally, the researchers suggest that investigations are needed regarding the phenomenon of full inclusion of women into male-dominated organizations without specifically structured women's support groups. Based on our research study, this phenomenon appears to be the rule rather than the exception. A final question for further thought is that if general research findings are antithetical to the practice of inclusion without structured support for women, how well are the women in such organizations fairing in comparison to their male counterparts in terms of stress management, job satisfaction, skill development, mentoring, networking, and career advancement.

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