


URBAN DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS: Characteristics, Tenure, and Salaries

NINTH REPORT



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INTRODUCTION

The Council of the Great City Schools (Council or CGCS) has studied the extent to which some of our large urban school districts overcome the impact of low socioeconomic status, English Learner status, and special education needs among students. The CGCS report, [*Mirrors or Windows: How Well Do Large City Public Schools Overcome the Effects of Poverty and Other Barriers? \(2021\)*](#), describes the importance and unique challenges of educating our nation's students in abject poverty and other factors that influence student outcomes. The study found that strong and effective educational leadership, particularly through the role of superintendents, is critical in shaping the trajectory of school districts.

As key figures overseeing administrative operations and policy implementation, superintendents are responsible for driving organizational excellence and student success. Over time, the superintendent's role has evolved from mere administrative oversight to strategic leadership, encompassing community engagement and crisis management. However, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has catalyzed a paradigm shift, necessitating adaptive leadership to navigate unprecedented challenges, foster innovation, and prioritize the well-being of students and staff (Love, 2023). In this context, superintendents serve as chief executives, guiding districts through complex terrain, balancing fiscal responsibilities, stakeholder expectations, and educational imperatives to cultivate inclusive, equitable learning environments.

Superintendent turnover is a critical issue in education leadership, influencing the stability and effectiveness of school districts. Understanding trends in superintendent turnover rates before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic is essential for assessing the impact of the crisis on the labor market for educational leaders. Continuity in the superintendent position is vital for large school districts as it ensures stable leadership and the consistent implementation of long-term educational strategies. Frequent turnover can disrupt progress, leading to fragmented policies and initiatives that hinder student and staff success.

Analysis by Schwartz and Diliberti (2022b) found that, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, superintendent turnover rates were approximately 13 percent. The authors also found that superintendents serving mostly students of color were less likely to report that they were considering leaving their positions. Factors such as job-related stress, school board relations, and excessive work hours were most often listed as reasons superintendents considered leaving the role (Schwartz, H. & Diliberti, M., 2022b).

This study updates [historical reports](#) on the superintendency conducted by the Council and aims to uncover trends in superintendent pay, tenure, and turnover in system leadership by examining the characteristics of urban school district superintendents within 77 of the Councils' current 78 member districts¹. This study focuses on understanding the racial and gender demographics of superintendents, trends in superintendent tenure, the prevalence of turnover within demographic groups as well as the relationship between superintendent and district characteristics and base salaries. By addressing these questions, the Council seeks to provide some insight that may inform conversation on the challenges facing urban school district leadership and inform strategies to promote stability and effectiveness in urban district leadership roles.

¹ Puerto Rico was excluded due to a lack of available information.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How have the characteristics and backgrounds of superintendents within urban school districts changed over the last two decades and since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. Do superintendent demographics (i.e., gender, race) and district characteristics (i.e., student population size, student population racial makeup, FRPL student representation, school board type) influence base salary across Council member-districts?
3. Did superintendent demographics (i.e., gender, race), district characteristics (i.e., student population size, student population racial makeup, FRPL student representation, school board type), and superintendent base salary correlate with the turnover rate across Council member-districts during the period examined?
4. Are there significant differences in superintendent tenure by demographics (i.e., gender, race), district characteristics (i.e., student population size, student population demographics), school board type, and superintendent base salary?

METHODOLOGY

Data collection for this research included 77 of 78 member districts, as Puerto Rico was not included in the study due to a lack of available information. The data collected included student enrollment figures, the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, and student racial demographic information from each district during the 2018-2019 and 2022-23 school years. These data were sourced from the National Center for Education Statistics' Common Core of Data.

Tenure length, salary, gender, and race of Council member-district superintendents in this report include each immediate predecessor of current district leaders. Those included would have been permanent superintendents – individuals who received contracts and/or having been formally appointed by each district's governing board of education. Tenure length was determined by the start and end dates of superintendent contracts. In this group, 66 of the 77 districts examined had leaders whose tenures ended during or after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Information was gathered from public-facing sources including state education department and school district websites, school board documentation including meeting minutes and contracts available online, local news media outlets, databases containing superintendent salaries, and education publications.

Several methodologies were used to answer the study's research questions. Statistical models, summary statistics, and means and correlation tests were run to examine trends and relationships between variables. In addition, superintendent turnover rates were calculated by dividing the number of superintendents who left each district each year by the total number of superintendents, multiplied by 100. We determined the annual superintendent turnover rate as well as the rate over the five years studied. We used a similar method to determine turnover rates by race and gender.

In this report, salaries are adjusted for local or regional cost-of-living differences using consumer price indexes from the Bureau of Labor Statistics or regional price parity data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis. Salaries among district superintendents whose tenures would have ended in different months/years were also adjusted for inflation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The focal point of this report was to examine possible relationships between superintendent characteristics, the characteristics of the districts they lead, and elements of the position likely impacted by the pandemic: superintendent base pay, tenure, and turnover rates among district leaders. The overall goal of this work was to garner a greater understanding of the changes in district leadership across Council of the Great City Schools' ("Council" or "CGCS") member-districts and to make comparisons—where possible—between the status of the workforce pre- and post-pandemic. This report also considered the often-noted disparities in pay, hiring, and retention at the superintendent level along the lines of gender and race. Listed below are some key findings:

OVERALL CHANGES IN DEMOGRAPHICS OF URBAN SUPERINTENDENTS.

- The pool of CGCS district superintendents has become increasingly diverse over the last 20 years, reflecting more of the diversity of student populations in urban school districts, with Black and Hispanic superintendents making up the majority of system leaders.
- Hispanic females have not seen significant benefits from the demographic shifts in urban superintendent roles.

SUPERINTENDENT SALARY WAS DETERMINED TO BE AFFECTED BY MANY OF THE FACTORS CONSIDERED IN THE ANALYSIS.

- Being a leader of a larger CGCS district was associated with having a larger base salary.
- In smaller districts (under 35,000), the majority of superintendents are Black. In the largest districts (greater than 100,000), half of superintendents are Hispanic, while nearly half of superintendents in mid-sized districts (50,000-100,000) are White, which impacts racial disparities in salary. No meaningful differences in salary between female superintendents and male superintendents were found among those leading CGCS districts.
- District leader salaries were not found to differ meaningfully when considering the representation of economically disadvantaged students in district populations.
- There was no meaningful difference in superintendent salaries when considering school board types (i.e., appointed school boards, elected school boards).

TENURE LENGTH VARIED SIGNIFICANTLY BASED ON RACE AND GENDER.

- The average length of tenure for preceding superintendents is about 2.13 years longer than currently serving superintendents.
- Among currently serving superintendents,
 - » Women were found to have significantly shorter tenures than their male counterparts.
 - » There was no discernable difference in the length of tenure by race.
 - » The smallest urban districts have the longest superintendent tenure among currently serving superintendents, while the largest districts have the shortest.
- Among preceding superintendents,
 - » Women were found to have significantly shorter tenures as district leaders.
 - » Black superintendents were also found to have tenures that were significantly shorter terms in the role.
 - » Hispanic male superintendents were found to occupy the district leadership position for significantly longer periods.
 - » The smallest urban districts have the shortest superintendent tenure, while the largest districts have the longest.

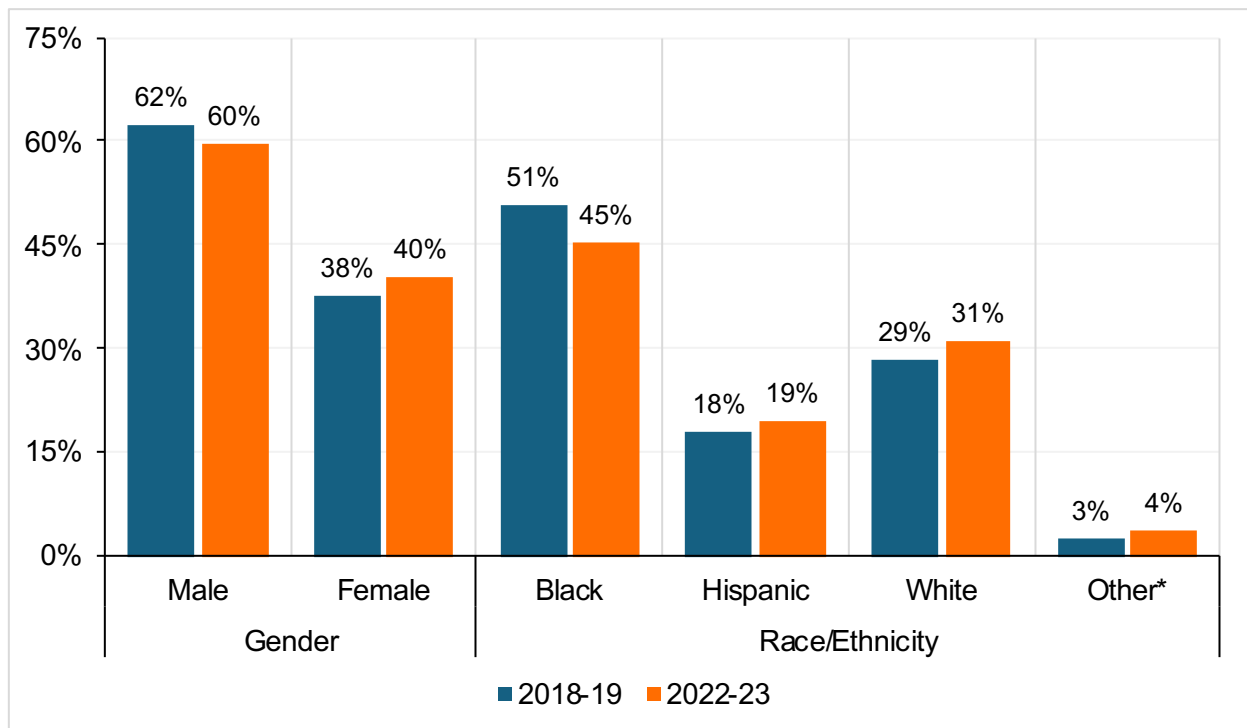
THERE WERE FEWER FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SUPERINTENDENT TURNOVER.

- Being a leader of a larger Council district was associated with higher rates of turnover. This relationship became insignificant after adjusting for cost-of-living.
- Being a leader of a CGCS district with lower representation of economically-disadvantaged students was associated with higher rates of turnover at the superintendent position.
- Higher post-pandemic salary was associated with higher rates of superintendent turnover.

SUPERINTENDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Analyzing the demographic characteristics of urban school district superintendents from 2018-19 to 2022-23 reveals significant trends. Overall, the total number of superintendents serving in 77 member districts over five years from 2018-19 through 2022-23 was 148. Of these, 85 were male and 63 were female. There has been a slight increase in female representation among Council superintendents, with the percentage of female superintendents rising slightly from the 2018-19 academic year. There has been an insignificant decrease in the number of Black superintendents since the 2018-19 academic year, and an insignificant increase in representation among White and Hispanic superintendents. Superintendents that are Asian, Pacific Islander, or Indigenous American continue to make up a very small portion of urban district superintendents (Figure 1).

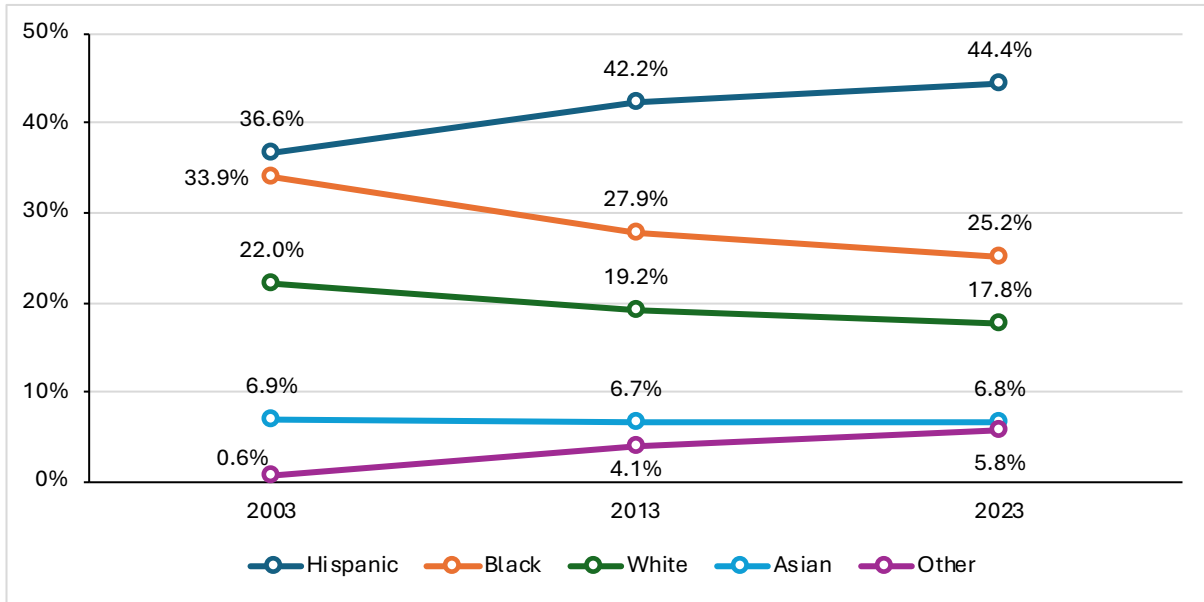
Figure 1. Gender and Race Representation among Council Member-District Superintendents



* Includes district leaders that, in the aggregate, constitute less than five percent of superintendents leading Council districts

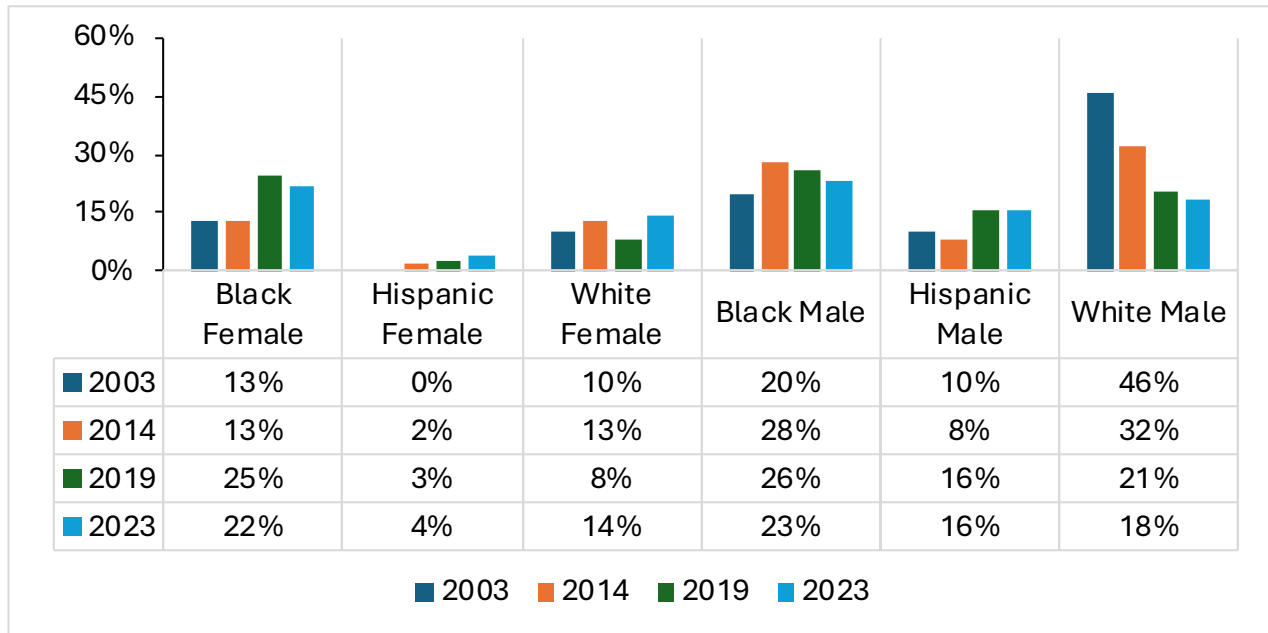
As shown in Figure 2, there has been a notable increase in the percentage of Hispanic students in large urban school districts, currently 44% of urban school district students since 2003. Black students (25%) and White students (18%) remain the second and third largest groups of students in urban school districts, though their enrollment rates have been steadily declining over time. Enrollment of Asian students, the smallest group of students in urban school districts, has remained steady over time.

Figure 2. Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity among Council Member Districts, 2003-2023



Similarly, superintendent demographics over this period became more reflective of the student populations they serve. The most significant increase has been among Black female superintendents, followed by Hispanic males, White females, and Hispanic females. The largest decline has been in White male superintendents, though White superintendents remain the second largest group of urban superintendents (32%). The majority of urban superintendents are now Black and Hispanic (65% in total). Of note, however, is the very small increase in Hispanic female superintendents over the last 20 years (Figure 3).

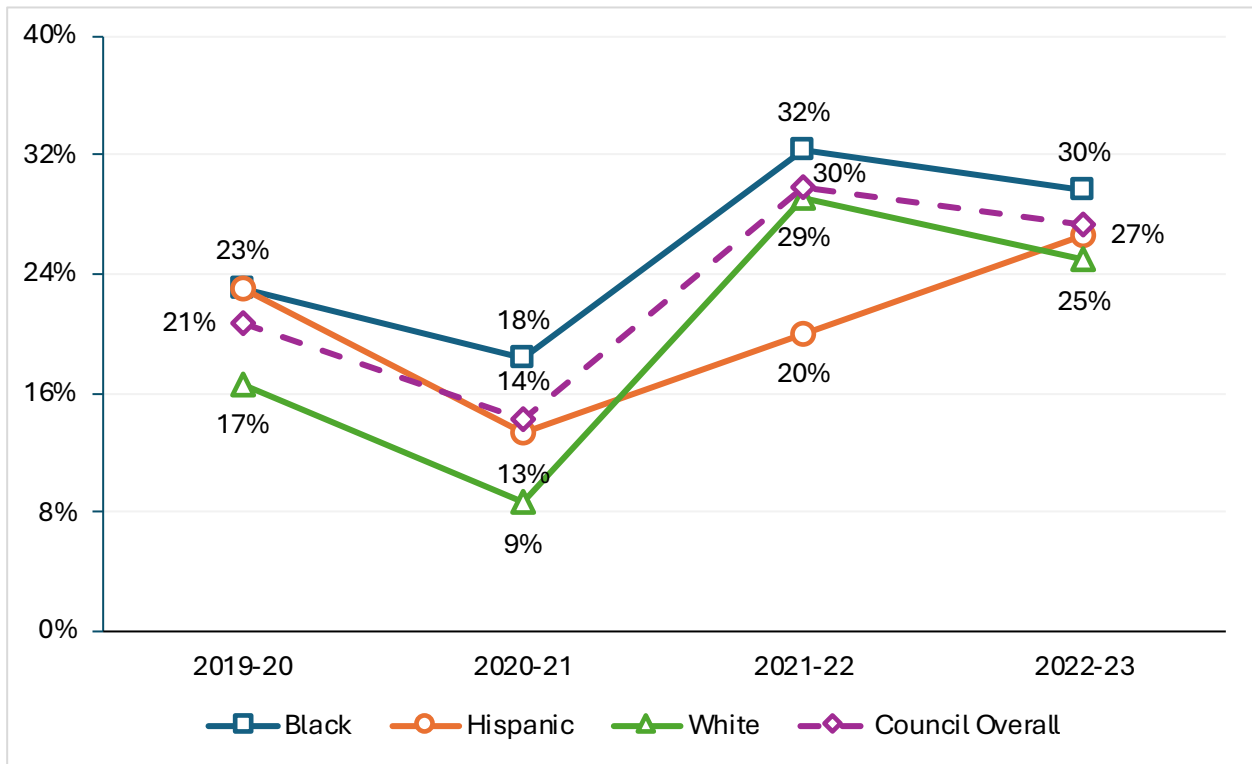
Figure 3. Race/Ethnicity and Gender of CGCS Superintendents: 2003, 2014, 2019, and 2023



Race/Ethnicity

Rates of superintendent turnover among districts led by Black superintendents tended to be greater than those seen across the Council, averaging 26 percent across the years considered. Hispanic superintendents in Council districts were among the most likely to turn over in the year examined prior to the pandemic but have since seen rates of turnover that were lower than those observed across the Council overall. White superintendents tended to have rates of turnover that were slightly lower than those observed across Council member-districts as a whole and were typically lower than those seen across the racial groups considered, with the exception of the 2021-22 academic year (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Superintendent Turnover Rates by Racial Group and Year



Gender

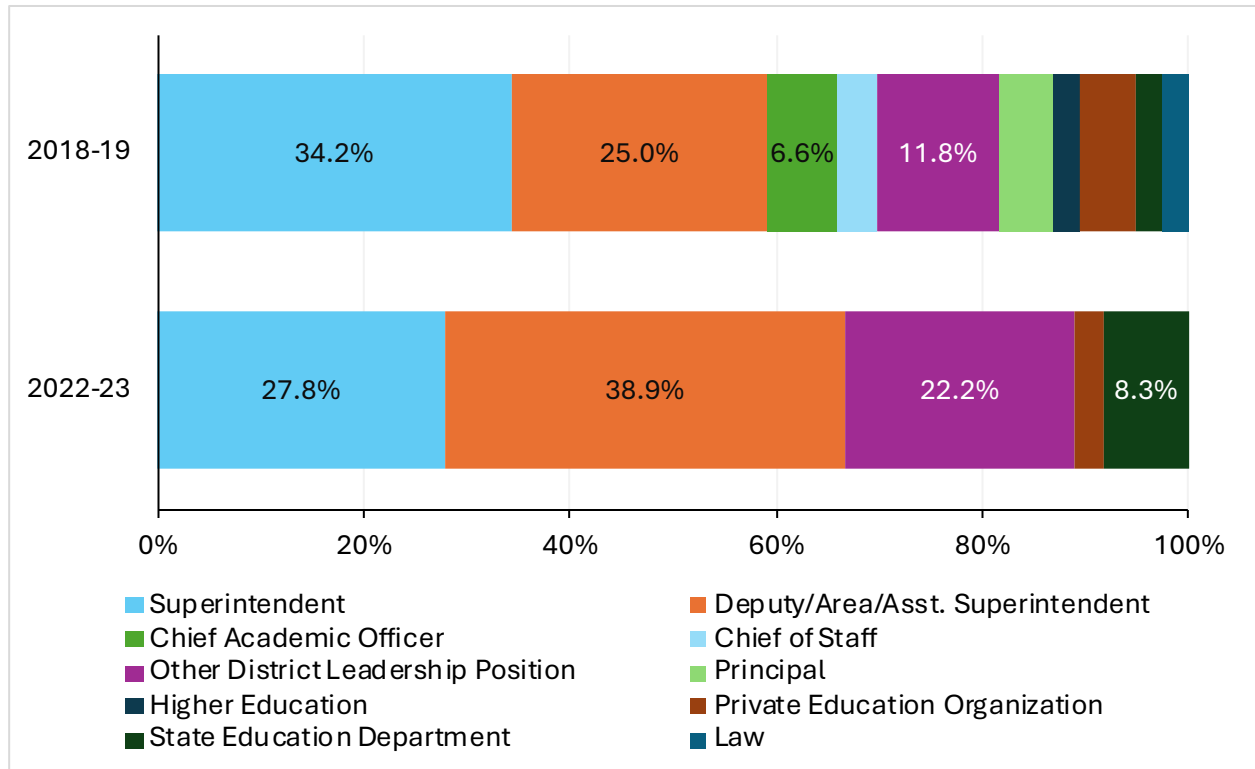
Before the onset of the pandemic, women were underrepresented in the superintendency, comprising slightly more than a third of superintendents nationwide, and research indicated a gradual increase in female representation had begun (Drake, 2023; Gullo & Sperandio, 2020; Wallace, 2015). The pandemic seems to have exacerbated the male/female gap across all districts, with a rapid increase in the turnover of female leaders in districts undergoing leadership transitions (White, R., 2023). Despite some improvements in female representation, the percentage of female superintendents leading Council districts marginally increased from 38 percent in 2018-19 to 40 percent in 2022-23 (Figure 1).

The Council's historical analysis of women in the superintendency revealed increases in the representation of Black, Hispanic and White female superintendents from 2002-03 to 2022-23 across urban school districts. The rate of change among Black female superintendents was highest, nearly doubling from 2003 (13%) to 2023 (22%) (see Figure 3).

Pre-Superintendency Role

Discernible shifts in pre-superintendency roles were also apparent. As illustrated in Figure 6, pre-pandemic (2018-19) superintendents came from a relatively diverse set of prior roles. The greatest change after the pandemic is the increase of superintendents who held deputy, area, or assistant superintendent roles (25% to 38.9%), other district leadership positions (11.8% to 22.2%), or leadership positions in state education departments (2.6% to 8.3%) before their current superintendent role (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Pre-Superintendency Roles, 2018-19 and 2022-23 School Years



DISTRICT LEADER SALARY

Comparing average base salary of district leaders pre- and post-pandemic, it was found that of the average base salary changed approximately five percent between 2018-19 and 2022-23, \$283,685 and \$296,593, respectively. This section of the report examines the relationship between district characteristics, superintendent demographics, and superintendent salaries.

Superintendent Salary by Student Population Size

When considering the impact of district size on superintendent salaries, it was found that Council district leaders heading systems having more than 100,000 students enrolled had higher average salaries both before and after the pandemic. The change in average salary among superintendents in this group was also greater than districts of smaller sizes (Table 1). The increases in salary corresponding to increases in district size were found to be statistically significant in both the 2018-19² and 2022-23³ academic years.

Table 1. Average Superintendent Salary by District Size, 2018-19 and 2022-23

	2018-19		2022-23		
Student Population Size	<i>n</i>	Average Salary	<i>n</i>	Average Salary	% Change
Less than 35,000	18	\$235,087	23	\$251,992	7.2%
Between 35,000 and 49,999	21	\$278,968	18	\$286,749	2.8%
Between 50,000 and 100,000	20	\$305,199	20	\$320,866	5.1%
Greater than 100,000	18	\$313,880	16	\$338,650	7.9%
Cost of Living Adjusted	(in 2023 dollars)		2022-23		% Change
Less than 35,000		\$325,617		\$278,506	-16.9%
Between 35,000 and 49,999		\$358,957		\$307,684	-16.7%
Between 50,000 and 100,000		\$406,781		\$361,684	-12.5%
Greater than 100,000		\$402,571		\$381,795	-5.4%

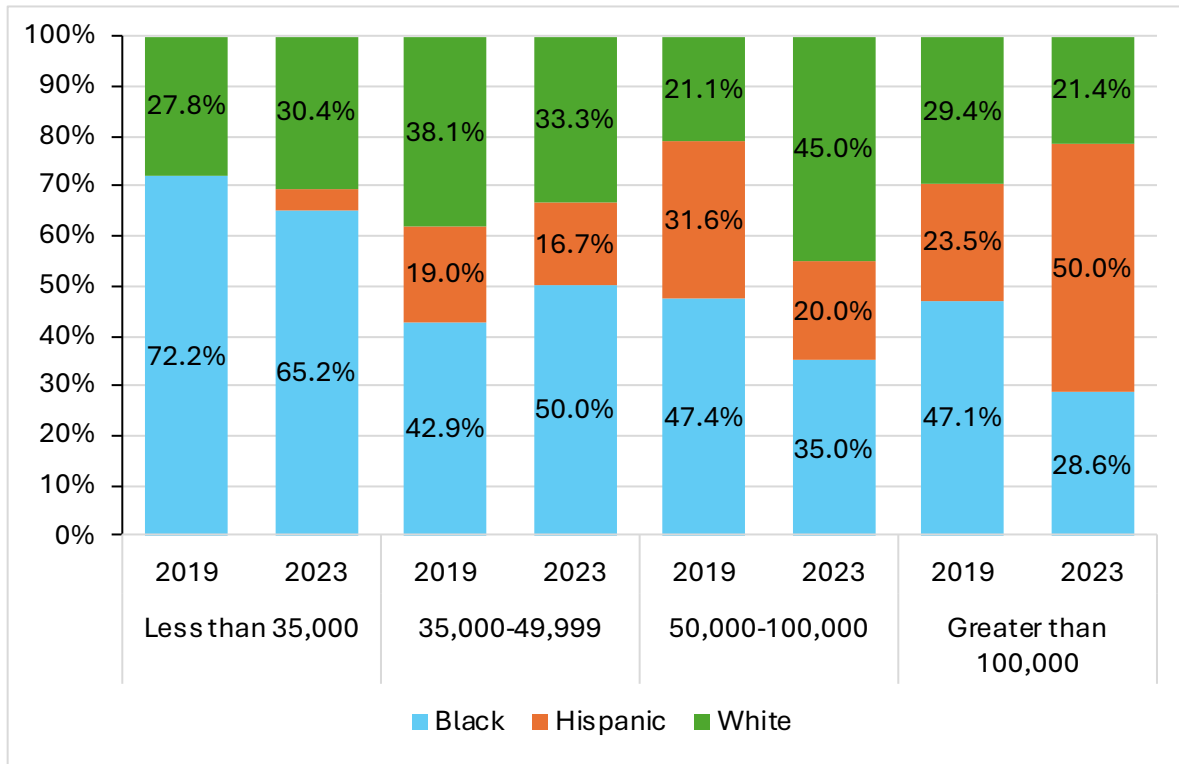
Knowing the relationship between district size and superintendent base salary, we then examined district size by the race/ethnicity of superintendents. Our study found that the majority of superintendents in smaller districts are Black. Given the findings related to salary and district size, the distribution of superintendents by race and district size has implications affecting salary across racial lines as well.

When analyzing superintendent demographics by district size, we find that in smaller districts (less than 35,000 students), the majority (65.2%) of superintendents are Black - a slight decline from 72.2% in 2018-19. In contrast, half of the superintendents in the largest urban school districts (greater than 100,000 students) are Hispanic (50%), a significant increase from 23.5% in 2018-19. Additionally, nearly half (45%) of superintendents in mid-sized urban districts (50,000-100,000 students) are White, rising from 21.1% in 2018-19 (Figure 8). These differences in placements of superintendents by district size explain a significant portion of salary disparities across racial groups.

² $\tau_b = .319, p < .001$

³ $\tau_b = .484, p < .001$

Figure 6. Proportional Distribution of Superintendents, District Size by Race/Ethnicity, 2018-19 and 2022-23



Looking at superintendent salaries by race and district size more closely, the trend across district sizes appears to play out consistently along racial lines as well, with salaries increasing as district size increases. Hispanic superintendents, those making up the largest share of Council district leadership in 2022-23, were found to have the highest average salaries among larger-sized districts while Black superintendents are the highest paid in the smallest urban districts (Table 2).

Table 2. Superintendent Salary by District Size and Race/Ethnicity, 2018-19 and 2022-23

	2018-19		2022-23		
Student Population Size	<i>n</i>	Average Salary	<i>n</i>	Average Salary	% Change
Less than 35,000	18	\$235,087	23	\$251,992	7.2%
Black	13	\$238,005	15	\$255,953	7.0%
Hispanic	0		1	\$200,000	
White	5	\$227,502	7	\$250,758	9.3%
Between 35,000-49,999	21	\$278,968	18	\$286,749	2.8%
Black	9	\$276,583	9	\$266,276	-3.9%
Hispanic	4	\$323,948	3	\$327,557	1.1%
White	8	\$259,162	6	\$297,057	12.8%
Between 50,000-100,000	20	\$305,199	20	\$320,866	5.1%
Black	9	\$315,497	7	\$318,463	0.9%
Hispanic	6	\$322,093	4	\$340,828	5.5%
White	4	\$259,240	9	\$313,864	17.4%
Greater than 100,000	18	\$313,880	16	\$338,650	7.9%
Black	8	\$320,614	4	\$328,250	2.3%
Hispanic	4	\$342,469	7	\$356,486	3.9%
White	5	\$295,012	3	\$330,000	10.6%
Cost-of-Living Adjusted	(in 2023 dollars)		2022-23		% Change
Less than 35,000	\$325,617		\$278,506		-16.9%
Black	\$326,594		\$285,251		-14.5%
Hispanic			\$191,183		
White	\$323,074		\$276,198		-17.0%
Between 35,000-49,999	\$358,957		\$307,684		-16.7%
Black	\$335,063		\$289,237		-15.8%
Hispanic	\$440,056		\$339,488		-29.6%
White	\$345,286		\$319,451		-8.1%
Between 50,000-100,000	\$406,781		\$361,684		-12.5%
Black	\$405,649		\$361,518		-12.2%
Hispanic	\$447,889		\$382,464		-17.1%
White	\$354,223		\$352,578		-0.5%
Greater than 100,000	\$402,571		\$381,795		-5.4%
Black	\$427,123		\$356,490		-19.8%
Hispanic	\$441,027		\$415,077		-6.3%
White	\$361,636		\$364,416		0.8%

Superintendent Salary by Student FRPL Rate

This section of the report provides a look at representation of economically disadvantaged students, as measured by the rate of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) in districts, relative to superintendent salaries. In these analyses, districts were grouped based on the percentage of FRPL students in the population in a manner that evenly distributes the number of districts across four groups (See Appendix Table A for quartile cut points). As can be seen in Table 3, there appears to be no discernible relationship between the percentage of FRPL students in the district and superintendent salaries.

Table 3. Average Superintendent Salary by FRL Student Representation, 2018-19 and 2022-23

	2018-19		2022-23		
FRPL Representation	<i>n</i>	Average Salary	<i>n</i>	Average Salary	% Change
1st Quartile (<25th %ile)	16	\$293,090	19	\$308,988	5.4%
2nd Quartile (25th-50th %ile)	19	\$268,397	19	\$284,009	5.8%
3rd Quartile (50th-75th %ile)	20	\$302,432	19	\$300,680	-0.6%
4th Quartile (<75th %ile)	19	\$273,269	19	\$292,695	7.1%
Cost-of-Living Adjusted	(in 2023 dollars)		2022-23		% Change
1st Quartile (<25th %ile)		\$372,350		\$329,673	-15.0%
2nd Quartile (25th-50th %ile)		\$346,104		\$307,237	-12.2%
3rd Quartile (50th-75th %ile)		\$395,952		\$334,030	-19.4%
4th Quartile (<75th %ile)		\$377,714		\$345,261	-9.2%

Superintendent Salary by Gender

Considerations of differences in salary across gender show only a slight gap between female and male superintendents across Council districts. While male superintendents have slightly greater salaries on average (Table 4), results of analyses of the relationship between gender among Council district leaders and superintendent salary indicate that the differences are not significant.

Table 4. Average Superintendent Salary by Gender, 2018-19 and 2022-23

	2018-19		2022-23		
Superintendent Gender	<i>n</i>	Average Salary	<i>n</i>	Average Salary	% Change
Female	29	\$282,824	30	\$291,693	3.1%
Male	48	\$284,205	46	\$299,788	5.5%
Cost-of-Living Adjusted	(in 2023 dollars)		2022-23		% Change
Female		\$368,242		\$328,690	-10.7%
Male		\$377,126		\$329,286	-12.7%

Superintendent Salary by School Board Type

Turning to school board types, while superintendents in Council districts having elected school boards appear to have higher salaries on average (Table 5), there were no meaningful differences in district leader salaries across school board types.

Table 5. Average Superintendent Salary by School Board Type

	2018-19		2022-23		
Board Type	<i>n</i>	Average Salary	<i>n</i>	Average Salary	% Change
Appointed	9	\$280,308	9	\$292,392	4.3%
Elected	68	\$284,132	67	\$297,157	4.6%
Cost-of-Living Adjusted	(in 2023 dollars)		2022-23		% Change
Appointed		\$343,880		\$310,363	-9.7%
Elected		\$377,738		\$331,561	-12.2%

DISTRICT LEADER TENURE

Preceding Superintendents

This portion of the report considers length of tenure among permanent Council district leaders that have most recently left the position as of December 2024. This section will examine superintendent tenure and whether district characteristics, or those of the district leaders, have any substantial effect on the length of time superintendents held their positions.

Overall, the average tenure of a district leader was found to be approximately 4.85 years. When looking at differences in tenure along the lines of race and gender (Table 6), it was found that women had significantly shorter tenures than their male counterparts⁴. Black superintendents were also found to have significantly shorter tenures than those of superintendents that were not Black⁵. Hispanic Male superintendents were also found to have significantly longer tenures⁶. Overall, 66 of the 77 districts examined had leaders whose tenures ended during or after the COVID-19 pandemic (between 2019-20 and 2022-23).

⁴ $t(75)=2.1, p = .036$

⁵ $t(62.883)=2.2, p = .035$

⁶ $t(75)=-2.0, p = .047$

Table 6. Average Length of Preceding Superintendent Tenure by Race and Gender

Superintendent Characteristic	<i>n</i>	Preceding Superintendent Tenure (in years)
Gender		
Female	27	3.82
Male	50	5.41
Race		
Black	39	4.09
Hispanic	10	5.97
White	26	5.67
Race and Gender		
Black Female	15	3.84
Hispanic Female	3	3.27
White Female	7	4.12
Black Male	24	4.25
Hispanic Male	7	7.13
White Male	19	6.25

An examination of superintendent tenure by district school board type showed no statistically significant differences across school board types. Length of tenure was also found to not be affected by factors such as district size (Table 7), superintendent salary (Table 8), or student population demographics (Table 9).

Table 7. Average Length of Preceding Superintendent Tenure by District Size

District Size by Enrollment	<i>n</i>	Preceding Superintendent Tenure (in years)
1st Quartile (<25th %ile)	19	4.46
2nd Quartile (25th-50th %ile)	20	5.11
3rd Quartile (50th-75th %ile)	19	4.58
4th Quartile (<75th %ile)	19	5.25

Table 8. Average Length of Preceding Superintendent Tenure by Salary

Superintendent Salary	<i>n</i>	Preceding Superintendent Tenure (in years)
1st Quartile (<25th %ile)	19	3.72
2nd Quartile (25th-50th %ile)	19	4.60
3rd Quartile (50th-75th %ile)	19	5.71
4th Quartile (<75th %ile)	19	5.22

Table 9. Average Length of Preceding Superintendent Tenure by Student Demographics

Student Demographics	<i>n</i>	Preceding Superintendent Tenure (in years)
Predominantly Black	31	4.19
Predominantly Hispanic	34	5.36
Predominantly Other Races	3	4.39
Predominantly White	9	5.39

Current Superintendents

Similar to the immediately preceding section, this portion of the report considers length of tenure among Council district leaders that currently serve in the position as of March 2025. This section will examine superintendent tenure and whether district characteristics, or those of the district leaders, have any substantial effect on the length of time superintendents held their positions.

The average tenure among current Council leaders was found to be approximately 2.72 years. Examining differences in tenure along the lines of race and gender (Table 10), it was found that women had somewhat shorter tenures than their male counterparts, though the difference was not significant. Hispanic Male superintendents were also found to have been in the role longer on average, while Hispanic Females were found to have been the role for the least amount of time.

Table 10. Average Length of Current Superintendent Tenure by Race and Gender

Superintendent Characteristic	<i>n</i>	Current Superintendent Tenure (in years)
Gender		
Female	34	2.32
Male	43	3.03
Race		
Black	37	2.83
Hispanic	15	2.77
White	19	2.96
Race and Gender		
Black Female	19	2.65
Hispanic Female	5	1.92
White Female	6	2.76
Black Male	18	3.02
Hispanic Male	10	3.19
White Male	13	3.05

Similar to findings among the most recent preceding superintendents discussed, length of tenure among current district leaders was found to not be affected by factors such as district size (Table 11), superintendent salary (Table 12), or student population demographics (Table 13).

Table 11. Average Length of Current Superintendent Tenure by District Size

District Size by Enrollment	<i>n</i>	Current Superintendent Tenure (in years)
1st Quartile (<25th %ile)	19	3.43
2nd Quartile (25th-50th %ile)	19	2.69
3rd Quartile (50th-75th %ile)	20	2.49
4th Quartile (>75th %ile)	19	2.27

Table 12. *Length of Current Superintendent Tenure by Salary*

Superintendent Salary	<i>n</i>	Current Superintendent Tenure (in years)
1st Quartile (<25th %ile)	19	3.50
2nd Quartile (25th-50th %ile)	19	2.76
3rd Quartile (50th-75th %ile)	20	2.29
4th Quartile (<75th %ile)	18	2.62

Table 13. *Average Length of Current Superintendent Tenure by Student Demographics*

Student Demographics	<i>n</i>	Current Superintendent Tenure (in years)
Predominantly Black	31	3.38
Predominantly Hispanic	34	2.32
Predominantly Other Races	3	1.31
Predominantly White	9	2.39

Comparison of Tenure, Current vs. Preceding

This section will provide a comparison of superintendent tenure length between current Council district leaders and their immediate predecessors. Looking across all districts, the average length of tenure for preceding superintendents, the majority of which completed their term prior to, during, or after the pandemic, was around 2.13 years longer than those currently serving as district leaders. When comparing tenures along gender lines, there appears to be a wider margin in average length of tenure between former and current male superintendents (2.4 years) compared to females (1.5 years). When considering race, the difference in length of tenure between former and current Black superintendents was far smaller (1.26 years) than those observed among their Hispanic (3.2 years) and White (2.71 years) counterparts. The gap in tenure length between current leaders and their predecessors was found to be largest among White Males (3.20 years) and Hispanic Males (3.94 years). The difference in tenure length among former and current leaders of the smallest Council districts was found to be discernibly smaller (1.03 years) than larger districts, where the average difference was around 2.5 years (Table 14).

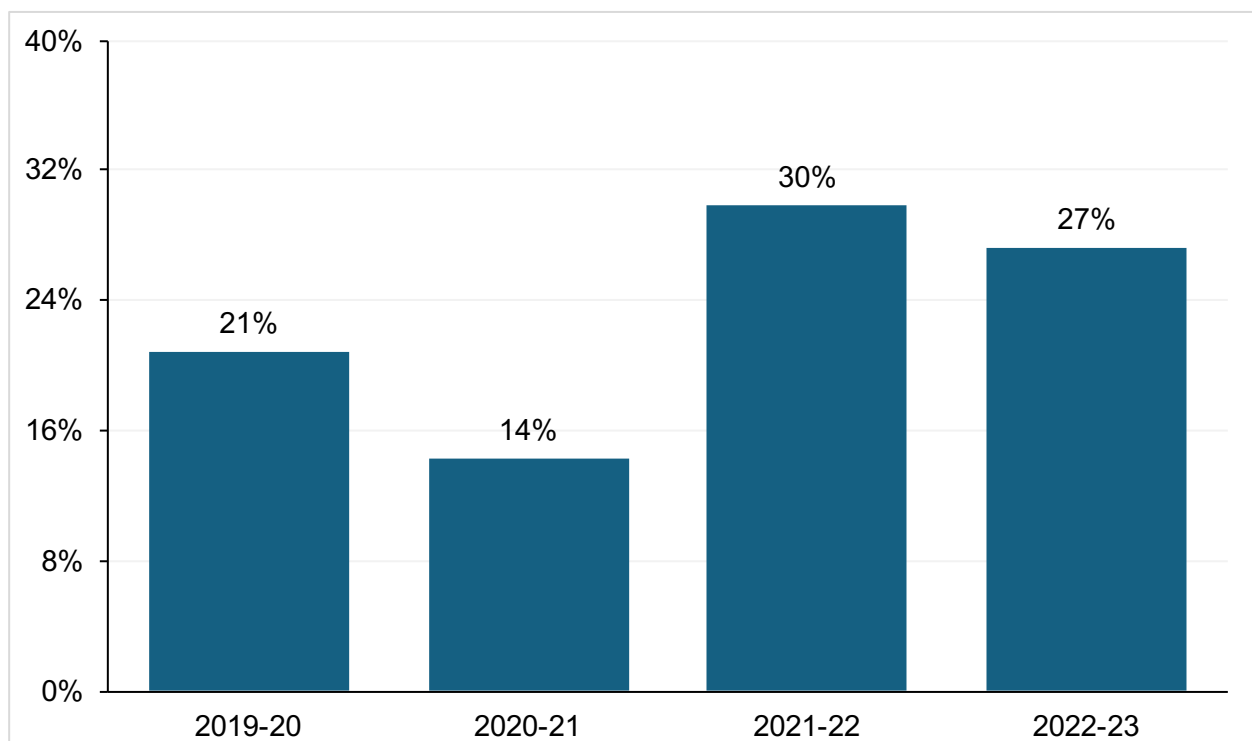
Table 14. Average Length of Superintendent Tenure by Race and Gender

Superintendent Characteristic	CURRENT		PRECEDING		Difference
	<i>n</i>	Average Tenure (in years)	<i>n</i>	Average Tenure (in years)	
All Leaders	77	2.72	77	4.85	2.13
Gender					
Female	34	2.32	27	3.82	1.50
Male	43	3.03	50	5.41	2.38
Race					
Black	37	2.83	39	4.09	1.26
Hispanic	15	2.77	10	5.97	3.20
White	19	2.96	26	5.67	2.71
Race and Gender					
Black Female	19	2.65	15	3.84	1.19
Hispanic Female	5	1.92	3	3.27	1.35
White Female	6	2.76	7	4.12	1.36
Black Male	18	3.02	24	4.25	1.23
Hispanic Male	10	3.19	7	7.13	3.94
White Male	13	3.05	19	6.25	3.20
Greater than 100,000					
1st Quartile (<25th %ile)	19	3.43	19	4.46	1.03
2nd Quartile (25th-50th %ile)	19	2.69	20	5.11	2.42
3rd Quartile (50th-75th %ile)	20	2.49	19	4.58	2.09
4th Quartile (>75th %ile)	19	2.27	19	5.25	2.98

DISTRICT LEADER TURNOVER

Noting the shorter tenure of current superintendents, we next analyze turnover among Council district leaders from the 2018-19 through the 2022-23 academic years, while considering various district and superintendent characteristics. For the purposes of the analyses described in this section, “turnover” will be determined as the number of superintendents in Council member districts hired on a permanent basis. Between the 2018-19 and 2022-23 academic years, 21 Council districts retained the same superintendent, 41 districts hired two permanent superintendents, and 15 districts hired three permanent system leaders. Among Council member-districts, approximately 73 percent replaced their district’s chief executive between the 2018-19 and 2022-23 academic years. The average rate of turnover per year among Council districts was found to be around 23 percent. Figure 7 illustrates the rates of turnover each year during this period. In the 2019-20 school year, Council district superintendents turned over at a rate of about 21 percent, followed by rates of about 14 percent in 2020-21, around 30 percent in 2021-22, and approximately 27 percent in 2022-23.

Figure 7. Rates of Superintendent Turnover across CGCS Districts, 2019-20 through 2022-23



Superintendent Turnover by Student Population Size

Looking at district size by student enrollment, the average number of superintendent replacements in larger districts was significantly higher than smaller districts during the pandemic. In 2018-19 larger districts experienced higher superintendent turnover compared to smaller districts⁷. Similar patterns were observed in the 2022-23 school year and the relationship between district size and increased turnover was significant⁸ (Table 15).

⁷ District size (by enrollment) in 2018-19 was found to be positively correlated with the number of Council district superintendents permanently hired between 2018-19 and 2022-23 ($r(75) = .228, p = .046$).

⁸ District size (by enrollment) in 2022-23 was also found to be positively correlated with the number of Council district superintendents permanently hired between 2018-19 and 2022-23 ($r(75) = .278, p = .014$).

Table 15. Average Number of Superintendents from 2018 through 2023 by District Size

Student Population Size	2018-19		2022-23	
	<i>n</i>	Average # Superintendents	<i>n</i>	Average # Superintendents
Less than 35,000	18	1.8	23	1.7
Between 35,000 and 49,999	21	1.7	18	2.0
Between 50,000 and 100,000	20	2.0	20	1.9
Greater than 100,000	18	2.2	16	2.2

Superintendent Turnover by Student Population Racial/Ethnic Demographics

The data provided in Table 16 indicates that none of the differences in superintendent turnover by race/ethnic differences are statistically significant.

Table 16. Average Number of Superintendents from 2018 through 2023 by District Student Demographics, 2018-19 and 2022-23

Student Demographics	2018-19		2022-23	
	<i>n</i>	Average # Superintendents	<i>n</i>	Average # Superintendents
Predominantly Black	30	1.8	31	1.8
Predominantly Hispanic	33	2.0	34	2.0
Predominantly Other Races	3	1.7	3	1.7
Predominantly White	11	2.2	9	2.2

Superintendent Turnover by Student FRPL Rate

In looking at the relationship between representation of FRPL students and superintendent turnover, Table 17 illustrates that Council districts having greater representation of economically-disadvantaged students were found to be significantly less likely to replace their superintendents⁹.

Table 17. Average Number of Superintendents from 2018 through 2023 by District FRPL Student Representation, 2018-19 and 2022-23

Student Demographics	2018-19		2022-23	
	<i>n</i>	Average # Superintendents	<i>n</i>	Average # Superintendents
1st Quartile (<25th %ile)	16	2.2	19	2.2
2nd Quartile (25th-50th %ile)	19	2.1	19	2.1
3rd Quartile (50th-75th %ile)	20	1.9	20	2.0
4th Quartile (<75th %ile)	19	1.6	19	1.4

⁹ There was a negative relationship between representation of FRPL students in Council districts in 2018-19 and number of superintendents hired by Council districts between 2018 and 2023 ($r(75)=-.395, p = .000$). Similarly, there was also a negative relationship between representation of FRPL students in Council districts in 2022-23 and number of superintendents hired by Council districts between 2018 and 2023 ($r(75)=-.395, p = .000$).

Superintendent Turnover by Gender and Race

When examining turnover among Council district leaders across racial and gender lines, no meaningful differences were found. Between gender groups, districts originally led by female superintendents had an average of two superintendents from 2019 through 2023, districts originally led by male superintendents in 2019 had a similar average, with the difference not being significant. The trend was comparable along racial lines, with districts averaging approximately two superintendents between 2019 and 2023. Differences in superintendent turnover among racial groups were not significant. Taking race and gender together, districts led by the examined comparable race/gender groups had similar averages in the number of superintendents between 2019 and 2023, and differences were found to not be significant (Table 18).

Table 18. Average Number of Superintendents from 2019 through 2023 by Race and Gender, 2018-19 and 2022-23

Superintendent Characteristic	2018-19		2022-23	
	<i>n</i>	Average # Superintendents	<i>n</i>	Average # Superintendents
Gender				
Female	29	2.0	31	2.0
Male	48	1.9	46	1.8
Race				
Black	39	1.9	35	1.9
Hispanic	14	2.0	15	2.0
White	22	1.9	25	1.9
Race and Gender				
Black Female	19	2.0	17	1.9
Hispanic Female	2	2.0	3	2.3
White Female	6	2.2	11	2.1
Black Male	20	1.9	18	1.8
Hispanic Male	12	2.0	12	1.9
White Male	16	1.8	14	1.7

Superintendent Turnover by School Board Type

Turning to superintendent turnover by school board type (appointed vs. elected), the average number of superintendents hired by school board type had no effect on the rates at which superintendents transitioned from their positions during the pandemic (Table 19).

Table 19. Average Number of Superintendents from 2018 through 2023 by School Board Type, 2018-19 and 2022-23

Board Type	<i>n</i>	Average # Superintendents
Appointed	9	\$280,308
Elected	68	\$284,132

Superintendent Turnover by Salary

In the case of superintendent salary, there were no statistically significant differences in trends in turnover by salary in the 2018-19 or 2022-23 academic years (Table 20). (See Appendix Table B for salary quartile cut points).

Table 20. Average Number of Superintendents from 2018 through 2023 by Superintendent Salary, 2018-19 and 2022-23

Superintendent Salary	2018-19		2022-23	
	<i>n</i>	Average # Superintendents	<i>n</i>	Average # Superintendents
1st Quartile (<25th %ile)	19	1.9	18	1.7
2nd Quartile (25th-50th %ile)	19	1.7	20	1.9
3rd Quartile (50th-75th %ile)	20	1.9	19	2.0
4th Quartile (<75th %ile)	19	2.2	19	2.1
Cost-of-Living Adjusted	(in 2023 dollars)		2022-23	
1st Quartile (<25th %ile)	20	1.8	19	1.8
2nd Quartile (25th-50th %ile)	19	2.0	19	2.0
3rd Quartile (50th-75th %ile)	19	1.7	19	2.1
4th Quartile (<75th %ile)	19	2.2	19	1.8

SUMMARY

Three major points of focus in this report were superintendent base pay, turnover rates, and tenure. The goal in this report was to gain some understanding of changes in the position across large urban city school districts who are members of the Council of the Great City Schools and making comparisons—where possible—between the status of the workforce pre- and post-pandemic. Disparities in pay, hiring, and retention at the executive leadership level along the lines of race and gender are common points of tension in conversations on organizational management.

The ten highest paid Council district superintendents in the 2022-23 academic year led districts in four states: California (5), Texas (3), Florida (1), and New York (1), which also happens to be the nation's most populous states—and largest economies—containing the two largest major cities boasting the country's largest Hispanic populations. Nine of the ten Council districts having the highest paid system leaders also had predominantly Hispanic student populations, and five of the ten superintendents in those districts were Hispanic.

While turnover rates were found to have increased during the pandemic, no distinguishable patterns along the lines of race/ethnicity were found and any differences were not significant. The urban superintendency has become increasingly diverse over the past two decades, with the majority of superintendents now being Black or Hispanic.

This study also found that gender had little impact on superintendent salary. The gender of Council district leaders was also determined to have no meaningful effect on the rate at which districts replaced their superintendent during or after the pandemic. Moreover, no significant relationship was found regarding student racial constitution and leadership turnover. However, we found that current superintendents have shorter tenures than preceding superintendents and female superintendents tended to have significantly shorter tenures compared to male district leaders.

One of the more interesting findings in this analysis pertained to district FRPL rates which indicated that superintendent salaries were unaffected by the percentage of economically-disadvantaged students in districts and turnover rates slightly increased among Council districts having lower FRPL rates. A recent RAND Corporation survey indicated that superintendents in large urban districts, which typically have higher FRPL rates, were significantly more likely to believe that the stresses and challenges of the role were ultimately worthwhile (RAND Corporation, 2023). While it is understood that there are a great number of elements that may have informed these perspectives, such as salary, career and/or political ambition, or commitment to mission-driven work, these insights highlight the complex dynamics between socioeconomic factors and leadership stability in education.

District size was related to superintendent salaries, as increases in student population correlate with increases in district leader pay. This was the case even after adjustments were made for cost-of-living differences. Turnover rates also increased as student populations increased. Student enrollment did not, however, appear to have a meaningful impact on the length of superintendent tenure. In addition, differences in school board type were not associated with superintendent salary or turnover across Council member districts.

Finally, the study found that districts with higher rates of superintendent turnover were correlated with higher superintendent base salary. In other words, districts with lower base salaries for superintendents experienced less turnover. After adjusting for cost-of-living and inflation, however, this relationship was no longer significant.

LIMITATIONS

This study does not include the Puerto Rico Department of Education due to its unique structure and governance. The two-month data collection and analysis timeframe, conducted in February and March of 2023, allowed researchers to confine the study but may not capture all relevant dimensions of superintendent experiences during the school year. For example, some districts during the school year may have had multiple superintendents who varied in race/ethnicity, salary, and previous roles. The window allowed researchers to focus on a relatively stable snapshot in time. Finally, analyses and findings comparing superintendent base salaries do not include controls for differences in cost-of-living that are commonly attributed to locale.

CONCLUSION

The demographic composition of superintendents across Council member districts offers some perspective on gender and racial diversity within educational leadership roles. Most significantly, the shift in superintendent demographic characteristics by race/ethnicity more closely reflects demographic characteristics of urban student enrollment, highlighting progress toward more diverse and representative district leadership. The predominance of male superintendents underscores the ongoing challenges in gender representation among district leaders, strengthening the need for concerted efforts to foster gender equity, particularly for Hispanic female (whose rates have only slightly improved) superintendents in Council member districts. Lastly, we must highlight the shorter tenure of currently serving superintendents and the increased rates of turnover in the superintendency post-pandemic.

The insights from this study have implications for school boards and administrators focused on enhancing leadership stability in urban school districts. To address the demographic shifts and factors influencing superintendent turnover, it is essential to refine recruitment and retention strategies that emphasize racial and gender equity. Developing tailored mentorship and leadership programs can significantly aid career advancement for underrepresented groups. Moreover, enhancing professional development opportunities, especially in areas like crisis management, can empower superintendents to navigate challenges more effectively. These opportunities should also consider how gender influences differences within groups and the experiences of leaders in superintendent roles.

Finally, school boards should prioritize governance training that underscores best practices in collaboration and transparent communication, strengthening superintendent-board relationships. Proactive efforts to bridge the gender gap and cultivate an organizational culture that appreciates diverse perspectives will enrich decision-making and policy development across large urban school districts.

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APPENDIX A: SUPPLEMENTARY TABLES AND FIGURES

Table A. *Cut Points for FRPL Student Representation Quartiles, 2018-19 and 2022-23*

FRPL Representation	2018-19	2022-23
Minimum	29.4%	35.1%
1st Quartile (<25th %ile)	< 57.2%	< 59.9%
2nd Quartile (25th-50th %ile)	57.2%-68.9%	59.9%-75.2%
3rd Quartile (50th-75th %ile)	69%-82.8%	75.3%-83.2%
4th Quartile (<75th %ile)	> 82.8%	> 83.2%
Maximum	100%	100%

Table B. *Cut Points for Superintendent Salary Quartiles, 2018-19 and 2022-23*

Superintendent Salary	2018-19	2022-23
Minimum	\$150,000	\$200,000
1st Quartile (<25th %ile)	< \$250,000	< \$255,000
2nd Quartile (25th-50th %ile)	\$250,000-\$279,999	\$255,000-\$287,499
3rd Quartile (50th-75th %ile)	\$280,000-\$320,000	\$287,500-\$330,781
4th Quartile (<75th %ile)	> \$320,000	> \$330,781
Maximum	\$477,753	\$440,000

Table C. *Cut Points for District Enrollment (Immediate Predecessor Analyses)*

Group	Enrollment
Minimum	12,075 students
1st Quartile (<25th %ile)	< 32,991 students
2nd Quartile (25th-50th %ile)	32,991 - 48,205 students
3rd Quartile (50th-75th %ile)	48,206 - 93,795 students
4th Quartile (<75th %ile)	> 93,795 students
Maximum	912,064 students

Table D. *Cut Points for Superintendent Salary (Immediate Predecessor Analyses)*

	Salary–COLA-adjusted, 2024 dollars
Minimum	\$113,405
1st Quartile (<25th %ile)	< \$258,132
2nd Quartile (25th-50th %ile)	\$258,132 - \$299,414
3rd Quartile (50th-75th %ile)	\$299,414 - \$365,702
4th Quartile (>75th %ile)	> \$365,702
Maximum	\$512,627