

Female Graduates in Educational Administration: Myths and Realities

Despite the fact that many women are well prepared and willing to take on roles of leadership within the public schools, they are still faced with a number of barriers when they choose an administrative career. Some of the hardest barriers to overcome are the myths about women who aspire to become administrators. In a recent survey of the five* women graduates of the University of Oregon doctoral program in educational administration (four more have graduated in higher educational administration), SEEL attempted to separate the myth from the reality.

The first interesting fact about the five female graduates of educational administration is that *none* are in public school administration. One woman is a vice chancellor at the community college level; two work as faculty research associates at universities. A fourth graduate is an associate director of a national educational administration organization, while the last one is a coordinator in a state department of education. Although none of the women work as principals or superintendents, four out of the five began their graduate work with just such a goal in mind. What happened to the aspirations they held then and why have they taken positions outside the world of public school administration? The following excerpts from interviews with these five women address some of the commonly-held myths about female aspirants, as well as shed some light on the questions.

"Aw, women don't really want to be administrators!"

The five interviewees, for the most part, made career choices for administration early in their careers. Two began pursuing the goal in their twenties, while three began in their early thirties. Two of the women had hopes of being elementary principals; two others wanted to work as building administrators at the secondary level. The fifth woman didn't have any definite plans at that point; she simply felt "pushed" towards administration by people in her district.

In most cases, the women had no role models to follow in making such a career choice. One woman said, "Twelve thousand kids in my district and not one female administra-

tor! That's why I went into administration." Although one graduate did benefit from seeing two women principals in action, most of the women agreed that the lack of women as role models was a "major problem." "I've never had a female boss in my whole life," one woman in her fifties exclaimed. Still, despite the lack of role models, these women determined to pursue careers in educational administration.

"Women? They don't have the right degrees to get a job!"

Four of the women actively chose the educational administration program in order to pursue their career goals. Only one woman said she entered the program through convenience because it dovetailed with her "lifestyle and family responsibilities." Friends, professors and a national reputation for research were the reasons cited by the women for choosing the program at Oregon.

Once admitted to the program, the women struggled with financing their graduate work. One woman flatly stated, "I knew if I was going to make it I'd have to do it myself. It was frustrating when I knew men who were getting encouragement, even being called for fellowships, and I was not. No women were called." Another two interviewees paid their own way the first year and would have dropped out the second year if they had not secured jobs on campus. One of the women who was a student in the '60's was given a teaching assistantship so she could come to the University. The more recent graduates did not receive such generous offers. The fifth woman depended on a husband's salary during her graduate work, while she balanced school work with child-care responsibilities. Despite their various struggles, all of the women graduated. The first completed her degree in 1964; the others followed in 1974, 1977 and two in 1978.

"Name me one woman who has had any experience for an administrative job!"

Although one female in the group had had no previous administrative experience before going back to school, the other four had. The least amount of experience was six

* There have actually been six women graduates, but SEEL was unable to reach one who lives out-of-state.

months in a coordinator's position in a large school district, while others had multiple experiences (coordinator, vice principal, central office), spanning from two to six years. Their teaching experience ran from three to ten years in various classroom settings.

"I can never find a qualified female applicant!"

Two of the five women interviewed went directly into higher education; three pursued public school positions. Only one was offered a job (a small district principalship); she declined the offer in favor of a research position. Another woman sought a principalship only to be confronted with selection committees that seemed bent on "finding reasons why I wouldn't make a good principal." She was asked blatantly discriminating questions in her interviews, such as what her marital status was and whether she might be available for "companionship" (this by an interviewer recently widowed). The third woman applied for a superintendency in a small school district. She became discouraged when her only response was a form letter saying, in essence, "No." She was later offered an associate director's position and accepted. She says she still hopes to be an administrator in the public sector, but upon completion of her degree she felt there was no chance of finding a position. She remarked, "I think you have to know someone to get a job and I didn't know anyone in Oregon."

"Everyone knows a woman won't move around to advance her career like a man will!"

Three of the graduates moved out-of-state to obtain their current positions; a fourth moved to another city in Oregon. Only one woman remained in Eugene.

ADVICE FOR FEMALE ASPIRANTS

All five women unanimously agreed that there *are* barriers



to advancement for women in the field. One said, "I felt from time-to-time some kind of latent discrimination on the men's part. After I was hired, things were OK. But, I believe women have to try much harder and do better than men." Another woman agreed, saying, "There are all kinds of barriers. Being a woman, it is still hard to get accepted." One felt her own sense of inferiority had been a barrier early in her career, but now felt the barrier was "defining what I want to do." She now believes she can do something if she *wants* to; it's a matter of determining what the next "something" is. Another graduate added, "I think there are less barriers for me now than one year ago because I'm learning new ways to get around them. I initially had a problem with people's incorrect images of what they thought I should or could do. Now, I am better at showing my skills or in getting someone to speak to those people about my skills."

To grapple with the barriers, the women had some advice for female aspirants:

"Be clear about what you want. Somebody's got to be a superintendent because they want to do the job. Don't let anything stand in your way; don't *allow* it!"

"Do the best you can in your chosen field, but search yourself to make sure it is the best choice. Education is not the only field and administration is *not* just a way out of the classroom."

"One way to aspire in educational administration is to come at it with your full potential and imagination. Learn to problematize the assumptions within the field."

"A woman who understands herself and organizations can make it. You can't cry discrimination if you haven't put forth the effort."

"Set your goals as early as possible in your life and then get your education. If you want high level jobs, you must be willing to assume the responsibility as well."

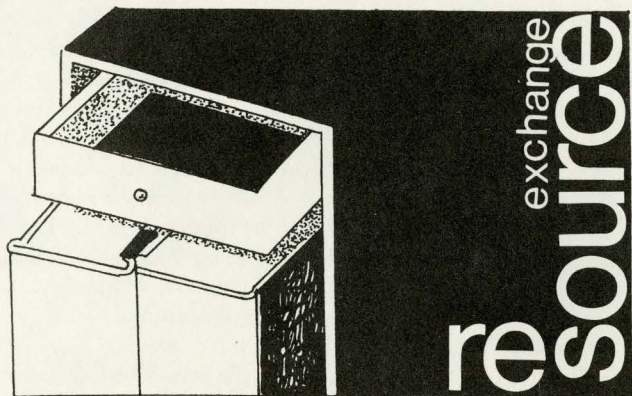
When asked what career choice they would make if they had it to do over, most did not emphasize educational careers. Several seemed to lean toward business and technical fields (such as urban planning, physics or medicine). One woman said she had steered away from science earlier because she didn't want a career where there were so few women. "Ironic!" she added, now that she is an administrator. Another did say she would choose administration again but would begin at an earlier age. One ended her comments, smiling and saying, "And . . . I might have chosen education again; it hasn't been so bad."

Certainly, these women are only a small sample of female aspirants in educational administration today. Yet their experiences reflect the problems many women face in the field. It is significant that all the women interviewed felt satisfied with their current positions, even though they did not attain their original career goals. Perhaps the lesson learned from these women is that even though career goals are made, they are not irrevocable. You may end up in a different place than you had planned in the beginning.

OWEA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Seaside, Oregon

June 19-20, 1979



The Oregon State Department of Education makes the following films available, free of charge, to Oregon teachers:

Changing Images. A 15-minute documentary showing children in a classroom responding to sex role stereotypes.

Chris and Bernie. A 25-minute film about two single mothers.

Growing Up Female. A classic, this 50-minute documentary shows the socialization of U.S. women through a personal look into six lives.

Joyce at 34. A 28-minute film showing a new mother's first attempts to deal with the conflicting demands of career and family life.

Sex Role Stereotyping in Schools is a series of three films: *Hey! What About Us*, offering insight into sex role stereotyping in physical activities; *I is for Important*, focusing on classroom social interactions; and *Anything They Want to Be*, exploring sex role stereotyping in intellectual and career-oriented activities.

Order the films from:

Joan Siebert
 Vocational Education Dept.
 State Dept. of Education
 942 Lancaster Drive NE
 Salem, OR 97310
 Phone: 378-3074

The Decline in Female Elementary Principals: Riddles and Clues. This paper, by Joan Kalvelage, looks at the decline of female principals from a historical perspective, relating it to such issues as the first wave of feminism and the bureaucratization of schools during the period of 1900-1930. Available from the SEEL Project.

Administrative Grooming and Recruitment

Many Oregon school districts offer informal programs to groom prospective administrators. Other districts make special attempts to attract and recruit female and minority candidates for administrative openings. Together, these two efforts provide ways to increase sex equity in educational administration, usually without major cost to the districts. This article illustrates some ways Oregon districts recruit women and minorities into administration. The information was gathered through interviews of school administrators by the six field coordinators of The Oregon Network.

The field coordinators located approximately 75 districts (about one-fourth of the state's total) that have informal grooming programs for in-district candidates. These programs fall into four categories: identifying potential administrators, providing on-the-job experience, providing formal training, and providing resources to individual aspirants. Many districts also expand their efforts to attract people outside their district.

of these questionnaires is to identify, encourage and help those who do.

Other districts, such as Junction City, send general announcements about administrative careers to faculties, and then follow up with meetings for those who express an interest.

By far the most common method is very informal: building and central office administrators "keep an eye out" for teachers who show interest, leadership potential, and who are well organized. These persons are then approached individually and encouraged to consider a career in administration. Many, if not most, administrators see this sort of individual development as a part of their job. (Indeed, this is how the "old boys' network" operates.) But in at least one district, Beaverton, principals are especially encouraged to be alert to leadership potential among the women on their staffs.

Recruitment from Within

Identifying Potential Administrators

Districts use a variety of ways to identify potential administrators. Dallas, for example, used a questionnaire to survey its staff members about their interest in administration. Gold Beach and other districts have also used questionnaires. Typically, such surveys find that the majority of teachers are not interested in administration. Administrators sometimes interpret this result to mean that women don't want administrative careers and many do not. However, the purpose

Providing Experience

Once interested individuals are identified, many districts provide practical experience such as short-term assignments and additional responsibilities in curriculum, attendance, inservice, or other areas. Interested individuals take on assignments such as chairing district or building committees which may include extra-duty pay or released time. The individual usually works with an experienced administrator who provides guidance and encouragement.

A number of districts provide semi-official administrative positions such as assistant principal, administrative assistant, grade level or department chair. Prospective administrators in these jobs work closely with members of the administrative team and gain leadership skills and experience as well as

(Continued on back)

familiarity with a wide scope of district issues. In districts such as St. Helens, Oakridge, Newberg, and Reynolds, people interested in administration can substitute for principals temporarily away from their buildings.

Formal Training

Academic and practical training is provided in a variety of ways. Reynolds and other Portland-area districts have intern programs with Portland State University. Each year, several new administrators and administrative aspirants participate in the Extern Program of the University of Oregon's Field Training and Service Bureau. Students at Oregon State University have practicum opportunities with administrators in the Corvallis district. Some districts sponsor credit courses and workshops for prospective administrators. Portland is offering an intern program, working with the Metropolitan Area Service Center. Astoria and Canby also offer district courses. Baker has a program in which one to three individuals train with building principals for two weeks each year.

Providing Resources

Many districts offer tuition reimbursement for courses taken toward administrative certification and other districts, such as Roseburg, Pleasant Hill, and the Yamhill ESD, provide released time. People resources are also used; aspirants can receive advice and counseling from superintendents, principals, and other administrators in one-to-one or group meetings. Serving on a selection committee also provides an important resource for aspirants because they can observe the process, and in other cases in-district hopefuls are interviewed to give them experience in how to respond to typical questions even though they are not being seriously considered for the job in question.

Recruitment from Outside

Approximately 30 districts, or about ten per cent of Oregon's total, mentioned recruiting from outside their ranks. Several districts made use of The Oregon Network's "Directory of Administrative Candidates" in seeking female and minority candidates. Others sent special notices to groups or

agencies particularly concerned with advancing women and minorities. Ashland, as well as other districts, have held workshops on equity in hiring. Lincoln County strives to maintain sex equity in the composition of screening committees. It and others with a more ethnic mix include minorities.

These grooming and recruitment efforts have had some success. SEEL's tentative figures show the number of female superintendents has increased to seven compared to two in 1974. Numerical increases have also occurred in junior high, elementary principals and assistant principals. While there have been advances, they represent only miniscule advancement toward equity.

A source of information on affirmative action hiring and agencies concerned with advancing women and minorities has been compiled by SEEL and will soon be available through the Oregon State Department of Education's *Know-Pak* series.

The Oregon Network ***Directory of Administrative Candidates*** ***1978-79***

The first issue of The Oregon Network's 1978-79 Directory of Administrative Candidates has been distributed to all school districts in the state. The directory lists 149 aspirants, of whom 78 (52 per cent) are women.

A second directory listing, including updates and corrections, will appear in March.

Copies of the directory and an application form for listing in the directory are available from SEEL.

Sex Equity in Educational Leadership Report

Editor: Carole Starling
Assistance: Joan Kalvelage, C. Sakre Oller, Pat Schmuck, Jean Stockard,
Nancy Gubka, Peg Williams, Mary Ann Smith, Spencer Wyant
Graphics: Ellie Specht, Pat Houghton

This report was developed by the Sex Equity in Educational Leadership Project within the Center for Educational Policy and Management (CEPM) at the University of Oregon. CEPM is supported in part by funds from the Office of Education (OE), U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Opinions expressed in the report do not necessarily reflect policies or positions of either CEPM or OE, and no official endorsement by either organization should be inferred. The University of Oregon prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, age, handicap, national origin, marital status, or any other extraneous considerations not directly and substantially related to effective performance. This policy implements various federal and state laws, executive orders including Title IX and its regulations and applies to employment, admission, education, and facilities. Direct inquiries to Myra T. Willard, Director, Affirmative Action Office, Oregon Hall, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon. Telephone: (503) 686-3123.

Sex Equity in
Educational Leadership
CEPM
University of Oregon
1472 Kincaid
Eugene, Oregon 97401

BULK RATE
Nonprofit
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 63
Eugene, Oregon