
Rural Superintendents in Wisconsin:

In their own words.

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Background

Curiosity about the experiences of rural Wisconsin superintendents drove this research and presentation.

What do rural superintendents wish they knew when they started, what advice they'd give to someone starting out, and what types of needs they had for professional development?

What can we expect? What does the data say about longevity and future shortages?

About this Presentation:

We love our jobs. How can we make it better for not just the kids, but for us too?

1. “Our Collective Experiences.”
2. Attempt to find trends in what we may or may not already notice or know.
3. How can we make our profession stronger?
4. What can we do to recruit new superintendents?
5. What recommendations can we make for professional development, licensure/courses.



Statistics

There are 421 School Districts in Wisconsin

→ **Unexpected**

This year, there are 72 districts with new superintendents.

→ **Emotional**

Why should we care?

→ **Simple**

1/6th of school districts! What happens when you have administrative turnover?

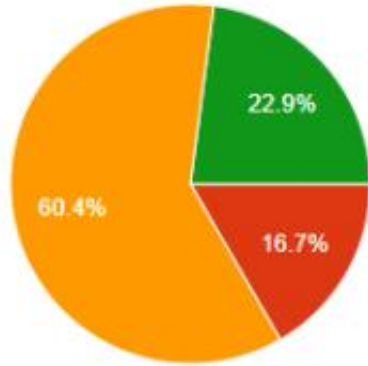
→ **SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED?**

A few takeaways:

1. Mentoring is important. Most indicated that having a mentor either in the building or at a neighboring school district is critical to success.
2. DPI Workshops are very important - they are also very timely. The “understanding the school levy” was cited by many respondents as the perfect example of professional development.
3. Networking is important, particularly among those who are new and among new superintendents.
4. Gender imbalance exists and there could be several reasons:
 - a. Most rural superintendents promote from high school principals. There are few female high school principals statewide. - this is its own research question.
 - b. Women who become superintendents often were “Directors” of Special Education or Curriculum (often found in larger districts).

What is your age range?

48 responses



- Under 35
- 35-45
- 45-55
- Over 55

FACT:

Most superintendents in Wisconsin are 10 years away from retirement.

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Just Because YOU work in a smaller district doesn't mean you have a smaller workload.

Respondents say they are also:

42% CI Directors

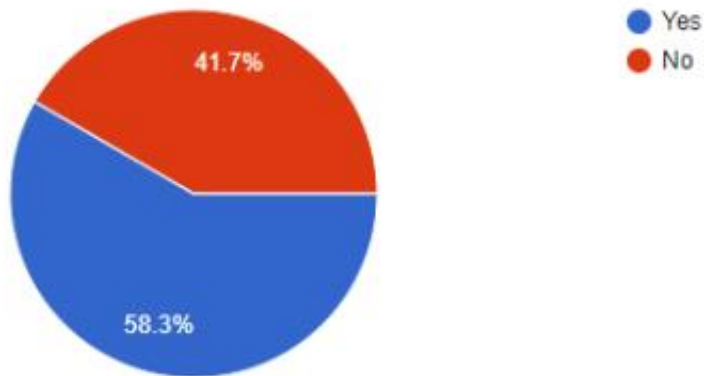
40% HR Directors

32% manage federal programs

26% Business Managers

Did someone tap you on the shoulder and say, "you should be a superintendent?"

48 responses



Questions:

What are we doing to encourage more women and men to enter our profession?

What challenges do you foresee rural school districts encountering that we are not equipped to handle?

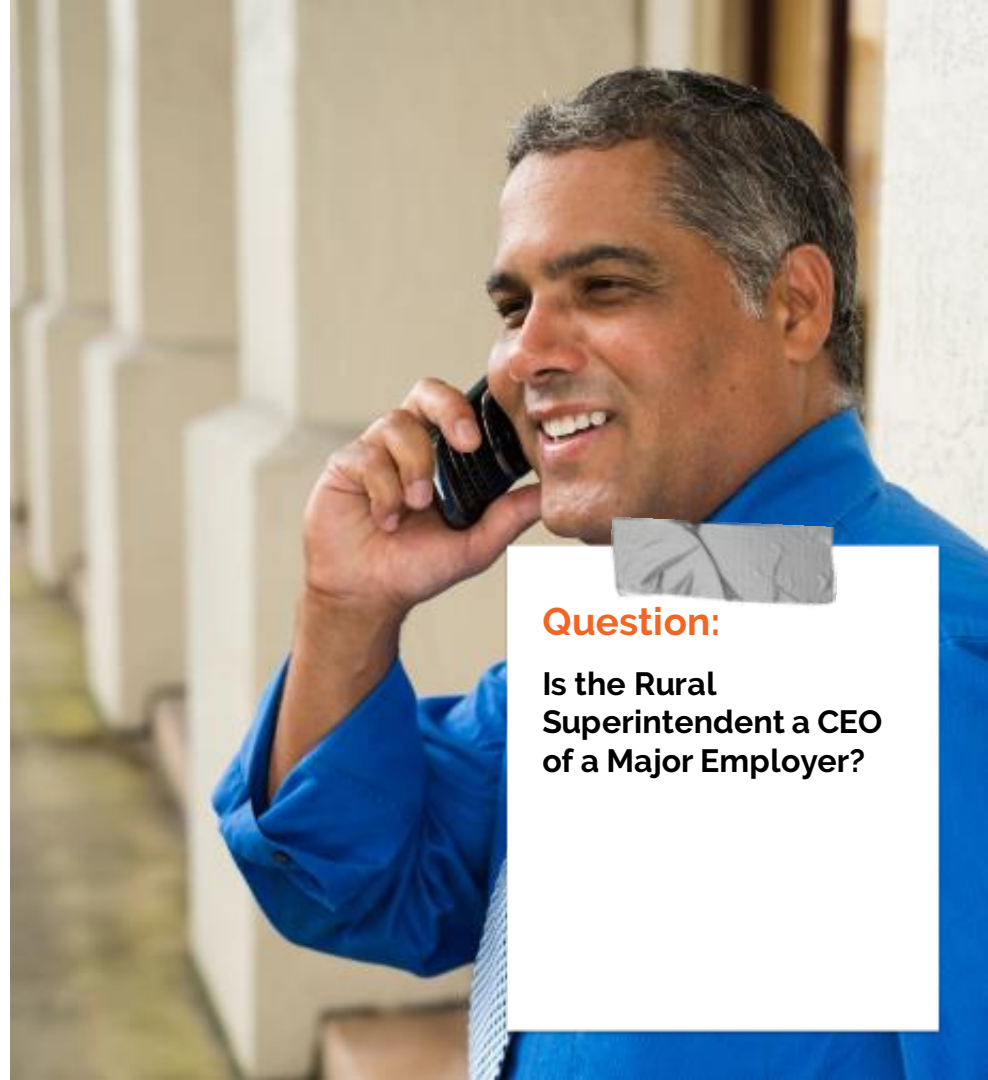


Who Encouraged You?

- **81% said a Superintendent or District Administrator**
- **12 % said a School Board Member or Board President** said they would be an excellent superintendent.
- **What implication is there for us who are currently superintendents?**

Classes that we wished we'd had in Superintendent School:

- Budgeting
- School Board Relationships
- HR/Employee Benefits/ Labor Law
- Instructional Leadership
- "Practical" School Finance (like DPI ones)
- Community Building
- Public Relations/Media Relations
- Facility Planning
- Strategic Planning
- Communication Plans/Social Media
- Equity Focused Leadership



Question:

Is the Rural Superintendent a CEO of a Major Employer?

A hand holding a smartphone against a blurred red background. The text is overlaid on the image.

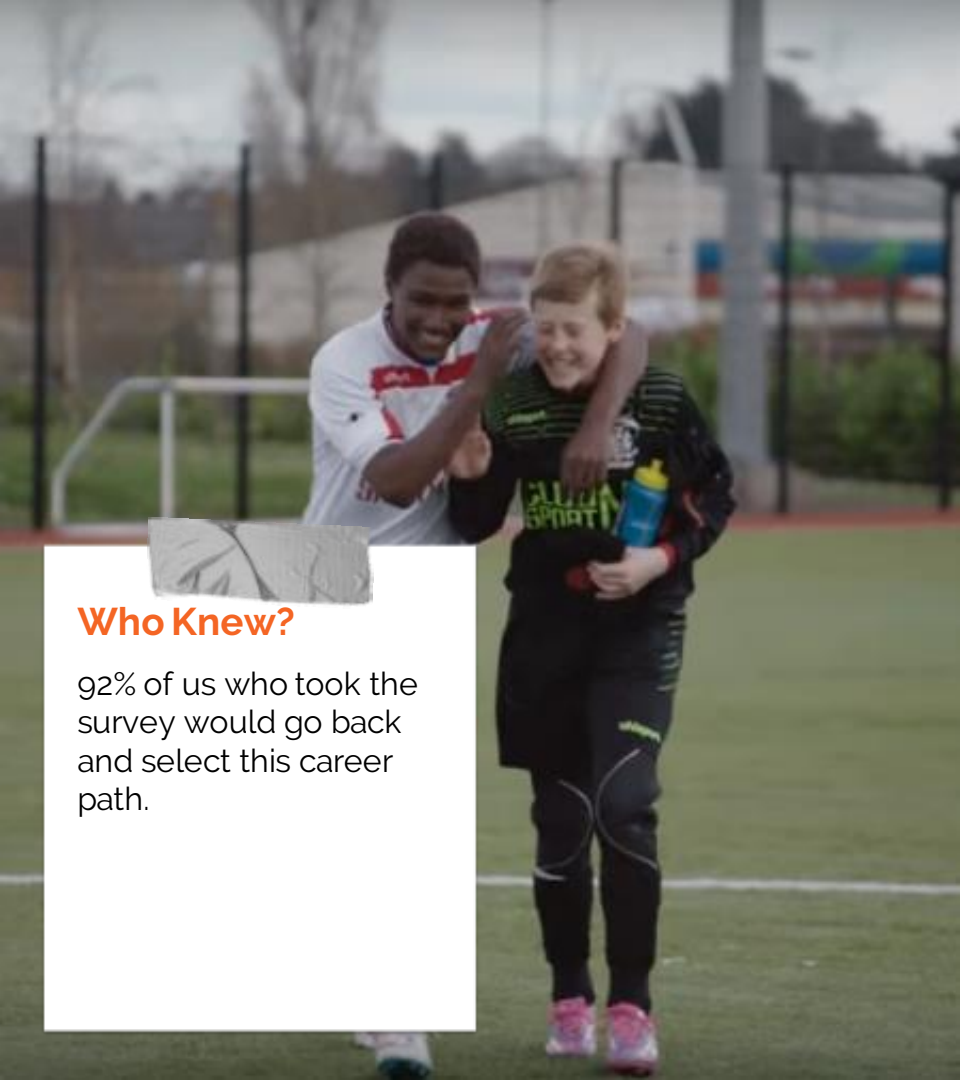
Fact:

**Most Rural Superintendents
started in administration as
a high school principal.**

What component of the job were you most prepared for when you started your first superintendent position?

- Instructional Leadership
- Community Relationships
- Staff/Parent Communications
- Staff Supervision
- Grant Writing





Who Knew?

92% of us who took the survey would go back and select this career path.

What Makes it Worth It? (Hint: It's about the kids...)

- The Kids
- Making a difference for Kids
- Making a difference for rural communities, schools, and kids

Top 1st Yr. Challenges:

- Too much work. (Staff Supervision and School Board Management to start)
- Personnel Management
- Board Micromanagement
- Turnover in prior years left inconsistency and “messes.”
- Work-Life Balance/Guilt

Thoughts:

School Board Orientation by the school's attorney, or WASB, but somehow “insist” or require they attend - could help with expectations.

What would make the job better?

Mentoring/Training

Relevant, on-the-job experiences; “internship.”

Professional Development

Encouragement/less guilt with attending PD events, national, regional, or local.

Newer Sup's

Veteran Superintendents

Better Contracts

Equal compensation to suburban/urban peers;

More Vacation Time

Other Benefits

Longer-term health insurance benefit; pay off student loans.

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What Advice do you have?

Build a network of peer superintendents that you can trust in the area to communicate with to help not only in that first year but to work with into the future.

Have a heart for kids and lead with the students in mind.

Don't be afraid to ask for help if you do not have the answer.

Know that your kids are going to grow up quick, so make sure you spend time with them at home in the evenings. Work-Life Balance is KEY.



**Why is this
information
important?**