

**EMPOWERING WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

**BREAKING BARRIERS: EMPOWERING WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

**FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE FUTURE**

by

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**BREAKING BARRIERS: EMPOWERING WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL  
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## **Dedication and Acknowledgement**

I would like to take the time to dedicate this paper to the amazing women in my life and my family. Throughout the past 2 ½ years, they have provided me continued support as my life changed while completing my master's degree. From a single woman to a wife and now a mother, their support, patience, and kindness never faltered and provided me with the foundation on which I could lean upon to complete this degree.

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Finally, to my husband, Kurt, and my father, John, thank you for providing an environment where strong women are encouraged to shine, and thank you for being amazing fathers who continually show support and love for your girls.

## **Abstract**

This capstone study examines the past and present environments in which women are both pursuing and leading in educational leadership. The purpose of this capstone study is to draw awareness to the experiences of women as system education leaders, as well as identify the barriers and challenges that they face in the male-dominated field of educational leadership. Recommendations such as intentional female hiring, focusing on female leadership characteristics, and implementing female mentorship programs identified in this capstone study aim to support education systems and school authorities in ensuring that women are better represented across educational leadership.

By increasing the representation of women in educational leadership, students and their families, as well as all school staff, will be positively affected by the inclusion of these educators who have a strong set of skills and characteristics. These changes can positively impact the educational journeys of all students and foster an environment of growth and intellectual challenge for a new generation of female leaders within education.

*Keywords:* women in leadership, women in educational leadership, educational leadership, leadership, principals, superintendents, barriers to women in leadership, successful women in education, mentorship, support for women in leadership, recommendations for women in leadership positions, system education leaders, gender balance, gender bias in educational leadership

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# **BREAKING BARRIERS: EMPOWERING WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE FUTURE**

## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study**

### **Introduction**

Within the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions throughout various fields, sectors, and departments (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Mareque et al., 2022; Rincón et al., 2017). Rincón et al. (2017) acknowledged the gender imbalance in decision-making positions, identifying that most barriers to senior management positions for women are related to gender stereotypes. It has been these gender stereotypes foundationally applied throughout society which continue to allow the gender imbalances in women's experiences in leadership; many of these gender stereotypes presently continue to restrict women's success.

Education is a field in which women are greatly underrepresented in divisional leadership (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Mareque et al., 2022; Shah & Shah, 2012). Women in educational administration have increased significantly throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries; however, they are often limited to the amount of movement they achieve within a school authority (Allred et al., 2017). Women are often restricted to administrative jobs such as directors and supervisors, from which they have limited chance at advancement (Wenniger & Conroy, 2001). Female underrepresentation is not limited to K-12 schools as it also applies to post-secondary education. Wenniger and Conroy (2001) stated that "women have become the statistical majority on many college campuses, but they still do not have the rights they deserve" (p. 3).

Understanding why women continue to be underrepresented in education, paired with suggestions on how to improve leadership conditions, are foundational elements in the success of

women. Furthermore, identifying women's strengths and opportunities for growth within leadership will continue to support movement forward in their attainment of senior positions and success within.

## **Background**

Educational leadership has continually been a male-dominated field, with women struggling against a masculine form of leadership for many years (Christman & McClellan, 2008). Dating back to the earliest educational establishments for post-secondary learning in the United States, men have been chosen for leadership roles at an exponentially higher rate than women (Wenniger & Conroy, 2001). It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that women were even eligible to attend universities or colleges in the United States, and not until 1933 that women were permitted to attend the same institutions as men (Wenniger & Conroy, 2001). Since admittance, women have increased their visibility throughout education by obtaining degrees and other skills necessary to showcase their readiness and ability to successfully lead. Considering the levels of success that women have had in their attainment of higher education, unfortunately, it remains that women are not receiving as many educational leadership positions as men, even though they meet and often exceed the qualifications (Wenniger & Conroy, 2001).

Rincón et al. (2017) observed that when prompted to name famous leaders, individuals predominantly name males such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Winston Churchill, and Barack Obama. In Rincón's study, female names were identified as synonymous with leadership, even though throughout history there were plenty of relevant examples of women leaders. Rincón et al. stated that "power belonged to men, and they took advantage of their power and freedom to implement their thoughts and ideas, both politically and economically" (p. 320). These societal feelings, coupled with the barriers faced when women

strive to enter leadership, continue to poorly represent women in leadership positions (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016).

My own experience within education has been influenced by the lack of women in divisional leadership positions. Throughout the four Alberta school divisions I have worked in, I have only had male superintendents. The gender of the superintendent had never presented a concern to me, and I had not spent much time dissecting the gender dynamics at a divisional level as a new teacher. However, at an administrative leaders' meeting that I attended, the superintendent took the opportunity to recognize the fairly balanced ratio of male and female school principals within the school division. Although I applauded the superintendent's recognition of the equity showcased throughout the room and felt pride in knowing that the school division had found success in its hiring practices, I found myself reflecting on my experiences within different school authorities and senior leadership teams. This reflection and experience motivated me to investigate the reasons for the lack of women in divisional educational leadership roles and discover what I could do to potentially close that gap for women in the future.

### **Statement of the Issue/Problem**

Research indicates many factors influence women's experiences in leadership, with gender and societal stereotypes being identified as one of the largest barriers (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Evans & Maley, 2021; Mareque et al., 2022; Mudau & Ncube, 2017; Rincón et al., 2017; Shah & Shah, 2012). Differences in male and female leadership styles in consideration with these stereotypes creates competition between what organizations feel are "traditional" leadership qualities and how to best achieve those results (Rincón et al., 2017). Considering these feelings about leadership perspectives, women wishing

to pursue divisional educational leadership must “fight the socially constructed norms of leadership to advocate for their abilities and find success” (Christman & McClellan, 2008, p. 7). Furthermore, Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) stated that due to the male-dominated nature of leadership, “the exclusion of women has become a part of ordinary institutional functioning” (p. 183).

Exclusion of female leaders can also occur as a result of women's familial obligations (Poduval & Poduval, 2009; Staff & Mortimer, 2012). Work-life conflict can create challenges for women as they may struggle with balancing professional, personal, and family responsibilities, which can also limit women pursuing system-level educational leadership (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Poduval & Poduval, 2009). Women may also experience setbacks or delays in their professional achievement, as women are more likely to interrupt their careers to take care of their children and family; this can serve as a barrier to their professional advancement (Rincón et al., 2017).

Although many barriers to women in leadership result from societal expectations and boundaries, women can limit their own potential due to personal factors, including unconscious bias and imposter syndrome (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Zenger, 2018). It is only when all sources of barriers are acknowledged that women can move past these roadblocks and successfully lead in education.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to advance the representation of women in divisional educational leadership roles by contributing to ongoing efforts aimed at increasing their presence and advocating for gender equity in leadership positions. To do this, society must first understand the factors that may influence the experiences of women in leadership overall. Being

able to understand the several factors that influence the experiences of women in leadership positions may help to identify and possibly alleviate some of the restrictions women are exposed to on a continual basis. Understanding the general experiences of women in leadership can be difficult, as a variety of opinions arise from women in this category. Artabane et al. (2017) identified that many women throughout Australia want opportunities for career progression; however, very few believe they have the same opportunities as men for promotion into senior leadership. Evans and Maley (2021) acknowledged that women continued to be subjected to the “glass ceiling” within leadership, with women facing a barrier to progression beyond middle management positions.

After understanding the experiences of women in leadership positions, it is not only necessary to identify the barriers that prevent women from receiving divisional leadership positions in education, as well as recommendations and strategies in which women can overcome those barriers. Evans and Maley (2021) suggested that “gender equity initiatives and structural changes may be needed [in Australia] to support a more balanced representation of women at senior levels” (p. 206). The hope for this representation is that by increasing proportions of women in business leadership, it will encourage more sectors to do the same. Increased visibility of women in senior leadership positions advocates for more women to enter leadership and identifies that there are supports in place to help make that goal achievable.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions used to develop this capstone study are:

1. What are the key characteristics that contribute to the effectiveness and impact of women leaders?

2. What barriers do women face when pursuing system-level educational leadership positions in school authorities?
3. What strategies can help women overcome barriers when pursuing system-level educational leadership positions in school authorities?

### **Significance of the Study**

It is necessary for the betterment of society that traditionally male-dominated sectors become more inclusive towards women (Rincón et al., 2017). Evans and Maley (2021) stated that “many of the common success factors identified by [their] research participants, such as education, curiosity and work ethic, are not gender specific” (p. 215). Therefore, having women in more leadership positions can help to improve the working conditions and experiences of individuals with whom they work and lead. The act of incorporating a variety of leadership styles in education can be advantageous to many (Evans & Maley, 2021).

The significance of this capstone study on educational leadership is impactful to a variety of stakeholders, including staff and students, as well as other fields in which the increase of female leadership can benefit. Christman and McClellan (2008) advised that “if others want to look at women leaders as guides for their own journeys, then they must look at the part of the mirror where gender and leadership bend and become fluid,” and they propose to “blur the gender lines and recognize a multidimensional approach for today’s leadership” (p. 23). This capstone study is significant because by supporting women in leadership positions, education can continue to become more inclusive to the needs of all and can ensure that the most impactful individuals are leading our school authorities.

## **Scope of Study**

The scope of study for this research is to examine scholarly research about the experiences of women in system educational leadership in school authorities. Examining the scholarly literature about the experiences of women in system education leadership positions is essential to understanding the challenges and opportunities they encounter. A comprehensive review of this literature provides insight into the conditions that influence how women establish and advance their careers.

## **Summary**

Women continue to face discrimination when it comes to the pursuit of careers outside of society's gender expectations (Kossek et al., 2017). When women do meet the identified requirements for a career, men often remain the preferred candidate selected, and even though women are earning more educational degrees than men, they continue to be "underrepresented at the top institutional leadership hierarchies" (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016, p. 181). At the same time, organizations often claim to be neutral when it comes to gender issues; however, this "gender neutrality" assumes that men are the standard, which renders gender issues invisible (Sheppard, 1992, as cited in Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016).

Women face several barriers when seeking educational leadership positions, and at times they may professionally and personally be torn between being segregated into a culture of women and being integrated into a culture of men (Christman & McClellan, 2008). These barriers include traditional societal expectations on the roles of men and women, the balancing of women's obligations to their family and maternal duties, and a lack of female mentorship or camaraderie in senior leadership positions (Evans & Maley, 2021; Rincón et al., 2017). It is necessary for institutions to address the lack of equity in leadership positions and identify

strategies to move forward to close the gap between genders. In conclusion, it is important to note the resiliency women exhibit on a continual basis when striving for leadership positions in all fields, divisions, and faculties, and these agents of change continue to rise to the occasion, exhibiting innovation and strength.

### **Outline of the Remainder of the Paper**

Chapter 2 of this capstone study reviews literature pertaining to women within educational and non-educational leadership positions. The literature focuses on examining the characteristics that contribute to the effectiveness and impact of women leaders. Within Chapter 2, barriers to the success of women leaders are identified to promote awareness and support for prospective female system education leaders. Chapter 3 focuses on recommendations to overcome barriers for women in educational leadership, including recommendations for school authorities regarding organizational culture and practices for women leaders. Chapter 3 will identify practices such as strategic recruitment and appointment of women in leadership positions, drawing upon the identified strengths of female leaders and female mentorship programs that should be adopted by school authorities to provide a strong foundation of success for women within or pursuing system education leadership.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

Across most job sectors, top leadership positions continue to be dominated by men (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Women are less likely to be selected for and remain in leadership positions as compared to men (Lawson et al., 2022). Evans and Maley (2021) reported that more women have entered the workplace and reached middle management, yet they remain underrepresented at senior executive and board levels. Educational leadership continues to be an area where women are underrepresented, even though the advantages of women within educational leadership positions are well known (Kossek et al., 2017; Mareque et al., 2022). Although the number of female school leaders has increased over the past 50 years, women continue to be underrepresented as system education leaders as compared to men (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010; Shah & Shah, 2012). The reasons why women continue to be overlooked for system-level leadership positions must be understood to successfully increase women in leadership across all sectors.

Examining the experiences of women in system-level educational leadership is necessary to provide insight for women who are interested in pursuing leadership. Through the understanding of common characteristics of successful female leaders, barriers experienced within the position, and recommendations to further support women in leadership, a potential leader will be better prepared for the various challenges as well as the growth necessary to be a successful leader. Furthermore, through ongoing support through female mentorship, women may feel better prepared to lead, closing the disparity between men and women in leadership and increasing visibility of successful female leadership.

## **Definition of Terms**

*Barriers:* Challenges that prevent women from advancing or succeeding in leadership (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016).

*Competency:* An interrelated set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes developed over time and drawn upon and applied to a particular leadership context in order to support quality leadership, teaching, and optimum learning as required by the Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (Alberta Education, 2023).

*Gender Bias:* Any one of a variety of stereotypical beliefs or biases about individuals based on their gender (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016).

*Gender Stereotypes:* Relatively fixed and oversimplified generalizations about women (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016).

*School Authority:* A public school board, separate school board, Francophone regional authority, charter school operator, or accredited private school operator (Alberta Education, 2023).

*Superintendent:* A superintendent appointed by a board pursuant to the Education Act and the chief deputy superintendent, if any, as referred to in the Teaching Profession Act (Alberta Education, 2023).

*Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard:* The Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard adopted by the Minister under section 18(2)(b) of the Education Act, as amended from time to time (Province of Alberta, 2021).

## **Key Characteristics of Female Leaders**

To support women in their pursuit of leadership, it is necessary to understand the characteristics of successful women in leadership positions. Women are now entering leadership

positions at a historically high rate; however, it has been a long and difficult journey (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Christman and McClellan (2008) reported that “women have struggled against a masculine form of leadership for many years” (p. 5). Historically, leadership has been dominated by men, resulting in significant male influence on the perception of leadership (Soklaridis et al., 2017; Wenniger & Conroy, 2001). Regarding educational leadership, Allred et al. (2017) reported that “gender and the superintendency are societal constructions, and society has constructed the superintendency as masculine, which has been reinforced by those who research, teach, and publish about the superintendency” (p. 1). Lemasters and Roach (2012) explained that for many decades, leadership theories have been developed by men from the experiences of men and have been taught or described by men. Women have different experiences of leadership, and so it is unreasonable to assume a singular [male] perspective of leadership experience, interpretation, and theory can fully inform the educational leadership profession (Lemasters & Roach, 2012). Therefore, a thorough understanding of leadership from a female perspective is necessary to aid in better preparing aspiring female leaders, as well as increasing the visibility of current female leaders.

Women possess a variety of characteristics and skills that support them in being successful leaders. Although many of these characteristics may be different than the characteristics attributed to male leaders, female characteristics are integral and necessary in successful leadership (Rincón et al., 2017). Three categories of female characteristics that greatly influence successful leadership include female leadership style and education and experience. Each of these categories is necessary independently; however, it is the collaboration of these characteristics that is the most impactful on successful female leadership.

### ***Female Leadership Style***

Considering the gendered career paths that men and women were historically categorized into (Kossek et al., 2017), it is not surprising that men and women typically approach leadership differently. Rincón et al. (2017) reported that male leadership tends to be task-focused and more formal and official, while female leadership focuses on people or relationships and has been considered a leadership of support. Women lead in a more democratic and participative manner than men (Rincón et al., 2017), and female leadership has an emotional component, such as focusing on dialogue, participation, and reaching agreements (Mareque et al., 2022).

Women possess many desirable personal traits that are advantageous to leadership. Mareque et al. (2022) stated that “feminine values associated with successful leadership, such as sensitivity, empathy, and effective communication, should be considered strengths when pursuing educational leadership” (p. 1010). Female leadership is often associated with the attributes of being socially supportive, humane, and helpful, with advanced communication and negotiation skills (Mareque et al., 2022). Women leaders are known to enhance others' self-worth and are more effective in creating excitement from and for work in individuals (Mudau & Ncube, 2017). The leadership qualities that women often possess result in a stronger relational leadership approach, which suggests that “leadership is about being in relationship with others in a horizontal rather than hierarchical sense” (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010, p. 6), and female leaders are “more interested in transforming people’s self-interest into organizational goals by encouraging feelings of individual self worth, active participation, and sharing the power of information” (Mudau & Ncube, 2017, p. 10598). “Women leaders more often and more effectively use a transformational leadership style than men, which is often related to more effective leadership” (Rincón et al., 2017, p. 321). Therefore, women are more likely to

successfully develop the leadership capacity of those they lead and, in turn, increase their own leader efficacy.

Within education, female leadership characteristics are necessary in supporting a wide variety of educational needs and may be more impactful than those of male leaders. For example, leadership characteristics attributed to women have proven to be necessary to support the learning gap in students brought on by the global COVID-19 pandemic (Onyema et al., 2020). Mareque et al. (2022) reported that feminine values associated with successful leadership, such as sensitivity, empathy, and effective communication, must be especially regarded to support students during times of crisis. Although it can be difficult for women to maintain a balance between their work as leaders and their personal lives, managing households and caring for family members have brought a dimension to women's leadership that can enhance their performance (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010).

The relational leadership approach attributed to female leaders in education is integral to forming relationships within the role. Alberta Education's Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (SLQS) competencies, in particular Competency 1: Building Effective Relationships where "a superintendent establishes a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment by building positive and productive relationships with members of the school community and the local community" (Alberta Education, 2023), emphasizes the importance of relationships within educational leadership roles. Mudau and Ncube (2017) reported that "women leaders are more like mentors or coaches; they favour collaboration, involve colleagues in decision making, nurture various members of the team, and are highly intuitive and often more service-oriented than men" (p. 10598).

Identifying and understanding female leadership styles can provide insight into the importance of female leadership across many sectors, including education. Mareque et al. (2022) stated that “women should be aware of their capacity, potential, and suitability for leadership,” and this understanding provides opportunities for aspiring female leaders to recognize these characteristics within themselves and to continue nurturing these attributes to assist in successful leadership.

### ***Education and Experience***

Mudau and Ncube (2017) stated that “experience and knowledge play an important role in women’s leadership success; hence, the more experience women leaders acquire, the more ability they have to accelerate their leadership skills and grant their success” (p. 10600). Women are better preparing themselves for leadership positions through educational attainment at historically high rates (Allred et al., 2017). Since the 1980s, “women have ‘caught up’ to men in their attainment of bachelor’s and master’s degrees and have surpassed them in doctoral degrees” (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016, p. 182). Through obtaining an education and other professional development that will best prepare them for leadership positions, women are intentional in their pursuit of becoming leaders and ensuring they receive the best qualifications to support their success.

Higher educational attainment and continued professional development are necessary for strong educational leaders in school authorities as well. In Alberta, the SLQS (Alberta Education, 2023) lists Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning as a necessary competency. The SLQS (Alberta Education, 2023) states that “a superintendent engages in career-long professional learning and ongoing critical reflection, identifying and acting on research-informed opportunities for enhancing leadership, teaching, and learning, and completes professional

learning on the code of professional conduct for teachers and teacher leaders” (p. 3). Women leaders have shown their commitment to professional learning in education through their attainment of education, as well as continued professional development that aids in their success as both school leaders and school authority leaders. Professional development may be experienced at either a school division or provincial level, and many of these professional development programs provide valuable leadership experience that is beneficial to the acquisition of leadership skills for female leaders.

### **Barriers Women Face when Pursuing System-Educational Leadership Positions**

Within most careers, an individual will experience some form of difficulty regardless of their gender. Historically, women have experienced barriers in their careers at a higher rate than men (Evans & Maley, 2021; Hanek & Garcia, 2022). Strategies that men have used, such as networking and “going the extra mile,” have not been as effective when utilized by women seeking promotion into leadership (Evans & Maley, 2021), and these hardships can reduce the number of women who enter and remain in leadership positions. To increase the number of women in system-level educational leadership positions and the success they experience, it is important to understand the barriers that women are likely to face. Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) reported that “women encounter numerous barriers to leadership, which occur in the broader society as well as at a personal level” (p. 182). Barriers in female leadership can be categorized into societal, organizational, and personal levels, and each level presents its own challenges to women entering leadership positions. These three levels of barriers that women experience when striving for leadership further exasperate the resiliency women must have in this pursuit (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Thoroughly understanding these barrier levels, specific difficulties, and other

anticipated hardships will aid in increasing the number of women remaining in leadership, as well as better prepare women who wish to pursue leadership positions.

### *Societal Challenges*

Women in leadership must navigate societal gender expectations, and these can be difficult to traverse (Yakimyshyn, 2023). Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) defined macro barriers as “barriers operating in a society as a whole [that] prevent women from advancing or succeeding in leadership” (p. 188). Historically, women have been separated from men into the jobs that they were best suited for. Men were typically suited for jobs that required decision making, achievement orientation, and assertiveness, while women were not (Kossek et al., 2017; Lawson et al., 2022). These gender stereotypes often resulted in a “devaluation of women’s performance, denial of their credit for success, and exclusion in the workplace” (Lawson et al., 2022, p. 1), as “gender roles [created] a barrier for women’s advancement into and perceived performance in roles that were incompatible with the norms of their gender role” (Hanek & Garcia, 2022, p. 3). The restriction of women to specific jobs based upon society’s expectations excluded women from many career opportunities (Kossek et al., 2017); furthermore, “the lack of representation of women in leadership roles perpetuates a cycle where the existing male-dominated leadership structures fail to adequately address the needs of women employees” (Thelma & Ngulube, 2024, p. 280). Globally, gender bias continues to significantly impact the success of women within leadership and can make it challenging for women leaders to contribute their leadership expertise (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). In the 1970s, both male and female managers perceived that the characteristics associated with leadership success were more likely seen in men rather than women, and studies showed that one of the most influential barriers to women’s pursuit of leadership in industrialized countries was the “persistent stereotype that associated management

with being male” (Schein et al., 1996, p. 34). Schein et al. (1996) concluded that the idea of “think manager-think masculine” and “think manager-think man” remained a dominant perspective among both men and women in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and that stereotypical male-dominated traits were deemed advantageous and preferable to have in leadership positions.

Societal challenges such as gender bias continue to influence the ability of both men and women to take women leaders seriously, and although gender discrimination is increasingly rare due to laws and organizational awareness in present society, this does not mean that gender discrimination has been eliminated (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016).

### ***Organizational Challenges***

In addition to societal challenges, organizational barriers also inhibit the success of women in leadership. Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) reported that most organizations reflect and promote a patriarchal society, and these reflections conform to stereotyped ideas of masculinity and femininity, which “place men in roles of power while women are in support roles” (p. 183). Rincón et al. (2017) found that:

the effectiveness of leadership depends on the attitude of the followers towards the leader, and in the case of female leaders, the followers are usually reluctant to accept the influence of a person who does not match the ideal image of a leader. (p. 334)

These barriers often consist of acts of bias and exclusion and are supported by gender norms and practices entrenched in the institution. (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016, p. 183). These barriers are often built into ordinary organizational functioning, so they are often invisible to men and women, and when these barriers accumulate, they can inhibit women’s ability to see themselves as leaders and the ability for others to see them as leaders as well (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016, p. 183). Furthermore, “stereotypical gender roles produce certain workplace behaviours, and in

some cases, a corporate culture that is less oriented towards the career development of women” (Rincón et al., 2017, p. 339).

Many theories support the continued existence of organizational barriers to women in leadership. Maxwell (2017) identified that bias may occur within senior leadership positions, where “boys club” culture persists. This dynamic includes people who enjoy the same types of hobbies and interests or exhibit the same types of personal and/or professional traits; these similarities and groups are referred to as *homosocial behaviour* and can restrict the inclusion of women in relationship building (Evans & Maley, 2021). Cotter et al. (2001) defined the ‘glass ceiling effect’ as implying that “gender disadvantages are stronger at the top of the hierarchy than at lower levels and that these disadvantages become worse later in a person’s career” (p. 655). Evans and Maley (2021) reported that women are more likely to decrease in their professional ambition due to exposure to the ‘glass ceiling effect,’ even though their ambitions start out similar to men’s. Furthermore, women may be less likely to receive support from females in similar positions within an organization due to the ‘queen bee’ phenomenon, which describes behaviours “driven by organizational inequalities where women engaged in leadership positions actively restrain the opportunities of upper mobility for junior women” (de Rocha Grangeiro et al., 2024, p. 86). Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) described queen bees as “more cut-throat, less empathetic and insecure” (p. 193). This phenomenon has proven to further reduce women’s opportunities to receive career support from the limited number of women in leadership positions within an organization, which reduces the number of women in leadership positions even further (Evans & Maley, 2021).

### ***Personal Barriers***

Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) defined personal barriers as barriers that “primarily operate at the level of individuals and include the individual’s daily interactions” (p. 191). Many of the barriers that are experienced at this level exceed the hardships that are experienced by male leaders and involve the female leader herself (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016).

Among the personal barriers that women may encounter in their careers, balancing professional responsibilities with caregiving roles, such as parenting, is a challenge frequently reported. Poduval and Poduval (2009) defined the working mother as “a woman with the ability to combine a career with the added responsibility of having a child” (p. 64). Working mothers have the additional responsibility of balancing their work and home lives in more demanding ways as compared to men, and balancing these dual worlds can impact a woman’s pursuit of leadership (Mudau & Ncube, 2017). At times, women may feel that they are “neglecting their role as mother” when they are meeting the requirements of their professional obligations in senior leadership positions (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016, p. 192). Poduval and Poduval stated that “it is important to understand that both these jobs [a career and motherhood] are extremely demanding, and to do justice to each without neglecting the other is a formidable task” (p. 64). Women who return to work after a few months of having children may feel torn between career ambitions and natural childbearing instincts (Poduval & Poduval, 2009), and working mothers may experience guilt regarding returning to work. Women may have greater interest in jobs that have family flexibility (Kossek et al., 2017). Poduval and Poduval reported that “while the professional aspirations of the modern working woman continue to soar, as soon as she becomes a mother her priorities often change” (p. 71).

Motherhood may also negatively impact a woman's pursuit of leadership through diminishing experience and wages. Staff and Mortimer (2012) reported that "mothers acquire fewer years of schooling and less work experience than other women" (p. 2) and that "employers may perceive mothers who have discontinuous work histories as uncommitted to their jobs or to their careers" (p. 3). "The most frequently hypothesized explanation of the motherhood wage penalty is that childbearing and childrearing disrupt the acquisition of formal education and on-the-job training," and due to this, mothers earn lower hourly wages than women without children (Staff & Mortimer, 2012, p. 1). Therefore, women must break through the 'maternal wall,' the double bias against women who are mothers (Evans & Maley, 2021), in pursuit of leadership.

Although many women have the education and experience to pursue school authority positions, their own self-doubt is holding them back from applying to many of these roles (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) explained how some women are often unwilling to appear assertive and undervalue their own abilities regarding the pursuit of leadership, and this significantly impairs the ability of women entering these positions. Rincón et al. (2017) determined "women are less likely to initiate negotiations to access the desired positions and opportunities and generally have greater social costs than men when they do" (p. 334). Due to a lack of opportunities, a scarcity of role models, and other elements of the 'glass ceiling,' some women have become disillusioned with their ability to successfully lead organizations (Evans & Maley, 2021). Therefore, it is not necessarily the lack of ability that is keeping women out of educational leadership, but it may be their decision not to enter it that restricts their pursuit (Zenger, 2018).

Women continue to experience challenges to their pursuit of leadership at almost every stage of their careers. Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) explained that "women experience barriers

that discourage and prevent their success as leaders on all fronts: their general society, their organizations, and within themselves” (p. 191). Understanding the impact of these barriers both individually and collaboratively, as well as identifying areas of support for these anticipated challenges, is necessary in best preparing women for system-level educational leadership positions and increasing the leadership capacity of women who are currently in these positions.

### **Strategies for Women to Overcome Barriers to System-Educational Leadership Positions**

Understanding both the key characteristics of successful female leaders and the barriers that women experience when pursuing system-educational leadership positions is necessary to aid in preparing aspiring females for success in these roles. However, identifying these characteristics and barriers does not provide support on how to best address and minimize the effects of these anticipated challenges. Therefore, it is integral to the success of female system-educational leadership that women are aware of how to overcome these barriers so they are best prepared for their roles as educational leaders. Three strategies that can help women overcome the identified barriers in school authorities include inclusive organizational hiring policies, mentorship, and maximizing leadership preparation prior to entering the role. Each of these strategies assists women in navigating the challenges that they will encounter in addition to the universal challenges of entering a position of leadership that are also experienced by men.

#### ***Organizational Hiring Policies and Inclusivity***

To promote inclusivity, organizations should prioritize gender diversity in senior leadership. Evans and Maley (2021) reported that organizations whose hiring policies supported gender diversity experienced variance of thought and perspective, as well as improved business performance and decision making. Strategic hiring practices supported by human resources, such as identifying an equal number of male and female candidates for the position, are necessary to

ensure gender-balanced hiring opportunities (Evans & Maley, 2021). Furthermore, holding organizations accountable to set targets and report on gender inclusion in senior leadership is necessary to change hiring policies for the benefit of inclusion (Evans & Maley, 2021). Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) stated, “gender diversity in the composition of boards has been considered as another possible way to move toward gender-diverse leadership within an organization” (p. 197). Hiring women into leadership positions helps to associate women with characteristics that are critical for leadership success, and “hiring women into leadership positions can provide pathways to systemically and positively changing gender stereotypes encoded in language” (Lawson et al., 2022, p. 2).

Many organizations have increased the number of women within their companies, as well as supported the success of working women through the development of initiatives such as flextime, family leave policies, and striving towards incorporating equal pay (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). A commitment to diversity sends a positive message within the organization, as well as to qualified women who are pursuing leadership positions (Rincón et al., 2017). Rincón et al. (2017) reported that “companies that are aware of the benefits that can be provided by the participation of women in senior leadership positions try to implement policies oriented towards a gender balance in these positions” (p. 338). “If organizations truly wish to unleash the expertise of their women and their men, then eliminating gender barriers is a good place to start” (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016, p. 198) and “it is essential to increase awareness in the corporate sector of all the advantages there are of increasing the participation of women in senior management positions” (Rincón et al., 2017, p. 341). Women leaders are [better] able to receive promotions and rise to leadership positions with the help of organizational support such as senior management’s vision and commitment to diversity inclusion (Fazal et al., 2020).

Mudau and Ncube (2017) suggested that “organizational authorities must be open-minded and willing to appoint young female staff who are competent” (p. 10601). Hiring female leaders exceeds organizational success, and this success empowers other women, influences female career aspirations, and aids in changing “pernicious gender stereotypes that are encoded in language” (Lawson et al., 2022, p. 8). Moreover, strategically hiring women into leadership positions aids in eliminating discrimination by making the top seem possible for other women but also aids in changing what it means to be a female leader (Lawson et al., 2022).

### ***Mentorship and Collegial Support***

Across multiple studies (Allred et al., 2017; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Evans & Maley, 2021; Mareque et al., 2022), women identified mentorship as one of the most impactful supports for success in female leadership. Mentorship provides opportunities for female system-level educational leaders to seek support and expertise from other women who are in or have been in similar roles. Evans and Maley (2021) explained that confidence is an important factor in the success of female leadership, and having a mentor who ‘believes in you’ can aid in building and maintaining confidence. “Mentors play an important role in helping women develop self-confidence but also in providing career sponsorship” (Evans & Maley, 2021, p. 215).

However, barriers to female leadership can inhibit the success of mentorship opportunities as well. Although female mentorship is advantageous in providing a female approach to understanding and succeeding within leadership, there are a limited number of women in leadership positions to provide mentorship. Therefore, it is necessary for female leaders to seek mentorship from men as well. Evans and Maley (2021) reported that “organizations need to have more than one token woman in order to achieve [female mentorship], and it is only when there are more than two women in the room that the

conversation will change” (p. 216). Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) stated that aside from discrimination, the lack of mentoring, sponsorship, and overall lack of support were the greatest reoccurring organizational-level barriers that significantly impacted the success of female leaders. Furthermore, the unavailability of personal and professional support systems such as female mentorship and female networking groups greatly influences the insufficient number of female leaders (Fazal et al., 2020).

Mentorship and collegial support should be prioritized by school authorities and other organizations to ensure female leaders are working with other females in some capacity. However, if a female mentor is not available to a beginning female leader and mentorship is to be facilitated by a man, they should be intentional about discussing the barriers women are likely to face and provide additional female networking opportunities for the female leader.

### ***Preparation for Entering Role or Organization***

Mareque et al. (2022) stated that women report a lower acquisition of leadership skills before university as compared to men. This lower acquisition can negatively impact the success of female leaders regarding both her job skills prior to entering leadership as well as her performance in the role. As it is likely that women will experience challenges to their roles as system-level educational leaders at a greater rate than men (Evans & Maley, 2021; Hanek & Garcia, 2022), it is necessary that women have the opportunity to develop their own leadership capacity through earlier preparation. Specific training is needed to be successful in the role of a system-level educational leader, and it is expected that applicants have certain previous requirements regarding experience and initial training (Mareque et al., 2022).

Mareque et al. (2022) stated that leadership is an ability that can be learned, although it may be easier for some individuals to master it than others. “Higher education institutions need

to make a strong commitment to supporting and developing leadership training, with the aim of equipping students with the necessary skills to become professional and social leaders” (Mareque et al., 2022, p. 1019). Moreover, “educational policymakers should promote the design and implementation of teacher training programs aimed at transforming gender norms, using a critical pedagogical approach based on transformational learning principles” (Mareque et al., 2022, p. 1019). Educational institutions should focus on developing in their students “feminine attributes that have been associated with successful transformational leadership, such as advanced interpersonal, communication, and negotiation skills” (Mareque et al., 2022, p. 1019), as it is well known that these leadership skills are necessary for success within the role as a system-level educational leader. To develop their skill sets to the greatest degree before entering a leadership role in school authorities, women should be proactive in their leadership training and seek out additional professional development to further prepare themselves for these roles.

### **Summary**

In the pursuit of leadership, women have proven that they are able to successfully meet and often exceed the expectations of this role. Women leaders are often more collaborative than men (Rincón et al., 2017), with a focus on transformational and horizontal leadership rather than utilizing a hierarchical approach (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010). Female leaders exhibit a more communicative leadership style as compared to males and are empathetic and understanding in their professional relationships (Mareque et al., 2022).

Unfortunately, aside from the identified strengths that women have as leaders, women are likely to experience barriers within this role at a greater rate than men (Evans & Maley, 2021; Hanek & Garcia, 2022). It is necessary to identify, understand, and address the barriers that women are likely to experience within their educational leadership experiences at societal,

organizational, and personal levels and to understand that these barriers work independently as well as in tandem. These barriers test, as well as develop, the strength of female leaders. Gender bias and discrimination, sexist organizational culture, and motherhood significantly impact women's success in leadership. These barriers historically influenced the pursuit and pathways of women in leadership, and although there has been some improvement regarding equality in leadership, women still experience many of these barriers today (Rincón et al., 2017).

Reducing barriers for women in leadership is most effective when addressed from both an educational and organizational approach. Ensuring that organizational hiring practices promote diversity and inclusivity ensures that women and their associated attributes are equally represented within leadership and that predominantly stereotypical male characteristics do not remain the only characteristics associated with leadership. Women possess a variety of advantageous characteristics for leadership, and the greater influence organizations have on identifying those characteristics as qualities necessary for leadership, the larger impact women will make in leadership experience (Evans & Maley, 2021). Providing opportunities for women in leadership to participate in mentorship and/or networking increases visibility of women within leadership, as well as promotes a transformational approach to leadership (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016), which positively impacts the leader's organization. Finally, ensuring women have exposure to and the ability to complete leadership training earlier in their educational journey and/or career aids in supporting women to ensure they develop and foster the skills, tenacity, and resiliency to become effective system-level educational leaders. By overcoming the barriers experienced by women in leadership, organizations can promote qualified women who successfully lead and are able to increase the leadership capacities of others.

## **Chapter 3: Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusions**

### **Summary of Findings**

For women to find success as system-level educational leaders in school authorities, it is necessary to understand the challenges female leaders are likely to face. It is common that women experience challenges to their leadership at three different levels—societal, organizational, and personal—and at each level these barriers can be difficult to conquer (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). The difficulties presented collectively from these three levels can amount to a burden that male leaders are unlikely to face (Rincón et al., 2017). For a female leader to successfully navigate these barriers, an understanding of female leadership experiences is necessary.

By having a thorough understanding of successful female leader characteristics such as female leadership style and educational attainment and experience, female leaders will be able to plan for and overcome anticipated challenges. Furthermore, through organizational supports such as strategic hiring practices, mentorship, and opportunities for leadership preparation programs, female leaders will be able to develop their capacity as leaders, as well as positively influence the leadership experience of other women as well. Women have proven to be successful system-level educational leaders in school authorities (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010; Mareque et al., 2022; Mudau & Ncube, 2017; Shah & Shah, 2012); however, they must break through the barriers that are holding them back from their true leadership potential.

### **Implications**

Understanding the experiences of women in leadership is necessary to inspire change regarding gender bias and gender imbalance within educational leadership. The greatest

implications lie with those who are striving towards leadership in school authorities, as well as those who are in positions within school authorities to make change. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of these parties to no longer accept the difficulties women experience in educational leadership as the norm. People in the positions of school administrators, school authority leaders, and school authority boards can empower women to initiate and maintain change in their school authorities through both education and action.

### ***School Administrators***

School administrators should be aware of the barriers that women face when pursuing system-level school authority positions. It is necessary for women and men to understand the hardships that women experience in leadership in addition to the typical challenges that are associated with the role. Through this understanding, administrators can be intentional about their desire and support for gender equity across all school authority levels.

School administrators should also familiarize themselves with the characteristics associated with successful female leadership. Rincón et al. (2017) reported that research supports that the qualities associated with leadership are often associated with men, regardless of whether or not the characteristics are deemed masculine or feminine. Therefore, to move away from societal and organizational gender stereotypes experienced throughout education, school leaders should seek to increase positive working relationships within the school community to increase the exposure to successful female leaders. Alberta Education (2023) stated that school leaders should act with fairness, integrity, and respect and engage in collegial relationships to meet the Leadership Quality Standard competencies, standards that successfully support the inclusion of female leaders.

Aspiring female system-level school authority leaders should begin preparing themselves for the challenges that they are likely to face as they pursue these positions. Women should refrain from accepting these barriers as expected within the position and seek strategies and support to eliminate these challenges (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). The more opportunities available to women interested in leadership to prepare for and navigate the anticipated barriers, the greater the likelihood of their success in the role. Experiencing success at lower positions in the education ‘hierarchy’ due to preparation and support from a mentor or networking increases the likelihood of success in senior leadership roles (Evans & Maley, 2021). Therefore, it is advantageous for women leaders to seek out opportunities for mentorship and networking with other women in leadership to provide a support network for when they rise to the role of superintendent.

### ***School Authority Leaders***

Current school authority leaders need to understand their role in supporting the success of female leadership in education. By understanding the experiences of women in leadership, school authority leaders can make a difference in their role through ongoing support for change. Female school authority leaders should reflect on their current role and practice and identify where their experience aligns with the experiences of other female leaders. Through this reflection, female leaders are better prepared to further support women in their pursuit of leadership and help eradicate the misconceptions that men are better suited for leadership (Mareque et al., 2022, p. 1020).

Mareque et al. (2022) stated that women “should aspire to exercise leadership functions and occupy leading positions, being well aware of their potential, sensibility, and suitability to face the problems that jeopardize fundamental education issues” (p. 1020). Furthermore, female

leaders can offer and participate in mentorship and networking opportunities that are advantageous to support women aspiring towards and who are in leadership.

School authority leaders who do not identify as female should also be educated in the barriers that their colleagues encounter. To remove gender bias and stereotyping in education, men need to show their support for women in leadership roles through intentional inclusive practices and increased awareness. All school authority leaders need to create awareness regarding female educational leaders by highlighting the experiences of women in leadership and work collaboratively to make change in school authorities.

### ***School Authority Boards***

In addition to school administrators, school authority board members should also be aware of the experiences of women in leadership positions. As a governing body for the policies and procedures guiding the school authority, it is necessary that the board be intentional in creating leadership positions that are inclusive and diverse. Lawson et al. (2022) reported it is necessary for organizations to shift the language they use when referring to men and women and their characteristics in leadership. School authority boards must refrain from remaining neutral regarding gender issues in the workplace, as this “supposed neutrality assumes that males are the standard” and therefore further supports gender stereotypes (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016, p. 183). Board members have the responsibility to support female leadership by changing gender-stereotyped language and creating board goals and initiatives that strive to eliminate gender stereotypes and bias within school authorities. Aligning education around female leadership experiences with school authority policy and practice should be prioritized by boards due to the leadership benefits associated with female leaders, as well as a moral imperative to support gender equity (Evans & Maley, 2021).

## **Recommendations**

Within this capstone study, the reviewed literature identified recommendations on how to improve the experiences of women in educational leadership. These recommendations specifically address the improvement of female leadership experiences through the reduction of barriers and increased support. To ensure that women in leadership have the necessary support for success as system-level school authority leaders, stakeholders must commit to providing opportunities to access support through professional development/personal learning communities, mentorship and networking, and strategic hiring practices. Through organizational support, women can better prepare for and perform as school authority leaders and increase their own efficacy and confidence as leaders (Fareeha et al., 2020).

### ***School Authority Professional Learning Communities for Aspiring Leaders***

Through professional development support from school authorities, aspiring leaders should have access to leadership professional learning communities that are committed to preparing future school principals and superintendents. Female educational leaders have specific needs and challenges which need to be addressed through programming and professional development (Allred et al., 2017), and professional learning communities provide support from school authorities to address these needs and challenges. This preparation is necessary to ensure the thorough understanding of these roles and what contributes to and constitutes success within each.

Within this professional development, the experiences of female school leaders and female school authority leaders should be acknowledged, examined, and discussed to increase the awareness and understanding of both female and male leaders (Allred et al., 2017). Specifically, school authorities should aim to implement leadership training programs aimed at

transforming gender norms that “use a critical pedagogical approach based on transformational learning principles” (Mareque et al., 2022, p. 1019). Strategies to increase gender equity within school authorities should be identified and utilised, as these strategies would help to reduce all three levels of barriers experienced by women in educational leadership (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Professional development that aims to create gender-balanced leadership environments may “begin to cultivate resiliency in women leaders” (Christman & McClellan, 2008, p. 17), and school authority supportive policies and procedures which promote diversity inclusion can increase success for female leaders (Fazal et al., 2020).

It can be concluded that professional learning communities within school authorities can provide opportunities and support for women to succeed as school authority leaders.

Opportunities to professionally prepare for leadership through collaboration and education can help to reduce challenges experienced within leadership roles (Mareque et al., 2022; Shah & Shah, 2012). School authority leadership professional development opportunities need to highlight the experiences of women to increase awareness and understanding of these experiences, as well as implement changes to aid in the success of female school authority leaders. Furthermore, these personal learning communities can also serve as gateways into female mentorship and networking that are integral supports for female leadership success.

### ***Mentorship for Female School Authority and School Jurisdiction Leaders***

As previously stated, research indicates access to mentorship as one of the most important supports for women in leadership positions (Allred et al., 2017; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Evans & Maley, 2021; Mareque et al., 2022). To assist in ensuring success and decreasing the number of barriers experienced, it is necessary for provincial educational authorities to

ensure that female school authority leaders have access to quality mentorship and support networks.

Provincial educational authorities, in collaboration with school authority boards, must prioritize the need for female mentorship for system-level school authority leaders. Female mentorship and networking initiatives should be accessible to all female system-level school authority leaders, as well as female school jurisdiction leaders, to ensure support for as many female school authority leaders as possible. Successful implementation from provincial educational authorities and school authority boards showcases a commitment to gender diversity and gender parity in leadership (Lawson et al., 2022) within provinces and a commitment to supporting women's leadership characteristics.

Support through mentorship and networking can provide women access to resources that assist in increasing knowledge applicable to the leadership role, as well as experience to overcome adversity (Christman & McClellan, 2008). Furthermore, due to the limited availability of female mentors, women in leadership are more likely to take the time to mentor other women in addition to their leadership roles (Mudau & Ncube, 2017) to aid in reducing barriers experienced by female peers. Lawson et al. (2022) recognized the importance of mentorship for female leaders by explaining, “female exemplars send signals to others: they empower other women, affect their career aspirations, and improve their performance in counter-stereotypic fields” (p. 8). Considering the many barriers that women experience in leadership and the benefits of gender-diverse leadership, they should recognize the possibility of unity through leadership mentorship, and provincial school authorities and school authority boards should provide the resources and time necessary to facilitate this support.

***Strategic Hiring for Leadership Roles in School Authorities to Promote Gender Equity.***

A final recommendation to support successful female leadership in school authorities is strategic hiring to promote gender equity. Strategic hiring should not be limited to superintendent positions and should include school jurisdiction leaders and board members. Lawson et al. (2022) stated that the United Nations identified gender inequality as “the greatest human rights challenge of our time” (p. 1). Gender equity is not only a woman’s issue, but it also impacts men, women, organizations, and society (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). By mandating the hiring of women into school authority positions that are reflective of the number of women within education, school authorities are putting their commitment to gender inclusion and equity into action. Moreover, “the greater presence of women in leadership positions can also contribute to generating reference models for other younger women and to transforming traditional gender stereotypes” (Rincón et al., 2017, p. 340), and this visibility can hopefully inspire more women to enter leadership positions.

Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) stated, “organizations with gender diverse leadership teams outperform organizations with homogeneous leaders” (p. 197), and it can therefore be concluded that the strategic hiring of women into leadership positions would be advantageous socially as well as economically. These economic benefits can serve as a starting point for organizations to increase the number of women in leadership positions, as financial benefits often prompt new initiatives or policies (Evans & Maley, 2021). Additionally, Rincón et al. (2017) reported that the strategic hiring of women into leadership positions can “serve to compensate over the short term for what is initially an unequal situation that represents an important cost for all of society” (p. 340).

Strategic hiring of women into leadership positions is necessary as an actionable priority for school authorities. Visible gender diversity goals positively impact organizations through economic and social benefits (Evans & Maley, 2021) as well as motivating more women to pursue leadership positions (Rincón et al., 2017). If school authorities committed to hiring practices that ensured equity for women in leadership, it is likely that more women would be willing to aspire to leadership positions (Evans & Maley, 2021) and seize opportunities and roles to positively impact school authorities.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this capstone study was to understand the experiences of women in educational leadership. The focus of the experiences of women in leadership highlighted the successful characteristics women in leadership possess, identified the barriers women experience, and provided insight as to how women could successfully overcome these challenges. Drawing upon the information provided in this capstone study, women can better prepare themselves for their pursuit of educational leadership, as well as continue to strive for excellence for those who are already system-level leaders in school authorities.

Understanding the experiences of women in educational leadership is also necessary for those whose actions directly impact these experiences, such as school administrators and school authority boards (Evans & Maley, 2021). Supporting female leadership in school authorities through initiatives such as provincial mentorship and networking programs, school authority leadership preparation and development programs, and school authority strategic hiring practices provides opportunities for women to develop into successful educational leaders and invites boards to strive for gender equality in their school authorities.

Rincón et al. (2017) stated, “the imbalance between the educational level of women and their career abilities implies a waste of human resources that prevents taking advantage of the talent and abilities of highly qualified people” (p. 341). To find success and strengthen the experiences of women in educational leadership, it is necessary to take a collaborative approach amongst all parties involved. This collaboration identifies allies who are dedicated to supporting and celebrating successful female leaders in education and identifies a commitment to break the barriers women are subjected to and ensure access to inclusive female leadership in the future.

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