Abstract

As a Black former superintendent of a U.S. urban school district, I understand the crucial need for Black superintendents to systematically document their experiences. Given the low number of Black school superintendents and the lack of research literature about them, Black superintendents need to describe and build knowledge about their experiences. In this article, I argue, autoethnographies allow Black superintendents to document their experiences, particularly focusing on how race and racism impact their work. On a broader scale, documenting and sharing experiences through autoethnography may lead to changes in the superintendent pipeline and social change. Future Black superintendents may use insights for strategic guidance and empowerment, increasing recruitment and retention in the superintendency. The article describes how Black superintendents can create an autoethnography and provides a brief personal example.

A Call to Black School Superintendents to Document Their Experiences Through

Autoethnography

As a Black former superintendent of a U.S. urban school district, I understand the crucial need for Black superintendents to systematically document their experiences. Given the low number of Black school superintendents and the lack of research literature about them, Black superintendents need to describe and build knowledge and insights about their experiences. Taking such action is necessary to maintain an account of successes and to provide evidence of challenges, concerns, and potential injustices that occur during their superintendency, particularly in urban school districts. Autoethnographies from Black superintendents may document systematic or structural racism to educate the wider public and field about such challenges as we increase the number of Black superintendents in urban (and other) districts across the United States. Autoethnography is a form of personal narrative combining autobiography and ethnography to help make sense of a social phenomenon (Ellis et al., 2011). Authors document their personal experiences, thoughts, and perspectives in a self-reflective, analytical form of storytelling research.

On a broader scale, documenting and sharing experiences through autoethnography may lead to cultural change and social justice (Dailey, 2015; Edwards, 2021; Wall, 2016). Future Black superintendents may use insights for strategic guidance and empowerment, increasing retention. Increasing the number of Black U.S. superintendents is important, particularly in districts serving large populations of Black students, as research has shown that Black students do better when they see and learn from Black leaders (Gershenson et al., 2021; Perry, 2019). Black students make up 14% of the U.S. public school population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022), yet only approximately 3% of superintendents are Black (Miles Nash &

Grogan, 2022). Black superintendents, through their lived experiences, are more likely to understand the cultural needs of Black children and to hire Black teachers (Castro et al., 2018; DeMatthews et al., 2017; Hansen & Quintero, 2018). In turn, Black educators "can leverage their affirming and reflexive pedagogical techniques to build reciprocal relationships with students" (Milner, 2018, p. 9). In one study, Black students who had two Black teachers by third grade were 32% more likely to enroll in college (Perry, 2019). In addition, Black leaders demonstrate higher expectations and cultural understanding of Black students than non-Black leaders (Castro et al., 2018; DeMatthews et al., 2017; Hansen & Quintero, 2018). Black educators and leaders serve as "mirrors" to students that allow them to see reflections of themselves in leadership. Concomitantly, Black superintendents are also more likely to hire teachers and staff who reflect student identities and are less likely to criminalize student misconduct (Castro et al., 2018; DeMatthews et al., 2017; Hansen & Quintero, 2018). Educational leaders with identities that reflect the students they serve are more likely to lead their schools with culturally responsive strategies that have a positive influence on students' well-being and academic outcomes (Castro et al., 2018; DeMatthews et al., 2017; Hansen & Quintero, 2018).

Several conceptual questions will be explored in this article: Why is it essential to recruit and retain more Black superintendents in school districts, particularly urban school districts? How might autoethnography serve as a tool to construct narratives of Black superintendents leading in urban school districts? What might those of us in education who care about the leadership of school districts learn from the experiences of Black superintendents to build environments that are affirming and supportive of nonassimilating, authentic Black leadership? Moreover, given the low number of Black superintendents—both in terms of representation and

persistence—what role do race and racism play in uncovering experiences of Black superintendents?

Literature Review

Race and Racism in Educational Leadership

Racism remains deeply embedded in educational institutions and structures (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). According to Roberts and Mayo (2021), qualitative and quantitative data revealed Black workers at all levels face obstacles to promotion and worse working environments than White workers or non-Black people of color. Those with careers in education are not exempt from this reality, particularly educational leaders and superintendents. When considered alongside the challenges and complexities typical to the superintendency, race adds another dimension of difficulty of functioning in the role that few in education administration understand or acknowledge. A gap exists in understanding the perspectives and lived experiences of Black superintendents (Angel et al., 2013). This gap allows for the misconception to persist that the superintendent role, when held by a Black person, is executed with the same level of functionality and challenge as when held by a non-Black person (Horsford, 2007). The experiences are not the same; Black superintendents face prejudices, job-related pressures, higher expectations, harder work, and atypical challenges (Simmons, 2013; Wilson & Kowalski, 2017).

Black superintendents face particular types of racism-related challenges. Frequently hired to increase equity in districts, such efforts often produce backlash in the White community (Bojorquez & Alyberty, 2022; Green, 2021; Guerra, 2020; Kingkade, 2021). White community members have accused Black superintendents of a personal agenda when they make hiring or financial decisions designed to address the problem of inequity that they were hired to solve.

Equity-oriented leadership requires considering the systemic inequalities that have historically

resulted in certain populations being underserved primarily due to their race or income (Kruse et

al., 2018). Community members may resist changes in financial allocations to help increase

success for all students or may polarize against the reform (Karch, 2020; Kruse et al., 2018).

Such resistance to change can escalate to personal attacks, firing, and deeply racist

responses and media posts (Green, 2021; Modan, 2021)—from members of the community

claiming racism does not exist. One Black male superintendent was criticized for being "loud"

and intimidating (Bojorquez & Alyberty, 2022), concerns unlikely to have been lodged against a

White man. As a result, Black superintendents may feel isolated, targeted, marginalized, and

exhausted (Modan, 2021). The pressures of race and racism create such obstacles to doing their

job, many Black superintendents leave the field (Kingkade, 2021; Modan, 2021). Black

superintendents also tend to lack mentors (Modan, 2021), given their low numbers.

Autoethnography, as it pertains to Black superintendents describing their experiences,

can be effectively merged with racial experiences. Sharing experiences through the lens of this

racially charged power dynamic may help other Black superintendents feel less alone and better

equipped. Critical race theory is a useful lens for autoethnography among Black superintendents.

Critical race theory is an analytical framework originally designed to illuminate racial inequities

that remain unaddressed by the legal system (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The theory is

useful in education to unearth phenomena that are unaccounted for when analyzing race and

privilege (Parker & Villalpando, 2007), particularly as systemic racism is perceived as "normal"

(Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Researchers can interpret evidence to support the notion that

racism is likely permanent; although there may be periods of progress, they are generally

preceded by periods of resistance and backlash as social forces reassert White social

conservative dominance (Bell, 2000). An important element in critical race theory is the counternarrative to counter the stories of the dominant social group (Dixson & Anderson, 2018). Dominant stories confirm positions of power and worth (or lack or worth), creating a perceived reality of systemic racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Rather than continuing an ineffective, color-blind approach to education (Coles & Stanley, 2021), race-conscious narratives can provide knowledge and perspectives to illuminate deeply ingrained inequities and change cultural practices (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Counternarratives through autoethnography offer a powerful tool in knowledge collection and sharing, particularly given the low number of Black school superintendents.

Lack of Black School Superintendents

The majority of students in U.S. public schools are children of color, yet school superintendents are overwhelmingly White. Table 1 presents the racial composition of U.S. public school students compared to school superintendents as of Fall 2020. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), U.S. public schools served 26.8 million students of color in the fall of 2020, representing 54% of students. Yet, according to data from the 2020 decennial study of the American Association of School Administrators (Miles Nash & Grogan, 2022), superintendents tend to be White (91.38%) and male (73.2%). Black women in particular are lacking in the superintendency (Angel et al., 2013).

Table 1

Race/ethnicity of U.S. Public School Students and District Superintendents, Fall 2020

Race/ethnicity	Student %	Superintendent %
White	45.6	91.3
Hispanic	27.8	2.51
Black	14.9	3.43
Asian	5.5	0.16
Multiracial/other	4.4	0.67
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.0	1.76
Pacific Islander	0.4	0.16

Note. Student data from *Condition of Education 2022: Racial/Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools*, by National Center for Education Statistics, 2022. Superintendent data from "Leadership and the U.S. Superintendency: Issues of Race, Preparation and Impact," by A. Miles Nash and M. Grogan, 2022, *School Leadership & Management*, *42*(1), 24–43.

The underrepresentation of superintendents with identities that reflect the racially diverse populations of students they lead in public schools is problematic. Having educational leadership representative of student diversity boosts leadership impact and positive student outcomes in public schools (Hansen & Quintero, 2018; Herman et al., 2017; Keiser et al., 2021).

Black Superintendents in Urban Districts

Black superintendents are increasingly hired in large, urban school districts to help solve many problems that affect schools beyond the scope of academics (Fusarelli et al., 2018). Although they only comprise about 3% of superintendents in the U.S., Black superintendents represented 42% of superintendents who were members of the Council of Great City Schools, which serves urban school systems of 25,000 or more students (Wilson & Kowalski, 2017). Black superintendents in urban districts face additional challenges. The average tenure of a Black

superintendent in an urban district during the 2014 school year was barely more than a year (Council of the Great City Schools, 2014). The average tenure of 3.6 years among U.S. urban superintendents is considered inadequate to produce sustainable change in district achievement (Wilson & Kowalski, 2017). Black superintendents are often hired in urban school districts with dire financial constraints (Wilson & Kowalski, 2017), and may face racial resistance, especially because they serve in an executive role, as my own experience described later in this paper reveals.

I define *urban* using Milner's (2012) three conceptual frames of urban educational environments: urban intensive, urban emergent, and urban characteristic. Urban intensive districts are in large, metropolitan cities across the United States (over 1 million people) and may struggle to provide adequate resources for large student populations. Urban emergent districts are in smaller cities still large enough to lack adequate educational resources. Urban characteristic districts, by contrast, are not located in large or midsized cities yet may be at the onset of experiencing challenges sometimes associated with urban intensive or emergent environments, such as an influx of a large population of English language learners. These definitions of *urban* avoid "victim blaming" (i.e., defining urban by race and socioeconomic status) and reflect the "systemic, institutional, and bureaucratic barriers" that can prevent these districts from operating at an optimal level and realizing the best possible student outcomes (Milner, 2008, p. 1575).

One challenge facing superintendents leading urban districts is shifting their focus from the day-to-day management of the district to understanding the complexities of the structures of historical inequity surrounding them, including how these structures impact the systems they oversee, the students they serve, and their own leadership roles. Graham et al. (2019) concluded that Black superintendents must cope with additional stressors of leading school districts in a

political climate of government-sanctioned bigotry. A brutal reality is that to be successful in improving outcomes for all students, a Black superintendent of urban schools must survive the politics of and the power of the status quo while simultaneously addressing the powerful force race plays in the leadership dynamic.

Khalifa et al. (2016) emphasized that urban superintendents need to exercise critical self-awareness as well as an awareness of their values, beliefs, and dispositions when serving diverse urban school populations. In addition, district leaders must be aware of factors that contribute to inequity and negatively affect student potential, academically, socially, and personally. Black superintendents must juggle these responsibilities along with having a "double consciousness," as described by Du Bois (1903). Black leaders are continually aware of their identity through the eyes of others, attempting to merge being American with being Black in a White culture. These superintendents often feel as if their identity is divided into several parts; they must hold a powerful, public position while often simultaneously facing racialized oppression in a White-dominated system. Research has shown that navigating work environments and communities in which they face explicit racism may be a standard part of lived experience for many Black professionals (Kingsberry & Jean-Marie, 2021; Roberts & Mayo, 2019).

Lack of Black Superintendent Voices

Delpit (2006) argued that one of the tragedies in the field of education is the manner in which the voices of Blacks have been silenced, because Black voices can contribute a depth of rich understanding of complex educational leadership challenges that others cannot. The research literature is scant regarding Black school superintendents (Carrier, 2017; Fields et al., 2019). A search of research databases revealed some studies specific to the intersectionality of Black female superintendents in particular, a growing area of research, but currently limited mostly to

doctoral dissertations rather than peer-reviewed articles. As Fields et al. (2019) pointed out, the topic of Black superintendents "has been largely neglected" (p. 1). Black educators continue their struggle to gain equality within the ranks of the school superintendency (Allen-Thomas, 2021; Grogan & Miles Nash, 2021).

Adding the voices of Black superintendents to the literature may help others meet the unique challenges. Black administrators may feel isolated, question their efficacy, or suffer imposter syndrome, feeling like they do not belong or are unworthy, as they navigate feelings of inauthenticity or insecurity leading non-Black peers (Kingsberry & Jean-Marie, 2021; Roberts & Mayo, 2019). Other psycho-emotional challenges include the expectation to serve as racial ambassadors and the resultant fatigue of leading conversations about race to help diverse staff understand, be more sensitive to, and work in more productive ways with one another (Grogan & Miles Nash, 2021). Unjust treatment, lack of support, and the pressure to conform to the standards White America has imposed upon the executive structure of school districts may stress Black superintendents and reduce their tenure (Roberts & Mayo, 2019).

Black superintendents need to describe their experiences in their own words to add to the research base. Autoethnography, when utilized as a research method, is an ideal means of developing pragmatic research that can be used to contribute to the scant literature on the lived experiences of Black superintendents in U.S. schools. The next sections explain how Black superintendents can meet this call.

Autoethnography as a Research Method

The autoethnographic research method combines the characteristics of both autobiography and ethnography (Ellis et al., 2011). As described briefly early in this article, autoethnography is a research method combining critical self-inquiry with narrative inquiry

(Edwards, 2021; Hughes & Pennington, 2017; Wallace, 2002). A personal experience method, autoethnography is used to produce research in the form of analytical, reflective self-storytelling that describes, conceptualizes, and helps to make sense of a social phenomenon; the author can help others understand nuances of these experiences at a deeper level and in a more systematic way (Ellis et al., 2011; Wall, 2016). Through the autoethnographic method, researchers document, examine, and inquire into their past experiences as well as their thoughts, feelings, perspectives, and any lingering effects associated with these experiences. Autoethnography has been applied to a range of research approaches, including examining topics of personal importance within a specified cultural or social context, attempting to find meaning in challenging experiences, or conducting a critique of the literature about a topic with personal significance (Wall, 2016). Autoethnography is also used to deepen understanding of social phenomena in organizations, families, and communities, typically by focusing on a troubling experience (Edwards, 2021). The goal is to make contributions to social science that provide insights into what it was like to endure a particular lived experience and provide greater meaning to a cultural experience for others (Ellis et al., 2011; Wall, 2016).

When approaching an autobiography, a researcher retroactively and selectively writes about past experiences, documenting reflections about these experiences (Ellis et al., 2011). Additionally, autobiographers may engage other sources such as newspaper articles, media clippings, and recordings to help with recall and increase trustworthiness of the study (Wall, 2016). The purpose of an autobiography is to identify significant moments that impacted the trajectory of a writer's life, typically times of existential crisis that forced them to attend to and analyze their personal lived experiences (Ellis et al., 2011). However, autoethnography can be

used to describe successes and joy of the Black educator experience in spite of systemic racism (Love, 2019).

When researchers approach an ethnography, they study "a culture's relational practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences for the purpose of helping insiders (cultural members) and outsiders (cultural strangers) better understand the culture" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 275). Ethnographers become participant observers in the culture that they are studying by taking field notes of cultural happenings, as well as noting their part in, and others' engagement with, these happenings (Ellis et al., 2011). An ethnographer may examine ways of speaking and relating, investigate uses of space and place, and analyze cultural items (Ellis et al., 2011).

Combined, the tenets of constructing an autobiography and an ethnography comprise the research method of autoethnography. Autoethnographers utilize aspects of both autobiography and ethnography to write about "epiphanies" (Ellis et al., 2011) that are realized by possessing a particular cultural identity. Autoethnographers, much like autobiographers, share accounts of their lived experiences. However, autoethnographers approach the work with the intent of building and constructing knowledge (unlike many autobiographers) and rely less on hindsight, being much more intentional about recalling significant events, conversations, and experiences. Much like ethnographers, autoethnographers illustrate cultural experiences in a way that is familiar to both insiders and outsiders. However, they do so from a cultural insider's personal perspective instead of the perspective of a participant observer. In this way, autoethnographers leverage their unique cultural insider perspective to take agency over their own narratives (Edwards, 2021; Ellis et al., 2021).

Edwards (2021) characterized autoethnography as being valuable in helping to deepen society's understanding of various cultural dimensions and interpersonal dynamics. Wall (2016)

asserted the benefits autoethnography to contribute to social justice. The findings have the potential to help readers learn how to navigate similar situations and empower them with information about what strategies should be employed to enhance their own experiences in a similar cultural context (Adams et al., 2017; Wall, 2016). Wall (2016) advocated for approaching autoethnography with a balanced perspective that lies between ethically capturing one's lived experiences to examine and analyze the meaning of these events in a way that advances collective thinking about the matter. Autoethnographies are meant to make a researcher's personal lived experiences meaningful and culturally engaging. In light of this objective, autoethnographies tend to be more accessible than traditional methods of research. This benefit of autoethnography can translate into making personal and social change possible for more people, as the research is likely to reach more diverse audiences than those who read research produced through more traditional research methods (Ellis et al., 2011).

Autoethnography in Educational Leadership

The use of autoethnography is gaining traction in the field of educational leadership but remains limited. For example, Garza (2008), a Latino superintendent, used the method for a study to make sense of his quest to lead for social justice. Dailey (2015) used autoethnography as a Black woman superintendent highlighting "nuanced cultural meaning and the identification of social justice and equity issues" (p. 10). Lowery (2008) used autoethnography to describe his lived experiences as a teacher and school principal to help him examine his cultural competence as an education leader. According to Chang and Bilgen (2020), "Autoethnography is perfectly suited for leadership identity exploration, as understanding leaders as individuals is a vital topic in leadership studies" (p. 95), providing support for the use of autoethnography as a viable research method for building the body of knowledge concerning Black urban superintendents.

Further, autoethnography gives Black superintendents who work in urban settings agency over their own narratives and allows them to provide a counternarrative to the dominant discourse (Dixson & Anderson, 2018) to challenge dominant educational assurances of fairness, equity, and antiracism in educational leadership. Autoethnography can illustrate the different challenges Black superintendents face compared to White colleagues (Wilson & Kowalski, 2017). With a discussion about the importance of autoethnography as a method to capture, document and describe Black superintendents' experiences, I turn next to discuss how to construct autoethnographies.

How to Create an Autoethnography

In this section, I hope to provide insights about how Black superintendents might document their experiences—particularly those related to race and racism to shed light on what other Black aspiring and practicing superintendents might need to consider. With a central goal of strengthening the pipeline of the Black superintendency, systematically documenting experience can be transformative in creating spaces where Black superintendents not only exist but thrive. Further, creating autoethnographies can be educative to others—Black communities and those outside—in deepening their knowledge and understanding about how racism can be damaging to the superintendency and what can be done about it.

The process of conducting research using autoethnography as a research method is multifaceted. First, after making observations, recording the details in a journal, and reflecting, the researcher reviews field notes, interviews, and cultural artifacts to reveal patterns of personal and interpersonal cultural experience (Edwards, 2021; Ellis et al., 2011). Next, the researcher critically analyzes and reflects on these experiences, considering how others might relate to and navigate similar experiences. Then, the researcher describes these patterns using the facets of

storytelling (character development, plot development, etc.). As an autoethnography is intended to be published and reveal counternarratives, autoethnographers may additionally compare and contrast their personal experiences against existing research (Ellis et al., 2011) to reveal any inconsistencies between lived experience and dominant societal claims. Although attempts can be made to provide structure to the autoethnographic method, ultimately, "Autoethnography cannot be one fixed and unassailable method but instead requires a potentially messy, fluid and highly contextual approach to exploring and understanding self-experience in context" (Edwards, 2021, p. 3).

I advise Black urban superintendents to carefully and consistently document their lived experiences if they have any aspiration of utilizing autoethnography as a future research method. Making detailed entries in a personal journal, updated at least weekly, may prove helpful. Keeping an ongoing account of incidents, stories, and events as well as any thoughts, feelings, and personal perspectives about these interactions documents the experience, allowing a superintendent to process weekly successes and challenges, particularly as it relates to race and how race impacts their ability to lead. For example, the journal can highlight any clearly racialized incidents the superintendent encounters while operating in the leadership role. When updating this journal, superintendents should recount any pertinent conversations with as much fidelity as possible and write in a way that could be instructive to other Black superintendents. As noted in my example, I kept both a formal journal for the board (weekly updates) and a personal journal.

In addition to keeping the journal, superintendents should save meeting minutes, newspaper articles, and evidence of news stories that will help them to recall and remember specific details, dates, people, thoughts, and feelings generated by these events (Adams et al.,

2017). With these measures, superintendents can reflect on their tenure and have ample information accessible if they ever desire to publish their experiences and critical reflections.

Personal Example

I was superintendent of a large urban district in the southeastern United States. During that time, I kept a formal weekly journal of my daily activities as a superintendent. The journal was in the form of a weekly memo that was written to board members detailing the activities and important actions and engagements for me during that week. The electronic memo was kept up to date for my entire tenure as superintendent. In addition, I kept a personal journal to help process some of the daily challenges and interactions that I experienced. I began journaling because, as the first Black superintendent in a large, southern, urban school district, I wanted to capture my experiences to be informative to future school leaders. I began to unpack events and perceptions, good and bad, that made up my lived experience as a Black superintendent working in an urban environment. I understood the power of capturing my experience and being able to ultimately communicate to others how issues such as race played into my daily conversations and actions. In addition, I added articles from the media to my autoethnography to highlight racial bias or racially motivated content. My school district captured daily news articles written about the district, and I filed those stories as they were communicated. I also worked with a public relations firm to do an analysis of the news articles written on me to accurately capture how I was portrayed in the media.

I was the first Black superintendent in my urban district. As I formulated my 100-day plan, many local power brokers suggested I meet with a prominent state politician. This seasoned political figure began our meeting with, "I am someone who does not sugar coat things. Would you like me to be brutally honest, or are you someone who cannot handle direct feedback?"

Intrigued by his bluntness, I responded, "Please, the more brutal, the better for me. I appreciate direct feedback." He recounted to me that he had been

> in meetings in rooms you may never be invited to attend . . . [with] good ol' boys who are scared to death of you. . . . You will be the first cross-over Black leader that people in this city will see impacting lots of White people directly. My advice to you is to go slow. I have already heard rumblings that you have hired a lot of [racial] minorities from [out of state] and have placed them in high-profile positions in [the school district]. People are not used to seeing that much change this fast. You have impressed most of the people who have interacted with you. I think you can be here for a long time, but you need to be mindful of the fact that this is the South. The good ol' boys need to know you. It would be wise for you to identify a few of them who can vouch for you in these backroom meetings.

I understood that the politician was trying to be helpful. I shared with him the names of White men I had met locally as well as the local members of my transition team, local and national advisors who would help shape my first 100 days and year of work. The politician said, "You having a surrogate in this town will help you a great deal."

He meant a White surrogate. As I reflect on this interaction and from my interpretation drawing from the documentation that I had captured, I believe what was being communicated to me was a Black man in a "position of power" was a threat, and I would never be allowed to participate in the existing social order without a "White surrogate." What I believe to be communicated to me was the only way for me to access the rights and privileges of the White social order would be for a White man in power to speak on my behalf. The White mayor had progressively employed people of color (Hale, 2018)—a privilege clearly granted to White

leaders. As a Black man, I did not possess the right to diversify the school system dramatically like the first White female mayor had begun doing at the government level. I wrote down this conversation in a journal immediately after the meeting to preserve the memory. Troubling but informative, the documentation of this experience is what I am explaining as essential to help build knowledge about experiences of Black superintendents. In the next section, I describe in more depth how Black superintendents can systematically document their experiences to shed light on their work.

Features of Capturing, Documenting, Analyzing, and Constructing Knowledge

As noted above, autoethnography involves collecting data from a variety of sources. Table 2 provides a list of possible data sources and the types of information and self-reflective questions these sources can generate. Adding critical race theory to the reflection can help provide racially conscious, illuminating narratives to the knowledge base. As Edwards (2021) noted, autoethnography is a fluid form of research, so this table is simply an example rather than a prescriptive listing.

Table 2

Dimensions of Autoethnography Data Capture and Analysis

Type of data collection	Description	Purpose	Potential questions
Journaling	Identify a time to write daily. Mornings are best to take a moment to reflect upon the prior day's activities and events.	Capture the actions, feelings, and emotions of daily experiences.	• What happened yesterday that is worth noting form a leadership perspective? • How did the event make me feel? • What lesson did I learn from the experience? • What were the motives of individuals I interacted with as a superintendent?
Media	Save newspaper stories, TV news stories, and school district press releases and updates.	You will be able to see how the media portrays you by analyzing word choice, balance of articles, and the tone of articles.	• How am I portrayed in the media? • What words are commonly used to describe me? • What is the tone of articles are news stories?
Board weekly updates	Document weekly communications with the board of education that are written to update the board on activities.	Weekly updates provide a good history of work that was being done within the school district and what you perceived to be important to share with the board.	• What were my priorities as a superintendent? • What issues were brought to the board? • What was the reaction to weekly updates?
Board of education meeting notes	Public minutes of board meetings can be captured and analyzed.	The board meeting notes provide a summary of meetings, how issues were addressed, and how board members agreed or disagreed with the superintendent and one another.	• What was the disposition of board members? • What was the superintendent's disposition? • What was the focus of meetings? • How did board members and the superintendent interact with one another?
Board member and community emails and communications	Emails and written communications sent to the superintendent can be captured as they are public communications.	Emails can be analyzed for tone, word choice, and subject to understand how people communicate with you.	• What was the tone of messages? • What issues were communicated? • How did individuals respond to the superintendent?

Summaries, Conclusions, and Implications

In this article, I have made a call for Black superintendent autoethnographies. I have offered literature describing the racism Black superintendents face as well as the value in providing narratives documenting such experiences. I reviewed literature supporting the need for more Black superintendents, the lack of their voices in the literature, and their racially complex and frustrating job environment. I described autoethnography as research method and provided a descriptive outline for others to use as a foundation for their own autoethnographies. Given the limited number of Black superintendents, those in the position need to document their perceptions and experiences—positive and negative—to add to the knowledge base and help other Black superintendents understand the position and cope with the challenges and feelings of isolation and marginalization. Autoethnographies can provide voice to Black superintendents to inform everyone in the education field of continuing obstacles, including systemic racism, for educational leaders.

Being a Black urban superintendent is a challenging leadership task in today's educational, cultural, and political context, particularly in urban districts. To communicate structural and systemic racism Black superintendents face, I call upon Black superintendents to capture, document, and build knowledge about their experiences through autoethnographies. As Adams et al. (2017) pointed out, the goal of the autoethnography is to reach a wide audience not limited to academics. I found a troubling reality is that to be successful in improving student outcomes, a Black superintendent must survive negative politics and power struggles (Modan, 2021) while simultaneously addressing the powerful role that race and racism play in their leadership dynamic. I argue that through autoethnography, superintendents can contrib- ute to the limited body of

knowledge concerning Black superintendents, par- ticularly in urban districts, providing insights that may

inform and empower current and future Black leaders in education.

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