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"Trial and error" and "trudging up a hill": Superintendents' beliefs about and engagement in state education policymaking

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This mixed methods research study explores superintendents' beliefs about and engagement in state education policymaking processes. Through interviews with 58 superintendents and a national survey of superintendents, I find that many superintendents feel that their voices have value in state policymaking spaces; however, superintendents' actual engagement in state policymaking processes is relatively low. Three factors shape superintendents' state policy engagement: (1) personal capacity, (2) proximity to state capitol, and (3) district size. This work can guide the development of formal educational opportunities and experiences to better prepare superintendents to engage in policy spaces. Colleges of education, researchers, and policymakers can also draw on this work as they consider solutions to reduce inequalities in superintendents' access to shape state education policy.

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Abstract

This mixed methods research study explores superintendents' beliefs about and engagement in state education policymaking processes. Through interviews with 58 superintendents and a national survey of superintendents, I find that many superintendents feel that their voices have value in state policymaking spaces; however, superintendents' actual engagement in state policymaking processes is relatively low. Three factors shape superintendents' state policy engagement: (1) personal capacity, (2) proximity to state capitol, and (3) district size. This work can guide the development of formal educational opportunities and experiences to better prepare superintendents to engage in policy spaces. Colleges of education, researchers, and policymakers can also draw on this work as they consider solutions to reduce inequalities in superintendents' access to shape state education policy.

Keywords: policy, power, engagement, superintendents, mixed methods

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Leaders of America's K-12 public school districts have increasingly been called upon to create equitable educational experiences by advocating on behalf of students and breaking down inequities within the K-12 public education system (Björk et al., 2020; Bredenson, 2004; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Theoharis, 2007). A powerful avenue through which educational leaders can advance educational equity is through shaping, interpreting, and implementing policy. For example, Hanushek and Luque (2003) and Mingat and Tan (2003) discuss how strategic policy actions by district leaders around class size and teacher salaries affect student performance; and Turner and Spain (2020) show how students' equitable access to educational opportunities is influenced by district leaders' academic tracking policymaking. Though district leaders have some discretion over the local realization of class size and teacher salary policies—and many other education policies—decisions made by district leaders are often shaped by state policy and funding.

In the United States—where a right to education is not guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution—state constitutions compel state governments to maintain and operate public schools, and provide for the majority of school funding needs (Black, 2020). While state government engagement and involvement in education policy has ebbed and flowed throughout history, state policymakers "have gained the upper hand in governance and have charted a course that may enable them to exercise considerable influence on important dimensions of local schools" (Malen, 2003, p. 210). Within this context, where education policy is being developed primarily by policymakers with little experience in education beyond their personal K-12 education experience as a student or parent of a student (White et al., forthcoming), the expertise

of education leaders is essential to the creation of state policies that advance educational equity. In short, education leaders aiming to "advance educational equity must not only do so at the local level, but also the state-level" (Sampson, 2019, p. 175).

Acknowledging that state policy influences local practices and educational environments in America's public schools (Grissom et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2004), researchers have explored how education leaders make sense of and implement state education policies in ways that contribute to or constrain progress toward educational equity and social justice (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2007; Mavrogordato & White, 2019; Callahan & Shifrer, 2016; Carraway & Young, 2015; Coburn, 2005; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2015; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011; Werts & Brewer, 2015). While much of this research has focused on principals, a growing body of research has drawn attention to district superintendents as actors shaping, interpreting, and communicating state education policies, as well as allocating resources and devising administrative rules to guide state policy implementation that fosters equity (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021; DeMatthews et al., 2017; Donaldson et al., 2021; Kowalski, 2005; Kruse et al., 2018; Leh et al., 2023; Woulfin et al., 2016). Yet, research has often focused on education leaders' interpreting and implementing state education policy *within* school walls, *after* an education issue has been defined and acted upon by state policy actors. Indeed, Woulfin and colleagues (2016) emphasize the role of superintendent "in mediating and brokering ideas from the state policy environment" and contend that superintendents must be "aware of their role in interpreting and shaping others' interpretation of educational policies" (p. 135). Strikingly little research has examined superintendents' role in proactively shaping state education policy in state policy spaces—before the policies are enacted.

Moreover, superintendents are often expected to use "political acuity to enhance their effectiveness" and be "political strategists" within their local communities (Kowalski & Björk, 2004, p. 82-83). These conceptions of superintendents' political role have been constrained to the micro-political context of the local district and surrounding community. For example, Boyd (1974) called for superintendents to influence policy through recommendations to local school boards and "adroit maneuvering and persuasion" within their local community. Research on superintendents' macropolitical engagement (Hurst, 2017; Szolowicz & Wisman, 2021), including their engagement in state-level K-12 education policy is scarce.

Recognizing that superintendents are "no longer able to choose whether or not to get involved in the political arena" (Edwards, 2006, p. 138), this research aims to explore superintendents' beliefs about and engagement in education policy in contexts outside of their local district—specifically, in state governing bodies where many policies shaping the day-to-day work of schools and the educational experiences of students are being designed and discussed. As state government becomes increasingly involved in dictating local education policies and practices (Henig, 2009; Malen, 2003), this study shifts from the traditional view of superintendents as local policy actors to better understand if and how they adopt a role as active agents in state policymaking processes. Three research questions guide this work:

1. What are superintendents' beliefs about engaging in state K-12 education policymaking?
2. How do superintendents engage with state K-12 education policymakers and participate in K-12 education policymaking processes?
3. What, if any, relationship exists between state and local contexts and superintendents' beliefs about and engagement in state education policy processes?

To explore these questions, I employed a mixed methods sequential explanatory design (Ivankova et al., 2006). First, I conducted semi-structured interviews with nearly 60 superintendents across two states to better understand their beliefs about and engagement in state education policymaking processes, as well as the ways that local and state contexts enhanced or constrained the ways they thought about, and then actually did, engage in state education policy processes. Second, I conducted a national survey of superintendents to explore superintendents' beliefs about their role as state-level policy actors, their levels of engagement with state policymakers and state policymaking processes, and the role that formal and informal education and social networks played in both their beliefs and engagement in state policy processes. This work can serve as a guide for leadership preparation programs and other organizations supporting current and aspiring superintendents to best prepare superintendents to engage in important state policy processes. This work can also inform leaders in colleges of education, researchers, superintendents, and state and local policymakers of barriers superintendents' face in engaging in state policy processes, and inform dialogue around inequalities in superintendents' access and ability to shape and inform state education policy.

Conceptual Framework

I approach this study through the interconnected lenses of new localism (Crownson & Goldring, 2009) and superintendents as embodiments of the larger places they represent (Jayne, 2011). I also expand empirical and theoretical scholarship focused on how local education policy implementation is shaped by state and local contexts to consider if and how state and local contexts are associated with policy engagement in education policy*making* processes.

Shaping policy in the context of new localism

State policymakers have become "increasingly, and at times aggressively, involved in efforts to influence schools" (Malen, 2003, p. 195). Most recently, policymakers in many states introduced and enacted anti-transgender and "Don't Say Gay" policies, legislation to limit teaching about race and racism, and bills that limit reading materials in schools (Anderson, 2021; Meyer et al., 2022; Mintzer, 2023; Pendharkar, 2023; Schoenbaum & Murphy, 2023). However, as state actors have been increasingly called upon to advance education policies, local education leaders' involvement in and influence over education policy does not have to wane (Henig, 2009). To the contrary, as state actors' take more active roles in education policymaking, superintendents may take concerted steps to share their expertise and knowledge in ways that will help policymakers understand policy problems and shape policy solutions. In fact, research suggests that state education policymakers highly value the voices of district leaders during the education policymaking process (White, 2018).

My inquiry draws on Crowson and Goldring's (2009) framework of new localism in an era of centralization. In particular, education leaders must often comply with prescriptive state education policies (Henig, 2009). At the same time, education leaders have been called upon to engage in policy actions that shape policy to their own contexts (Crowson & Goldring, 2009). Thus, while superintendents can shape "top down" policies within their context during the implementation process, they are also uniquely positioned to shape policy through a "bottom up" approach that informs policy as it is being made (Elmore, 1979).

Yet, literature suggests that superintendents, serving at the pleasure of a locally elected school board, are in a precarious position to engage in political arenas where policy is being made (Björk & Gurley, 2005; Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021; Kruse et al., 2018). The precariousness of the work of superintendents—as appointees of publicly elected boards—has

been fortified in recent years as political stances related to how school districts should approach the COVID-19 pandemic and social issues such as racism and gender identity and sexuality have proliferated (White et al., 2023). Within this context, superintendents, on the one hand, are "street-level workers" that answer to their local communities and school boards and are responsible for developing and implementing sound local policy (Lipsky, 1980; Spillane et al., 2002). On the other hand, a growing state role in education policy coupled with a growing market and private-sector in K-12 education has created "an erosion of localities as sites for both pragmatic leadership and political mobilization" (Henig, 2009, p. 112). As such, district leaders' engagement with policy processes has begun to look "more and more like the political and administrative interactions surrounding such other local services as housing, welfare, and community development," necessitating broader policy participation "if the supporters of public education are to hold their own" (Henig, 2009, p. 126-127). This study positions superintendents as key policy informants (Grossman, 2010) who are capable of proactively impacting policy as it is developed, both on their own and in collaboration with others (Sabatier & Weible, 2014).

Superintendents as "avatars"

As the chief operating officers of one of the most important public institutions within a community, superintendents are highly visible leaders. School districts not only provide an essential public service to their community by providing free, high-quality education, available to all students in the community, but they are often one of the largest employers in their local community and often serve as a hub for civic, social service, and recreational purposes and enrich community connectedness. In this way, superintendents are similarly positioned as mayors of local communities (Marland, 1970)—exceptionally visible community leaders who serve the public and are held accountable for providing essential public service to their

constituents. As such, coupled with the concepts of new localism, I extend Jayne's (2011) concept of "mayors as avatars" to superintendents.

Similar to gaps in superintendent research, research on mayors often focuses on local political leadership, and has both "not adequately considered the role of mayors in broader political and economic structural change" and

> failed to develop detailed and sustained accounts of the ways in which mayors perform a role that is messy, complicated and underpinned by complex, political, economic, social, cultural, and spatial practices and processes in different cities (and different spaces and places within those cities) (Jayne, 2011, p. 802).

As such, Jayne (2011) draws on McNeill's (2001) concept of mayors as "personal representatives of their city" (p. 805) to posit that mayors can serve as "avatars" that contribute to understandings of the "diversity and complexity of spatiality of local political leadership" (p. 808). Jayne (2011) contends that mayors serve as "visible manifestation or embodiment" of "abstract concepts of ideologies of place, community and politics that are both territorial and relational" (p. 802, 805).

Extending this framework to superintendents offers a view of superintendents as embodiments of their local districts, operating from local political logics within broader political contexts—in the case of this study, state policymaking spaces. Within the context of new localism, viewing superintendents through this lens offers an opportunity to understand their political relationality to both local spaces and other superintendents. In their role as "avatars", superintendents serve as representatives of their districts and key policy informants (Grossman, 2010) who are capable of proactively impacting policy as it is developed, both on their own and in relation with others (Sabatier & Weible, 2014).

State and Local Contexts and Policy Processes

Finally, this work considers empirical and theoretical work that suggests that superintendents' beliefs about and engagement in state policy processes may be encouraged and empowered, as well as challenged and constrained, by various contextual factors. Research focused on if and how state and local contexts factor into superintendents' engagement in education policymaking processes is scant. However, research suggests that education policy implementation can vary across states, and is shaped by contexts such as state as well as district size and local capacity (Jennings & Spillane, 1996; Spillane, 1996, 1998; Spillane et al., 2002). As such, I consider how state and local contexts factor into superintendents' approaches to education policy *before* implementation—explicitly, in policymaking processes.

Methods and Data

This study employs a mixed methods sequential explanatory design (Ivankova et al., 2006), drawing on interviews with superintendents and a national survey of superintendents. Guided by Ivankova et al. (2006), the *a priori* mixed methods explanatory research design decisions that I made included (a) sequence of data collection and analysis and (b) stages in the research process where the two phases are connected and results integrated (Creswell et al., 2003). Regarding sequence, I collected the data in two consecutive phases: qualitative, followed by quantitative. The integration of the qualitative and quantitative phases occurred in three places: at the outset of the study, where I formulated research questions that could only be answered with both forms of data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010); the intermediate stage when analysis of survey data informed analysis of interview data, and vice versa (Hanson et al., 2005); and the interpretation stage (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003).

Data sources and collection procedures

In the first, qualitative, phase of the study, I used a multiple case study approach (Yin, 2009) to explore superintendents' beliefs about and approaches to state policy engagement, and if and how local contexts are associated with particular beliefs about and engagement in state policymaking processes. Within the multiple case study design—where cases are at the state level—analyses focused on within and across case variation (Yin, 2009). I first developed and piloted a semi-structured interview protocol. Working with three recently retired superintendents, I explored whether the issues I aimed to explore for this research study were being adequately captured by my semi-structured interview questions. The pilot study included both cognitive interviews, as well as a post-interview discussion around question wording and order, interview techniques, and whether questions should be modified, added, or removed (Malmqvist et al., 2019; van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001).

In Spring 2019, I recruited superintendents across the states of Ohio and Virginia to participate in one 60-minute semi-structured interview (Patton, 1990). The states of Ohio and Virginia were selected as cases for two primary reasons. First, these two states are often characterized as "microcosms" and "bellwether states" of American politics writ-large (Burns, 2012; McLelland, 2015). Second, Ohio and Virginia have distinctive K-12 school district structures: while Ohio is a state with relatively decentralized districts of varying sizes, Virginia school districts are more centralized, with primarily large county- or city-based districts. This dichotomy allowed for analysis of how local contexts such as district size and local capacity may contribute to superintendents' beliefs about and engagement in state education policymaking.

To recruit superintendents, I curated a list of all superintendents in Ohio and Virginia for which public contact data was available (n=739). Through a stratified random sampling process (Sheppard, 2020) that aimed to maximize within-state variation in superintendents' backgrounds

and demographics, as well as district size, demographics, and urbanicity of the district, I selected approximately ten percent of superintendents from the curated list. Superintendents were recruited to participate in the interview via an e-mail invitation; non-responders received two follow-up invitations. Superintendents were offered a $50 Amazon gift card as a token of thanks for participating in the interview; however, only 50% of interviewees accepted the gift card, which aligns with methodological research on political elites that suggests some elites often have rules about accepting compensation (Kertzer & Renshon, 2022).

Superintendents were provided with the option to be interviewed face-to-face, via phone, or via Zoom. In total, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 58 superintendents from Ohio (n=28) and Virginia (n=30) between June and October 2019. Table 1 details response rates in each round of recruitment, interview modalities, and district locale of interviewees.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The purpose of the second, quantitative phase of the study was to explore superintendents' beliefs about and actual engagement in state policy processes via a national survey of superintendents. I piloted the survey with three retired superintendents to ensure clear question wording and response options, and to identify the approximate amount of time the survey may take participants to complete (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). The survey was broken into three sections which, alongside question items and response types, are shown in Table 2. In order to conduct a national survey of superintendents, in Summer 2020, I developed a database of names and e-mails of all public school district superintendents in the United States whose information was publicly available either via public-facing superintendent directories published by state education agencies or state associations of superintendents, or through district websites (n=12,553). Subsequently, I distributed my survey to all superintendent contacts via

Qualtrics in Spring 2021. I followed best practices for access and design in research with occupational elites—defined as "actors whose institutional roles afford them higher levels of influence over public policy" (Kertzer & Renshon, 2022, p. 9). In particular, I addressed issues of anonymity and duration (Goldstein, 2002) by giving respondents the approximate time commitment to participation in the survey within my recruitment e-mails, and clearly stating that all responses would be kept confidential and maintained in a secure, password-protected space. I followed political elite research methodological recommendations to initiate multiple follow up messages (Vis & Stolwijk, 2020) and sent non-responders two reminder e-mails.

Seven percent of superintendents responded to the survey. This response rate is typical of occupational elites, who are more difficult to access (Kertzer & Renshon, 2022), and is line with response rates of surveys conducted by the American Association of School Administrators (e.g., Kowalski et al., 2010; Tienken, 2020) and other national superintendent surveys (White, 2023). Given that superintendents were leading through crisis at the time the survey was distributed, it is also possible that the survey response rate was negatively impacted by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, survey respondents were representative of national superintendent demographics: among those that responded to the gender and race/ethnicity survey questions, 28.5% identified as female and 71.5% as male; and 93.2% of identified as White/Caucasian, 4.4% Black/African American, and 2.4% another racial/ethnic group; 4.6% indicated that they were of Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin. Demographics of both survey respondents and interviewees, in comparison to national demographics, are shown in Table 3.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Analysis

Qualitative analysis. Interviews conducted in person or via the phone were recorded via voice recorder, and those conducted via Zoom were recorded within the Zoom software. All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, and transcripts were entered into Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software. I began with deductive coding in which superintendents' responses to interview questions were coded based on the topic of the question. For example, superintendents' responses to the question "Do you think that superintendents, in general, should be involved in the making and discussion of education policies at the state level as you are?" were coded as "beliefs about role/involvement." Sub-codes were then applied indicating whether the interviewee felt superintendents should (a) be more or less involved than they currently are and (b) whether superintendents should be involved all the time, sometimes, or never. As another example, responses to the question "To what extent would you say you are involved in the making of and discussion around various state education policies in [state]?" was coded as "Actual involvement in state policymaking processes." Subsequently, I applied codes related to sentiments around involvement (i.e., positive, negative, neutral) and frequency of involvement.

Next, I employed the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify emerging themes among superintendents within and across states (Miles et al., 2014) and allowed codes to emerge inductively. To simultaneously preserve the uniqueness of each superintendent and generate cross-cutting themes, I followed a within- and across-case synthesis of interviews through weekly memos (Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2009). While described in more detail in the results section, one example of the inductive coding was that superintendents frequently discussed "contexts that impact state policy involvement." Within this code, I identified three contexts that numerous superintendents described: capacity, size of district, and proximity to policymakers. Within the capacity code, four sub-codes emerged: financial

resources, human resources, time resources, and education/training; and, within these three codes, I coded whether they contributed to or inhibited involvement in state policymaking. Once all transcripts were coded, I applied descriptors of state, district locale, and superintendent gender to each transcript and subsequently explored patterns within each case (i.e., state) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Finally, I developed categorical matrices to examine quotes that provided illustrative examples related to each pattern or theme. To provide context for each quote and demonstrate how the full sample of superintendent interviewees informed the findings, all direct quotes presented in the findings include the de-identified transcript number, state, district locale, and superintendent gender within a parenthetical.

Quantitative Data Analysis. Survey data was exported from Qualtrics and imported into STATA for cleaning and descriptive analyses. Descriptive analysis are valuable when they identify "socially important phenomena that have not previously been recognized" as well as when they are "used to diagnose issues that warrant the immediate attention of policymakers, practitioners, and researchers" (Loeb et al., 2017, p. 1, 3). Quantitative analyses focused on variation in Likert scale responses for survey questions on beliefs about the importance of engagement with state policymakers, frequency of engagement, and the role of postsecondary education in preparing them to engage with state policymakers.

Results

The majority of superintendents felt that superintendents should be more engaged in state policymaking processes than they currently are. Though some superintendents simply saw state education policy engagement as part of their job, others felt it was important to provide state policymakers—who often have little experience in education—with tangible examples and data. Still others felt it was important to engage in policymaking processes solely to set a good

example of democratic engagement for students. In contrast, some superintendents felt that engagement in state education policymaking processes was not worth their time, often because they felt like their voice was not valued by policymakers, they had too much going on locally, or they were hesitant to engage in political activism.

While many superintendents felt that their voices had value in state policymaking spaces, actual engagement in state policymaking processes was quite limited. Three factors shaped superintendents' actual engagement: (1) personal capacity, including money, time, human resources, and education/training, (2) proximity to state policymakers, and (3) size of the district/weight of voice. In what follows, I describe these themes, and elaborate on how superintendents' beliefs about and actual engagement in state education policymaking vary by state and local contexts.

Superintendents' beliefs about engaging in state education policymaking processes

Nearly all superintendents indicated that they want to be more engaged in state education policymaking processes and feel that they can provide a valuable perspective. As shown in Figure 1, 91% of superintendents agreed or strongly agreed that their knowledge is valuable to state policymakers. Additionally, 95% of superintendents believed it is important to be engaged with state policymakers, particularly state education policymakers (97%)—the same proportion who believed it is important to be engaged in local policymaking processes (97%). Among interviewees who elaborated on their beliefs about state policy engagement, 10% felt that they did not need to be involved in state policy processes (OH: 7%, VA: 13%), 21% felt they should be involved sometimes/in specific circumstances (OH: 18%, VA: 23%) and 40% felt they should be involved all the time (OH: 39%, VA: 40%). Regardless of feelings of the extent of

involvement, 53% explicitly indicated that superintendent should be *more* involved in state education policymaking processes than they currently are (OH: 54%, VA: 53%).

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Reasons for engagement in state policymaking processes. Superintendents felt it was important to be involved in state education policy processes for three primary reasons: (1) it is part of the job (2) they are experts and can provide concrete examples of how the policy will impact students, and (3) wanting to set an example for others. Analyses exploring variation based on district locale and state did not reveal any clear patterns of variation across these characteristics.

***Engagement as part of the job*.** For many superintendents, engaging in state policymaking processes was seen as part of their job responsibilities. One superintendent stated, "if we're not speaking up for ourselves and for our kids, then we're not doing our jobs" (33: OH, rural, male). Similarly, superintendents felt compelled to be engaged in state policy processes as part of their commitment to improving public schools writ-large, not just for their district. One superintendent shared that superintendents needed to "flex our local muscle more to be involved" and felt that her "job is larger than just running the school district, it's also advocating for the school district down in the state house and around the community" (31: OH, suburb, female). Another superintendent echoed this comment, feeling that it was his "job to advocate for our schools and to hold them [policymakers] accountable for the decisions that they make". He shared that "sometimes that's a tough conversation […] but at some point in time we are not going to lay our kids on an alter to be sacrificed and looked over" (17: VA, city, male).

***Engagement to share expertise and concrete examples*.** Some nsuperintendents emphasized the importance of providing expertise to policymakers who have little experience in

education, sharing thoughts such as “we are the most reliable and knowledgeable voices of our schools and communities” (48: OH, rural, male) and “most of the folks up there recognize that they're not educators. It's a lot of attorneys and folks who've never been in a classroom necessarily. So I think it's great whenever we can get involved” (7: VA, town, male). One superintendent also stated

> a lot of legislators are not educators and so if you can provide them the facts that they need during the general assembly meetings, it's worth their weight in gold for them because they're not fully sure which some educational bills come forward (20: VA, rural, male).

Similarly, some superintendents felt it was important to provide concrete examples and stories to state policymakers. One superintendent described a situation in which he told a state policymaker

> ‘That's a great idea, but let me tell you an instance where that really won't work. Your good intentions are going to have some unintended consequences and possibly impact this child in this way or this family in this way.’[…and] when you're sitting in session and a legislator is serving in a committee and they tell the story of a child that you told them and then you watch the faces and that's like... (56: VA, rural, male)

Engagement to set an example. Several superintendents indicated that they were involved in state policymaking because they wanted to set a good example for their constituencies. Superintendents shared sentiments like, “I would tell them [students], ‘Democracy is a verb. You should be involved.’ And I want to set an example, and I do think students see that, and they've said that to me” (53: OH, rural, male). From a broader perspective, some superintendents echoed a slightly different version of common mantra of democratic societies of “if you don’t vote, you can’t complain.” In particular, one superintendent explicitly stated that if they were not involved, they did not “feel like we have the right to then complain

about it later" (9: VA, suburb, female); and another shared, "if I don't go out there and advocate for us, then shame on me because then I can't complain when the bill gets passed or doesn't get passed" (4: VA, suburb, female). In a similar vein, one superintendent wanted to ensure that policymakers could not place blame on superintendents for their decisions, stating,

> you don't want [policymaker] to say I have not had one single superintendent call me or one school administrator call me opposed to this. So email or call and say I'm opposed to this. Then they can't say I didn't have anybody who opposed you. And [policymaker] told me one time, 'I don't know whether I agree with you, but if you don't call and tell me, I don't know that I don't agree with you or I do agree with you. Call and tell me your opinion, or email me.' I do think that part is important. I think in the absence of hearing anything—and we all sort of do that—silence is acceptance; and the absence of hearing from us, they assume it's okay. (25: VA, rural, male)

Reasons for limiting engagement in state policymaking processes. Among superintendents that were less compelled to engage or less positive about engaging with state policymakers, pessimism was often rooted in not feeling as though the effort was worth their time. One superintendent asked, "why bother because we've had years when people don't listen?" He then critiqued those who shared about their involvement with state policymakers, stating "I've just kind of gotten tired of it. If I spend an hour talking with a legislator, I'd rather spend an hour working with our kids here or on something that mattered locally?" (22: VA, town, male). Another superintendent felt it was not part of his job responsibilities, stating,

> We weren't hired to form state education policy. We were hired to enact state policy. I think getting our input and having a better, broader view of all the implications that things could

> have that you may not have thought about as you're designing the legislation would be helpful. (51: OH, town, male)

Some superintendents felt that they had little impact because they rarely got face-time with their legislator, making statements like "I just don't see the benefit in taking time away from being in the district" if they only were able to talk with a legislative aid (28: OH, rural, female). Similarly, superintendents sometimes felt that policymakers should actively seek superintendents out, rather than superintendents begging for their time; as one superintendent expressed, "I don't think we should go to Richmond, hat in hand and tell them what we need. I think they should ask us to come" (19: VA, city, female). Others simply felt that their voice carried little weight, as expressed by these two superintendents:

> I would like to be more involved. My first priority is home obviously, and I need to make sure that things here are where they should be. But I wish that we had more of a voice from a state perspective in terms of what we're accountable for, so that we could help as opposed to react. I feel like we're constantly reacting. (30: OH, suburb, female)

> My first commitment is taking care of our school division. Part of that, in the grand scheme of things, a very small part of that is making sure that at the state level, nothing's going to happen to us that impacts locally, something that all of a sudden our hands are tied and we're hamstrung and can't do what we need to do. I think an awareness of that, but I think one could become overly engaged in this and all of a sudden, you take up too much of a [state policymaker's] time. I think there's a balance in that. I realize I'm one voice of thousands that they listen to. Does my voice carry weight? No. But does the superintendent of [district] carry a little bit of weight? Yes. (56: VA, rural, male)

Building on this sentiment, some superintendents felt an obligation to be involved, even though they did not have a strong desire to do so, did not have enough time, or felt vulnerable to political backlash. Some superintendents saw state policy engagement as "a necessary evil" (47: OH, suburb, male). Others shared that they were "involved out of necessity", feeling that "if we don't do something, it's sink or swim for us" (17: VA, city, male). Similarly, some superintendents felt an obligation to be involved. For example, even though he was "spread so thin" in terms of work at his 31 school sites, one superintendent conveyed frustration when he would "read something one day and go oh crap, that passed?" (11: VA, rural, male). Another superintendent grounded his decision to stay out of state policy issues in the need to be responsive to local elected boards and avoid political backlash, sharing:

> You really only should be involved if you are willing to speak to your convictions. Because superintendents in Ohio report to locally elected boards […] superintendents are often very cautious to kind of go with the flow because they don't want to jeopardize their seat. So maybe superintendents in these other districts can get more involved through their advocacy organizations as opposed to maybe direct advocacy that leaves them feeling too vulnerable because we're doing nobody any good if we all just get fired because we speak up. (40: OH, city, male)

Superintendents' actual engagement in state education policymaking processes

While many superintendents felt it was important to be engaged in state education policymaking processes—even those who were less optimistic about the investment in and impact of engagement—superintendents have relatively low levels of engagement at legislative sessions and state board of education (SBE) meetings. On the national survey, the majority of superintendents indicated that they attended two of fewer SBE meetings (85%) and state

legislative sessions, hearings, or committee meetings (62%) per year. About one-quarter (23%) of superintendents attended three or four, and 15% attended five or more legislative sessions, hearings, or committee meetings per year. Frequency of engagement was lower for SBE meetings, where just 9% of superintendents attended three to four meetings, and 6% attended five or more meetings per year.

Moreover, superintendents correspond with state education policymakers relatively infrequently—often just a few times a year (see Figure 2). When superintendents do interact with state policymakers, they primarily engage with their local representative, who may or may not be in a strong position of power over state education policy. District superintendents rarely communicated with state policymakers who have the most power over education policymaking processes, such as education committee chairpersons and members who are on the front lines of deciding whether education bills advance in state policymaking process, or state superintendents and SBE members who often have the power to propose and vote on state rules and regulations for public schools. This finding runs counter to survey patterns shown in Figure 1, where the proportion of superintendents felt it was nearly equally as important to engage with any state policymaker (95%) as it was to engage specifically with state education policymakers (97%).

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Interviews with superintendents revealed that perhaps one reason that superintendents rarely correspond with state policymakers is because they are frustrated with lack of engagement and follow through by state policymakers. One superintendent shared, “When I've communicated, it's ‘Thanks, but we don't really want to engage with you. We've made up our mind’"(43: OH, town, male) and “Everybody gets so frustrated about is the lack of follow

through…I think superintendents should be very involved in policy, but it's so difficult because you just feel like you're trudging up a hill" (32: OH, suburb, male).

Contexts that influence state education policy engagement

Four aspects of superintendents' local contexts emerged as influential in their engagement in state education policymaking processes: (1) personal capacity, (2) proximity to state policymakers, and (3) district size/weight of voice. Looking across the two case study states, issues related to personal capacity and proximity to state policymakers were universal challenges; however, district size/weight of voice was mentioned more often by superintendents in Ohio, where there is significantly more variation in district size than in Virginia. Additionally, Virginia superintendents frequently discussed the strength of working collaboratively with one another and their state association of superintendents. Ohio superintendents rarely mentioned collaborative policy engagement.

Personal capacity. A major barrier to superintendents' engagement in state education policymaking processes was time and staffing. This pattern was particularly common for superintendents in smaller districts. As one superintendent pointed out, "I think there's where it takes a lot of time, it takes energy, and a lot of times just trying to plan this call today was troubling" (31: OH, suburb, female). Superintendents in smaller districts specifically shared feeling crunched for time, making statements such as "The superintendent is 24-7, 365, and in small districts you don't have staffing" (43: OH, town, male); "we don't have the days off to take to advocate, and so we're reluctant to do so" (10: VA, suburb, male); and "I would spend more time if I had more time. We'll have an issue at school or my other job responsibilities take over, and then I can't go to Richmond and I'm very frustrated" (9: VA, suburb, female).

Smaller districts superintendent also felt constrained by a lack of human resources. For example, one superintendent shared,

> If I'm in a one horse town and I'm in a 800 student district and I don't have a Bob, and I don't have a Meryl, and I don't have these people and it's just me, it's like being a high school principal. You don't have as much time. (44: OH, town, male)

Both large and small district superintendents recognized that districts with more resources to hire someone to engage with state policymakers were often heard in state policymaking processes. For example, a superintendent of a small rural district in Virginia explained that "all of the larger [districts] have lobbyists that look out for their interests" and felt that the smaller districts "don't have the resources that other large ones do" (23: VA, rural, male). A superintendent of a large district explained what this looked like in their district, stating

> When we would push back on things, [policymakers] had to listen, because it was such a large [district], but also a lot of that was achieved through our lobbyist who constantly was meeting with legislators who were staying on top of policy, who bring everything back to him in the Reader's Digest version. These are the things that are going to impact our division. So you never were caught unaware of something. (6: VA, city, female)

When superintendents in smaller, lower capacity districts were working on local issues—particularly ballot initiatives—they also expressed hesitancy to get involved at the state level due to limited capacity. For example, one superintendent shared "we're going to be on the ballot at [sic] March, so that'll be my first ballot issue in five years as superintendent. And while we're on the ballot, that's all I have time for, to be honest" (28: OH, rural, female). Other small and rural district superintendents had limited personal capacity because, without many other central office staff, they managed with a wide variety of local issues. One superintendent shared,

> Superintendents in larger school districts who have more people, maybe can do a little bit more. But even then, you're dealing with your own local stuff, levies, buildings, cheerleading, whatever it is, playground, walkie talkies, you're dealing with all this other things too Like again, in a big district you're typically not. (39: OH, suburb, female).

In some cases, especially in Virginia, superintendents credited their state association of superintendents with reducing capacity-related barriers to involvement. For example, one superintendent shared,

> Last year there were 300-some legislation deals. So how do you have time to go through 300 and some legislative bills. So thank goodness for them to kind of tease into them further and kind of say, you know, we need to look at this one, this one, this one. And so then we focus on 10 or so versus 350. So yeah, I'd like to have more time, but thank goodness for them and I can devote time on those 10 or so. (13: VA, rural, male)

Another Virginia superintendent expressed that they were "really thankful for the superintendent organization" because "if you're hearing with one voice what 133 superintendents want then it does hold a little bit of weight and we push it forward" (5: VA, suburb, female).

Survey data provided insight into another personal capacity issue that superintendents faced: education and training to engage in state policymaking processes. As shown in Figure 3, only about one-third of superintendents agreed or strongly agreed that their postsecondary training helped them (a) understand the state education policymaking process or (b) how to engage with state education policymakers. Similarly, about two-thirds of superintendents indicated that their postsecondary education did not emphasize the importance of engaging with state education policymakers and the state education policymaking process. Zero interviewees felt that they received formal training about policy or policy engagement. As one superintendent

shared, they learned how to engage in state policymaking processes via "Experience. Talking with others. Spending a lot of time with older, experienced superintendents and having discussions with them. And trial and error. Just doing things" (50: OH, suburb, male).

INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

Proximity to state policymakers. Superintendents in districts closer to the state capitol were often more likely to be engaged in state education policymaking processes. One superintendent shared

> I run a district that's close to the capitol, so for me it's a 30 minute drive...Some of my colleagues run much smaller districts with no support staff and they're two and a half or three hours away from [the capitol]. It's just not really feasible for some of those folks" (29: OH, town male). Similarly, another superintendent described that "when we have those [legislative] breakfasts, I shoot down [redacted] street. I don't have to drive […] I am literally three miles from the statehouse. (39, OH, suburb, female)

This same superintendent shared that she previously served in a district about two hours away from the capitol and, in that district, she was rarely meeting with state policymakers.

In contrast, superintendents leading districts in remote areas of their state shared the challenges of distance and the amount of time required to access state policymaking spaces. For example, one superintendent shared that the drive to the state capitol was "about three hours and it's only a three minute time to testify. And so that's a long day just to testify for three minutes" (20: VA, rural, male). Some superintendents stated that they tried to be engaged "from a distance," but felt it was "not the same as being in their office and speaking to them [state policymakers] directly" (7: VA, town, male). There was awareness that superintendents closer to the capitol "are probably more involved because they are just closer in proximity[…] I'm sure,

because I know the superintendent of [district close to capitol] and they are way more involved in lobbying and politics kind of things" (14: VA, rural, female).

When engagement with state policymakers required a lot of out-of-district time, rural and small district superintendent often felt that the local community or school board did not value their engagement. One superintendent shared,

> When I first got to the [area], they [the board] didn't believe in coming to Richmond. They really didn't. The frank piece of it is we're closer to nine other state capitals than we are to Richmond. You think I'm joking. I can be in [another state's capitol city] in five hours. It takes six hours to get Richmond. (56: VA, rural, male)

Another superintendent commented that to speak to state policymakers at the capitol was "an overnight trip" that involved ten hours of driving round-trip. He shared,

> it's not possible for me to do anything constructive in a day driving up and for an hour meeting and coming back. So I'm envious of the superintendents that are closer to Richmond that say, "Yeah, I ran up right before lunch." And I'm like, "Yeah, I had to leave before breakfast to get here." So I'm envious of that. (2: VA, rural, male)

Size of district/weight of voice. Some superintendents felt limited in their ability to engage due to a perceived lack of weight of their voice in the state policymaking processes. In particular, many superintendents in smaller districts indicated that they were less engaged in state policymaking processes because their voice had little leverage with state policymakers. One superintendent compared his prior experience in a smaller district where he "may not have had quite an audience with them [policymakers]" to now, as "the superintendent of a district that's the county seat, I'm a little more visible" (49: OH, suburb, male). Similarly, a superintendent described a larger district that had substantial sway in policymaking processes, stating that the

district was “big enough that the way they go is the way the state will go.” Further, she shared that larger district superintendents “carry a lot of weight when you have that many schools, and that many people in that area. A small school system doesn't really carry a lot of brawn when it comes to anybody giving a crap what we want” (14: VA, rural, female).

Frustration among superintendents who did not feel that their voice held much weight, often led to disillusionment about engagement. One superintendent shared,

> I guess I've become a little disenfranchised because after so many years of trying to point out things that I saw that might need to be fixed to address whatever school [district] I was in and nobody was listening, it's almost why bother any more. Why waste my time doing that? I have other stuff to do. Because at the end of the day, if I scream loudly and I'm in [small district] or [my district], people don't listen. If the superintendent in [large district] screams, and I know superintendent] well, but if he screams, he's going to be heard. He doesn't have to scream. He can whisper, and he's going to be heard. That's the choice I made to be in medium to small school systems. I would rather be involved. I just kind of got tired of it. (22: VA, town, male)

Discussion and Implications

This research examined superintendents’ beliefs about and engagement in state education policymaking processes, accounting the ways that superintendents, like mayors, “perform a role that is messy, complicated and underpinned by complex, political, economic, social, cultural, and spatial practices and processes in different cities” (Jayne, 2011, p. 802). Superintendents described the varied reasons for performing this role—with some seeing it as part of their job responsibilities or a mechanism through which they can set an example for students around democratic engagement. Superintendents felt that their voices were important to state

policymakers, and often described their engagement in state policymaking processes similarly to how mayors have been described as "avatars"—contributing to state education policymakers' understandings of the local context in which prospective policies would be implemented, and the implications such policies would have on students, educators, families, and communities. Superintendents' acknowledgement of the power that large district superintendents have in state policymaking processes suggests that superintendents' engagement in state policymaking processes occurs in relation to both their local spaces as well as other superintendents.

Many superintendents actively engage in state policymaking processes and believe that their voice is valuable in these spaces. However, the majority of superintendents felt that they should be more involved in state policymaking processes. Actual engagement in state policy processes was quite limited and, when engagement did occur, state policy actors with significant power of education policymaking were rarely the point of contact. This orientation is particularly important as state actors have become increasingly involved in the minutiae of public schooling—ranging from the types of books students can access to the types of bathrooms students have access to. Some superintendents described how they worked to share their experiences and knowledge with policymakers in the hopes that they can help shape policy solutions by helping policymakers acquire a clearer understanding of policy problems. However, this approach was not universal; some superintendents were frustrated by a lack of responsiveness from state policymakers, felt that they lacked the capacity to engage, or felt that their voice was not powerful or valued in state education policymaking spaces. Differences in superintendents' beliefs about and engagement in state policy processes were not significantly different across the two states of study. However, local context—particularly the size and

capacity of a district as well as the distance to the state capitol—do appear to have an impact on superintendents' engagement.

Improve access to and education about state policymaking processes

This research exposed a number of barriers to state policy engagement shared by superintendents. Proximity to the state capitol was an issue identified by superintendents in both states included in this study. While the COVID-19 pandemic pushed state governmental bodies to expand virtual engagement in policy processes, this commitment to providing multiple avenues of meaningful engagement must be maintained to ensure access to those whose districts are located a further distance away from state capitols. To ensure superintendents have equitable access to engage in state policymaking processes, state legislators serving on education committees and state board of education members may consider traveling to different parts of the state to conduct business. This practice could also provide an opportunity for state policymakers to partner with superintendents to engage with students, families, and community members that could be directly impacted by their policy decisions.

Superintendents overwhelmingly felt unprepared to engage in state education policymaking spaces. About two out of every three superintendents indicated that their education or training did not emphasize the importance of engaging with state policymaking processes, and did not help them understand state policymaking processes or how to engage with state policymakers. Leadership preparation programs and superintendent support organizations should consider ways to prepare superintendents to effectively engage in state policymaking by providing opportunities for superintendents to gain knowledge about and skills related to the technical and inter-personal aspects of education policymaking, as well as best practices for establishing relationships and engaging state policymakers in conversation. These educational

opportunities should emphasize a broad understanding of the individuals and groups with power in state policymaking processes, and support superintendents in developing effective approaches to communication, networking, and relationship-building among a wide array of state policymakers. For example, state legislators serving as the chair of an education committee have a duty to lead the entire state's education policymaking efforts. While oftentimes stakeholders see legislators as only serving their specific constituency, serving as the chair of a committee should compel the legislator to take the interests of all constituents within the state into consideration. Similarly, depending on the institutional structures of state boards of education (e.g., members appointed, elected statewide, or elected based on region) and superintendents (e.g., relationship to the board, voting power), district superintendents interested in shaping rules and regulations must effectively engage with state education policymakers who have the most education policymaking power, oftentimes the board president or the state superintendent.

In helping aspiring and current superintendents' learn to engage in state education policymaking, the tense political climate that superintendents are currently operating within cannot be ignored. Superintendents across the United States have been fired—many time without cause—by local school boards, often motivated by school board members' political or policy positions (e.g., Andruss, 2023; Atterbury, 2022; Dana, 2023; Kingkade, 2022; Uphaus, 2022; VanderHart, 2021). Within this context, leadership preparation programs and superintendent support organizations should help superintendents develop skills related to proactive, effective communication with local school board members and constituents about the value and results of state policy engagement efforts. Moreover, leadership preparation programs and superintendent superintendents-related associations and organizations should ensure superintendents have access

to support networks in cases where school board or local community members may be averse to the superintendent' state policy engagement efforts.

Finally, superintendents' engagement in state policy processes will vary over time and place. For example, policy engagement in states with part-time legislatures or state boards of education who only meet a few times a year will be substantially different than in states with frequent, year-round policy sessions. Additionally, superintendents in some states may need to be more involved if state government actors are engaged in policymaking that is not equity-oriented, or who are actively working to dismantle public education and harm kids' access to high quality educational opportunities. Maintaining and expanding superintendents' access to state policy processes, thus, will require different degrees of support; and the process of providing such supports must undergo continuous evaluation and adjustment to ensure timely and meaningful engagement that proactively informs state education policymaking processes.

Addressing issues of capacity and differential weighting of superintendent voice

Superintendents in larger districts appear to have more financial capacity and human resources to shape state education policy. State associations of school administrators play an important role in advocating for all districts, and often do have a strong voice in state policy processes; however, superintendents should have equitable access to opportunities to communicate how policies may impact their specific community. Leadership preparation programs and professional associations can play a pivotal role in preparing superintendents—regardless of the size of the district they serve—to engage in state policy spaces by building their personal capacity through curricular and real-world opportunities to understand the importance of engaging in state policymaking processes. Programs and professional organizations should consider instruction and supports that will help superintendents engage with policymakers,

including education on time management and organization, network development, and effective communication practices related to education policy.

Many superintendents face more than one barrier to policy engagement. For example, many of the superintendents that live further from the state capitol are located in small, rural districts. Both state organizations and state policymakers should consider how superintendents with multiple barriers to engagement can be supported, and identify avenues of collaboration and networks that provide all superintendents an opportunity to have their voice be a part of state education policymaking conversations. These efforts are especially important in states like Ohio where the size of school districts varies widely, and superintendents in smaller districts may feel like their voice carries little weight.

Conclusion

In this study, I described superintendents' beliefs about and engagement with state education policymakers and uncovered multiple barriers superintendents face in engaging in state education policymaking processes. Given that the superintendency is a predominantly White, male profession, future research should explore variation in beliefs about and engagement in state policymaking processes based on superintendent gender and race. In doing so, researchers may also examine if and how leadership preparation programs prepare aspiring superintendents to engage in policy spaces. Studies may explore whether faculty and instructors of policy courses for educational leaders take a one-size-fits-all approach to policy engagement, or if the curriculum and teaching acknowledges and subsequently addresses the possibility that women superintendents and superintendents of color that engage in state policymaking processes may do so in the face of gender and racial discrimination and biases. Further research could also help inform leadership preparation programs in the types of formal training and education

experiences that superintendents may benefit from, and center the voices of women superintendents and superintendents of color to better understand their experiences when they engage in state policy spaces.

The timing of data collection for this study coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, with interviews being conducted before the pandemic occurred, and surveys being conducted shortly after the pandemic shut down the majority of America's K-12 public schools. As such, superintendents responding to the survey may have been less engaged in state policy processes as they were focused on keeping students and educators safe. As such, research should continue to explore superintendents' experiences with and engagement in state policymaking processes, particularly as state actors have become more actively engaged in shaping and enacting policies that are associated less with the academic work of public schools and more with pushing political agendas (e.g., Pendharkar, 2023; Reuters, 2022).

Finally, future research should more deeply explore the ways that superintendents' policy engagement is actually informing state policymakers' decisions. As district leaders engage in policy spaces and advocate for the needs of students and families in their district, understanding the barriers they face and developing guidance, support, and networks that allow superintendents to overcome these barriers could allow for meaningful engagement with state policymakers in ways that lead to more informed, equitable, and just education policy. Given the increasing involvement of the state in shaping education policy at the local level, considering ways to both amplify superintendents' voices and ensure equity in access to state policymaking spaces is more important than ever.

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Table 1

Superintendent interview recruitment and sample

	Virginia	**Ohio**	**Total**
Number recruited - Round 1	46	38	84
Number interviewed - Round 1	17	7	24
Face to face	11	5	16
Phone/Zoom	6	2	8
Number recruited - Round 2	35	20	55
Number interviewed - Round 2	9	2	11
Face to face	3	2	5
Phone/Zoom	6	0	6
Number recruited - Round 3	18	88	106
Number interviewed - Round 3	4	19	23
Face to face	1	11	12
Phone/Zoom	3	8	11
Total Recruited	99	146	245
Number of superintendents interviews	30	28	58
Participation rate	30%	19%	24%
District locale of Interviewees			
City	20% (6)	11% (3)	15% (9)
Suburb	30% (9)	36% (10)	33% (19)
Town/Rural	50% (15)	54% (15)	52% (30)

Table 2

Superintendent survey topics, questions, and response types

Topic	Questions	Response type
Beliefs about state policy engagement	I believe... it is important to be engaged in policymaking processes in my local community and school district that my knowledge and experiences are valuable to state policymakers (e.g., state legislators, the governor, state board of education members) it is important to engage with any state policymaker (e.g., state legislators, governor) it is important to engage with state education policymakers (e.g., state legislators serving on education committees, state board of education members)	5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree)
Actual state policy engagement	In an average month, what percent of your time would you say you spend on advocating for specific education policies or communicating with state policymakers about policies that will or do impact your district, schools, educators, students, and families?	sliding bar from 0-100
	Have you attended a meeting of your State Board of Education?	yes/no
	(if no) What are the main reasons that you have not attended a State Board of Education meeting?	open text
	(if yes) Thinking about the most recent State Board of Education meeting that you attended, what were the main reasons that you attended the meeting?	

	Within the past year, approximately how many State Board of Education meetings have you attended?	Categorical (0-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9 or more)
	Since you've been a district superintendent, approximately how many State Board of Education meetings have you attended?	Categorical (Less than 5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, more than 20)
	In general, what are the main reasons that you attend State Board of Education meetings?	open text
	Note: same questions presented for legislative sessions, hearings, committee meetings	
Frequency of state policy engagement	Select the frequency of contact with each of the following… your state legislator a state legislator serving on an education committee the chairperson of an education committee in the state legislature legislative staff the governor and/or a member of their cabinet State Board of Education member State Superintendent State Board of Education staff member	Frequency: Categorical (Never, a few times a year, monthly, weekly, daily)
Education and training related to policy engagement	My post-secondary education and/or training... helped me understand the state education policymaking process helped me understand how to engage with state education policymakers emphasized the importance of engaging with state education policymakers and the state education policymaking process	5-point Likert scale (Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree)

Table 3

Participant demographics, compared to national superintendent demographics

	National*	Survey	Interviews
Male	74%	72%	80%
Female	26%	28%	20%
Caucasian, White	89%	89%	95%
African American, Black	5%	4%	4%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0%	1%	1%
Native American or Native Alaskan	1%	1%	2%
Multiracial	NA	1%	1%
Hispanic/Latinx	3%	5%	2%
Republican/Conservative	33%	42%	NA
Democrat/Liberal	31%	27%	NA

**Note: National data drawn from 2019-20 superintendents within Author (2023) National Superintendent Database and AASA American Superintendent 2020 Decennial Study*

Figure 1

Superintendents' level of agreement with "I believe..." statements related to engagement in state education policymaking processes

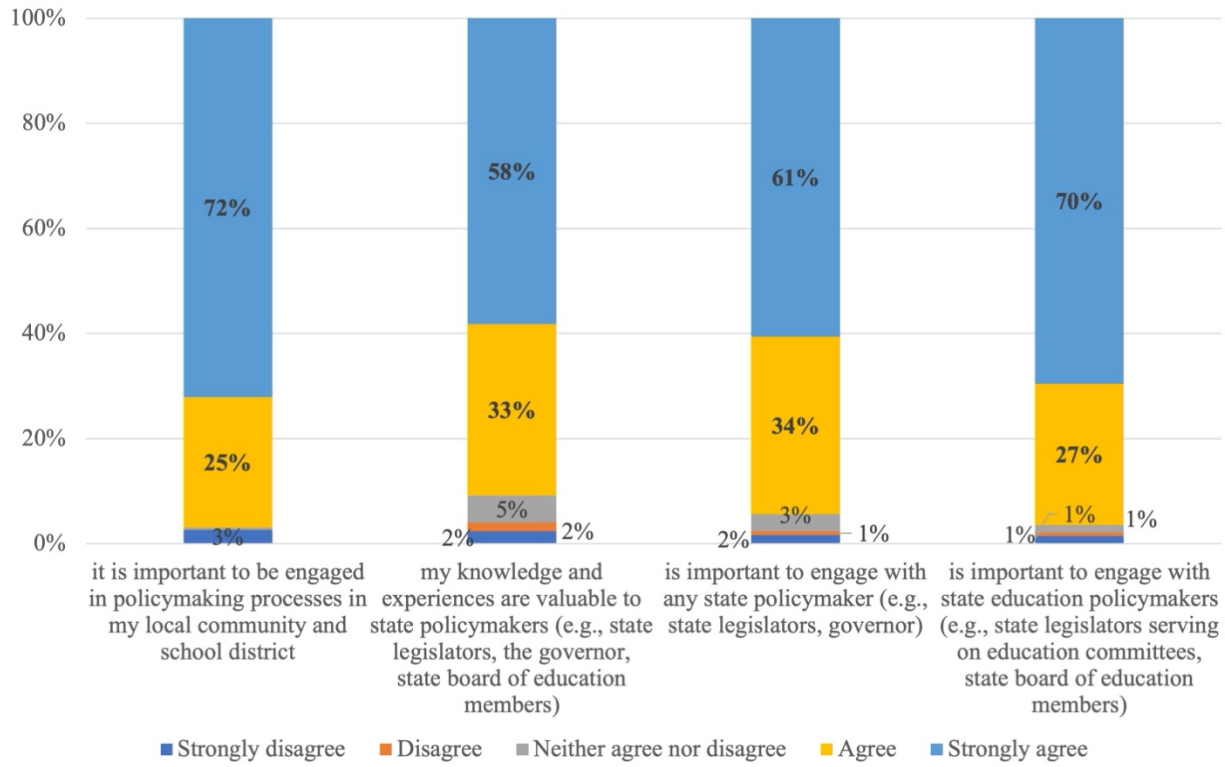

Figure 2

Superintendents' frequency of correspondence with state policymakers

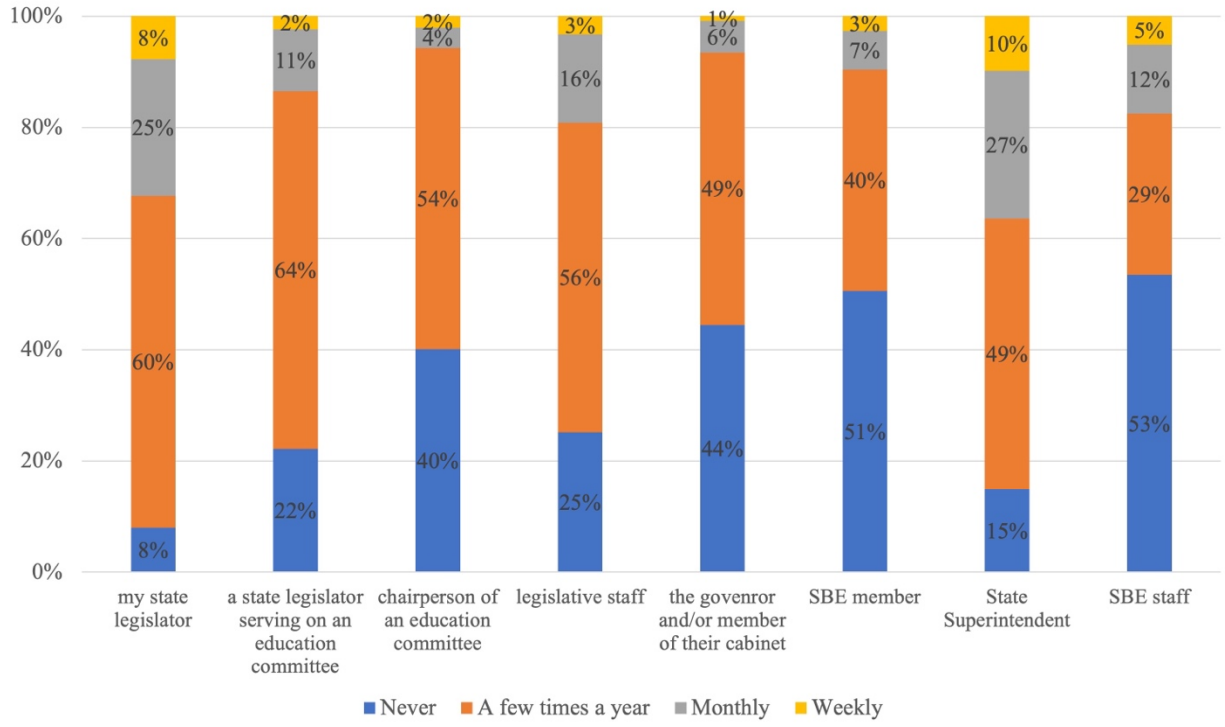

Figure 3

Distribution of responses for questions with stem "My post-secondary education and/or training…