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The Status of Women Leaders in Utah Education: A 2017 Update

In 2014, the Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) released a research and policy brief titled, “The Status of Women Leaders in Utah Education.”¹ The document was one of four released in 2014 that focused on understanding the status of women’s leadership in politics, education, nonprofits, and business. This brief provides a three-year update to determine what, if any, progress has been made in women’s leadership within Utah’s public (K–12) and higher education (public and the two largest private) sectors. The brief compares Utah data with national data and reviews the applicable literature.

Higher Education

A 2013 American Council of Education (ACE) report titled *On the Pathway to the Presidency*² stated that women comprised 43% of senior administrators in all types of higher education institutions. More recently, a 2017 report by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR)³ stated that women now hold roughly 50% of all administrative positions in higher education across the United States, yet actual representation varies depending on the type of both positions and institutions. For example, a 2009 Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) publication⁴ stated that women represented 52% of senior leaders at community colleges but only 34% in doctorate-granting institutions. Thus, there are obvious discrepancies in the data, but most sources consistently acknowledge that the percentages of women in academic leadership are still not high enough, particularly for women in senior leadership roles. They also call for increased preparation and hiring of women throughout all levels of management and leadership within higher education.

Position-Specific Data

This section compares national and Utah data on six position-specific categories within the higher education arena (e.g., Board of Regents, President, Boards of Trustees, Chief Academic Officers and Vice Presidents, President’s Cabinets, and Academic Deans). Utah data were obtained by collecting information on institutional websites and/or contacting people in each institution. The public colleges and universities analyzed were Dixie State University (DSU), Salt Lake Community College (SLCC), Snow College (SC), Southern Utah University (SUU), University of Utah (U of U), Utah State University (USU), Utah Valley University (UVU), and Weber State University (WSU). The private higher education institutions analyzed were Brigham Young University (BYU) and Westminster College.

Boards of Regents

Governing bodies that oversee higher education in each state include boards of regents, commissioners, and education boards. The data presented here were collected from each state’s governing board website. Overall, in 2017 women comprise 33.5% of members of states’ governing bodies, a 4.2% national increase from 2014. Currently, Nebraska (66.7%), Washington (66.7%), Michigan (63.6%), New York (58.8%), and Rhode Island (58.8%) top the list on women’s representation. The states with the lowest percentage of women include Missouri (11.1%), Oklahoma (11.1%), Louisiana (12.5%), and Georgia (15.8%). Utah ranks 23rd, at 31.6% (slightly below the national average). Currently Utah’s State Board of Regents has six female members and 13 male members, which is unchanged since 2014. Hence, there has not been progress toward equal representation on the Utah Board of Regents in the last three years.

Presidents

A 2016 report published by the American Council on Education and the Center for Policy Research and Strategy (ACE/CPRS)⁵ stated that women comprise approximately 27% of college and university presidents across the United States; this can be distinguished further as 29.1% at public and 24.1% at private educational institutions. Even more recently, however, a 2017 national study just released by the American Council on Education found that the percentage has risen to 30%. In Utah, currently two of eight public institutions (USU and SLCC) have female presidents (25%, which is up from 12.5% in 2014), and neither Utah private university in our analysis has a female president.

Boards of Trustees

According to the 2016 ACE/CPRS national study,⁶ female participation on U.S. university and college boards of trustees grew for public institutions from 28.4% in 2010 to 31.5% in 2015, while for private institutions it grew from 30.2% in 2010 to 31.7%. For Utah, in 2014 we reported that 29.8% of members of college and university boards of trustees were female, which was close to the national average at that time. This percentage for 2017 has substantially increased; now 38.3% of members of Utah public and 36.1% of the two private college and university boards of trustees are female. Utah is now above the national average. DSU, SC, and WSU have equal gender representation on their boards. The highest absolute number of female trustees is at Westminster College (n=11), which represents 39.3% of their board members, while the highest percentage of female trustees is at SLCC (60%). At the low end, three Utah institutions only have two females serving as trustees: USU (18.2%), U of U (18.2%), and BYU (25%). In addition, we discovered that the number

of chair and vice-chair positions on Utah public boards of trustees filled by women has risen from 20% in 2014 to 35.3% in 2017.

Chief Academic Officers & Vice Presidents

An ACE/CPRS 2016 study⁷ reported that 43.6% of chief academic officers (CAOs) were female (an increase from 39.1% in 2013).⁸ In Utah, two of eight (25%) CAOs of public institutions (U of U and WSU) are women, which is the same as what we reported in 2014. A 2017 report by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) maintains that 42% of senior institutional officers at colleges and universities nationally are female, compared to 39.3% in 2013.⁹ This is the closest national data we can use for comparison with a vice president position. In 2014, 23.3% of vice presidents in Utah public institutions were women. There has been a decrease since 2014, as currently 19.6% of vice presidents (including CAOs) in Utah public institutions are women. DSU, SC, and USU currently have no female vice presidents, while the highest percentages are 40% (WSU) and 37.5% (U of U). The two private institutions have a combined percentage of 44.4% of women vice presidents.

Presidential Cabinets

The closest national comparison we can make to the gender distribution on presidential cabinets is the 42% of senior institutional officers reported above. Although these data are not an exact representation of presidential cabinets, they provide a fairly accurate snapshot of women in cabinet-level positions. As mentioned, Utah data were obtained by mining institutional websites or contacting individual institutions to determine cabinet composition. Support staff names were removed from the cabinet or council lists in tallying the data. Some institutions had “councils” that included more seats than a typical presidential cabinet, so these positions were removed from the tallies as well. It appears that approximately 27.4% of presidential cabinet members at the eight public institutions are female (up from 23% as reported in 2014). WSU tops the list, with 42.9% of presidential cabinet members being female, followed by UVU at 36.4%. Westminster has 54.5% female cabinet members, while BYU’s percentage is 30%. SC (15.4%), DSU (21.4%), SLCC (25%), and USU (26.9%) are at the bottom.

Deans

Academic deans are among key leadership positions within institutions of higher education. The CUPA-HR 2017 report suggests that the percentage of female deans in the nation increased from approximately 33% in 2001 to slightly over 40% in 2016.¹⁰ In Utah, 22.9% of academic deans in public institutions (down from 30.8% in 2014) and 31.6% in private institutions are women. However, there are substantial differences across Utah institutions. For example, the U of U and Westminster employ 47.4% and 60% female deans, respectively, with DSU at 28.6%, BYU at 21.4%, USU at 20%, SLCC at 16.7%, WSU at 14.3%, and SUU at 12.5%, while SC and UVU have none.

Summary

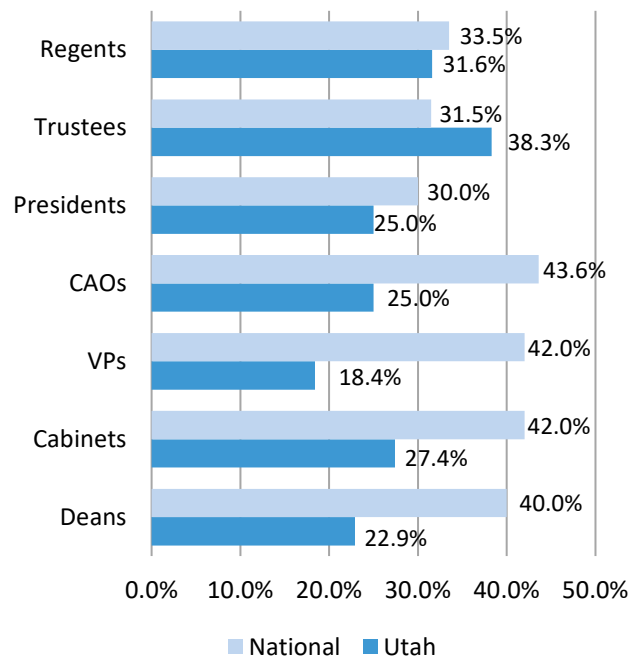
Table 1 provides an overview of the positions just discussed by gender. Overall, there are 80 females (30.1%) and 186 males (69.9%) serving in the most senior positions within Utah public higher education. This represents a slight increase of 2.3% since 2014. The total row in Table 1 does not double count individuals who serve in two of the categories.

Table 1: Top Positions in Utah Public Higher Education by Gender

	Female	Male	Total	% Female
Board of Regents	6	13	19	31.6
Presidents	2	6	8	25.0
Board of Trustees	31	50	81	38.3
Chief Academic Officers	2	6	8	25.0
Other Vice Presidents	7	31	38	18.4
President’s Cabinets	29	77	106	27.4
Deans	16	54	70	22.9
Total¹¹	80	186	266	30.1

Figure 1 compares the Utah percentages in Table 1 with national percentages for all types of institutions (e.g., research, comprehensive, community college) found in the literature.

Figure 1: Women in Academia by Position (Utah Public vs. Nation)



Utah has made some progress since 2014. Female representation has slightly increased in presidencies, board of trustee members and chairs, and in the composition of presidential cabinets at public institutions. Representation has remained steady on the Utah Board of Regents and with CAO representation.

tation, while decreasing in the overall percentages of vice presidents and academic deans in public colleges and universities around the state.

As a new feature for 2017, we also looked at the gender breakdown of top positions in the Utah System of Technical Colleges (USTC) and its eight campuses. The Commissioner and Associate Commissioner are both male, while the overall Board of Trustees has 15 seats with only two currently filled by women (13.3%). One of eight campus presidents is a woman (12.5%), and 23 of 96 (24.0%) campus governing board positions are filled by women. Overall, females comprise 23.1% of leadership positions within the USTC system and the campuses combined.

Why is it important to have women in senior leadership positions in Utah colleges and universities? The White House Project report answers this question in the following passage: “When we look at where women stand in the leadership ranks of academia, so much more is at stake than the mere numbers of women who have reached the top. The presence—or absence—of female academic leaders can have far-reaching influences not only on the institutions themselves, but beyond that, on the scope of research and knowledge that affects us all. Studies have shown that when prominent female academics are involved in research, for example, it can affect the nature of both the questions that are asked and the findings. Women in senior faculty positions and top-level leadership positions in academia provide male students, faculty and staff an important opportunity to work with talented women—an experience that will prove increasingly valuable. . . . In addition, these women serve as powerful role models and mentors to younger women starting out on the path to leadership themselves. Thus, these leaders can serve to bring out the best in women of not only this generation but several generations to come.”¹²

What is currently being done in Utah? First, the Utah Women in Higher Education Network (UWHEN), founded in 2010, was created to inspire and prepare more Utah women for leadership in higher education (www.uwhen.org). Representatives from all public, most of the not-for-profit, and several for-profit institutions serve on the board of directors. Event and conference attendees report that these are making “a difference,” but tracking actual promotions will be important in future years. Presidents Matthew Holland (UVU), Denece Huftalin (SLCC), and Richard Williams (DSU) have served as presidential sponsors since its creation.

Second, national work is moving forward as well. UWHEN is an affiliate of the American Council on Education (ACE), which launched the “Moving the Needle: Advancing Women Leaders in Higher Education Leadership” campaign in 2016. This initiative aims to secure the commitment of higher educational leaders to achieve gender parity among the U.S. college and university chief executives by 2030.¹³ As of August 2017, the list of Utah higher education presidents who have joined this commitment includes Denece Huftalin (SLCC), Matthew Holland (UVU), Stephen Morgan (Westminster), David Pershing (U of U), Gary Carlston (SC), Charles Wight

(WSU), Richard Williams (DSU), Noelle Cockett (USU), Dave Woolstenhume (Utah System of Technical Colleges), Aaron Weight (Uintah Basin Technology College), Chad Campbell (Bridgerland Technology College), Brennan Wood (Southwest Technical College), and Richard Nielsen (Rocky Mountain University of Health Professions).¹⁴ In addition, on July 5, 2017, Utah Governor Gary R. Herbert issued a letter of support for this national initiative—the first governor in the United States to do so. The letter encourages public and private university and college presidents and trustees to provide opportunities to address women in leadership roles in higher education. UWHEN partners with the UWLP, the Women’s Leadership Institute (WLI), and other organizations to broaden its influence in higher education around the state.

Finally, most institutions have women’s networks and/or groups. Most participating campuses host women’s seminars and gatherings for female employees. In addition, a few offer women-only leadership training and development, and all institutions are looking at ways to strengthen their efforts. Other community and nonprofit women and leadership programs welcome women from higher education settings to participate in their efforts and offerings. A list of Utah events and programs is located here: <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/>.

Public Education (K–12)

This section compares national and Utah data on the following leadership positions and/or categories within public education: Boards of Education, State Offices of Education Leadership, District Superintendents, District Staff Directors, and Principals. The majority of the Utah data was obtained from the extensive Utah 2016–2017 Educational Directory found online,¹⁵ as well as by accessing relevant websites. Researchers identified gender by looking at the names of individuals within specific positions listed. If names were not gender-specific, online searches of schools or district and state offices provided additional details.

Boards of Education

In 2017, the *National Association of State Boards of Education* provided a list of each state’s board of education membership by gender.¹⁶ It appears that 47.3% of state board members across the country are female (down 1.3% from 2014). In Utah, eight of 15 (53.3%) State Board of Education elected seats in 2016 were held by women; however, in 2017 that number moved to 11 of 15 (73.3%). This is a significant increase from past years and puts Utah among the highest states nationally for the percentage of women on state school boards. Currently the Utah State Charter School Board of Education has three of seven (42.9%) seats held by women.

Historically, only two sources of national data have reported the gender of school district board members. First, a 2002 report¹⁷ stated that 38.9% of board seats nationally were held by women at that time, with larger districts having higher percentages than smaller districts. However, a more recent 2010 National School Boards Association study¹⁸ (the latest data available) reported that 44% of school district board seats across the United States were held by women. Although a more recent report has not been published, this number has

most likely increased since 2010. Utah has 41 school districts throughout the state, and each district has an elected board of education, typically with either five or seven seats. The 2017 data reflect that, of the 234 total district board of education elected seats in Utah, women held 111. Hence, 47.4% of the 234 elected school district board positions are currently held by women, which is a 4.6% increase from the 42.8% reported in 2014.

State Offices of Education

According to the 2017 Council of Chief State School Officers directory, 49% of the nation’s state superintendents are now women (25 of the 51 total). This marks a significant increase from the 29% reported in 2013.¹⁹ In 2016, Sydnee Dickson was elected to lead the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) as the State Superintendent of Public Instruction; Dickson is only the second female in this position during the past 50 years.²⁰ In terms of other leaders within statewide offices of education, researchers were unable to find national data that would provide a valid comparison to the Utah findings. However, within the state, all individuals listed on the USBE leadership organizational chart (superintendent, director, or officer) were tallied. In 2014, nine of the 23 individuals in these positions are women (39.1%). This percentage has increased to 65.2% with 15 of 23 leadership posts presently being held by women.

District Superintendents and Staff Directors

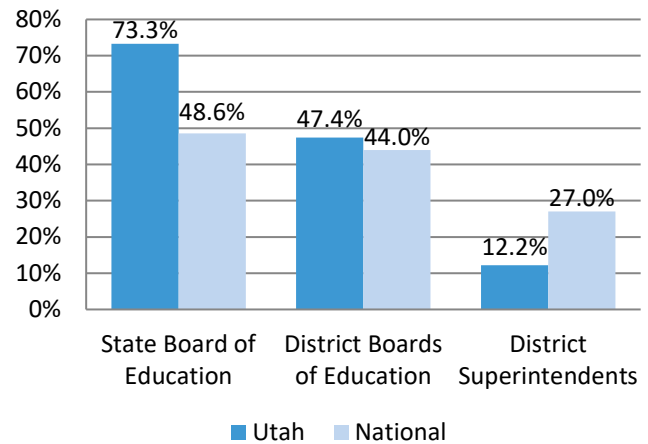
The national School Superintendents Association recently published its 2016 Superintendent Salary & Benefits study²¹ that tracks the demographics and other elements for district superintendents nationwide. Based on 1392 responses (15% response rate) the study reports 23% females among district superintendents. However, according to the *Study of the American Superintendent 2015 Mid-Decade Update*, 27% of district superintendents across the country are women (the most recent data).²² Today in Utah, only 12.2% (5 of 41) superintendents are female; the ratio has not changed since 2014. The district-level staff directors in all 41 of the school districts across the state were also tallied this year, and 36.2% are female, an increase of 1.1% from the numbers that were reported in 2014. National comparison data for these directors could not be found.

Table 2 provides an overview of the positions just discussed. Overall, there are 228 females (41.5%, compared to 37.3% in 2014) and 321 males (58.5%, compared to 62.7% in 2014) serving in the leadership ranks of the positions just outlined within Utah public education. Figure 2 compares the percentages outlined in Table 2 on three of the positions with the national comparisons outlined in the existing literature already presented.

Table 2: Utah State and District Leadership by Gender

	Female	Male	Total	% Female
State Board of Education	11	4	15	73.3
State Charter Board of Education	3	4	7	42.9
Utah State Office Leadership	15	8	23	65.2
District Boards of Education	111	123	234	47.4
District Superintendents	5	36	41	12.2
District Staff Directors	83	146	229	36.2
Total	228	321	549	41.5

Figure 2: State and District Boards of Education & Superintendents by Gender (Utah vs. Nation)



School Principals and Assistant Principals

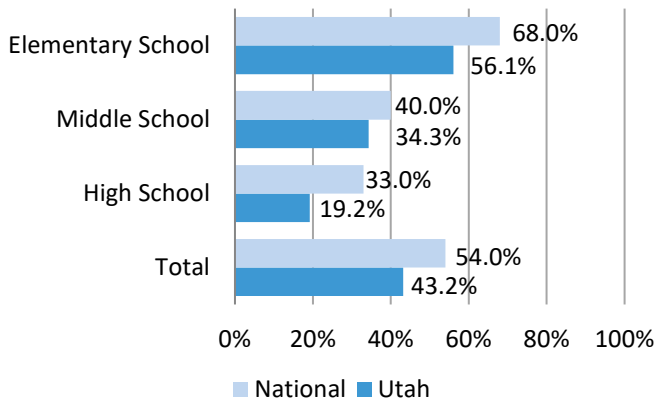
According to a 2017 *National Center for Education Statistics* report, “54 percent of public school principals were female. Relatively more primary school principals were female (68 percent) than were middle, high, or combined school principals (40 percent, 33 percent, and 42 percent, respectively).”²³ Currently, in Utah, 43.2% of public school principals overall are women; 56.1% of elementary school principals are women, a 3.7% increase from 2014, while the number of female middle/junior high school principals increased slightly from 32.4% in 2014 to 34.3% in 2017. Women also comprise 19.2% of high school principals (0.3% down from 2014). In addition, women comprise 51.8% of principals in specialty schools. In terms of assistant principals, no national data could be located, but in Utah, female assistant principals in high schools have increased from 28.7% to 31.1% in three years, while in middle/junior high schools the increase was from 38.9% to 41.0% (see Table 3 for additional details).

Table 3: Utah School Principals and Assistant Principals by Gender

	Female	Male	Total	% Female
High School Principals	24	101	125	19.2
High School Assistant Principals	69	153	222	31.1
Middle/Junior High Principals	49	94	143	34.3
Middle/Junior High Assistant Principals	73	105	178	41.0
Elementary School Principals	300	235	535	56.1
Specialty School Principals/Directors	29	27	56	51.8
Total	544	715	1259	43.2

Overall, 43.2% of principals and assistant principals in Utah are women (a slight increase from 41.1% in 2014), which is still behind the 54% reported nationwide. Figure 3 compares the percentages outlined in Table 3 with the positions for which national comparison data could be located.

Figure 3: Utah School Principals by Gender (Utah vs. Nation)



In summary, during the last three years, female representation on the Utah State Board of Education, school district’s boards of education, leadership within the USBE, district level staff directors, high school assistant principals, middle/junior high principals and assistant principals, and elementary school principals has slightly increased. Although Utah is still not on par with the national percentages, in most areas progress has been made.

Conclusion

Ensuring that women are well represented as educational leaders will be imperative to meet the impending challenges before Utahns today. New pathways to better decision making have been forged through women’s diverse leadership styles and focus on inclusiveness and cooperation.²⁴ In addition, their presence provides female role models for staff and students.²⁵ Their focus on developing others has been shown to deeply enrich the programs and institutions of which they

are a part. The research continues to report that truly diverse and inclusive leadership teams produce more creative, innovative, productive, and effective results.²⁶

Extraordinary challenges continue to plague public and higher education institutions in Utah and the United States, and strong leaders with outstanding capabilities are needed more than ever to help schools, colleges, and universities meet these challenges. Within the constantly changing national and state educational environments, leaders must have an exceptional and diverse set of capabilities and competencies to help their institutions rise to new levels of excellence and innovation. Yet, schools, colleges, and universities continue to struggle more than ever to find qualified, effective leaders not only to take the helms of their organizations, but also to move into other important leadership positions therein. Hence, finding, preparing, and supporting future educational leaders is imperative for the future of Utah. In fact, it is critical that Utah leaders and residents encourage and prepare all talented individuals—men and women—to take up this challenge by stepping forward to become leaders within the state’s education system and schools.

¹ Madsen, S. R., Fischer, B., & Backus, C. (2014, March 31). The status of women leaders in Utah education. Research & Policy Brief No. 3, Utah Women & Leadership Project. Retrieved from <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/8-status-of-women-leaders-in-utah-education.pdf>

² Kim, Y. M., Cook, B. J., American Council on Education. (2013). On the pathway to the presidency 2013: Characteristics of higher education’s senior leadership. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

³ Bichsel, J., & McChesney, J. (2017, March 2). Pay and representation of racial /ethnic minorities in higher education administrative positions: The century so far. Research report. CUPA-HR. doi:10.13140/RG.2.2.14076.95365

⁴ Hall, C. C. I. (2009). Learning from number two: Diversity in community college leadership. *On Campus with Women*, 28(2). Retrieved from http://www.aacu.org/ocww/volume38_2/national.cfm

⁵ Johnson, H. L. (2016). Pipelines, pathways, and institutional leadership: An update on the status of women in higher education. *American Council on Education and the Center for Policy Research and Strategy*. Retrieved from <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/Higher-Education-Spotlight-Pipelines-Pathways-and-Institutional-Leadership-Status-of-Women.pdf>

⁶ Johnson, H. L. (2016).

⁷ Johnson, H. L. (2016).

⁸ College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR). (2013). Administrators in higher education survey: For the 2012–13 academic year [Data file]. Knoxville, TN: Survey Publisher.

⁹ Bichsel, J., & McChesney, J. (2017, March 2).

¹⁰ Bichsel, J., & McChesney, J. (2017, March 2).

¹¹ There is overlap in some categories, so the total does not equal the numbers within the columns. For example, a vice president also serves on the president’s cabinet, so the total only includes the real number of positional leaders in the state.

¹² Wilson, M. (2009). The White House project report: Benchmarking women’s leadership (p. 16). Retrieved from http://www.in.gov/icw/files/benchmark_wom_leadership.pdf

¹³ American Council on Education. (2016, January 12). ACE launches Moving the Needle Campaign to achieve higher education leadership gender parity. *American Council on Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/ACE-Launches-Moving-the-Needle-Campaign-to-Achieve-Higher-Education-Leadership-Gender-Parity.aspx>

¹⁴ American Council on Education. (2017, March). Moving the needle: Advancing women in higher education leadership—Commitment signers by state. *American Council on Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/MTN-Commitment-Signers-by-State.pdf>

¹⁵ Utah State Board of Education. (2016). Utah 2016–2017 educational directory. Retrieved from <https://www.schools.utah.gov/educationdirectory>

¹⁶ National Association of State Boards of Education. (2017, August 17). State boards of education data [Data file].

¹⁷ Hess, F. M. (2002). School boards at the dawn of the 21st century: Conditions and challenges of district governance. *National School Boards Association*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED469432.pdf>

¹⁸ Hess, F. M., & Meeks, O. (2010). School boards circa 2010: Governance in the accountability era. Retrieved from <https://www.nsba.org/school-boards-circa-2010-governance-accountability-era>

¹⁹ Lennon, T. (2013). Benchmarking women’s leadership in the United States. University of Denver, Colorado Women’s College. Retrieved from <http://www.womenscollege.edu/bwl/>; Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO]. (2012). Meet the chiefs. *CCSSO*. Retrieved from http://www.ccsso.org/Who_We_Are/Meet_the_Chiefs.html

²⁰ Utah State Board of Education (USOE). (2016).

²¹ Finnan, L. A. & McCord, R. (2017, February). 2016 AASA Superintendent Salary & Benefits Study. *AASA*. Retrieved from <https://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Banners/2016%20Superintendent%20Salary%20and%20Benefits%20Study%20Non-Member%20Edition.pdf>

²² The School Superintendents Association. (2010). AASA releases 5-year study on the American school superintendent. *AASA*. Retrieved from <http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=38583>

²³ National Center for Educational Statistics (2017). Characteristics of public elementary and secondary school principals in the United States: Results from the 2015–16 national teacher and principal survey. *Institute of Education Sciences. U.S. Department of Education* (p. 3).

²⁴ Madsen, S. R. (2015, January 12). Why do we need more women leaders in Utah? Utah Women & Leadership Brief, No. 5. Retrieved from <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/10-why-do-we-need-more-women-leaders.pdf>

²⁵ Hall, C. C. I. (2009); Wilson, M. (2009).

²⁶ Lennon, T. (2013); Wilson, M. (2009).

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