



urban Indicator

Volume 8. Number 1

June 2006

Urban School Superintendents: Characteristics, Tenure, and Salary Fifth Survey and Report

INTRODUCTION

Urban school superintendents hold one of the most important and challenging jobs in America's education system. The Council of the Great City Schools represents the majority of large urban school districts in the country. Though there are approximately 17 thousand school districts in the country, the Council's 65 districts serve approximately 7.4 million of America's 48.3 million k-12 students (15 percent), and some 30 percent of the nation's students of color, low-income, and English language learners. With such vast numbers of students – including the nation's most vulnerable children – urban superintendents clearly face a set of challenges that are systemically different from those in the rest of the nation's school districts.

In this era of accountability and standards, superintendents are expected to make visible and rapid improvements in student achievement. As a result of the increased availability of achievement data to the public, superintendents are under more public scrutiny than ever (Fuller, et. al, 2005). Parents and teachers are able to closely monitor district progress.

Urban district superintendents also face a variety of challenges that are often largely unrelated to teaching and learning. For example, in its survey of urban superintendents, The Center on Reinventing Public Education determined that many urban superintendents found political pressures and internal conflicts to be difficult to manage and detract from the time that could be spent working on improving student achievement (Fuller, et. al, 2005). Superintendents are cognizant of being held uniquely accountable for meeting student achievement goals in their districts (Snider, 2006; Hunter and Donahoo, 2005).

Given this backdrop and the historically short tenures of most urban school superintendents, the Council prepared this report to improve public understanding of employment patterns and demographic trends among the nation's urban superintendents. The organization has been surveying its member districts approximately every two years since 1997. This, the council's fifth report on urban superintendents, presents the results of the Council's 2006 survey.

METHODOLOGY

The Council of the Great City Schools surveyed its member cities in the early spring of 2006 to determine the characteristics of urban school superintendents in the United States. This report contains the results of that survey. Results from past surveys are included for comparison.

Surveys were sent to board secretaries and superintendents using an online survey tool. In some cases, the surveys were faxed to respondents and subsequently entered by CGCS staff. The surveys were sent out beginning in February 2006 with two reminders in March to ensure the highest response rate possible. Respondents were asked to provide information on the gender, race/ethnicity, salary, benefits, and bonuses on their respective district's superintendent.

A total of 59 out of 65 member districts were included in this analysis. Surveys were received from 46 of the 65 districts. Council staff were able to locate salary and tenure information for 13 of the remaining 21 districts. All data presented in this publication are reported in summary form. Salaries for previous years have been adjusted for inflation and are presented in constant 2006 dollars.

HIGHLIGHTS

Demographics

- ♦ As of 2006, forty-six percent of Great City School (GCS) superintendents identified themselves as white, 45 percent as black, 9 percent as Hispanic, and 2 percent as other. By contrast, in 1997, 37 percent of GCS superintendents identified themselves as white, 47 percent as black, and 16 percent as Hispanic. (Figure 1)
- ♦ As of 2006, sixty-nine percent of GCS superintendents were men. Some 34 percent of all superintendents were white males; 26 percent were black males, 7 percent were Hispanic males, and two percent identified themselves as other. (Figure 2)
- ♦ As of 2006, approximately 31 percent of GCS superintendents were women. Some 19 percent of all superintendents were black females; 12 percent were white females; and 2 percent were Hispanic females. (Figure 2)

Tenure

- ♦ The average tenure of the acting GCS superintendents increased from 2.8 years in 2003 to 3.1 years in 2006.¹ (Figure 3) This is an increase from 1999, the lowest point recorded by CGCS, when average tenure was about 2.3 years.
- ♦ Forty-two percent of GCS superintendents have been in office for between one and five years. This is down from 54 percent in 2003. (Figure 4)
- ♦ Twenty-five percent of GCS superintendents have been in office for more than five years, up from 15 percent in 2003. (Figure 4)

¹ Tenure was defined as length of time the current superintendent had been in office as of February 1, 2006. Previous reports measured tenure from July of the year in which the survey was given.

- Thirty-three percent of GCS superintendents have been in office for one year or less, a slight change from 31 percent in 2003. (Figure 4)
- The average tenure of the immediate past GCS superintendent was 4 years and 4 months in 2006, about the same as the average tenure of the immediate past superintendent in 2003.

Salaries

- Even accounting for inflation, CGS superintendent salaries have increased by 20.2 percent since 1997, when CGS superintendent salaries averaged \$172,948. In 2006, CGS superintendent salaries averaged \$207,547. This was an increase of 1.7 percent from 2003, when the CGS average superintendent salary was \$205,996.
- 2006 salaries for GCS superintendents ranged from \$140,000 to \$305,000. Figure 6 shows the distribution of salaries.
- GCS superintendent salaries do not appear to vary a great deal by tenure. The average salary for a GCS superintendent with five or more years experience is \$215,000; the average for those with between one and five years experience is \$201,000; and the average of those superintendents with one year or less experience is \$209,000. (Figure 7)
- Average GCS superintendent salaries do appear to vary according to the size of the city district. The average salary for a GCS superintendent with fewer than 50,000 students is \$184,000; in a district with between 50,000 and 100,00 students the average salary is \$216,000; in a district with between 100,000 and 200,000 students the average salary is \$228,000; in a district with more than 200,000 students the average salary is \$247,000. (Figure 8)
- In 2006, average salaries are similar across most race/ethnicity and gender subgroups. (Figure 10)
- The average GCS superintendent salary is larger than that of their counterparts across the nation. In particular, the average 2004-2005 salary for superintendents of districts of all sizes was \$128,770 (Educational Research Service, 2004). (Figure 11)

Benefits and Bonuses

- The range of annual bonuses or pay-for-performance provisions in 2006 ranged from \$5,000 to \$68,000.
- Some 55 percent of GCS superintendents had benefits that included a car or mileage allowance; 34 percent had financial bonuses; and two percent had a housing allowance in 2006.
- The average benefit package for GCS superintendents was valued at approximately \$82,000 in 2006.

DISCUSSION

Several patterns, trends, and relationships relating to employment and demographics have emerged through the course of this analysis.

The demographics of urban superintendents have become more diverse over time. Currently, more white women, black women, and Hispanics are superintendents in GCS school districts than was the case in 1997. The largest increase is among white women, who went from zero percent of the CGS superintendents in 1997 to 12 percent in 2006.

The tenure of GCS superintendents has gradually increased over time, from a low of 2.3 years in 1999 to an average of 3.1 in 2006. GCS superintendents are staying in their districts for longer periods of time, although the length of tenure of the GCS superintendents does not appear to be directly related to salary.

Overall, salaries have been steadily rising since 1997 when the vast majority of superintendents earned less than \$200,000. In 2006, most superintendents earned more than \$200,000, with half of those superintendents earning more than \$250,000.

Superintendent salary does not appear to vary with tenure, but there does appear to be a relationship between superintendent salary and district enrollment. In short, superintendents in larger districts tend to earn more money, suggesting that salary rewards for big-city superintendents vary according to the level of responsibility and magnitude of the job itself.

REFERENCES

- Council of the Great City Schools. (1997). Urban school superintendents: Tenure and salaries, Urban Indicator 4(1), 1-4.
- Council of the Great City Schools. (2000). Urban school superintendents: Characteristics, tenure, and salary. Urban Indicator 5(2), 1-6.
- Council of the Great City Schools. (2001). Urban school superintendents: Characteristics, tenure, and salary. Urban Indicator 6(1), 1-6.
- Council of the Great City Schools (2003). Urban school superintendents: Characteristics, tenure, and salary. Urban Indicator 7(1), 1-6.
- Educational Research Service. (2005). Salaries and Wages Paid Professional and Support Personnel in Public Schools, 2003-2004 and 2004-2005. Arlington, VA.
- Fuller, H. L., C. Campbell, M. Celio, J. Harvey & J. Immerwahr (2003). An Impossible Job? The View from the Urban Superintendent's Chair. Seattle, Washington, Center on Reinventing Public Education.
- Hunter, R. C. & S. Donahoo. (2005). "All things to all people: Special circumstances influencing the Performance of African American Superintendents." Education and Urban Society 37(4): 419-430.
- Snider, J. H. (2006). The superintendent as scapegoat. Education Week. Washington, DC. 25(18): 31, 40.

Figure 1. Race/Ethnicity and Gender of GCS Superintendents: 1997 and 2006

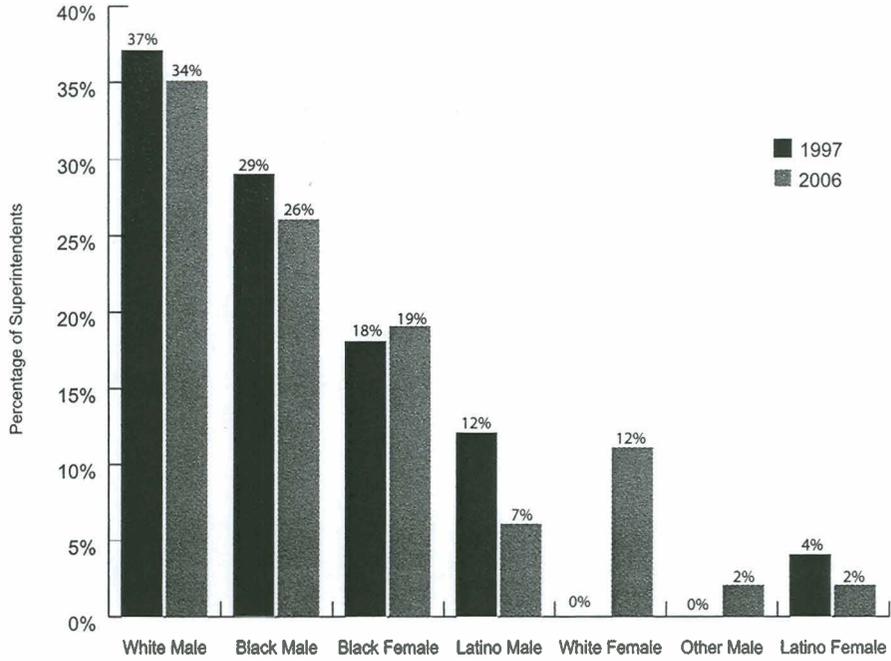


Figure 2. Race/Ethnicity and Gender of GCS Superintendents in 2006

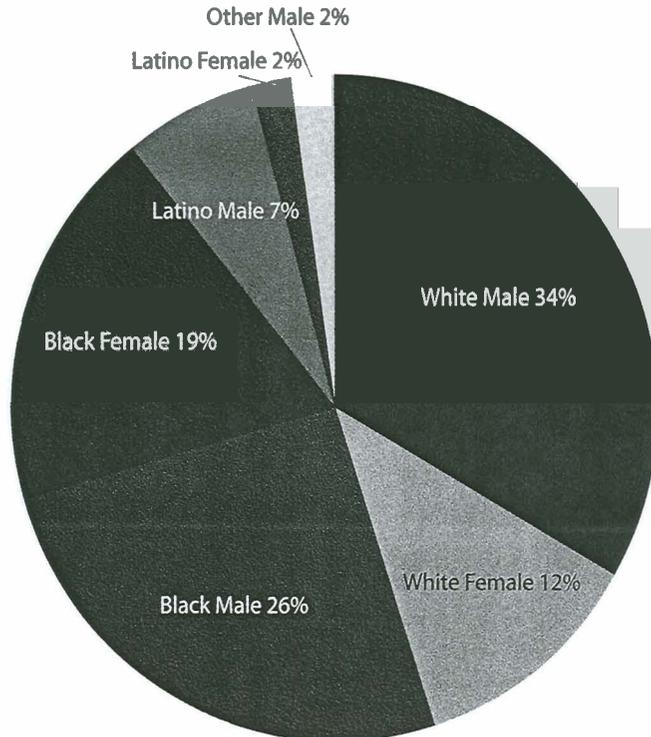


Figure 3. Average tenure of GCS superintendents: 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003, and 2006.

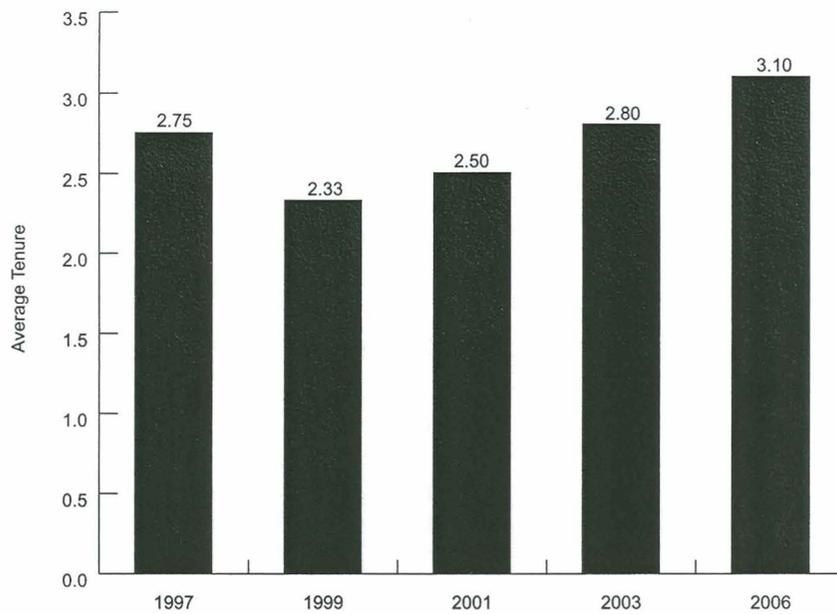


Figure 4. Percent of GCS Superintendents by tenure: 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003, and 2006.

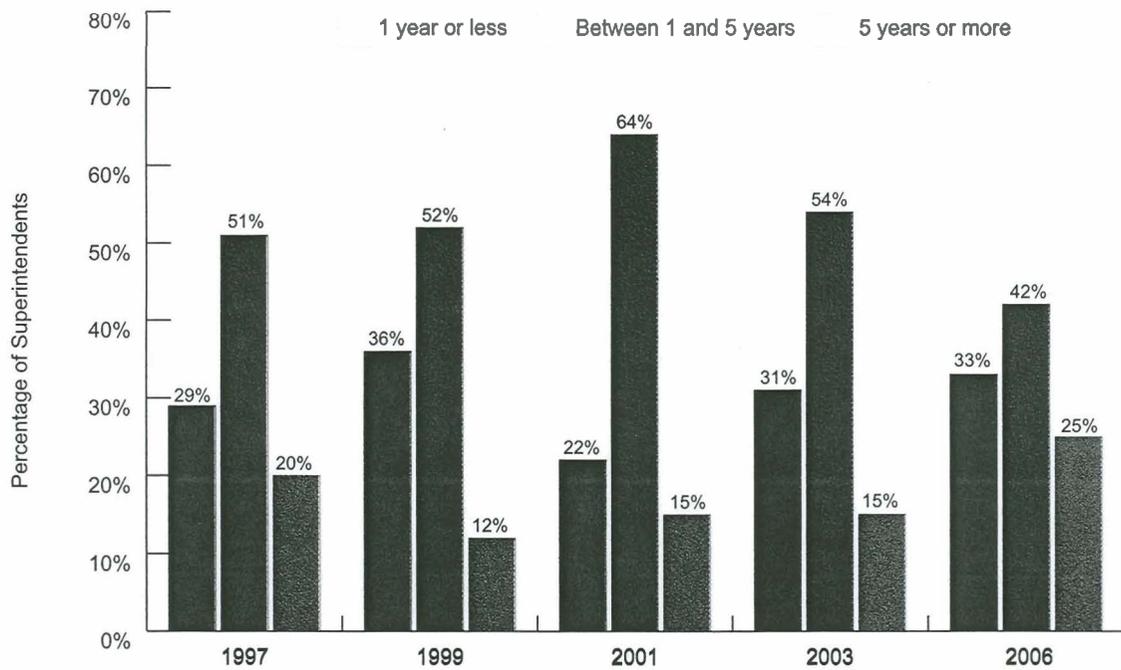


Figure 5. Average annual salary of GCS superintendents: 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2006

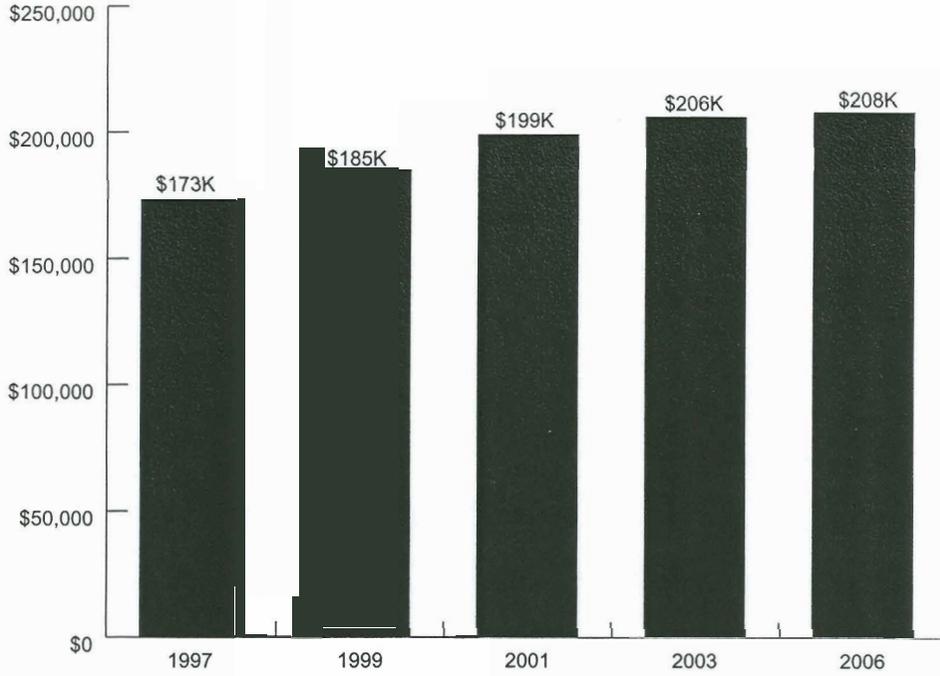


Figure 6. Percent of GCS superintendents by salary range: 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2006.

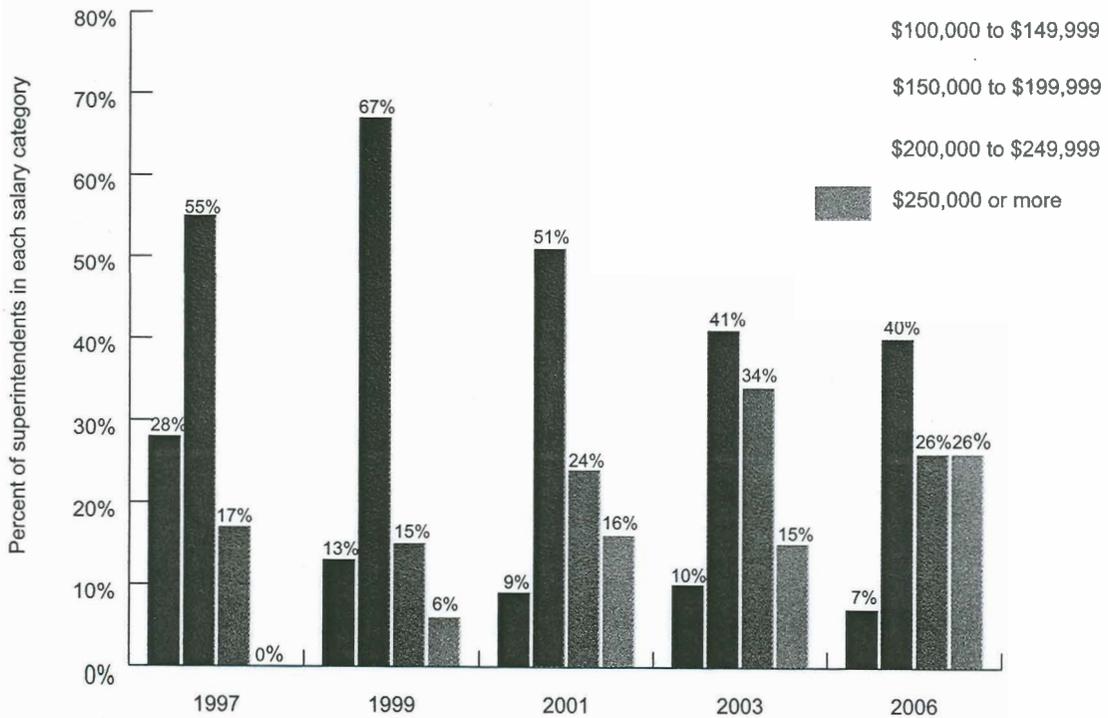


Figure 7. Average annual GCS superintendent salaries by tenure in 2006.

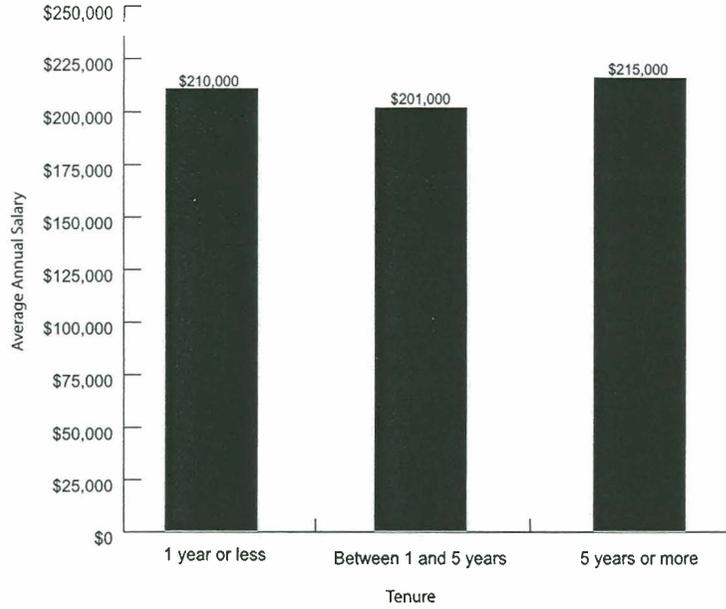


Figure 8. Average annual GCS superintendent salaries by tenure: 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003, and 2006.

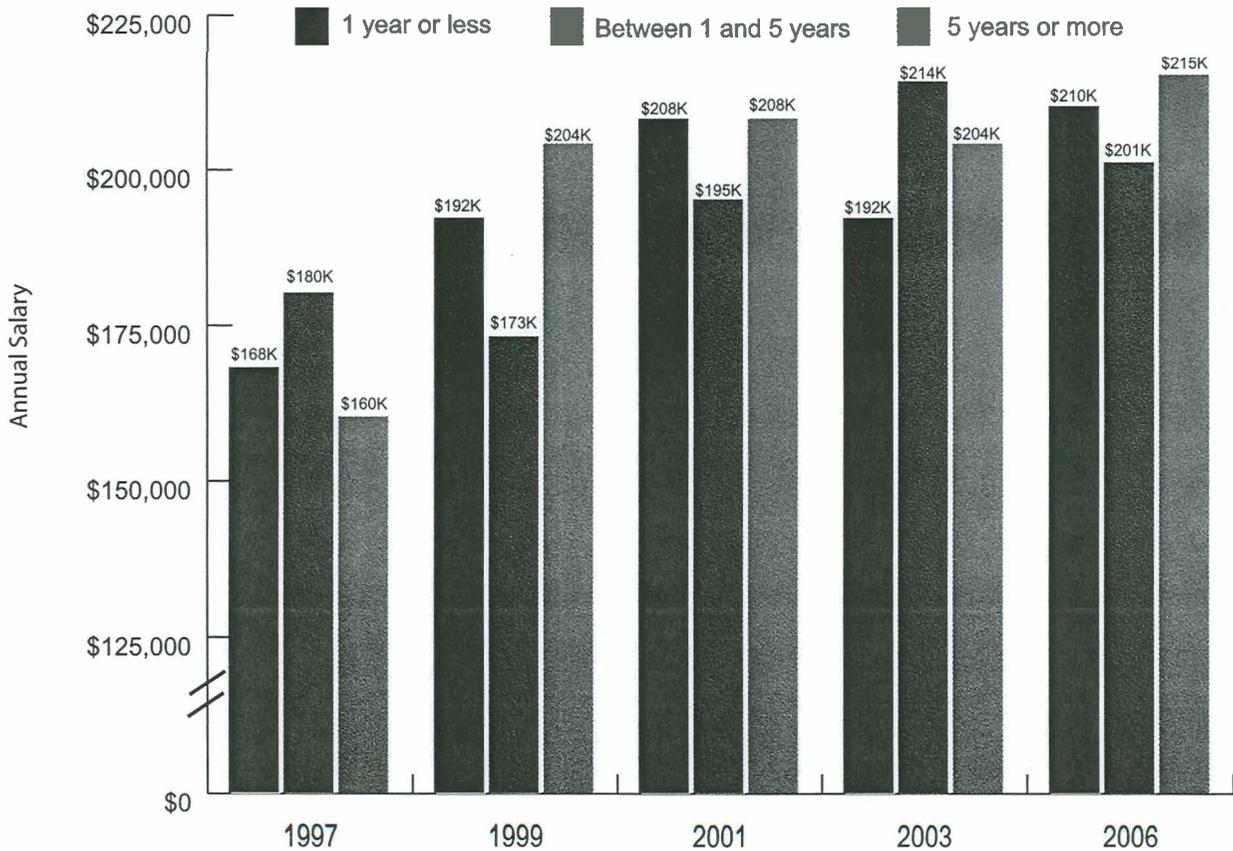


Figure 9: Average annual GCS superintendent salary by school district enrollment: 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003, and 2006.

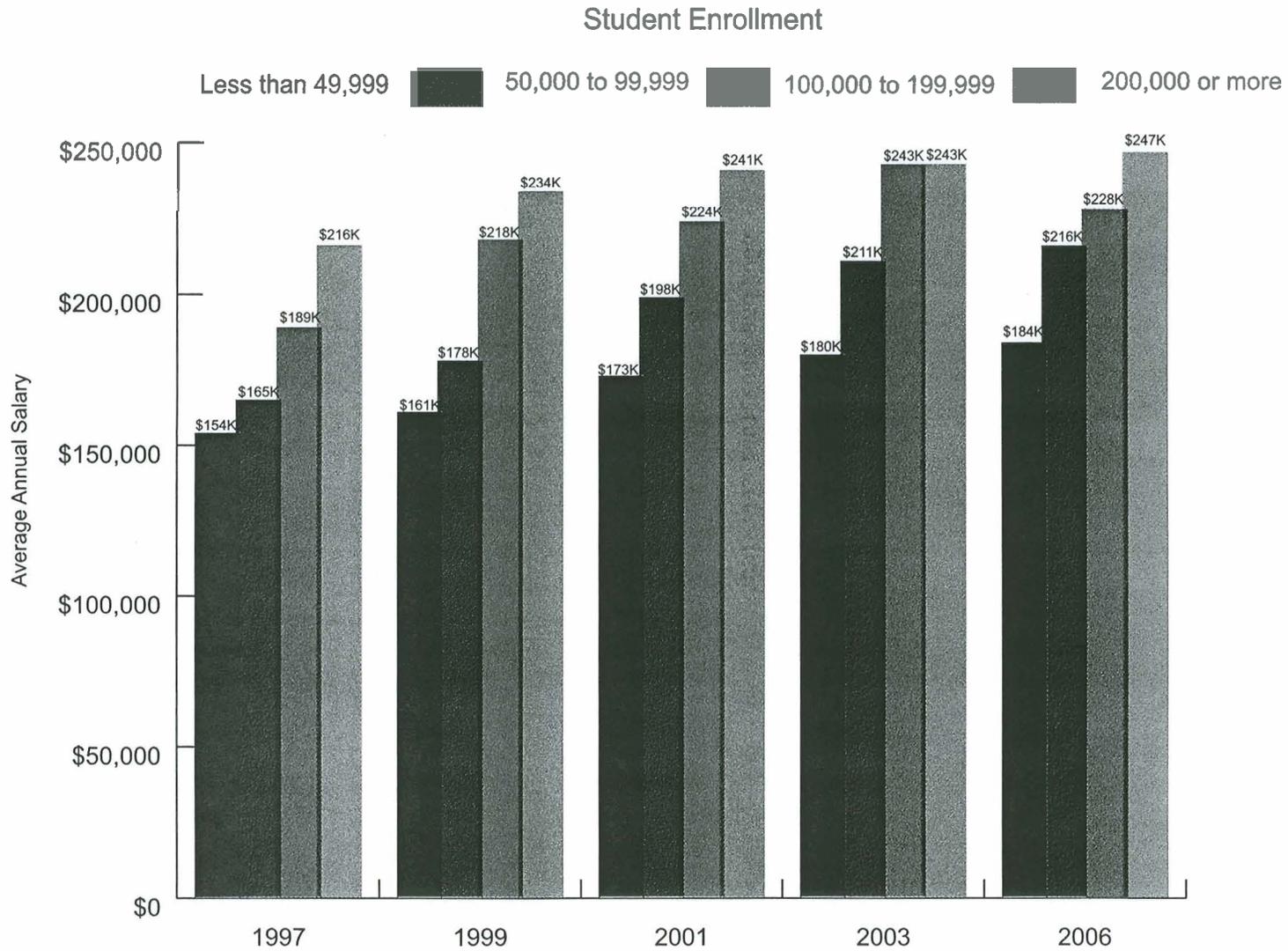


Figure 10. Average annual salary of GCS superintendents by race/ethnicity and gender in 2006.

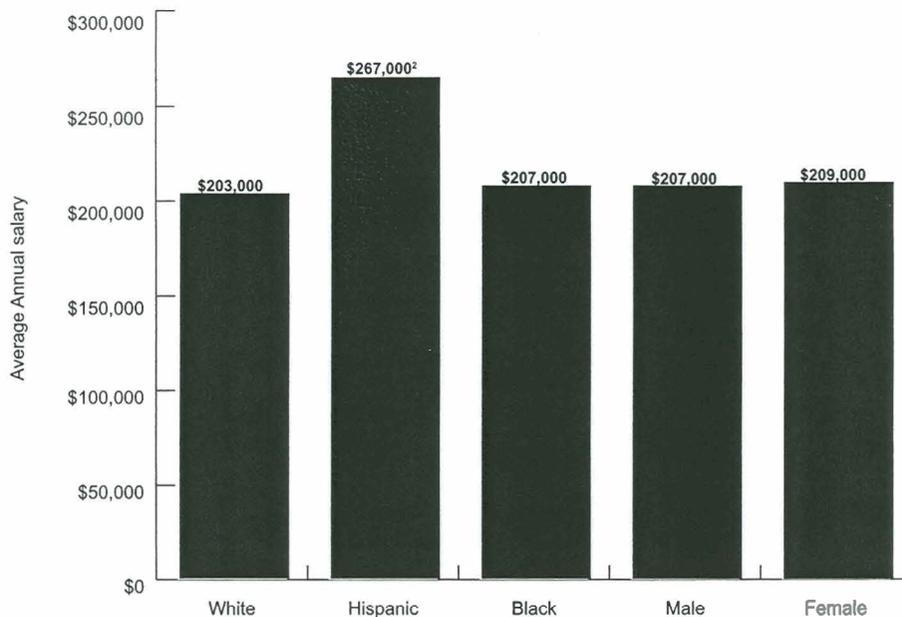
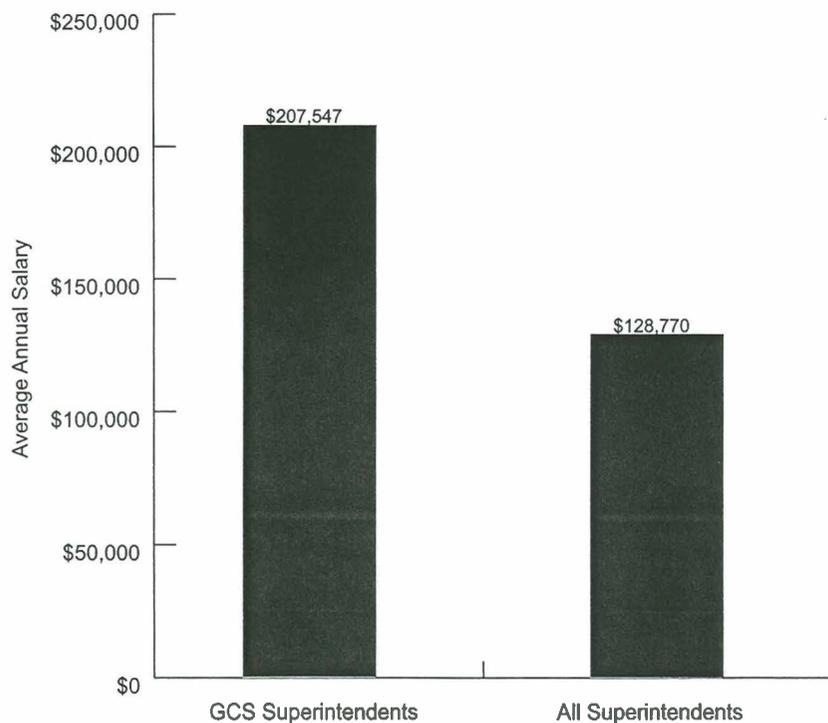


Figure 11. Average annual salaries of GCS superintendents in 2006 and all superintendents in 2005 (Educational Research Service, 2005).



² Average salary for Hispanic superintendents is based on data from five urban school superintendents.