ABSTRACT

RIDDICK, FRANCINE PISCITELLI. What is Your Bench Strength? An Exploration of Succession Planning in Three Large School Districts in a Southeastern State. (Under the direction of Dr. Lance Fusarelli and Dr. Matthew Militello.)

Large school districts face a number of challenges due to their sheer size. One of these challenges involves staffing the role of the principal. With Baby Boomers reaching retirement age, large school districts, especially those experiencing growth, have to fill numerous leadership positions. In order to fill these positions efficiently and effectively, many school districts are beginning to develop and implement succession planning programs to expand their internal pool of leadership candidates. Succession planning strategies have been utilized in the business world for years and the education realm is beginning to realize their value. This study explores three large school districts in a southeastern state and their efforts to implement effective succession planning systems. While all three districts have a variety of strategies in place, none of the districts have a comprehensive, written succession plan and corresponding evaluation. Other similarities across the three districts include administrator certification programs, coaching programs, the predominant use of self-selection into succession planning initiatives, the principal position as the focal point, and the value of utilizing the cohort concept. Some differences across the three districts are the departments and positions responsible for succession planning initiatives, the categorization of some strategies as succession planning, and an additional position as a secondary focal point.
What is Your Bench Strength? An Exploration of
Succession Planning in Three Large School
Districts in a Southeastern State

by
Francine Piscitelli Riddick

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

Educational Administration and Supervision

Raleigh, North Carolina

2009

APPROVED BY:

_______________________________  ______________________________
Dr. Lance D. Fusarelli     Dr. Matthew C. Militello
Committee Co-Chair     Committee Co-Chair

_______________________________  ______________________________
Dr. Kevin P. Brady     Dr. Bonnie C. Fusarelli
DEDICATION

To my loving and supportive husband, Lindsey,

my spirited son, TL,

and our newest angel, Loryn.

Completing my doctorate would not have possible without their unyielding support,

continuous encouragement, and occasional sacrifices.
Francine Piscitelli Riddick was born in New Haven, Connecticut and her family moved to Hendersonville, North Carolina when she was in elementary school. After graduating from Hendersonville High School, she enrolled in North Carolina State University to study mathematics education and psychology. Upon graduation from NCSU, Dr. Riddick remained in the Raleigh area and was hired by the Wake County Public School System.

As a math teacher, Dr. Riddick earned a Masters of Education in Curriculum and Instruction with a concentration in Instructional Technology from NCSU. This degree led to her district level position as the Senior Administrator for K-12 Instructional Technology. In this position, she developed numerous resources and professional development programs revolving around technology integration and 21st century skills at both the district and school levels. During her tenure in this position, Dr. Riddick obtained a Masters of School Administration degree, also from NCSU.

She is currently the Director of Learning for a public-private partnership with the mission of building system leadership capacity in five school districts. In addition to providing leadership training, Dr. Riddick’s primary roles with the organization are to look for ways to incorporate online learning opportunities to enhance existing face-to-face trainings and to manage program design, development, and evaluation.

Dr. Riddick resides in Clayton, NC, with her husband, Lindsey and their young children, TL and Loryn. She enjoys reading and spending time with family and friends.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to offer sincere thanks to my entire family for their support and encouragement during my pursuit of this degree, which required me to spend less time with them and more time with my work. I want to thank my parents for somehow or another instilling in me my love of learning and my determination to finish. I also want to thank my brother-in-law, Tim DeRousseau, who spent numerous evenings entertaining my son, TL, so that I could attend class or complete assignments when my husband had other obligations. TL can definitely attribute some of his affinity for athletics to these evenings together.

I want to thank Dr. Bonnie Fusarelli for continuously reminding us to “enjoy the journey” and my fellow Wake County Cohorters, who are the primary reason I was able to enjoy the journey. I miss our time together, our laughter, and our lists. I know we will continue to support one another over the years and share in each other’s joy as we complete this journey.

Finally, I would like to thank my dissertation committee: Dr. Lance Fusarelli, Dr. Matthew Militello, Dr. Kevin Brady, and Dr. Bonnie Fusarelli. I know they all spent numerous hours reading and editing my work, and their encouragement and support was invaluable to me. Thanks especially to my co-chairs, Dr. Lance Fusarelli and Dr. Matthew Militello, who knew when I needed to be pushed to the next level and when I needed a break. Their demeanor and attitude helped keep me focused with everything in perspective.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................. viii
LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................................................................ ix
CHAPTER ONE ....................................................................................................................... 1
INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................... 1
  Overview ............................................................................................................................... 1
  Statement of the Problem ................................................................................................... 2
  Purpose of the Study ........................................................................................................... 4
  Research Questions ............................................................................................................ 5
  Definition of Terms ............................................................................................................ 6
  Significance of the Study ................................................................................................... 8
  Overview of Approach ....................................................................................................... 9
  Theoretical Framework of the Study .................................................................................. 9
  Organization of the Study ................................................................................................ 11
CHAPTER TWO .................................................................................................................... 13
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ........................................................................................ 13
  Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 13
  Educational Leadership and School Change ..................................................................... 14
  Succession Planning in Business and Public Management ................................................ 18
    Succession Planning in Business .................................................................................... 18
    Succession Planning in Public Management .................................................................. 24
  General Succession Planning in Education ........................................................................ 26
  Succession Planning for Principalships ............................................................................ 29
    Deterrents to Principalships ......................................................................................... 32
    Principal Recruitment ................................................................................................... 34
    Principal Preparation Programs .................................................................................... 36
    New Principal Socialization .......................................................................................... 43
  Summary ............................................................................................................................. 46
CHAPTER THREE ................................................................................................................ 47
DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY ........................................................... 47
  Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 47
  Research Questions ............................................................................................................ 47
  Selection of Qualitative Research Methodology ............................................................... 48
  Rationale for Case Study ................................................................................................... 50
  Site Selection and Sample ................................................................................................. 52
  Data Collection Procedures ............................................................................................... 53
  Materials .............................................................................................................................. 54
  Data Collection ................................................................................................................... 55
    Interview Method ........................................................................................................... 56
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Documents and Other Artifacts</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Field Notes</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Validity and Reliability</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safeguards against Researcher Bias</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Issues (IRB)</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case #1: Glendale County Schools</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Succession Planning Overview</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Succession Planning Programs: Identification and Development</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability of Succession Planning Programs</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of Succession Planning Programs</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case #2: Carrington County Schools</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Succession Planning Overview</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Succession Planning Programs: Identification and Development</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability of Succession Planning Programs</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of Succession Planning Programs</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case #3: Westin County Schools</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Succession Planning Overview</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Succession Planning Programs: Identification and Development</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability of Succession Planning Programs</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of Succession Planning Programs</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Case Analysis of Data</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison of District Demographics</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question #1: Why Succession Planning?</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question #2: Succession Planning Programs</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question #3: Succession Planning Program Effectiveness</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question #4: Similarities and Differences Among District Programs</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Recurring Themes</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the Study</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of Findings</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of Formal Written Plan</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of Reporting Mechanisms and Formal Evaluation</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Sustainability</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1     Glendale County Schools 2008-2009 Demographics ...................................... 68
Table 2     Glendale County Succession Planning Strategies by Position Level .............. 71
Table 3     Carrington County Schools 2008-2009 Demographics ................................. 79
Table 4     Carrington County Succession Planning Strategies by Position Level ........... 83
Table 5     Westin County Schools 2008-2009 Demographics ..................................... 90
Table 6     Westin County Succession Planning Strategies by Position Level .................. 94
Table 7     Overview of District Demographics Based on 2008-2009 Data ................... 101
Table 8     Matrix of Succession Planning Strategies by Position Level ........................ 109
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study. ............................................................... 11

Figure 2. Modified Conceptual Framework for Succession Planning in Education. ..... 133
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

All long-term successful athletic coaches understand the value of succession planning, though it is not often termed “succession planning” in athletics. In the athletic world, succession planning is thought of as bench strength. How strong are the players sitting on the bench during the game? Whether the sport is football, basketball, baseball, soccer, or any other team sport, the bench must contain players prepared to play in case of injury, illness, poor performance, or other unforeseen issue. This same concept of bench strength can be applied to education. Whether the need is a result of retirements or growth, school districts need to have a strong bench of candidates to fill administrator positions as the need arises so they are not caught in a reactive crisis mode wherein they are forced to hire less-than-ideal personnel to fill openings.

Overview

Large school districts face a number of challenges simply as a direct result of their size. Based on 2005 data, the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning reports 51% of principals in one southeastern state are or will be eligible for retirement in the next five years (Waters, 2006). For one of the districts in this study, this problem is compounded by explosive growth. The district has more than doubled in size since 1985 to a total of 137,706 students on the 20th day of school for the 2008-2009 school year. Since 2000, this school district has added 50 new schools and has 26 more schools slated to open in the next five years pending funding (Westin County Schools, 2009). Consequently, the current
superintendent of this district has appointed 96 principals in the last 40 months. Ninety of these 96 principals, for a total of 93.75%, were internal hires which suggests that succession planning strategies in this district are effective. Nevertheless, in addition to the district’s current expected annual principal turnover rate of 9%, which is lower than the state average of 12%, this particular district also has to plan to increase their number of principals because of their growing number of schools (State School Report Cards, 2009).

To further complicate matters, the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) has resulted in key concerns for current and future principals. NCLB expanded and intensified an era of accountability in the field of public education. This extensive legislation includes components regarding student achievement, technology, and highly qualified school personnel. Student achievement data at the school level collected as a result of this accountability legislation is sometimes used in evaluating principal effectiveness. With all of this intensified scrutiny, in addition to the day-to-day leading and managing of teachers and students, it is possible the role of principal has become less desirable, which may decrease the supply or pool of candidates seeking leadership positions. Such events further reinforce the importance and need for school districts to develop and implement effective succession planning systems.

**Statement of the Problem**

Succession planning has been the norm in the business world for some time. Conger and Benjamin (1999) studied more than a dozen organizations to determine how successful companies develop their next generation of leaders. They describe the socialization approach
to leadership utilized by companies such as Federal Express and PepsiCo. Federal Express utilizes a Leadership Institute, which was founded in the mid-1980s. The mission of the Institute is to develop leadership talent though coursework and experiences that examine and apply the principles and practices of successful leadership, while instilling their corporate philosophy and their way of doing business. PepsiCo also utilizes a program approach through its PepsiCo Learning Center. There is a program specifically designed for socializing senior-level managers called *Building the Business*. This program only allows nine senior managers to participate at a time and the most unique aspect of it is that it is led by the company’s CEO. Both of these companies are: (a) identifying potential candidates, (b) providing them with professional development, and (c) providing them face-time with upper management.

More recently Sobol, Harkins, and Conley (2007) have written about some of the best practices for succession planning in place at leading organizations such as CIGNA, Honeywell, Lockheed Martin, Merrill Lynch, Purina, and Unilever. In these companies, a successor is always being groomed for important leadership positions, so when the time comes, the change in leadership is virtually seamless. All of these companies have varied approaches, with different strengths. As a result of their studies of best practices, Sobol et al. have developed a succession planning framework. They refer to this framework as SPD—Succession, Progression, and Development. SPD is a continuous cycle that contains four distinct stages: (a) design/create/modify the system, (b) analyze resources, (c) prepare
organization implementation, and (d) monitor and measure. This framework can be used as a tool when developing succession planning strategies.

The practice of succession planning is not as common in education. Often when a leader departs, many programs and initiatives disappear as well, because the structure and motivation that supported the programs resided within the administrator, instead of being embedded within the staff. In a study of ten low-performing middle schools in the Baltimore City Public School System, there were fourteen principal changes between 2003 and 2007. The study showed that 90% of the schools had at least one principal change during this period, while more than 80% of the schools had two or more principal changes and 50% of the school experienced three or more changes in principal (Advocates for Children and Youth, 2007).

Educational leaders now consider the business practice of succession planning as a result of the combination of the general increase in turnover rates in the principalship, the potential for an even higher turnover rate with Baby Boomers aging into retirement, the modern-day deterrents to the principalship, and the need to avoid the potential performance lag that often accompanies a change in leadership. Large school districts, particularly those encountering surges in growth, experience this problem exponentially as a result of the high demand for school leaders and uncertain, uneven supply of candidates.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this exploratory case study is to determine what succession planning means in three large school districts in one southeastern state and what factors influenced the
formation and implementation of succession planning strategies. Large districts are studied since they have more school based administrator positions, which means simply due to scale, they also have the potential to have more vacancies. At this stage in the research, succession planning is defined as any formal plan of action to find the best possible candidates to fill educational leadership vacancies, including the principalship. In this particular research study, succession planning includes recruitment, selection, preparation, and socialization of aspiring administrators.

**Research Questions**

Specifically, this study will address the following research questions:

1. Why are succession plans enacted by school districts?
   a. What influences the formation of succession plans in three large school districts in one southeastern state?

2. What do school district succession plans look like?
   a. What do succession plans look like and how are they implemented in three large school districts in one southeastern state?

3. Do school district succession plans work?
   a. In what ways are three large school districts in one southeastern state assessing the effectiveness of their succession planning efforts?
   b. In what ways have three large school districts in one southeastern state planned for sustainability of their succession planning efforts?

4. What are the similarities and differences of school district succession plans?
a. In what ways are the succession plans of three large school districts in one southeastern state similar or different from one another?

b. In what ways are these plans similar or different from the conceptual and empirical literature?

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions of key terms will be used in this research. These terms may have different meanings in other situations.

*Aspiring principal/principal candidate* is a person who desires to be a principal and is currently in the assistant principal role, in the assistant principal pool of candidates, or enrolled in a Masters of School Administration program. This person is engaging in some type of activity to prepare them for the role of principal of an elementary, middle, or high school.

*District Liaison* is the person who is representing their participating school district in this study and acting as a resource to the researcher. This person will provide documents, artifacts, and other information directly to the researcher, as well as participate in interviews and/or surveys as needed.

*Induction programs* are professional activities designed to provide new and aspiring principals with information and experiences by which they gain the values, norms, attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed to satisfactorily perform their duties (Hart, 1993).

*Large school districts* will have a minimum of 50,000 students enrolled for the 2008-2009 school year to be considered as a participant in this study.
Lateral entry is term used to describe a person who holds a non-teaching college degree and obtains teacher licensure while teaching.

Mentoring programs are formal programs in which people new to a role are paired with a person experienced in the role with the intent that the experienced person will listen to the novice’s issues and concerns, provide support, and offer guidance and advice as needed.

Preparation programs are formal activities ranging from obtaining the required education and licensure to attending additional professional development activities mandated and/or recommended by individual school districts in order to become a principal.

Principal is the leader of an elementary, middle, or high school who is assigned all responsibility for administrative supervision, management, and instructional leadership at the school.

Recruitment is the activity associated with attracting people to apply to the administrative vacancies.

Selection is the process by which an individual is chosen to occupy a position, either within the applicant pool or for a specific position.

Socialization is the process of professional learning by which an individual acclimates to the new position of principal and acquires the skills, attitudes, and group norms needed to be successful.

Succession planning is the purposeful and systematic effort of projecting leadership requirements, identifying a pool of high potential individuals with the capacity for
development to senior leadership, and developing these candidates through planned work experiences, training, education, and personal growth (NAPA, 1997).

*Sustainable* refers to the characteristic of being maintained, without interruption or significant weakening, indefinitely.

*Turnover* refers to the ratio of people in a particular position having to be replaced for any reason including growth, firing, retirement, mobility, and resignations, to the total number of people in the position. All turnover rates utilized will represent turnover in a given year, not average turnover over a period of time.

*Well-qualified principal candidates* are those candidates who hold the requisite education and licensure, as mandated by the state in which they are practicing or hoping to practice, as well as any other requirements deemed mandatory by the individual district.

**Significance of the Study**

Researchers have reported the applicant pool of qualified principals is shrinking (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress, 2003; United States Department of Labor, 2008). The United States Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008) reports an estimated additional 17,000 new elementary and secondary school principals will be needed between 2006 and 2016. This number reflects approximately an 8% increase in the number of positions and addresses the need to staff new schools. According to this report, job prospects in this area are favorable since in addition to growth, a large proportion of educational administrators are expected to retire in the next ten
years (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008). Succession planning is a strategy that can be utilized to assist in filling the applicant pools with qualified, high-quality candidates.

Succession planning is a relatively new concept in the field of education; therefore there is not a significant amount of research on the topic. In this era of accountability in public schools and the increasingly tough demands placed on school administrators, developing leaders to meet today’s challenges in a school district is a critical issue. Insights from this study may enable school districts to begin developing their own succession planning programs and activities.

**Overview of Approach**

To address these research questions, a qualitative collective case study methodology will be employed. The researcher will serve as the primary research instrument and explore artifacts, policies, documents, and other self-published materials representing succession planning activities from each participating district. For each district, the researcher interviewed a minimum of two people in senior leadership positions who are knowledgeable about the district’s succession planning strategies. Time was spent in each of the districts and initial interviews were conducted in person. Follow-up interviews were conducted in person and telephone and email correspondence was used for clarification purposes.

**Theoretical Framework of the Study**

This exploratory qualitative study was designed to be a case study focusing on three different large school districts in one southeastern state. Since a formalized program surrounding succession planning is relatively new to education, this exploratory design is
appropriately to explore methods and programs being implemented. Large districts were chosen due to their number of school based administrator positions and the resulting potential of more vacancies simply due to the issue of scale.

The study was completed from the standpoint that succession planning is a practice that should be utilized in some form or another in large school districts given the leadership demands of these districts. Large school districts can especially benefit from this practice due to the high demand for highly qualified leaders and uncertain, uneven supply of candidates in applicant pools.

Jarrell and Pewitt (2007) researched a leadership development program for a city government and developed a framework for planning a sustainable workforce. The key components of this framework are:

- planning
- selection and training of staff,
- sustainability, and
- evaluation of the process in practice.

This study employed Jarrell and Pewitt’s framework and examined these four elements of succession planning in large school districts. Figure 1 illustrates this framework. The entire box that encompasses the figure represents the planning component. The first box within the figure represents the individual succession planning strategies that come from the planning process. Once the strategy is developed, participants for the strategy are then identified and
developed. Finally, the strategy is evaluated with sustainability of the strategy being considered.

**Organization of the Study**

This chapter overviewed the purpose of the study in relation to the problem, research questions, definition of pertinent terms, and the significance of the study. The next chapter reviews current literature regarding educational leadership and school change and succession planning in business, public management, and education. Literature reviewing succession planning specifically for the principalship is examined, including principal preparation, recruitment, and socialization. The third chapter describes the methodology implemented in this study, with an emphasis on data collection and analysis procedures. The fourth chapter

---

**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study.**
details the data collected for each of the three participating school districts. Finally, chapter five includes a summary of the study, discussion of findings, alignment to existing research, recommendations and implications for educational practice, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review research literature pertinent to this study. The chapter opens with an exploration of the topic of educational leadership and school change. Next, the general topics of succession planning in business, public management, and education are explored. Finally, succession planning for the role of the principal is examined and areas such as deterrents to the role, recruitment, preparation, and socialization of principals are examined.

While most organizations, both in the private and public sectors, practice leadership development, many are not purposeful or systematic about it. For the purposes of this study, succession planning will be defined as the purposeful and systematic effort of projecting leadership requirements, identifying a pool of high potential individuals with the capacity for development to senior leadership, and developing these candidates through planned work experiences, training, education, and personal growth (NAPA, 1997). It is important to note succession planning is a process, not an event. The leadership development programs of a succession plan should align to enable the organization to compete more effectively, reinforce desired perceptions about the organization, foster employee legitimacy, and focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the organization (Cohn, Khurana, & Reeves, 2005). It is important to acknowledge this study focuses on internal succession planning and does not explore the implications of external hiring.
Educational Leadership and School Change

Newman, King, and Youngs (2000) suggest that school capacity is the key to success for school reform and outline five important characteristics: (a) teachers’ abilities, (b) professional communities, (c) coherent programs, (d) technical resources, and (e) principal leadership. Fullan (2001) contends leadership is the key characteristic imperative for success, because it brings the other four qualities together to form the cohesive whole. Elmore (2000) is in agreement with Fullan (2001) and states:

The job of administrative leaders is primarily about enhancing the skills and knowledge of people in the organization, creating a common culture of expectations around the use of those skills and knowledge, holding the various pieces of the organization together in a productive relationship with each other, and holding individuals accountable for their contributions to the collective result. (p. 15)

The job of a school administrator is much more than managing the daily duties of a school. Since school administrators have influence in the hiring, firing, and retention of teachers and teachers most impact student learning, the job of a school administrator has the potential to create significant change (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

School improvement and organizational change take time and commitment. Research in this area suggests that school leaders need at least five years for successful implementation of large scale change initiatives (Fullan, 1991). In addition, regarding leadership and sustaining results, Fullan (2005) wrote, “when it comes to sustainability, each level above you helps or hinders (it is rarely neutral)” (p. 65). All stakeholders must be aware of the goals
of the school district and directly align their work efforts. When this is done correctly, change initiatives have the opportunity to become embedded within the system, instead of within a single leader. In theory, when a leader is replaced, the new leader would follow the same alignment of goals and work.

Over fifteen years ago, Hord (1993) asserted “the leadership of the principal has been consistently cited as the most significant factor in the success of campus change efforts” (p. 16). Similarly, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) indicated, “[School] leadership not only matters, it is second only to teaching among school related factors in its impact upon student learning” (p. 5). Likewise, Crow (2006) stated, “although the relationship between student achievement [and the school principal] is indirect, the importance of this role for developing and maintaining school culture, promoting a vision of academic success for all students, and creating professional learning communities has clearly been supported by research and theory” (p. 1).

Many researchers have claimed a relationship between leadership and student achievement (Hord, 1993; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2004; Crow, 2006). To further validate these claims, Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) completed a meta-analysis of 70 studies involving 2,894 schools, approximately 1.1 million students, and 14,000 teachers and discovered there is a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement. They found 21 specific leadership responsibilities significantly correlated with student achievement. While all of these 21 leadership responsibilities are required for first order change to be successful, only seven of them are associated with
second order change, which is more challenging. Second order change requires a dramatic change in current practices. The leadership responsibilities correlated to second order change are: (a) knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, (b) optimizer, (c) intellectual stimulation, (d) change agent, (e) monitoring and evaluating, (f) flexibility, and (g) ideals and beliefs.

While much of the research on school leadership focuses on traditionally prepared school leaders, school leaders do not always have to come from a traditional educational background in order to be successful. Major General John Stanford chronicles the success of the Seattle Public School System during his tenure as superintendent in his 1999 book *Victory in our Schools*. Stanford describes the problems the school district was facing and notes that they were primarily business problems, not educational problems. According to Stanford (1999):

The school district needed someone who was experienced at leading large, complex, heterogeneous organizations and had a track record of turning them around. It needed someone who had managed multimillion-dollar budgets and kept them consistently in the black. It needed someone who had inspired a burned-out workforce and infused them with a vision of what they could achieve. It needed someone who had taken an organization that had lost the confidence of its customers and brought it back on track. (p. xvii)

Stanford was this person. He had to lead the district through ten major philosophical shifts that were perpetuating the district’s biggest problems. He felt until these shifts were
addressed, any effort to turn the district around would be undermined. Many of these philosophical shifts were directly related to educating children, such as stop focusing on adults and begin focusing on children and stop believing that some children can learn and start believing that all children can learn (Stanford, 1999). Stanford proved that it does not require an educator to lead a district through this type of change. It does, however, require an effective leader.

Crews and Weakley (1995) agree with the importance of school based leadership and summarize:

Show me a good school and I’ll show you a good school leader. When you poke into the inner workings of a successful school, you will find—without fail—a skillful leader who understands how to transform educational practice, not just transact educational business. The flip side is also true. Show me a school that is failing, and I’ll show you a school hungry for leadership. Policy makers and education engineers have spent more than a decade looking for the magic bullet to fix schools. Look no further. If leadership isn’t the magic bullet, it is the oil that makes the mechanism fire. Put a strong leader in a troubled school, give that leader flexibility to make the important decisions, then watch the school rise to the top of the heap. (p. 5)

School administrators are in a position where they can significantly impact a school, in either a positive or a negative way. Purposefully developing strong leaders through succession planning strategies will assure there are effective school leaders available who can assist schools through challenging change.
**Succession Planning in Business and Public Management**

Karaevli and Hall (2002) analyzed thirteen organizations known for strong succession planning and leadership identification and development programs. Twelve of these organizations were private corporations and one was a public sector organization. All of the succession plans were very successful, yet they were very different. Karaevli and Hall’s (2002) research demonstrated that because context plays a significant role, there is no best way of succession planning. The next section explores succession planning in the business sector and several similar approaches emerge.

**Succession Planning in Business**

The concept of succession planning in the business world is not new. For years, succession planning has been used in business to develop and maintain strong leadership in the organization over time and to help prepare for an unexpected event (Butler & Roche-Tarry, 2002). McDonald’s displayed strong succession planning in regards to an unexpected event in 2004 when Jim Cantalupo died suddenly of a heart attack (Bhanagar, 2004). Charan (2005) wrote, “Charlie Bell’s ascension to the top spot at McDonald’s within hours of Jim Cantalupo’s death reflected well on a company that had its house in order” (p. 78). A similar situation occurred more recently when Bill Johnson took over as chairman and CEO of Progress Energy, a Fortune 500 company providing power to more than three million customers. Robert McGehee suffered a stroke on a Sunday and Johnson was appointed interim CEO on Monday. McGehee passed away on Tuesday and by Friday, Johnson was appointed as CEO and chairman (Smith & Bowens, 2007).
A variety of researchers have explored the topic of succession planning in business. Conger and Benjamin (1999) studied more than a dozen organizations to determine how successful companies develop their next generation of leaders. Part of their focus is on the socialization approach to leadership utilized by companies such as Federal Express and PepsiCo. The socialization approach emphasizes the company’s climate and style of doing business. Both Federal Express and PepsiCo utilize in-house leadership learning programs.

In the mid-1980s, Federal Express founded their Leadership Institute. The mission of the institute is to develop leadership talent through coursework and experiences that examine and apply the principles and practices of successful leadership, while instilling their corporate philosophy and their way of doing business. PepsiCo also utilizes a program approach through its PepsiCo Learning Center. There is a program specifically designed for socializing senior-level managers called “Building the Business.” This program only allows nine senior managers to participate at a time and the most unique aspect of it is that it is led by the company’s CEO (Conger & Benjamin, 1999).

More recently Sobol, Harkins, and Conley (2007) have written about some of the best practices for succession planning in place at leading organizations such as CIGNA, Honeywell, Lockheed Martin, Merrill Lynch, Purina, and Unilever. In these companies, as well as in many others, a successor is always being groomed for important leadership positions, so when the time comes, the change in leadership is virtually seamless. All of these companies have varied approaches, with different strengths. As a result of their studies of best practices, Sobol et al. have developed a succession planning framework. They refer to
this framework as SPD—Succession, Progression, and Development. SPD is a continuous cycle that contains four distinct stages: (a) design/create/modify the system, (b) analyze resources, (c) prepare organization implementation, and (d) monitor and measure. This framework can be used as a tool when developing succession planning strategies.

For over a decade, Bower (2007) has interviewed company Chief Executive Officers and studied more than 1,800 successions to find company performance was significantly better when insiders were successors in the CEO position. Collins (2001) came to similar conclusions using different data sets. Bower (2007) suggests as a rule that the best leaders are “people from inside the company who have somehow maintained enough detachment from the local traditions, ideology, and shibboleths to maintain the objectivity of an outsider” (Bower, 2007, p. 94). According to Bower (2007), these leaders are often referred to as inside-outsiders and grooming these individuals for critical leadership positions in the future should be a fundamental goal of succession planning.

Succession planning should not be confused with its predecessor, replacement planning. Replacement planning focused on an individual replacing another individual, whereas succession planning encompasses a broader approach towards the training and replacement of numerous individuals. Rothwell (2001) proposed the following definition of succession planning for businesses: “a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement” (p. 6). Using this definition, succession planning can include issues such as the “procedures necessary for a successful
transfer, legal and financial considerations, psychological factors, leadership development, and exit strategy” (Ip & Jacobs, 2006, p. 327). Ip and Jacobs (2006) believed “succession issues are generally applicable to organizations regardless of size, sector, and geographic location” (p. 327).

Among other items, Leibman, Bruer, and Maki (1996) believed succession planning helps companies assure the continuity of prepared leaders for key executive positions, engage senior management in a disciplined process of reviewing the organization’s leadership talent, guide the development activities of key executives, re-examine business unit structures, processes, and systems, and align with other systems that support the leadership renewal process. As these benefits suggest, succession planning has evolved over the past thirty years from what was just simply replacement planning. Succession planning now encompasses a broader range of activities including organizational and leadership development. Leibman et al. (1996) asserted “rather than focusing on the right person at the right time, corporations need to develop strong leadership teams for strategic tasks” (p. 19). They believed succession planning focuses on the individual, while succession management focuses on the organization.

Along these lines, Leibman et al. (1996) proposed that in order to effectively address today’s dynamic, global environment, succession planning must transform into succession management along six different dimensions: (a) corporate orientation, (b) organizational focus, (c) outcome, (d) assessment techniques, (e) communication, and (f) selection pools. Leibman et al. delineated slight differences between succession planning and succession
management for all six dimensions, but the outcomes for both share an important characteristic: having prepared leadership within the organization.

Conger and Fulmer (2003) also utilized the term succession management. They propose five rules of succession management: (a) focus on development, (b) identify “linchpin positions,” (c) make it transparent, (d) measure your progress regularly, and (e) keep it flexible. Focus on development emphasizes leadership development as a key facet of succession planning. It promotes action learning, which results in practical solutions to major strategic problems.

Identify “linchpin positions” refers to the “jobs that are essential to the long-term health of the organization” (Conger & Fulmer, 2003, p. 79). Conger and Fulmer’s research revealed “by monitoring the pipeline for these jobs, companies can focus development programs on ensuring an adequate supply of appropriate talent” (p. 79). Once the talent is identified, they can be provided with opportunities to develop their talent.

In the past, succession planning was often highly secretive “in an attempt to avoid sapping the motivation of those who aren’t on the fast track” (Conger & Fulmer, 2003, p. 81). Since today’s contracts are often now “based on performance—rather than loyalty or seniority—people will contribute more if they know what rung (of the corporate ladder) they are on” (p. 81). Many companies now use technology to make their succession plans more transparent, allowing employees to update their personnel information in an online database, as well as see available positions and salary ranges. Human resource managers can query the database to find employees matching specific skill sets.
Conger and Fulmer’s (2003) next rule is about monitoring progress regularly. In order to be successful with succession planning, it is not enough to know the perfect replacement for the top position is already being groomed. You must also know “the right people are moving at the right pace into the right jobs at the right time” (p. 82). It is important to have a cadre of highly skilled leaders ready to take on new challenges, but at the same time “you must make sure that high potential employees have enough options that they don’t grow restless—royal heirs can be expected to show patience when waiting for the throne, but corporate heirs have many other opportunities” (p. 82).

The final rule of succession management according to Conger and Fulmer (2003) is about flexibility. They believe:

The best practice organizations we studied follow the Japanese notion of kaizen, or continuous improvement in both processes and content. They refine and adjust their systems on the basis of feedback from line executives and participants, monitor developments in technology, and learn from other leading organizations. Indeed, despite their success, none of the best-practice companies in our study expects its succession management system to operate without modification for more than a year. (p. 84)

Succession planning efforts can only be effective if they are up to date and responsive to the organization’s current needs, so the organization must be flexible and open to continuous improvement.
Some researchers who use the term succession planning in their studies are often describing some of the qualities of succession management proposed by Conger and Fulmer (2003) and Leibman et al. (1996). For example, Ibarra (2005) believed “best practice organizations use succession planning to develop and maintain strong leadership and to ensure that they address all of the competencies required for today’s and tomorrow’s work environment” (p. 19). He continued by stating, “effective organizations do not passively wait for the future; they create it by investing their time, thoughts, and planning to ensure the continuity of their talent, both their leaders and their front line employees” (p. 19). As a result, for the purposes of this study the term succession planning will include the components of succession management.

*Succession Planning in Public Management*

Succession planning is rare in public agencies for a variety of political reasons. Often both elected and appointed positions have tenure limitations or are tied to a particular political administration. Sometimes, officials assume succession issues are beyond their scope of work and feel they lack the information necessary to proceed (Jarrell & Pewitt, 2007). Pynes (2004) writes specifically about the challenges of workforce and succession planning in the public sector. She cites the financial implications typically tied with workforce and succession planning initiatives and the accompanying fear of backlash from citizens as well as from elected officials. Pynes (2004) reminds us that “sometimes the political realities of public organizations undermine change” (p. 399). The time factor of political terms often results in short term perspectives of how organizations should function.
Schall (1997) goes somewhat deeper into the barriers the public sector faces regarding succession planning. She outlines four different barriers that must be overcome in order for succession planning to be taken seriously in the public sector: (a) the leader’s reluctance to take on the task of succession planning, (b) the leader’s assumption that succession planning is beyond the scope of their work, (c) no clear understanding of how to frame the succession plan, and (d) no information on how to handle succession planning in an ever-changing political environment (Schall, 1997).

Jarrell and Pewitt (2007) researched a leadership development program for a city government and developed a framework for planning a sustainable workforce. The key components of this framework are: (a) planning, (b) selection and training of staff, (c) sustainability, and (d) evaluation of the process in practice. This framework was developed with the public sector in mind, but could also be employed in the realms of business or education.

According to Berry and Wechsler (1995), state agencies rely heavily on strategic planning models developed in the private sector, though public timelines are generally shorter than private ones. Research conducted on leadership development by the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA, 1997) has resulted in the recommendation of integrating succession planning into an organization’s strategic plan. Schall (1997) insists “the public sector can, and should, focus on the longer term” and “senior officials, whether elected or appointed, must not only think strategically during their tenure but also be oriented
beyond their tenure” (p. 9). Being willing and able to develop an effective succession plan is crucial in order for this longer term focus to happen.

**General Succession Planning in Education**

At this point in time, little has been written about the topic of succession planning in education. In fact, very few school districts have “come close to having all the components of a well-designed management development system” (Tucker & Codding, 2002, p. 22). Business and the military have both been successful in developing succession planning structures as a part of their organization. These two arenas have utilized an “‘iron triangle’ of carefully calibrated relationships among job training, job assignments, and career advancement” which is “largely missing in American school systems” (p. 11). Succession planning activities in education should be “aimed towards divesting old professional identities, expectations, and values and replacing them with the values, skills, and assumptions necessary to support new ways of doing things” (Hart, 1993, p. 279).

Normore (2007) believed “successful school districts provide well-structured leadership development opportunities and experiences by capitalizing in long-term investment of time, energy, attention, and resources to professional development programs” (p. 8). Numerous school districts across the nation have begun to explore the concept of succession planning, specifically to address the perceived issue of principal shortages. Goodlad (2004) recommended the first priority for all new superintendents should be selecting and developing both leadership and management skills in the most promising people for principal positions. Goodlad (2004) believed “there should be, waiting in the
wings, a sufficient number of qualified persons to take over each principalship as it is vacated. The search for leadership in a district should be continuous” (p. 277). Some school districts are heeding this advice.

Fairfax County, Virginia combined district funds with a Wallace Foundation grant to begin their Learning, Empowering, Assessing, and Developing Fairfax, or LEAD Fairfax, program as a succession planning strategy. About ten years ago, Fairfax realized that within five years of 2001, the district was going to lose approximately 70% of their current leaders. For this large district, this meant they were going to need roughly 129 new principals and even more assistant principals. Wanting to take advantage of their experienced leaders and their organizational culture, they decided to build a “grow your own” model within their district. The curriculum contains four areas of emphasis: (a) leading people, (b) leading learning, (c) managing the business of schools, and (d) being able to develop themselves and others (López, 2008).

LEAD Fairfax has a variety of cohorts to meet their succession planning needs. They have an Administrative Intern program, where they take teacher leaders and pair them with an experienced mentor principal for one year. During this year, participants serve in an overstaff position under the wing of their mentor and participate in a variety of experiences and professional development to assist them in becoming successful administrative leaders.

Similarly, LEAD Fairfax offers the Administrative Certification cohort through a partnership with the University of Virginia. This program combines university level coursework, an internship, and specific programs over a year’s time and participants receive
administrator certification. Being district specific, this program is more intense than the university’s traditional certification program and participants are selected by the district.

Another administrative cohort is the Aspiring Principals cohort. This cohort is “comprised of individuals who are designated as high flyers by our Cluster of Superintendents. They typically are within 12 to 18 months of a principalship” (López, 2008, p. 9). This cohort follows a similar curriculum to those mentioned above, with some additional content. Participants complete a 360 degree assessment through the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina. This assessment allows participants to see their strengths and weaknesses in the area of leadership and hone their skills before taking on a principalship. They also participate in a variety of program offerings to prepare them for the principalship including, but not limited to ethics, systems thinking, data driven decision making, and planning and managing change (López, 2008).

Finally, LEAD Fairfax also offers a Support Program cohort for their support leaders, essentially anyone not directly involved in instruction. This program follows a similar curriculum as the other cohort, but without the instructional focus (López, 2008). LEAD Fairfax is one district’s comprehensive leadership development program to address succession planning needs.

Another large school district has taken a similar approach. In 2006, the Long Beach, California school district faced its first shortage of qualified applicants for principal vacancies and had the foresight to know more shortages were on the horizon. As a result, they developed three short programs for people interested in becoming school leaders. They
developed a three-day workshop for people interested in becoming an assistant principal, aive-day workshop for assistant principals who want to become principals that also includes an additional five days of shadowing a principal, and a program in conjunction with California State University-Long Beach for current teacher leaders that provides a fast track to the necessary administrator credential. While instituting these programs, the district also “revamped its selection and evaluation process for school leaders to ensure it was really identifying people with the desire and potential to lead” (Olson, 2008, p. 4). Ever-honing their succession planning strategies, this district is also in the process of developing a yearlong apprenticeship as a principal-in-training.

Though little has been written about succession planning in education, there are a variety of approaches a district can take in tackling this issue. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) believe, “Effective succession means having a plan and making plans to create the positive and coordinated flows of leadership, across many years and numerous people, that will secure improvement over time” (p. 92). The next section will specifically explore the idea of succession planning for principals.

Succession Planning for Principalships

Hart (1993) writes about administrator succession planning no longer being a simple matter of finding the right person for the principalship. She describes it as a dynamic, continuous process of systematically identifying, assessing, and developing leadership talent for future endeavors. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) agree and state, “One of the best ways to secure successful succession is to stretch and spread leadership across people now, not just in
the future, to distribute and develop leadership so that successors will emerge more readily and take over more easily” (p. 93).

Stutsman (2007) explored the shortage of well-qualified principals and succession planning policies in 67 different Florida school districts using a survey method. A total of 36 districts of various sizes participated with 64% of the participating districts having written succession planning policies in place. Her research determined there was no correlation between district size and the actual shortage of well-qualified principal candidates at the elementary and high school levels. At these two levels, shortages appeared to exist, regardless of size. At the middle school level, there was a significant relationship between district size and shortages of well-qualified principals, with shortages being reported as greater in small school districts. Stutsman (2007) also explored the idea of anticipated shortages of well-qualified candidates for principal vacancies and found no significant relationship between district size and anticipated shortages. About the same number of districts anticipated a shortage of well-qualified principals, as did not, regardless of district size.

One of Stutsman’s (2007) most interesting findings revolved around the research question: Is there a relationship between the shortage of well-qualified candidates for principal vacancies and the presence of written succession planning policies? At both the elementary and middle school levels, regardless of district size, there was a significant relationship between the shortage of well-qualified principal candidates and the presence of written succession planning policies. Where there were written succession planning policies
in place, fewer shortages of well-qualified candidates were experienced. At the high school level, shortages of well-qualified candidates were reported regardless of whether or not there were written succession planning policies in place. Stutsman (2007) found no significant relationship between anticipated shortages of well-qualified candidates and the presence of written succession planning policies. All districts were anticipating principal shortages in the next twelve months.

Stutsman (2007) also explored the various succession planning strategies in regards to the principalship in her study. She found 91% of her participating districts had some variation of an aspiring principal program in place. This finding is significantly different from the 1998 Educational Research Survey (ERS) that found only 27% of surveyed districts had an aspiring principals program. Regarding induction programs, Stutsman (2007) reports 62% of the districts had induction programs for new principals and 59% included a mentoring component for new principals. The 1998 ERS survey found 46% of those surveyed had some form of induction or mentoring program in place.

In regards to succession, district leaders should design programs “to increase commitment, provide preparation for major change across schools, or decrease ambiguity” (Hart, 1993, p. 279). Hart (1993) goes on to explain how principals can be divided in a variety of ways to meet the goals of the district. Hart is describing experiences for principals already in the role. This next section explores the role of the principal, as well as recruiting and preparing people for the role.
Deterrents to Principalships

In this era of accountability, the role of the principal has changed dramatically. Principals are more than a simple manager. They need to be an effective instructional leader. Davis, Darling-Hammond, Lapointe, and Meyerson (2005) stated:

The role of principal has swelled to include a staggering array of professional tasks and competencies. Principals are expected to be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations and communications experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special programs administrators, as well as guardians of various legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. (p. 3)

While trying to cover all of these duties effectively and efficiently, principals also have to deal with the sometimes conflicting needs of their stakeholders, which include teachers, district officials, parents, students, and state and federal agencies. It is sad to say, but over the years, the “public trust in professional educators has turned to public disgust” and the “support that the principal used to get from parents and the community has evaporated, replaced by what seems like a constant battle, an endless series of demands that often easily escalate into abuse” (Tucker & Codding, 2002, p. 3).

As if the lack of community support is not enough to deter a candidate, Tucker and Codding (2002) described principals referring to themselves as “one-minute decision makers,” because “they have a minute to decide one issue before they are confronted with the next one” (p. 2). This type of work environment is high-stress and the average principal
works a sixty-hour week (Tucker & Codding, 2002). Due to the number of hours and the various responsibilities, one would expect a principal to make comparably more than teachers. In many cases, this assumption is false. Though the annual salary figures for principals appear significantly higher than teachers, when you factor in the number of months worked, since principals work year round while teachers are typically ten-month employees, and then the number of weekly hours worked, the hourly rate for principals is often lower than the rate for teachers (Tucker & Codding, 2002). Over the years, teachers have gained and maintained more political power and community support which has resulted in teacher salaries increasing at a higher rate than administrator salaries (Tucker & Codding, 2002).

Caldwell, Calnin, and Cahill (2002) stated, “the literature suggests that the ubiquity of change, complexity of the role, level of renumeration, status of the profession, legal constraints, and impact on family life are all reasons for the dearth of candidates seeking leadership roles in schools” (p. 205). Results from the research of Cooley and Shen (1999) revealed ten key factors that influence potential administrators in their decision of whether or not to seek leadership roles in education. Among these ten factors is the aspect of relationships. Organizational relationships, as well as relationships among teachers, administration, and governing authority were noted as the most significant factors. Other factors included the level of stress associated with the position, poor working conditions, and “the unattractive nature of the work in a society that is placing more and more demands on teachers, schools, and principals” (Cooley & Shen, as cited in Caldwell et al., 2002, p. 205).
The increasing demands placed on the role alone may have an impact on the current supply. Some parts of the country have reported almost sixty percent of principals will retire, resign, or leave their positions for another reason in the next five years (Peterson, 2002). Other parts of the country reported their issue concerning principal supply has more to do with the inequitable distribution of quality principals to suburban and affluent areas. Impoverished and underserved communities often have a difficult time finding qualified applicants who are committed to working in the area and not using the position as a stepping stone.

Principal Recruitment

Schlueter and Walker (2008) believe one of the most important tasks facing school districts today is recruiting and selecting building level administrators. Anderson (1991) discovered that often the most capable and qualified candidates were overlooked due to the haphazard nature of the process. Streamlining processes and taking a thoughtful and organized approach can improve a district’s chances of hiring a quality principal (Schlueter & Walker, 2008).

Most states require either a specific degree or licensure to serve as a school administrator. Choosing to meet these requirements is often based on self-selection. Some districts are discovering that in order to have more qualified and quality candidates, they need to actively recruit candidates into principal preparation programs and use an internal, “grow your own” approach. Some school districts recruit exclusively internally, others solely
recruit externally, and many utilize both strategies (Lee & Keiffer, 2003; Winter, Rinehart, & Munoz, 2002).

The literature suggests that recruitment strategies vary considerably in scope. Significant factors impacting this variance include the complexity and prestige of the position, as well as the size and location of the school district (Winter et al., 2002). Other factors are the student population, benefits, and salary as it relates to the responsibilities of the position (Young & Castetter, 2003). Both internal and external strategies have their own sets of strengths and weaknesses in regards to the organization’s health.

Lovely (2004) stated that one of the most important things we can do for our profession is to “encourage those with promise to become school leaders. Securing effective candidates to take over when we’re gone will guarantee a successful future for students, schools, the nation, and the world” (p. 18). Goodlad (2004) agreed and emphasized that school districts need to make a concentrated effort to “identify employees with leadership potential” (p. 306). Some sources that may be of assistance in this process include recommendations from district employees, university placement offices, professional organizations, special interest groups and community organizations for referrals, and the use of professional firms specializing in recruiting for administrative positions (Stutsman, 2007).

One recruitment strategy employed by the Boston Public Schools is a set of ten after-school seminars called Exploring School Administration. These seminars are designed to garner interest in the role of being a school administrator and are targeted at educators and community leaders who have demonstrated leadership potential. Another recruitment
strategy is Boston’s most recently developed program, the School-Based Administrator program. This program provides leadership development for school leaders and serves many functions including educating teachers and recruiting them into leadership roles. The program provides “professional learning that facilitates instructional improvement, creating professional networks to support sharing of best practices, and providing school based administrators who aspire to the principalship with the skills and experiences required to be competitive candidates for the role” (Takata, 2008, p. 27). Recruitment strategies vary from district to district, based on their needs and what they have to offer.

Gajda and Militello (2008) completed a study with the purpose of determining the nature of the principal shortage in Massachusetts. The results of this study were intended to assist the Massachusetts Department of Education in recruiting and supporting principals in the state. This study found there are more educators holding principal licenses in the state, than are needed to fill principal positions. It is important to note, however, that only half of those educators holding principal licensure intend to become an administrator. Gajda and Militello (2008) state “simply recruiting more people for a position that appears undesirable will not solve the problem of the principal pipeline” (p. 17).

*Principal Preparation Programs*

Unfortunately, when examining principal preparation programs, there is “typically very little connection between the curriculum as taught and the actual demands, conditions, and problems of everyday practice” (Tucker & Codding, 2002, p. 13). Programs offered solely through a university often have little coherence and do not include enough
performance activities which would “shed some light on their suitability as school administrators” (p. 13). These programs are also often considered “cash cows” for the university and are expected to admit and graduate a significant number of candidates in order to fund other university programs. A consequence in this case is that often there are minimal admission standards and minimum effort throughout the program will result in certification.

On the other end of the spectrum are state-approved credential programs which are often “hyperrational,” emphasizing required skills and knowledge and requiring documentation and supervised fieldwork. Though these programs appear thorough and directly related to the position, the programs typically offer very little substance. In these cases, while the knowledge and skills necessary may be clearly delineated, it is often unclear how to obtain, practice, and master these skills. Also, how these skills correlate to the demands of the job on a regular basis is ambiguous at best (Tucker & Codding, 2002).

According to Tucker and Codding (2002), some of the most successful programs can be found at a handful of elite universities, such as Stanford and Harvard. In addition, strong programs are also in place at the University of Wisconsin, Wichita State, and the University of California at Fresno. These programs use cases, simulations, and role-play to base their programs in situations that school administrators typically encounter. They also utilize techniques such as action research and problem-focused curricula to further strengthen the program.

Another promising set of programs studied included partnerships between universities and particular school districts or jurisdictions. The collaborations between Teachers College
and Westchester County, Chicago School Administrators Association and Northwestern University, and San Diego Public Schools and San Diego State were studied and revealed a focus on leadership and problem solving surrounding the work of the involved school districts and the strategies being used to raise student performance. While appearing successful on the surface, when examined more closely, it was determined these programs were built on too small of a scale, had little institutional support, and were typically poorly funded (Tucker & Codding, 2002).

Some school districts design their own principal preparation programs in addition to the university and/or state requirements. For example, the Boston Public Schools created the School Leadership Institute, which serves as a primary resource in developing future leaders of the Boston Public Schools. Previously, Boston identified the *Essentials of Whole School Improvement*, a framework that has received national recognition for its results (Boston Public Schools, 2004). This framework’s emphasis on leadership and professional learning led to the founding of the School Leadership Institute.

One of the most notable programs of Boston’s School Leadership Institute is the Boston Principal Fellowship. This program is a one-year urban principal preparation program featuring opportunities for hands-on experience four-days a week with an experienced principal. The program includes 90 days of courses and seminar, placement with one of the area’s strongest principals, a Massachusetts Initial Principal license, an optional master’s degree, consideration for full-time placement in the district, and most importantly, membership in a lifelong professional network (Takata, 2008).
System and program leaders attribute the success of the Boston Principal Fellowship program to three essential factors. The first factor is the cohort model, which begins to build a critical network of support from the very beginning and is strengthened over time. The second factor is the residency experience, the hands-on time under the guidance of an expert leader. The third and final factor is the course work, which is directly aligned to the program of work and challenges of the district (Takata, 2008).

The state of Kentucky began an intense study through the Wallace Foundation of their principal preparation programs in 2005. This study resulted in a number of recommendations for redesigning principal preparation in Kentucky. One of the notable recommendations was to establish a dynamic relationship between the school districts and local universities, adopt highly selective admission standards, and redesign the curriculum to support student achievement and include school-based learning experiences. In addition, the recommendation was made to require all new principals to pass state and national tests for administrative licensure and raise the standards to renew administrative certificates (Browne-Ferrigno & Fusarelli, 2005).

Tucker and Codding (2002) described four guiding principles to be used when developing principal preparation programs. The first principle is the focus should be very clear: “preparing school leaders to lead and manage schools that can consistently produce steady gains in student performance without substantial increases in school budgets” (p. 25). The second principle is the concept of partnerships between the providing institution and a school district. There should be intense collaboration between the two entities and
responsibilities on each end. The third principle involves the demonstration of benchmarking best practices in education, the exploration of best practices in the business and military realms, and a significant investment in curriculum development. The fourth and final principle is that there should be no monopoly over the provision of programs. The absence of a monopoly will allow for healthy competition in the market which will inevitably lead to an enhanced product and put the power in the hands of the customer.

Following the same intent, Sykes (2002) described seven recommendations to be used as guiding principles when designing leadership programs. These recommendations were harvested from a variety of models, examples, and reforms that are considered best practices and include:

1. Provide an expansive role for adult learners in leadership development.
2. Educate students in carefully formed groups and use group learning.
3. Utilize the problem as a central building block of the curriculum.
4. Integrate foundational knowledge and analytic procedures with field experiences.
5. Shift program orientations from courses to learning objectives; build integrating mechanisms across learning experiences.
6. Utilize external examinations to supplement and complement programmatic learning in professional study.
7. Plan for and take account of peripheral or incidental learning in professional education. (Sykes, 2002, pp. 181-184)
All of these recommendations are aligned with the work of Tucker and Codding (2002) as previously discussed. This alignment serves to strengthen the value of these principles and illustrates the importance of their use when designing leadership programs.

Perhaps these design recommendations need further attention. After completing a four-year study of America’s education schools, Levine (2005) released the report *Educating School Leaders*. This report focuses on the education of school administrators, both principals and superintendents. The report details the challenges of these leadership roles and proposes a nine-point template to evaluate the quality of school leadership programs. The areas examined under this template include: purpose, curricular coherence, curricular balance, faculty composition, admissions, degrees, research, finances, and assessment. The report examines various educational leadership programs in the United States on this template and concludes “the majority of programs range from inadequate to appalling, even at some of the country’s leading universities” (Levine, 2005, p. 23).

Based on Levine’s (2005) findings, as well as the aligned findings of Hess and Kelly (2005), the Southern Regional Education Board (2006) conducted their own study of principal preparation programs and determined there is “dramatic evidence of a major structural weakness in the architecture of school reform—quality preparation for aspiring school principals that ensures they master the essential competencies for leading school improvement and having a positive impact on student achievement” (SREB, 2006, p. 11). The final report outlines the necessary role that policy makers, state agencies, university
presidents, departments of educational leadership, local school districts, and local school boards must play in order for change to take place.

Most states are the licensing agencies for school administrators, so “the state is in the driver’s seat when it comes to the design and quality of principal preparation and it appears that in many states the ignition key is still in the off position” (SREB, 2006, p. 13). Adams and Copland (2005) completed a study of the licensure content for principals in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. This study concludes licenses don’t reflect a learning focus, licensing requirements are unbalanced across states and misaligned with today’s ambitions for school leaders, and licenses form the foundation of school leadership development (Adams & Copland, 2005).

As a result of their examination, Adams and Copland (2005) propose a balanced framework for licensure which acknowledges three different categories of necessary elements: individual-focused elements (personal character, education, experience, skill assessment, and prior certifications), organizational focused elements (strategic, social performance, technology utilization, and constituency management knowledge and skills), and learning focused elements (knowledge and skills regarding educational programs, students, teachers, schools, and community outreach). Adams and Copland’s (2005) model, Licensing-Plus, is a “framework for principal licensure and school leadership development that affects practitioners in three stages: licensure, specialized professional learning that develops technical expertise, and leadership development. It also employs research to make tighter linkages between licensing requirements and proven practice” (p. 45).
Based on research, The Wallace Foundation (2008) summarizes four broad lessons that can assist in increasing the quality of leadership preparation nationwide:

Lesson One: Successful principal training programs are significantly different from the majority of programs in existence. They are more selective, more focused on improvement of instruction, more closely tied to the needs of districts, and provide more relevant internships with hands-on leadership experience. (pp. 5-6)

Lesson Two: Leadership training should not end when principals are hired. It should continue with high-quality mentoring for new principals to promote career-long growth in line with the evolving needs of schools and districts. (p. 7)

Lesson Three: High-quality leader development can make a real difference, but providing it can involve added costs. Resources therefore should be directed at quality programs with proven benefits. (p. 8)

Lesson Four: Fixing what’s wrong with leadership preparation is essential, but not enough. Addressing the leadership challenge also requires remedying the difficult working conditions that can undermine even the best-trained principals. (p. 9)

The Wallace Foundation (2008) believes “improving the training of school principals isn’t the entire answer to the nation’s education leadership challenge. But it is certainly a crucial part of it” (p. 11).

New Principal Socialization

Browne-Ferrigno (2003) believes “the making and education of a principal extends beyond completion of a preparation program but should also include support during the
preparation program. Once assigned the new role of principal, districts can work with the
new principals to “reinforce district goals and influence the outcome by formalizing
reorientation/socialization experiences” (Hart, 1993, p. 281). Some of the ways this formal
socialization is accomplished is through induction and mentor programs.

Many districts assign new principals a mentor, who is an experienced principal. In
order to achieve stronger relationships, some districts try to match mentor pairs through a
variety of characteristics, including demographics, geography, or other similar personal
characteristics. Villani (2006) defined mentoring as “support from a more experienced
colleague who is trained to promote new principals’ heightened job performance and self-
reflection” (p. 19). Mentors should serve as more than just as a sounding board or
sympathetic ear. Mentors should be effective at asking questions that explore the issue at a
deeper level and promote reflection.

The Wallace Foundation (2007) conducted a study to determine the elements crucial
to the success of an effective mentoring program. The five primary characteristics that
emerged from this study are: (a) formal criteria to select mentors, (b) formal training for
mentors, (c) mentors should be assigned mentees with similar ethnicity, gender, culture, and
school demographics, (d) mentors should receive some form of compensation, which may
include special professional growth opportunities or conference attendance, and (e) the
mentor program should be designed to be a growth experience for everyone involved.
Another socialization method used to assist new principals is a mandatory induction program. Villani (2006) described induction as “a multidimensional process that orients new principals to a school and school system while strengthening their knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be an educational leader” (p. 19). Through an induction program with regular meetings, new principals can share their trials and successes and gain insight from each other as they learn their new role together.

The Boston Public Schools utilizes an induction program called the “New Principal Support System.” This program begins with a week long summer institute to prepare new principals for a successful opening of school. After school begins, the program continues with monthly networking sessions where principals discuss their daily challenges and collaboratively problem solve. In addition to the monthly networking sessions, members also participate in structured professional development designed to support them in the challenges the district faces. First year members also receive mentoring from an experienced principal and participate in site visits to other schools. Second and third year principals are assigned a coach to assist with leadership and operational challenges. These principals also have monthly networking sessions (Takata, 2008).

Eiter (2002) described the “most successful leadership development efforts in corporations take a systems approach that extends beyond the classroom experience. In these companies, leadership skills are augmented through 360-degree assessment and feedback, coaching, key development assignments, and mentoring” (pp. 116-117). The field of education also sees value in this systems approach and the specific activities mentioned.
Mentoring has already been addressed in this section and key development assignments can easily be made a part of existing induction programs. In addition, many school districts have a structure in place to engage a principal and stakeholders in a 360-degree assessment.

Socialization into a new role “involves implicit and explicit pre- and post-appointment opportunities to learn about leading. These leaders learn about culture and change, leadership and management skills, knowledge, and dispositions required to perform their social role in the organizational culture” (Normore, 2007, pp. 8-9). Once in a new role, socialization is an important facet that must be addressed in succession planning initiatives.

**Summary**

This chapter overviewed literature pertinent to the topic of this research study. It looked at research covering the concept of succession planning in the business world, public sector, and in the field of education. The review specifically explored succession planning for the role of the principal in education, including deterrents to the principalship, recruitment, preparation, and socialization programs. The next chapter revisits the research questions that remain relevant and important and goes on to detail the methodology that was employed to answer the questions.
CHAPTER THREE
DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of succession planning, especially succession planning in regards to the principalship, in three large school districts in one southeastern state. This chapter presents the research questions and a thorough explanation of the methodology employed in both data collection and analysis.

Research Questions

All research contains one or more overarching research questions to drive the study. The specific research questions driving this study were:

1. Why are succession plans enacted by school districts?
   a. What influences the formation of succession plans in three large school districts in one southeastern state?

2. What do school district succession plans look like?
   a. What do succession plans look like and how are they implemented in three large school districts in one southeastern state?

3. Do school district succession plans work?
   a. In what ways are three large school districts in one southeastern state assessing the effectiveness of their succession planning efforts?
   b. In what ways have three large school districts in one southeastern state planned for sustainability of their succession planning efforts?
4. What are the similarities and differences of school district succession plans?
   a. In what ways are the succession plans of three large school districts in one southeastern state similar or different from one another?
   b. In what ways are these plans similar or different from the conceptual and empirical literature?

   **Selection of Qualitative Research Methodology**

   When developing the research design of this study, a number of sources were consulted to determine the appropriate approach. The first step was to confirm the choice of a qualitative design over a quantitative design. In *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define qualitative research as:

   …a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

   This study examined succession planning strategies in three different large school districts in one southeastern state using interviews and documents and artifacts, with the researcher being the primary research instrument.
Merriam’s (1998) definition of qualitative research aligns with Denzin and Lincoln’s (2005). Merriam stated (1998) “qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (p. 5). In this study, succession planning is the social phenomena and each district is studied within its own setting. Merriam continued by comparing qualitative research to quantitative with the description “in contrast to quantitative research, which takes apart a phenomenon to compare component parts (which become the variables of the study), qualitative research can reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole” (p. 6).

Qualitative research uses emergent design (Creswell, 2007). Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) suggest a qualitative study emerges from field notes. The researcher analyzes field notes to identify common threads or themes and weaves them together to tell a story. The researcher is not bound by a preconceived theory, but instead allows the themes and the stories to emerge from the data. Qualitative research uses an interpretive inquiry (Creswell, 2007). The research generated is an interpretation of events and situations through the eyes and mind of the researcher.

Since the primary purpose of this project was to gain an understanding of the concept of succession planning in large school districts in one southeastern state, a phenomenon in its natural setting, a qualitative research design was the most appropriate. A qualitative approach uses the researcher as the key instrument in the field and allows for gaining an in-depth understanding of the topic being studied. Wolcott (2008) stated, “First-hand experience
through participant-observation is both the starting point and the filter through which everything else is screened as we make sense of all that we have observed” (p. 53).

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) described the data collected during qualitative research as “rich in description of people, places, and conversations and not easily handled by statistical procedures” (p. 2). The data collected is descriptive, in the form of words or images. The data can be captured from sources such as transcripts, memos, photographs, field notes, documents, or other records. This description thoroughly depicts the data of this study, which includes detailed explanations of succession planning activities for three different large school districts.

Qualitative research is an inductive process requiring the researcher to study the particulars collected to construct an understanding of the topic in much the same way that a picture, unrecognized initially, is constructed from the collection and examination of its many parts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). This study was designed to take this approach. The researcher gathered extensive data about succession planning activities for three large school districts in one southeastern state and then attempted to make meaning from it.

Rationale for Case Study

Stake (1995) defined case study as “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within the important circumstances” (p. xi). Stake believed the “real business of case study is particularization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does” (p. 8). In another definition, Yin (2003) stated, “a case study is an empirical
inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (p. 13). Yin’s definition includes the word contemporary, which is of particular relevance to this study since the concept being studied is relatively new to education. In alignment with both Stake and Yin is Merriam’s (1988) definition of case study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 21).

Case study methodology was chosen for this study due to the exploratory nature of the research problem. Case study design is known to be effective when studying educational innovations. In this regard, Merriam (1998) wrote, “educational processes, problems, and programs can be examined to bring about understanding that in turn can affect and perhaps even improve practice” (p. 41). This study utilized three separate cases to explore how leadership succession planning strategies are used, and provides a rich, thick description of each case. In this study, the unit of analysis is each individual school district and the phenomenon being studied is leadership succession planning.

The design of a case study is descriptive and either interpretative or evaluative. The results of a case study include thick, rich description and accompanying data for analysis which can provide information that can be used to affect policy, practice, and future research (Merriam, 1988; 1998). Since this study takes place within its natural setting, it is likely the research will have an impact on practice (Lieberman, 1988). This particular case study involves three distinct cases that are descriptive and interpretative in nature.

The three cases in this study are meant to stand alone and not be judged on effectiveness. The cross-case analysis is specifically meant to describe the similarities and
differences among the cases. This case study is particularly significant because the phenomenon of leadership succession planning as a program is relatively new to education and the findings of the study may be of interest for future practice, planning, and reform. Therefore, this design is suitable for this study.

**Site Selection and Sample**

The districts chosen to be studied as a part of this research were purposefully selected. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) point out purposeful sampling is “believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory” (p. 65). Sites were chosen based on the belief they would yield maximum information about the topic being studied. The three largest school districts in the chosen state of this study were selected as a result of their size based on 2008-2009 school year student enrollment data. The three largest districts were chosen based on the premise that since they have a greater number of school administrator positions, they also have the potential of a larger amount of vacancies at any given time simply due to the issue of scale.

The researcher specifically chose to study three school districts for two reasons: comparability and manageability. If only two districts were studied, there would be a risk that the two districts would either be extremely similar or extremely different. With only two districts, the researcher would be unlikely to know whether these results were mere coincidence. By studying a third district, the concept of coincidence becomes less likely. Regarding manageability, in qualitative research, the researcher provides rich, thick
descriptions. In order to provide such details, the researcher must immerse herself in these
districts. Immersion was challenging, though possible, with three districts.

The specific sample of people utilized within each district was selected with
assistance from the participating district based on knowledge and experience with the
district’s succession planning activities and availability. Two individuals knowledgeable
about their district’s succession planning strategies were formally interviewed in each
district. As a result of snowball sampling, one additional contact with another district staff
member knowledgeable about the specific succession planning initiative was made in each
district to collect missing data. There were a total of six formal face-to-face interviews, two
informal face-to-face interviews, and numerous follow-up contacts, some in person and some
via telephone and email.

In addition, 50 documents and other artifacts relating to succession planning were
examined in this study. Some of these documents were provided directly by each district,
while other documents were discovered through the researcher’s investigation of each
district’s resources. Of the 50 documents and other artifacts, 19 were from Glendale County
Schools, 16 were from Carrington County Schools, and 15 were from Westin County
Schools. A complete list of these documents and artifacts can be found in Appendix A.

Data Collection Procedures

Yin (2003) emphasized the importance of having a case study protocol. The purpose
of the protocol is to keep the researcher targeted on the subject of the case study and allow
for future replication to increase reliability of the study. The first step to be taken in this
research project was to obtain permission from the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research. Once this permission was obtained, the researcher had to seek permission for participation from each of the three participating school districts and the commitment from one person in each of these districts to serve as a district liaison. The district liaison was the primary contact for the school district. They participated in an interview, assisted the researcher in acquiring all of the applicable documents and artifacts, and facilitated communication between the researcher and other district staff as appropriate.

Once permission was obtained, initial interviews were scheduled and document collection began. After all data was collected, an initial analysis determined the various succession planning strategies and potential themes across the three districts. Artifacts, documents, interview transcripts, and field notes were color coded representing the themes. At this point in the research, it was realized that additional contact with the districts was necessary for the purpose of further clarification. So, additional appointments were scheduled and the resulting information was recorded and coded in the researcher’s field notes so that further analysis could occur. Finally, a matrix was constructed to display the different succession planning initiatives taking place for various positions across the three districts.

**Materials**

A digital voice recorder was used to record the interviews, which were later transcribed verbatim. The researcher also took reflective field notes immediately following the interviews and recorded these reflections in an electronic journal. On several occasions,
the researcher also recorded digital audio reflections immediately after interviews and other district visits. All printed artifacts were organized by district, coded, and catalogued for reference purposes. All materials were securely stored in a locked file cabinet.

**Data Collection**

Three specific primary data sources were used for this research study: interviews, documents, and artifacts. These primary sources were purposefully selected as a result of their complementary nature. Johnson and Turner (2003) described the strengths and weaknesses of the various data sources. According to Johnson and Turner (2003), the strengths of interviews include strong interpretive validity, possibility for probing by the interviewer, and usefulness for exploration. The weaknesses of interviews include the reactive and investigator effects. Both reactive and investigator effects are on behalf of the participant being interviewed in the moment by a third-party. At the same time, the strengths of documents and artifacts include unobtrusiveness, making the possibility of reactive and investigator effects low, and their usefulness for exploration and corroboration. The weaknesses of documents and artifacts include possibly low interpretive validity and potentially incomplete data due to incomplete reporting. Utilizing the combination of interviews and document and artifact analysis served to offset the weaknesses of each method.

In addition to the three primary sources of data, one secondary source of data was utilized: reflective field notes. The researcher recorded reflective field notes as needed, including handwritten notes, an electronic journal, and digital audio recordings. Handwritten
notes were taken during interviews or district visits. As soon as possible after the interviews or district visits, a more thorough reflection was completed in an electronic journal. For two of the districts, audio recordings of the researcher’s thoughts and reactions to the interviews and district visits were completed in the car before traveling home. For the third district, reflective field notes were typed immediately following the interview sessions.

Interview Method

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), “interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings” (p. 645). In a qualitative study, interviews help the researcher develop detailed descriptions and integrate multiple perspectives. Interviews also help to describe processes and contribute to a holistic description of the situation (Weiss, 1994).

Results of interviews should be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable (Seidman, 1998). To assist in this task, an interview guide was utilized in order to maintain a semi-structured format. This format was used with the intention of providing consistency across interviews in questioning and to help establish priorities by using highly focused questions. In addition, analysis and comparison of responses was made easier since an interview guide was used.

Prior to interviewing, the researcher began to develop a relationship with the participants via electronic and telephone communication. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and shared with the participants the general framework for the study, including the types of questions that would be asked so that the participants would feel
prepared for the interview. The interview questions were developed based on the theoretical framework of the study, exploring each succession planning strategy and discussing how participants are identified and developed and how the strategy is assessed. The interview guide is located in Appendix B.

When interviewing, the researcher ensured the participants felt comfortable and there was a sense of rapport with the researcher. The researcher utilized active listening skills, remained focused, and sought clarification as necessary. Interviewing is not just a device for gathering information, but a technique to allow people to construct reality and to make meaning out of a situation (Seidman, 1998; Weiss, 1994; Wolcott, 2008). Seidman (1998) stated, “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 3).

Initial interviews were conducted in person while the researcher was onsite visiting the districts. Interviews took place at the complete convenience of the participants in their own offices during the researcher’s district visits. Initial interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. All six initial interviews were transcribed verbatim. Additional contacts to confirm data took place face-to-face, as well as via telephone and email, based on scheduling availability. Two of the three districts had one additional interview with a different district level administrator. These interviews were specifically conducted to capture missing data surrounding a particular succession planning strategy. Therefore, these interviews focused solely on the components of an individual succession planning strategy and the entire
interview guide was not followed. Consequently, these interviews were not transcribed. Data collected during these two interviews were recorded in the researcher field notes.

*Documents and Other Artifacts*

Another primary source of data for this study was the collection of documents and other artifacts provided by each district. Since documents and other artifacts are typically produced for reasons other than the research study at hand, they do not have the same limitations as interview data. The existence of documents does not intrude upon or alter the setting in the same way the presence of a researcher does. Connections between documents and the research problem depend on the researcher’s flexibility in constructing the research problem and its associated questions. According to Merriam (1998), “such a stance is particularly fitting in qualitative studies, which, by their very nature, are emergent in design and inductive in analysis. Documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem” (p. 133).

Documents and artifacts for each participating district varied in number and scope. A listing of the documents and artifacts examined for this research study can be found in Appendix A. Since none of the participating districts had a formal, comprehensive succession plan, very few documents were actually tendered to the researcher by district administrators. Most of the documents and artifacts were discovered through the researcher’s personal search of the district’s various websites. Some of the documents were obtained through visits to the districts and their welcome centers.
Reflective Field Notes

A secondary source of data used in this study was the researcher’s reflective field notes. Reflective field notes “contain sentences and paragraphs that reflect a more personal account of the course of the inquiry. Here you record the more subjective side of your journey. The emphasis is on speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 114). These reflections include reflections on analysis, method, ethical dilemmas and conflicts, the researcher’s frame of mind, and points of clarification (Bogdan & Biklen). Miles and Huberman (1994) believe that these notations “are primarily conceptual in intent. They don’t just report data; they tie different pieces of data together in a cluster, often to show that those data are instances of a general concept” (p. 72). Since in qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument, these reflective notes are a means to a better study and are a method of “attempting to acknowledge and control observer’s effect” (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 116). These reflective notes assisted the researcher when interpreting the other data collected by providing reminders of the context.

After each interview, the researcher immediately reflected on the experience and compiled notes in an electronic journal. On two occasions, a digital audio recorder was utilized to capture reflections during travel time. These reflections were later transcribed and added to the electronic journal. Reflective field notes were also produced throughout the data analysis process and emphasized new insights the researcher was discovering as the three districts were examined.
Data Analysis

All six initial interviews were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were analyzed, along with other documents and artifacts and researcher field notes, first for the various succession planning strategies, and later for recurring themes. The constant comparative method of data analysis was employed. This method is often used with case studies, especially case studies involving multiple data sources. The key component of the constant comparative method of data analysis is the researcher begins analysis immediately upon the start of data collection. The analysis continues to double back and review as additional data is collected. As the data is continuously compared, new themes emerge, and the information can be confirmed or discounted (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These are the steps that were followed in this study with an emphasis on the various succession planning strategies. Data analysis began as soon as the first artifact was collected and continued throughout the entire process, with the researcher continually reviewing the analysis to date and updating based on new findings.

The interview guide was used to assist in extracting information across districts. Specifically, the responses to each individual question were studied within the research framework of identification and development, sustainability, and evaluation of succession planning activities to find similarities and differences across the three participating districts. A matrix of succession planning strategies was developed. This matrix clearly lists the individual succession planning strategies and delineates which levels of staff the strategy addresses, as well as which districts offer the strategy.
Recurring themes were color coded throughout the transcripts, artifacts and documents, and researcher field notes. The themes discovered included: (a) certification programs, (b) support issues, and (c) developing leadership in current roles. The researcher was able to self-code the data and manage it electronically through a regular word processing application and subsequent hard copies of materials.

**Research Validity and Reliability**

To address issues of validity and reliability, triangulation of data was used whenever possible. Interviews were conducted and artifacts were examined to determine alignment to interviews. In addition, member checks were utilized to verify the accuracy of the report. As a part of the member check, the district liaison and interview participants were asked to review the final written narrative regarding their district to check for accuracy. Unlike in quantitative research, generalizability or internal validity is irrelevant in this study because the purpose of qualitative research is “to understand the particular in depth, rather than finding out what is generally true of the many” (Merriam, 1995, p. 4). The purpose of this research project was to intensely study the succession planning strategies of three large school districts in one southeastern state.

Hammersley (1992) indicates that validity and reliability within qualitative research can be challenging. He devised his own test to determine both the validity and relevance of a study. In terms of validity, Hammersley asks three questions: Is the study plausible and credible? Is the evidence presented central to the research question? Is the preponderance of evidence equal to the claim made within the study? In terms of relevance, Hammersley
(1992) asks: Is the topic of significant importance that it will be of interest? Will the topic add to the body of literature? This research study passed the Hammersley tests in both validity and relevance.

To specifically address the concept of reliability, a case study protocol was designed (Yin, 2003). The purpose of the case study protocol was to allow another researcher to replicate the same case and result in the same findings. This case study protocol involving interviews, documents, and other artifacts is described in the procedures section of this methodology chapter and also includes the specific structured interview guide located in Appendix B.

**Limitations of the Study**

As a qualitative research study, this study presents the same limitations typical of most research applying qualitative methodology. The study was limited to three large school districts in one southeastern state. Since the sample size was small, generalizability is a problem. An assumption was made that the district liaison and other interviewees were honest in their responses and as thorough as possible.

Besides the general limitations of qualitative methodology, the specific data collection methods utilized in this study posed limitations as well. Interviews have the probable limitations of reactive and investigator effects, due to the participant being interviewed by a third party without necessarily being prepared for all of the questions asked. Documents and artifacts have the potential limitation of low interpretive validity and possibly incomplete information (Johnson & Turner, 2003). These two methods were chosen to be
used in tandem to minimize limitations, since the strengths of one of the methods offset the weakness of the other.

Finally, this study focused on describing succession planning practices, not evaluating them. In addition to general effectiveness, participants’ and district employees’ levels of awareness of the succession planning strategies, as well as their perceptions of the programs, was not explored. Evaluating the effectiveness of these succession planning practices, including levels of awareness and perceptions of the value of these practices, are areas for further study.

**Safeguards against Researcher Bias**

Since the researcher works closely with one of the school districts involved in this project, the perception of researcher bias may arise. This particular study involved descriptive data, rather than evaluative data. In other words, the researcher simply described what policies, processes, and procedures the participating school districts have in place regarding succession planning and noted the similarities and differences across the districts. The researcher did not evaluate these policies, processes, and procedures for effectiveness, so researcher bias was not an issue.

Member checking was employed to assist in limiting researcher bias. The district liaison and interview participants were asked to read the portion of the research report related to their district and they verified its accuracy. Misunderstandings were discussed and changes were made as needed.
Ethical Issues (IRB)

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) list the two traditional and official guidelines for ethics in research with human subjects: informed consent and the protection of subjects from harm. This study followed the guidelines and procedures outlined by the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research. An Institutional Review Board form was completed and submitted. Written permission was sought from each participating district. In addition, each subject participating in an interview was given an Informed Consent Form for Research (see Appendix C) to sign which indicated an understanding of the nature of the study, the methods to be employed, and a willingness to participate in the study. Participation was voluntary and subjects were allowed to cease participation at any point during the study.

The specific districts participating in the project were not identified by name. In addition, the state in which these districts reside was simply referred to as a southeastern state. Personal identifiers for participants being interviewed, such as names and specific position titles, were removed from all documentation of this study.

The researcher employed a personal code of behavior being careful to focus on this specific study and did not pry into other unrelated areas. All subjects were treated fairly and with respect. The researcher appreciated the subjects’ donation of time and effort and formally acknowledged their contribution to the project with a note of thanks. Since this was an exploratory, descriptive study, there were no ethical issues, including no conflicts of interest.
Summary

This chapter described the methodology and specific techniques used in conducting this research study examining the succession planning practices of three large school districts in a southeastern state. The methodology is qualitative by nature and incorporated a case study design. Interviews and district documents and artifacts were the primary data sources. Researcher field notes served as a secondary data source. All collected data was analyzed looking for similarities and differences in approaches to each district’s idea of succession planning, with specific attention given to the position of the principal. The next chapter presents findings within and across each district.
CHAPTER FOUR
DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter will introduce the three school districts studied as a part of this research project and detail each district’s succession planning strategies utilized during the 2008-2009 school year. The districts will be presented in ascending order of smallest to largest district. All district names have been changed to protect anonymity.

The information contained in this section was collected through six formal face-to-face interviews, two informal face-to-face interviews, and numerous follow-up contacts, some in person and some via telephone and email. In addition, 50 documents and other artifacts, including each district’s website, were examined. Of the 50 documents and artifacts, 19 were from Glendale County Schools, 16 were from Carrington County Schools, and 15 were from Westin County Schools.

After the individual districts are depicted, a cross-case analysis will be presented revolving around the four research questions, which also encompass the four areas of the framework used to guide this study: (a) planning, (b) identification and development of participants in succession planning programs, (c) sustainability of succession planning programs, and (d) evaluation of succession planning programs.

Case #1: Glendale County Schools

Glendale County Schools was the smallest district in this study, but the third largest district in the state with 71,503 students and 120 schools. Of the 120 schools, there are 67
elementary schools, 22 middle schools, 26 high schools, and five special/alternative schools. Glendale County is centrally positioned in the northern piedmont area of the state and the schools are located in urban, suburban, and rural areas across 650 square miles.

District demographics (see Table 1) in regards to race and ethnicity for the 2008-09 school year are as follows: 0.5% American Indian, 5.4% Asian, 8.9% Hispanic/Latino, 40.8% African American, 39.5% Caucasian, and 5% Multi-racial. Other 2008-09 demographics in regards to direct services provided include 14.6% of students receiving special education services and 49.79% participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program (F&R).

The district’s mission is to graduate responsible citizens prepared to succeed in higher education or in the career of their choice. In January 2009, the district unveiled a strategic plan developed based on the input of nearly 4,000 parents, students, employees, and community members. The plan serves as a three and a half year road map for the district and is divided into eight key areas: (a) improving academic achievement, (b) supportive family and community involvement, (c) strategic human resource management, (d) respectful and responsive service, (e) safe schools and character development, (f) optimal operations, (g) transformational technology, and (h) clear baseline and equitable standards (Glendale County Schools, 2009).
Strategic human resource management is the area of the strategic plan with the most implications for succession planning. Three of the nine implementation strategies directly relate to succession planning programs:

1. Develop a selection, appointment, and development process for school-based administrators.
2. Develop an employee selection and appointment process designed to grow current and future leaders.

3. Strengthen orientations for new employees.

Some variations of these initiatives are described in the sections below, but the district’s strategic plan calls for enhanced systems and programs in these areas to be launched during the summer of 2010 (Glendale County Schools, 2009).

Succession Planning Overview

Glendale County defines succession planning as vertical movement among the different levels of positions and includes the components of recruitment, induction, and development. This definition of succession planning includes tracks of classified staff, such as teacher assistants, moving into teacher positions, teachers moving into assistant principal positions, and assistant principals moving into principal positions. Some of the succession planning strategies have been in place for ten years, adapting over time as needed, while other strategies are in the first stages of implementation. Glendale County currently has programs aligned with this definition in its succession planning model and district administrators realize that these programs are about “developing the power we have in the district to recruit and retain talent.”

A significant factor that led Glendale County to specifically consider a succession planning model was individual staff members, their realization that “things were being done haphazardly,” and their developmental backgrounds. No single individual or department was responsible for the concept. Now, both the human resources department and the professional
development department, which is housed in the curriculum division in this district, are taking ownership of the plan. One senior level administrator in each department leads the charge and continuously communicates and collaborates with others to align their efforts and trim overlap as much as possible.

Another factor influencing the development of succession planning initiatives in Glendale County is the turnover rate in the principal position. According to 2007-08 data, Glendale County had a 14% turnover rate in the principal position, which is slightly above the state average of 12%.

The greatest strength of the succession planning program in Glendale County is the internal certification programs. Described in more detail in the next section, Glendale County offers a number of programs to assist staff in attaining certification for positions at the next level beyond their current role. The district has received state-level permission to offer some of these certifications completely internally, while other programs take place through partnerships with universities. Due to the success of their full-fledged internal program, they are currently seeking state-level permission to operate similar programs in other areas.

**Succession Planning Programs: Identification and Development**

Glendale County’s succession planning programs are outlined in Table 2 and begin at the classified staff level. The district offers a program in which classified staff, such as a teacher’s assistant, can acquire their teaching license. This program has been in place for over ten years and receives private funding from an outside organization. Participants self-
Table 2

Glendale County Succession Planning Strategies by Position Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Succession Planning Strategy</th>
<th>Classified</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Assistant Principal</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Other District Admin.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Certification</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Cohort</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateral Entry Resource Center</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Academy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSA Cohort</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay for Performance/Retention</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

select into this program with a principal’s recommendation and applications are screened to meet basic pre-requisite eligibility requirements. Once these requirements are met, a screening interview takes place and if successful in this interview, the participant can be hired on a provisional license as they work through their licensure program. Typically, there is full tuition reimbursement with this program.

In an effort to encourage more people to enter the teaching profession, the state passed legislation allowing school districts to use an approved program of study and grant
teacher licensure for teaching candidates without utilizing an outside agency, such as a university. When a person holds a non-teaching college degree and obtains teacher licensure while teaching, the process is referred to as lateral entry. The Alternative Certification Track in Glendale County credits its success to a variety of reasons: customized to local district needs, low cost, most courses co-taught in the summer by master teachers and community college staff, courses specifically designed for lateral entry candidates, support and networking the cohort model provides, and use of on-site coaches throughout the year for support.

To support teachers working on their lateral entry certification, Glendale County offers a Lateral Entry Resources and Advising Center. This resource center is staffed and offers guidance to lateral entry teachers before, during, and after seeking lateral entry certification. In addition to offering district level and school level support through the form of a school level induction and success coordinator and an individually assigned mentor, lateral entry teachers are also assigned a lateral entry buddy, who is a successful lateral entry teacher with tenure in the school district. The staff of this resource center can also provide on-demand support and coaching as needed.

One district administrator stated, “As a teacher in the succession planning model, an administrator should work with you as a licensed faculty member to take your individual growth plan and turn it into something a little more substantial.” The district administrator shared “the opportunities we offer them to allow them to continue to grow professionally and
take on leadership roles as a teacher will help us with both retention and succession planning.”

A possible next step for teachers in this succession plan certification strand is attaining school administrator licensure. For a number of years, as a succession planning strategy, Glendale County has sponsored cohorts of teachers working towards their administrative licensure. To date, the district has sponsored five cohorts in this program. They have experienced great success with the cohort model and are currently looking to expand its in-house licensure to include the administrative track. Participants self-select into the program, but must be accepted by both the university and the district. Glendale County’s application process includes a completed resume, writing sample, letters of reference, an online administrator profile, and an interview. Currently, there is tuition reimbursement associated with this program provided the participant works for the district for three years following graduation from the program.

When talking about the administrative licensure cohort, one district administrator shared that an effectiveness indicator would be the number of candidates placed in principalships or other senior leader roles. The district administrator estimated that the cost of the program for one cohort of twenty-three people was approximately $40,000. The district administrator shared, “If you take twenty-three people through a program and hire eighteen of them as principals, that’s a pretty good success rate. For $40,000 you get eighteen principals? That’s great!”
A final step in this succession planning ladder of certifications is the doctoral degree accompanied by superintendent licensure. So far the district has sponsored two cohorts in this program and covers 75% of tuition with the provision participants continue to work for the district for three years following program completion. Participants self-select and the application process is similar to the administrative masters’ cohort, requiring applications to both the district and university.

Once employees are hired, it is very important to retain them. Glendale County has a variety of induction processes in place for support to new employees. There are programs designed specifically for classified staff, new teachers, new lateral entry teachers, and new principals. To specifically serve teachers, every school has a cadre of mentors and an Induction Support Coordinator. It is the responsibility of the Induction Support Coordinator to plan and provide a new teacher orientation meeting and five monthly seminars at their school site. On months where there is not a school-based seminar, there is a regional seminar for new teachers to attend. Mentors meet regularly with the new teachers and provide support on an ongoing, as-needed basis.

The new principal induction program involves a week-long “boot camp” in the summer where they prepare for their first day with staff, schedules, budget issues—“essentially all of the practical day-to-day things that they are going to face as a principal.” The program is referred to as “boot camp” since it is the initial indoctrination and instruction to learn the basics of being a principal in this particular school district, similar to boot camps in the navy and marines. One district administrator stated, “Participants have told me they
dreaded coming because they wanted to be in their building getting work done, but they say
they’ve gotten more work done here because no one was coming and interrupting them.” The
administrator goes on to share that participants typically leave the session with “their
schedules pretty much done, their evaluation plans done, their budgets started, their first staff
meeting arranged, and the beginning of a professional development plan done.”

Once school begins, the cohort of new principals meet monthly on topics pertinent to
the time of year and what needs to be happening at the school level. In addition to the
centralized monthly support sessions, there are also on-site visits and coaching from a senior
level district administrator who is not their evaluator and who considers their interactions to
be confidential in nature. The coaching component includes “telephone interventions,
mentoring, supporting, listening, and emails.”

In addition to coaching from the district administrator, new principals are also
carefully paired with a peer mentor within the district and assigned a paid executive coach
from outside the district. These executive coaches are typically retired principals, usually
with experience in Glendale County Schools, and work with the new principal for a
minimum of one year. As funding permits, the principal can ask to retain the coach for a
second and/or third year. The peer mentor assists the new principal in the day-to-day typical
workings of a principal in Glendale County, while the executive coach serves more to
challenge their level of thinking and to act as a sounding board. In 2006-2007, there were
twenty-five new principals in this program, fifteen new principals in 2007-2008, and eight
new principals in 2008-2009. Regarding the dwindling numbers of new principals, one
district administrator shared, “Though some of it may be due to the economy, I definitely think some of it is a tribute to the fact that we’re putting structures in place, providing support, and achieving more.”

All assistant principals, including new assistant principals, are required to participate in the AP Leadership Academy. Assistant principals progress through this academy in a cohort over the course of three semesters. Glendale County has partnered with a local university to provide this professional development opportunity. The program focuses on 21st century leadership standards and includes theory, practical application, and ongoing work in between sessions. A follow-up to this program focusing on leadership development skills for assistant principals interested in becoming principals is currently in development and will be based on self-selection and an application process. This program will include a significant amount of scenario and simulation activities.

One final program mentioned as a succession planning strategy in terms of retention is the district’s efforts in the area of pay for performance. The program is a “comprehensive teacher incentive plan that combines multiple components to keep and attract highly effective teachers and administrators for the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement in schools with critical needs” (Glendale County, 2009). The program began with twenty original schools and has now expanded to thirty schools.

**Sustainability of Succession Planning Programs**

Though many of the succession planning programs outlined here are funded, most could continue without funding. For example, the certification programs described include
funding for tuition. This funding could be reduced or removed and interested individuals could still participate in the programs by funding the costs themselves.

Many of the programs in Glendale County’s succession plan are sustainable for two reasons: people and systems. The people involved in these succession planning programs are dedicated to the success of the programs beyond their tenure. They are believers in developing leadership capacity. They aim to develop programs that are structurally sound, systematic, and can be continued by a successor without any lapse in services due to turnover.

*Evaluation of Succession Planning Programs*

Glendale County does not have a comprehensive evaluation in the area of succession planning, though it does have some form of evaluation for each individual program. One district administrator described the evaluations of many of the programs as “primarily qualitative and perception oriented.” She has explored having a quantitative evaluation completed on some of the leadership development components, such as the principal coaching and AP Leadership Academy, but to date has been unsuccessful. She has collected a significant amount of anecdotal evidence for all programs, both informally and through surveys.

Participant result data surrounding the administrative cohort programs, both the masters and doctoral levels, are posted by cohort on the district’s website. The data shows how many people began and completed the program, as well as whether or not they currently hold a leadership position as an assistant principal, principal, or central services staff
member. This data is recognized as the current primary effectiveness indicator of succession planning in Glendale County.

The Human Resources department collaborated with an outside evaluator to assess the effectiveness of its pay for performance model. A complete report documenting the results of the program, as well as conclusions and recommendations made by the outside evaluator, are posted on the district’s website.

**Case #2: Carrington County Schools**

Carrington County Schools is the second largest district in this study, as well as the second largest district in this state. This district is located in the southern-central part of the state, on the southern border. Serving 134,060 students, Carrington County is often considered urban, though its 527 square miles also encompass suburban areas. This district includes the largest city in the state, which is also considered the twentieth largest city in the nation. The district currently has 172 schools. There are 99 elementary schools, 31 middle schools, 33 high schools, four “special/optional” schools, and five pre-kindergarten sites.

District demographics (see Table 3) in regards to race and ethnicity for the 2008-09 school year are as follows: 4.3% American Indian, 4.7% Asian, 15.5% Hispanic/Latino, 41.8% African American, and 33.7% Caucasian. Other 2008-09 demographics in regards to direct services provided include approximately 11% of students receiving special education services, 48.7% participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program (F&R), 9.1% enrolled in the English as a Second Language Program (ESL), and 13.7% classified as Limited English Proficiency (LEP).
### Carrington County Schools 2008-2009 Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Schools</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td>134,060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficiency</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Services</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The goal in this district is to achieve equity, excellence, and go beyond what has been envisioned or dreamed for this district. Work in this district is guided by three questions: Is it educationally sound? Is it good for kids? Is it fiscally responsible? Carrington County is committed to providing the highest quality education possible for each and every student.
The district wants students to be competitive locally, nationally, and internationally so they will lead successful, productive lives (Carrington County, 2009).

Succession Planning Overview

According to senior level staff, Carrington County wants to develop a succession plan for the district that enables district employees to create and manage their own career trajectory within the district. The district wants to be proactive in developing “pools of talented employees to succeed and fill positions by the time they become vacant.” In the past, Carrington County has often looked externally to fill senior leadership roles, but they would like to, as one district administrator describes it, “groom our talent from within” and begin to have a pool of talented candidates internally to search first, before going outside of the district.

Carrington County had a 10% turnover rate in the role of the principal in 2008-09. This rate is slightly lower than the 2007-2008 state average of 12%, but is significant due to the size of the district. The mentality of “grooming our talent from within” and already having a pool of internal candidates has been in place for the role of the principalship for some time now and may contribute to the lower than average annual principal turnover rate. Carrington County would like to expand that mind-set to other leadership roles in the school system.

In addition to the principalship, Carrington County wants to assure there are opportunities at the schoolhouse level for teachers to develop their leadership capacity. Carrington County believes there is a need for leadership opportunities for teachers who
aspire to the role of school-based administrator, but there is also a need for leadership
development for teachers who wish to remain in the classroom.

At the central services level, there is also a need for succession planning strategies to be implemented. Carrington County is currently exploring this concept with the executive cabinet and assuring that all of the senior leaders have a plan and staff in place so that, as one district administrator stated, “it would be business as usual if the leader walks out the door right now.” Another district administrator shared a concern, “Think about the district’s exposure if our CFO (Chief Financial Officer) walks out the door to a private institute. It’s like a cannonball hitting the side of a canoe. We would not be ready for that!” Organizing and implementing this type of plan is more complex than it sounds, since it involves the continuous development of personnel at all levels of the organization.

Overall, Carrington County considers succession planning to involve both the schoolhouse level and the central services level. A district administrator shared, “We must look at the full continuum or pipeline from recruitment to retention to development. An entire culture needs to be built around the idea of developing people.” Carrington County emphasizes their desire to change the focus on “highly qualified” associated with No Child Left Behind to “highly effective.” One Carrington County administrator stated, “Our succession planning is now moving towards recruiting the highly effective, retaining the highly effective, and developing the highly effective for long term leadership in the district.” While some of the succession planning strategies in this district have been in place for almost
ten years and have evolved with time, other strategies are in their first year of implementation.

Succession Planning Programs: Identification and Development

Succession planning initiatives in Carrington County are outlined in Table 4. In this district, succession planning begins at the teacher level. In the 2008-2009 school year, the district put in place a five-year teacher induction program. This program contains a five year plan for every new teacher in the district regarding the district’s support, opportunities, and professional development. Some of the planned modules are required, while others are optional, which will give the district an idea of what areas need to be cultivated in more depth.

Also at the teacher level is the master teacher program. Participants initially self-select into this program and then must have their principal’s recommendation and produce a portfolio of their work. The final component of the selection process involves two rounds of interviews. Once selected, participants are committing to a three-year program in which they receive ongoing intensive and extensive training and host a lab classroom for other teachers in the district to visit. Teachers who visit these classrooms are expected to identify a specific area of expertise or teaching strategy that is modeled during their observation and then return to their own classroom to implement it. After implementation, they meet with the master teacher to evaluate how it went. Master teachers are compensated for the additional time they spend working for this program. A district administrator involved with this program stated, “This program provides teachers the opportunity to move into the adult coaching role, but
Table 4

*Carrington County Succession Planning Strategies by Position Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Succession Planning Strategy</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Assistant Principal</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Other District Admin.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Pilot Projects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Academy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master Teacher Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSA Cohort</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBPTS Special Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Leaders for New Schools</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay for Performance/Retention</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Institute</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Fellows Institute</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

allows them to remain employed in the classroom and sort of stretch themselves to learning and beginning that initial step of working with adults.”

Another initiative at the teacher level is the National Board certification process. A Carrington County district administrator shared, “This is a valuable self-reflection process that causes the individual teacher to take stock of why they do what they do in their
classroom.” This southeastern state offers some benefits from the state for being nationally board certified through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Aside from the standard National Board process, Carrington County offers a coaching and mentoring program surrounding this process to help people prepare, as well as complete the process.

The Teachers’ Institute in Carrington County is yet another succession planning strategy designed for teachers. Many programs developed for teachers focus on pedagogical aspects. This program is a focus on content and started several years ago through a partnership with Yale University. When the program began, local teachers traveled to Yale in the summers to participate in content-related seminars. These rigorous seminars are now replicated locally throughout the year to allow more teachers to participate. The partnership with Yale University still remains and serves as an advanced level for the teachers who are high performers at the local seminars. Yale University developed an evaluation structure for this program with key measures being teacher retention and student achievement. One unique aspect of this program is that aside from the director of the program, the entire program is run by teachers. The teachers make the decisions on who participates in the seminars, including the entire interview process.

A final succession planning strategy aimed at teachers is the Teaching Fellows Institute. This program is a week-long professional development opportunity that focuses on instructional strategies. At the end of the Institute, teachers are expected to return to their schools, implement their learning, and assist others at their schools in these areas. Each school can nominate a participant and a cohort of twenty-five teachers is formed each year.
There are currently five cohorts of teachers that have successfully completed this program for a total of 125 teachers across the district. When selecting the cohort, the district tries to assure representation across the various schools in the district.

The MSA cohort is the next leadership opportunity that is available for teachers is also available to central services employees. Carrington County has partnered with a local private college to “develop a leadership program that is tailored to the needs of an urban school district.” The district identifies candidates that they believe have the potential to be strong building or central services leaders and invites them to apply to the program. A district administrator shared, “These are really top level folks invited to apply. I mean they are superstars. It is an honor to be nominated.” Once invited to apply, candidates participate in a full day of assessment activities including an on-demand writing prompt, scenario solving, in-basket activities, formal presentation, and a traditional interview. Participants in this program are not directly tracked for the principalship. Some participants may have been chosen for future roles with central services. The cohorts for this program contain approximately two-thirds school-based personnel and one-third central services based personnel who are typically curriculum specialists that have shown the potential to be strong school administrators. This program utilizes some federal funding, but is primarily funded through a local corporate sponsor. Participants pay a nominal fee each semester to participate and will complete the program with a Master’s degree. Carrington County expects participants to remain in the district for four years after the completion of the two-year
program. This program has a full cohort of 25 of the district’s “top-flyers” and has recently tapped its second cohort.

Another succession planning strategy to train future principals involves the national organization New Leaders for New Schools. This non-profit organization provides a rigorous selection process, intensive training program, and ongoing support as a pathway to become an outstanding principal of an urban public school. This is a year-long alternative licensing program, so while successful completion of this program does not result in a Master’s degree, it does result in licensing to serve as a principal. Carrington County just completed the selection process for its first cohort of this program and expects to have them in formal leadership roles in the district within the year. A district administrator shared, “We are looking at this as a strategic staffing opportunity, where we will take graduates of this program and assign them to one of our more challenging schools with the hope of closing the achievement gap.”

Once the role of the principal is attained, one of the succession planning initiatives in Carrington County is a coaching program for new principals. First and second year principals are automatically assigned a coach and area superintendents can request a coach for third year principals. Coached are retired successful principals who go through a research-based training program specifically developed for coaches. The coaches meet with their assigned principals at monthly meetings and provide other guidance on a weekly basis through meetings, phone calls, and emails as needed. These coaches receive stipends for their work in this program.
A final formal succession planning strategy already in place is the Leadership Academy. In the past, the Leadership Academy was only accessible to senior leaders in the district. In recent years, it has expanded to school-based and central services administrators, as well as teacher leaders, including teachers in roles such as literacy facilitator and academic facilitator. The Leadership Academy offers seminars to assist in leadership development. The seminars vary in scope based on need.

In addition to formal succession planning strategies, central services is currently exploring the possibility of expanding the concept in their area. A senior leader has been assigned succession planning as a special project and is examining the entire continuum from recruitment to retention to development across all levels of the organization. In addition to maintaining the formal programs currently in place in the district, this person is also beginning to explore and pilot new initiatives and strategies to implement, including at the central services level. This strategy is categorized as Individual Pilot Projects in Table 4.  

*Sustainability of Succession Planning Programs*

The succession planning programs in Carrington County are highly sustainable. Senior leaders in the district value the concept of succession planning and an effort is being made to increase internal district leadership capacity by incorporating succession planning programs into the infrastructure of the organization. Many of the succession planning strategies currently in place, such as the teacher induction program, have been designed in this fashion and are expectations of the way business is done in Carrington County. As a result, these strategies are highly sustainable.
In addition, many of the succession planning initiatives are funded using a variety of sources for each program. For example, to fund the Master’s degree cohort program through a private college, a combination of federal money, corporate dollars, and participant cost is used. This method of funding increases the odds of sustainability, with the reasoning being that if one source of funding is removed, it is possible that the other sources could make up the difference.

*Evaluation of Succession Planning Programs*

Carrington County is not currently evaluating its succession planning model as a whole, though it is evaluating many of its formal succession planning initiatives. As a whole, one district administrator stated, “Our weak link in my mind is clearly not at the teacher level. I feel good about that pipeline, from recruiting and induction to developing our teachers as teacher leaders. I think we’re well on our way.”

A couple of the succession planning strategies, the Teachers’ Institute and the New Leaders for New Schools partnership, have been and will continue to be evaluated by partnering entities. In addition, the local research and evaluation departments will begin to evaluate the programs based on the models used by the partnering organizations.

Though Carrington County is evaluating some of the formal programs, they acknowledge that some of the data they are seeking is hard to acquire. For example, when evaluating the teacher induction program, the district is following each participant in the program in terms of retention, but the district is also interested in student achievement and it is very difficult to isolate the impact an individual program can have on student achievement.
An area of evaluation that the district aspires to in regards to succession planning involves the recruitment of teachers. In conjunction with the teacher induction program, Carrington County would like to be able to assess the effectiveness of new teachers and pinpoint what teacher preparation programs provide the strongest teachers in each area. With that data, Carrington County can target their recruitment for specific groups of teachers.

**Case #3: Westin County Schools**

Westin County Schools is the largest district in this study and it is located in the central part of the state. Serving 137,706 students, the district is often referred to as urban, though its 860 square miles encompass a significant amount of suburban and even rural areas. The district currently has 156 schools and has been growing rapidly in recent years. There are 99 elementary schools, 30 middle schools, 23 high schools, and four “special/optional” schools. The 2008-09 school year had an enrollment increase of 5,930 students on the 20th day of school. The previous year’s enrollment increase was 7,566 students and the 2006-07 year’s increase was 6,439 students. Since 2000, 50 new schools have opened and there are 23 more schools scheduled to open in the next four years pending funding approval. So, after filling positions due to normal attrition, this district also has to fill positions as a result of growth. Westin County is currently the largest school district in this state and the 18th largest district in the nation (Westin County Schools, 2009).

In addition to the substantial growth the district is experiencing, diversity in the district is also increasing. District demographics (see Table 5) in regards to race and ethnicity for the 2008-09 school year are as follows: 0.3% American Indian, 5.8% Asian, 11.5%
Table 5

*Westin County Schools 2008-2009 Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Schools</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td>137,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-racial</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficiency</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Services</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hispanic/Latino, 26.1% African American, 51.8% Caucasian, and 4.6% Multi-racial. Other 2008-09 demographics in regards to direct services provided include 13.9% of students receiving special education services, 28.4% participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch
Program (F&R), 5.1% enrolled in the English as a Second Language Program (ESL), and 9.3% classified as Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

This district focuses on the superintendent’s vision which involves a community of caring stakeholders (parents, teachers, administrators, and staff) successfully working collaboratively with support from the broader community to ensure that every child educated in the district graduates on time, prepared for the future. All work in the district is to be aligned to the superintendent’s four strategic directives: (a) focus on learning and teaching, (b) retain, recruit, and train high quality employees, (c) develop and implement systems and organizational structures to support schools, ensure accountability, and engage the community, and (d) expand fiscal accountability.

Succession Planning Overview

Westin County defines succession planning as more than filling positions. They consider succession planning to be maintaining a pipeline of “future ready” leaders at every level. One district administrator interviewed noted that “succession planning does not only mean promotion to the next level. It also means becoming more accomplished in the role you currently find yourself.” The district believes succession planning is developing people in the positions where they are currently seated with leadership skill-sets to be used both in the current position as well as in future positions. In addition, beyond the human resources component, succession planning is also about developing systems and structures to assist in carrying the district forward as people in the various roles change. One district administrator
shared, “We want to develop leaders from the seats they are in and make sure we have the structures in place to carry the system forward at any given time.”

Succession planning is important in this district for a variety of reasons. The district experienced a 9% turnover rate in 2007-2008 in the principal position, which is less than the state average of 12%, but significant due to the district’s size. The current superintendent has appointed 96 principals in his 40-month tenure, which includes 82 principals during an 18-month period. Ninety of the 96 principals were internal hires, for a 93.75% internal hire rate. Succession planning strategies to prepare principal candidates have been in place since 2002. This internal hire rate can be considered an indicator that the strategies are effective.

Turnover is not the only factor causing this number to be so high. The district has also experienced substantial growth over the last fifteen years. Even in the current economic downturn, Westin County is still anticipating more growth. Aside from growth and the typical turnover rate, the district also cites what one district administrator calls “the graying of administrators” as a concern that may lead to greater turnover in the coming years. A district administrator stated, “Right now, half of the Superintendent’s Leadership Team is eligible for retirement. This number gets much higher if you look one year out. We have got to think beyond our immediate needs and look five years down the road.”

The greatest strength of succession planning in this district is that everyone understands the need. The superintendent is not alone in this task, nor is it the sole responsibility of the Human Resources department. One of the district’s four strategic directives is to recruit, retain, and train high quality employees, and everyone’s work is
aligned to the directives. Another strength worth noting is the partnership Westin County formed in 2006 with surrounding districts to develop a central organization to assist the districts with leadership development programs. By leveraging the power of economy of scale, each district is able to reap the benefits of this organization, which as a sole district they would be unable to sustain.

Succession Planning Programs: Identification and Development

A complete listing of succession planning programs in Westin County is included in Table 6. Formal succession planning programs in this district begin at the teacher level. The district offers an Institute for Teacher Leaders. This two-year program follows a cohort model and participants attend a variety of trainings and district level meetings together. One of the objectives of the program is for participants to understand the internal protocols for leading in this district. To participate in the program, each area superintendent begins the process by selecting one school in their region in which they want to focus on developing teacher leadership. Principals of those selected schools recommend teams of two to three teachers to matriculate through the program together. The purpose of the school-based teams is the action research project based on the school improvement plan that is the basis of study during the second year of the program. A district leader who works with the program stated, “The growth of these teachers over the two-year program is significant. It is exciting to see their leadership skills honed.”

One Westin County district administrator shared, “Because the first formal positional leadership opportunity is the role of the assistant principal, there are significant programs
Table 6

*Westin County Succession Planning Strategies by Position Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Succession Planning Strategy</th>
<th>Classified</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Assistant Principal</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Other District Admin.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AP Leadership Academy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddy-coaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Cohort</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institute for Teacher Leaders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Academy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Leader Lab</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSA Cohort</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Leaders Network</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

surrounding that position in this district.” To begin with, through a partnership with a local university, the district has sponsored eight cohorts of students working towards their Masters of School Administration degrees. The course of study these groups have followed has been tailored to the district’s specific needs. Approximately half of the course work is taught by qualified senior leaders in the district and the other half is taught by university professors. In addition, these cohorts are required to take additional seminars that target district issues,
which other students obtaining their degrees through the same university are not required to take. Participants self-select into the program, but first must be admitted into the university program and then are screened at the district level through an application and interview process utilizing successful, experienced principals. A district administrator who works with this program shared, “If a measure of success is the number of participants who stay in the district, then this program rates very well: 98% of people who have been trained through this program remain in the district, contrasted with about 83% of people who go through traditional preparation programs.”

Once the position of assistant principal is obtained, there is a year-long induction program for the role in Westin County. The Assistant Principal Induction Program kicks off the year with a day-long introductory session and then meets monthly for half-day sessions. The formal portion of the sessions involves getting to know the people and services of Central Services. A district leader stated, “We think it is extremely valuable for people at this level (assistant principal) to begin to understand the workings of central services: who we are and what we can do for them.” The informal portion is the networking that occurs and the time spent with mentors. Each new assistant principal is paired with a trained mentor for the year. Pairings are carefully determined and consider factors such as grade level, school-type, proximity, and general compatibility. The mentors receive three days of intensive training on how to be an effective mentor, as well as a host of tools to assist them in the process.

Serving as a mentor is one component of leadership development for the experienced assistant principal and there are several other opportunities. The current superintendent is
vocal about the empowerment and development of assistant principals. One district leader shared, “Our superintendent regularly reminds principals to look at their assistant principals as potential principals and assist in their professional growth.” The superintendent and area superintendents now regularly meet with the assistant principals on at least a quarterly basis. Assistant principals also have a professional development program, Learning Leader Lab, designed solely for them. This program has three different strands of study and occurs over the period of a semester. Classes meet approximately once a month and there are additional items to be completed in between meetings. The goals of these strands are to increase and enhance leadership capacity, as well as job knowledge and skill sets.

A final opportunity to develop leadership capacity at the assistant principal level is the Assistant Principal Leadership Institute. This program is highly selective and involves an application, online assessment, and interview process. Participants self-select to apply, but must have a letter of recommendation from their principal with their application before proceeding to the online assessment and interview process. One district administrator shared, “The greatest champion of any assistant principal should be their principal. They know first-hand if this person is professionally up to the tough task of improving student achievement.” Westin County has graduated two cohorts through this program and is currently forming the third cohort. Individual cohorts meet monthly for a two-year period and receive a variety of professional development opportunities based on their needs.

Westin County has two primary, formal opportunities for professional growth and leadership development at the principal level. The first is participation in a doctoral cohort.
The district has worked in partnership with two separate universities to create two doctoral cohorts. The first cohort has completed all coursework and members have received their licensure to be superintendents. They are currently in the dissertation research and writing stages of the program. Members of this cohort self-selected and applied to the university and district program. The second cohort just began coursework, but was selected differently. The second cohort has members from four different districts in it. Members were hand-selected by their respective superintendents as potential future district leaders. One district administrator shared, “The superintendents picked people who are leaders among their peers and have been very innovative and systemic in improving their schools.” The four districts work closely together on a variety of initiatives and partnered with the university to form this cohort. The university is allowing district leaders to assist in the shaping of this new program so that it aligns directly with the new school executive and superintendent evaluation models.

The other opportunity for professional growth designed specifically to meet the needs of a principal is the School Leaders Network. Currently, Westin County has four cohorts involved in the School Leaders Network. Each network is led by two fellow principals who are designated as the network facilitators and receive stipends for their work in leading these groups. These facilitators attend training at the national level three times a year and guide the group through action research, problem solving, and reflection activities surrounding a specific topic of study. The networks are professional learning communities of practice in which principals work together to solve real problems and create school cultures that sustain
achievement. These communities meet monthly and work on challenges surrounding leadership, empowerment, teacher effectiveness, and teacher retention.

Westin County hopes to expand its leadership development program for principals by adding a formalized principal coaching component. Currently, new principals take place in a year-long Induction program that meets monthly and highlights the people and services of Central Services. The most well received component of this induction program is the media training. Each new principal receives one half-day training from a media professional in how to handle the media. New principals are also matched with a buddy-coach to assist with questions regarding school operations and district policy as they arise, but there is no formal training program or protocols offered to the buddies.

A final succession planning strategy in Westin County involves developing the leadership capacity of managers and supervisors in the non-instructional portion of central services. Cohorts of leaders in departments such as Maintenance and Operations and Child Nutrition Services participate in professional development sessions in a Leadership Academy format to hone their communication and leadership skills.

**Sustainability of Succession Planning Programs**

Even in this time of economic uncertainty, the majority of leadership development programs in place in Westin County are still able to be sustained. One of the district leaders interviewed noted most of the programs are “not necessarily built completely on money.” Without funding, some programs may change, but they would not disappear. For example, the program involving the cohorts working towards their masters degrees in school
administration used to have tuition reimbursed to successful participants at the 50% level. As funding for this program decreased, the rate of tuition reimbursement decreased to its current level of two years of no reimbursement.

An administrator interviewed commented that “programs do not exist in a vacuum; they are people driven.” With the entire district focusing on retaining, recruiting, and training high quality employees, some version of succession planning initiatives are likely to remain in place under the direction of a variety of senior leadership staff members. Another district administrator shared, “We look at everyone as a potential leader and try to differentiate in terms of our training offerings. It’s just the way we do things here.”

Evaluation of Succession Planning Programs

Westin County does not have a formal succession plan in place. Instead, the district employs a variety of programs to meet this need. As a result, it does not have a formal evaluation plan to assess the effectiveness of its succession planning program as a whole. One informal way of assessing the effectiveness of the plan as a whole may involve the data point of the appointment of 82 principals in an eighteen-month period. Of this group of principals, only five of them were hired from outside the district which would indicate a strong level of success in maintaining a pipeline of people primed for their next opportunity.

When describing the evaluation process for the individual programs, one of the district administrators interviewed mentioned the Kirkpatrick model of evaluation. The Kirkpatrick model of evaluation consists of four levels: reaction, learning, behavior, and results (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). While all of the programs in Westin County are
evaluated in a variety of forms, including both formative and summative evaluations, most of the evaluations focus solely on the reaction level and only a few delve deeper into the learning level. Most organizations offer leadership development programs because of levels three and four, wanting to see a change in the participant’s daily work or in the organization as a whole. Unfortunately, evaluations have not been done at these levels in Westin County in regards to succession planning and leadership development.

**Cross Case Analysis of Data**

*Comparison of District Demographics*

The three districts participating in this case study were purposefully selected since they are the three largest districts in the state in regards to 2008-2009 student enrollment data. The largest districts were chosen on the hypothesis that they would be more likely to have succession planning strategies in place as a result of the number of positions in the districts. The hypothesis turned out to be correct as all three districts had a variety of succession planning strategies that were being implemented or had been implemented.

Though the districts were selected based solely on student enrollment data, the districts experienced a number of similarities (see Table 7). On any of these data points represented in the table, two of the three districts have relatively similar data and it is not always the same two districts.

One particularly interesting piece of data is the number of schools in each district. The smallest number of schools in one district is 120 schools, accounting for 26.8% of the total schools in the three participating districts. The largest district has 172 schools,
Table 7

*Overview of District Demographics Based on 2008-2009 Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Glendale</th>
<th>Carrington</th>
<th>Westin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Schools</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td>71,503</td>
<td>134,060</td>
<td>137,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>49.79%</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
<td>__</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficient</td>
<td>__</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving Special Education Services</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Dashes represent data that was not readily available.

38.4% of the total. The difference between these two districts is only 52 schools, which would amount to only 11.6% of the total. The third district has 156 schools, 34.8% of the total. This amount is 36 schools, or 8% of the total more than the district with the least number of schools, but 16 schools, or 3.6% of the total less than the participating district with
the most schools. The main reason that this data point is worth noting is because there is not a direct correlation between the number of students in the district and the number of schools.

In other words, Westin County is the participating district with the most students, but Carrington County is the participating district with the most schools.

All three of these districts have one large city in their jurisdiction and as a result, have areas which are considered urban. All of the districts are primarily considered suburban and two of the three districts have areas that are considered rural. These three districts not only have student enrollment size in common, as well as other basic demographic data among at least two of the three districts, they also have a number of succession planning strategies in common.

*Research Question #1: Why Succession Planning?*

The purpose of this research question was to explore why the participating school districts develop and implement succession planning initiatives. What are the driving factors that made these districts feel the need to act in this area? Based on 2007-2008 data, the southeastern state in which this study took place has an average annual principal turnover rate of 12%. Of the three districts participating in this study, the two larger districts had lower than average annual rates of 9% and 10%. The third participating district, while the third largest district in the state, is significantly smaller than the other two participating districts. It is just over half the size of the largest district and has a higher than average annual turnover rate of 14%. Annual turnover data going back to the 2002-2003 school year remains
consistent with the same two districts having lower than the state average annual rate and the third district being higher than the state average.

While these percentages seem relatively insignificant, when a district has 150 schools a 10% annual principal turnover rate results in fifteen vacant positions. Two of the districts in this study have greater than 150 schools and the third district, which only has 120 schools, is experiencing an annual principal turnover rate greater than 10%. In addition, one of the larger districts has also been experiencing significant growth over the past decade. It has opened 50 new schools since 2000, which is an additional 50 principal positions and at least as many assistant principal positions.

In addition to the current annual principal turnover rate, data collected for this state in 2005 by the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning reports 51% of principals are or will be eligible for retirement in the next five years (Waters, 2006). This data suggests there is a substantial need to have candidates prepared and ready to take on these leadership roles. Utilizing succession planning strategies internally allows potential candidates to be versed in “the way we do business here.” All three participating districts believed in the value of preparing in-house candidates.

Regarding definitions of succession planning, Glendale County defines succession planning as vertical movement among the different levels of positions and includes the components of recruitment, induction, and development. Glendale County currently has programs aligned with this definition in its succession planning model. The realization that
“things were being done haphazardly” was a significant factor that led Glendale County to specifically consider a succession planning model.

Carrington County considers succession planning to involve the “recruiting and retention of highly effective educators and their development in terms of leadership opportunities within the schoolhouse level and the central services level for long term leadership in our district.” They specifically want to offer leadership opportunities at the classroom level to provide challenges and opportunities for teachers who wish to remain in the classroom. They also want to begin to develop an internal talent pool, so they will not have to fill as many leadership positions from external sources.

Westin County defines succession planning as more than filling positions. They consider succession planning to be maintaining a pipeline of “future ready” leaders at every level. The district believes succession planning is developing people in the positions where they are currently seated with leadership skill-sets to be used both in the current position as well as in future positions. In addition, beyond the human resources component, succession planning is also about developing systems and structures to assist in carrying the district forward as people in the various roles change. Aside from turnover and the aging of current administrators, substantial growth is a factor driving this district to utilize succession planning strategies.

While all three districts have relatively equivalent definitions of succession planning and are using succession planning strategies for similar reasons, there are slightly different nuances to each district’s approach. In fact, some of the districts offer comparable programs,
but chose not to include these programs as a part of their discussions about their succession planning strategies. Some examples of this situation involve the National Board certification process, lateral entry programs, and teacher induction programs. All three districts have activities surrounding these programs, but some districts choose not to consider them in terms of succession planning, while others consider them a vital component of their plan. One district administrator in Carrington County stated, “Developing people where they are, challenging them in their current roles to retain them as loyal staff members is an important component of succession planning for our district.” A district administrator from a district not including these type of programs as part of their succession planning strategies shared, “Retention is certainly a part of succession planning, but we try to develop people where they are, with an eye towards where they are going.”

*Research Question #2: Succession Planning Programs*

All three participating districts were able to describe a variety of programs that are considered succession planning strategies in their districts, but none of the districts had a formal, comprehensive succession plan. In other words, while all districts could cite various programs, certification tracks, and leadership development opportunities for several different positions within each district, not a single district had a formally recognized succession planning document that addressed the various programs in place.

With no formal plan in place, different district level administrators were responsible for the succession planning initiatives across the three participating districts. Glendale County splits the responsibility between two distinct departments. These departments are
able to collaborate with ease due to strong relationships between the senior-level administrators in the departments. As for the other two districts, the superintendent of Carrington County recently assigned succession planning to a senior-level administrator as a “special project” as a result of the administrator’s interest in the topic. All of the succession planning efforts in Westin County, for teachers and administrators, come out of a single division led by a senior-level district leader.

*Research Question #3: Succession Planning Program Effectiveness*

Though all three participating school districts are evaluating individual succession planning strategies, none of the districts are evaluating the effectiveness of their succession planning efforts as a comprehensive program. None of the three participating districts have a formal succession plan in place, so none of the three districts have a formal comprehensive evaluation.

In the individual strategy evaluations, the data typically was anecdotal and often of a qualitative nature versus a quantitative nature. In addition, the evaluations usually involved the quality of the individual session or professional development offering, instead of evaluating the session as a succession planning strategy. In addition, following the Kirkpatrick model of evaluation utilized by one of the participating districts, all of the evaluations being conducted only cover the first two levels: reaction to the session and learning from the session. None of the evaluations address the final two levels of the Kirkpatrick model which cover long term behavior change and results (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006).
Regarding the principal position, in addition to the evaluation of the programs in this area, officials interviewed in two of the three districts were able to cite the reported data regarding the principal position, turnover percentages, and where the replacements came from—whether internally or externally from memory. The third district was able to recall the turnover percentage from the past year, as well as the number of new principals over each of the last three years, but did not specify whether they were hired internally or externally. This quick recall of data in this area further cements the idea of the value placed on this position and the need to have quality and qualified people waiting in the wings ready to take on these roles.

In the area of sustainability, all three participating districts credited people and structures in place to allow for continuity of the programs. Many of the programs have become institutionalized and will continue with ease. Other, newer programs have been developed with the concept of sustainability in mind and have structures in place to assure their continuity beyond the current staff. Many of the programs that have financial backing, such as the Masters degree cohorts, require participants to have some of their own financial ownership in the program. During interviews, the potential of less funding was discussed and thoughts were that the programs could continue with decreased financial assistance at the district level and increased financial ownership on behalf of the participants.

Research Question #4: Similarities and Differences Among District Programs

To assist with keeping track of the various succession planning programs across the three participating districts, a matrix of the various programs and the staff that they serve was
created (see Table 8). By using this matrix, it is easy to see where the programs overlap across districts, as well as which staff classifications are emphasized in each district.

One aspect that was similar in all three districts was the concept of self-selection into programs. With very few exceptions, all of the succession planning strategies covered across the three districts involved self-selection for participation and application. In other words, almost all of the programs were completely open for anyone meeting the pre-requisites to apply. In many cases, programs had application processes, sometimes often rigorous and multi-faceted, involving assessments, interviews, and writing samples, but participants still self-selected to apply. Notable exemptions from this trend include a doctoral cohort in Westin County, where you had to be nominated to apply for the program by the superintendent and a Masters degree cohort in Carrington County, where district senior leaders invite participants to apply.

While all three districts had a variety of programs in place for teachers, Carrington County had a strong emphasis on building leadership capacity at the teacher level. Carrington County begins its succession planning at the teacher level from the very beginning through a five-year long teacher induction program. Then, the district has a number of different programs for teachers to choose from to further their practice. Teachers can hone their instructional skills by participating in the Teaching Fellows Institute or the National Board certification process. Carrington County also allows teachers to focus on content mastery through their Teacher Institute. Once teachers feel they have mastered both the content and instructional strategies, they can apply to be Master Teachers in the district. In this program,
Table 8

*Matrix of Succession Planning Strategies by Position Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Succession Planning Strategy</th>
<th>Classified</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Assistant Principal</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Other District Admin.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Certification Track</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td>A, B, C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Cohort</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Pilot Projects</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A, B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institute for Teacher Leaders</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateral Entry Resource Center</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Academy</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A, B, C</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B, C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Leader Lab</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master Teacher Program</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSA Cohort</td>
<td>A, B, C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A, B, C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBPTS Special Program</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Leaders for New Schools</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay for Performance/Retention</td>
<td>A, B</td>
<td>A, B</td>
<td>A, B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Leaders Network</td>
<td>A, B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A, B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Assistant to Teacher</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Institute</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Fellows Institute</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* A = Glendale County, B = Carrington County, and C = Westin County.
teachers receive extensive and intensive training to ensure quality teaching, and then other teachers in the districts observe their classrooms and receive coaching from the classroom teacher on a particular strategy observed.

Glendale County and Westin County both offer programs for teachers, but not to the extent of Carrington County. Glendale County has an intense focus on their teacher induction program and lateral entry resource and advising center, as well as opportunities to participate in Masters degree program or a pay-for-performance program at high-need schools. Westin County also offers the Masters degree program, but places its emphasis on developing the leadership capacity of teachers through their Teacher Leaders Institute.

Since the role of the assistant principal is the first formal position of leadership, Westin County believes that the role is a “linchpin position” and is “essential to the long-term health of the organization” (Conger & Fulmer, 2003, p. 79). As a result, Westin County focuses its succession planning efforts at this level. Opportunities begin with participation in a year-long induction program. Westin County was the only participating district to offer an induction program for this position. After successful completion of induction, assistant principals can then access leadership development opportunities through a program called Learning Leader Lab. The next step for experienced, successful assistant principals is to be invited to participate in training to serve as mentors for new assistant principals. The final tier of leadership development for the position is to apply to be a member of the Leadership Institute. This is often the last step of leadership development before attaining the position of principal and involves a rigorous application and interview process.
Glendale County and Carrington County both offer a version of a leadership academy for assistant principals. Glendale County’s leadership academy is a formal program completed as a cohort, while Carrington County’s leadership academy offers a variety of professional development offerings that can be accessed at any time. In addition, both Glendale County and Carrington County have pay incentive programs for assistant principals meeting specific criteria at select schools within their districts.

Overview of Recurring Themes

A number of interesting themes emerged throughout the data analysis portion of this research project. The most recurring themes included the concepts of certification, support, and developing leadership in current role. These three themes surfaced in all three participating districts.

The certification theme starts at the classified staff level. Glendale County offers an in-house certification program to assist teacher assistants in acquiring their teaching certification. Glendale County also has a resource and advising center for their lateral entry teachers to assist these teachers in completing their certification. After teacher certification is attained, Carrington County specifically mentioned support surrounding the National Board certification process. However, it is extremely likely, due to state incentives, that all three districts have some support surrounding this process. All three participating districts offer cohort programs to obtain Masters degrees that are accompanied by principal licensure and one district offers a program sponsored by a national non-profit organization that also leads
to principal licensure. Two of the three participating districts sponsor doctoral cohorts, which upon successful completion leads to superintendent certification.

The theme of support came in two primary ways: support in a new role and support through colleagues. Support in a new role is offered through a variety of induction programs. Glendale County has induction programs for new classified staff, teachers, and principals. Carrington County offers an intensive and comprehensive five-year long induction program for new teachers. In the area of succession planning, Westin County emphasizes its year-long induction programs for both assistant principals and principals.

All three participating districts offer support through colleagues for their principals through some type of coaching program. Glendale County and Carrington County offer a formal coaching program for their principals, using experienced coaches, often retired principals, who receive both stipends and training, while Westin County offers more of “buddy-coach” model, using current principals in the district to serve in this role. The “buddy” aspect of the “buddy-coach” model is the result of the evolution of a former “principal buddy” model used in Westin County. Principals used to be assigned a buddy to contact with questions regarding school operations and district policies. This model has been expanded to include formal coaching components, to assist the principal in professional growth, above and beyond efficiently running the school and understanding district policies. In addition, Westin County has a mentor program in place for assistant principals. Experienced, successful assistant principals receive training to serve as mentors and provide support to new assistant principals.
Another form of support through colleagues is the cohort concept. All three districts utilize the cohort concept in several ways. The Masters and doctoral degree programs offered in the participating districts follow a cohort model, as well as some of the other professional development opportunities such as the Learning Leader Lab and School Leaders Network in Westin County. The cohort model takes a group of individuals through a shared experience over the course of time. The shared experience and time together results in networking and relationships that outlast the formal tenure of the cohort.

Everyone interviewed described the need to develop leadership in the roles that people currently find themselves. Conversation revolved around the idea of developing skills that will serve leaders in both their current and future roles, keeping the districts running smoothly and their leadership pipelines filled with quality candidates for when openings occur. The importance of having strong teachers in the classroom remains a concern among all three districts and having opportunities for teachers to serve as teacher leaders in various roles will assist in this endeavor.

Summary

This chapter explored the data collected as a part of this research study. It outlined the succession planning strategies employed by the three participating districts within the framework of identification and development, sustainability, and effectiveness. The chapter then compared the demographics of the three districts, as well as the succession planning programs in the three districts in alignment with the research questions of the study. The chapter concluded by discussing the three themes that recurred across the data collected from
the three districts. The next chapter will summarize this study and its findings, as well as provide some recommendations for succession planning programs, some implications for educational practice, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter will provide a summary of this research study as well as an overview and discussion of its findings. Considering the relevant literature and the findings of this study, some recommendations for succession planning programs and implications for educational practice will be proposed. This chapter will conclude with recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Study

The three largest school districts in one southeastern state were asked to participate in a research study regarding succession planning programs. Though the districts were selected solely on their size, they shared some similar demographics. The study was based on Jarrell and Pewitt’s (2007) framework used for planning a sustainable workforce for a small city government. The key components of this framework are planning, selection and training of staff, sustainability, and evaluation of the process in practice.

The study was guided by four primary research questions: Why are succession plans enacted by school districts? What do school district succession plans look like? Do school district succession plans work? What are the similarities and differences of school district succession plans?

To answer these research questions, the primary data source utilized was transcripts from interviews with district leaders. Each district provided access to two senior-level district
leaders with familiarity with the district’s succession planning strategies. These interviews were conducted following an interview protocol and using an interview guide. Additional district staff was contacted after these interviews for specific information as recommended by interview participants. To triangulate the data, documents and artifacts from the districts were used as well as the researcher’s field notes.

When analyzing the data, a matrix of the various succession planning strategies and affected staff was developed. The matrix also displays which districts are offering the strategies. In addition to the succession planning strategy matrix, themes recurring throughout the transcripts, documents, and other artifacts were color coded and noted.

**Discussion of Findings**

*Absence of Formal Written Plan*

All three of the participating districts were able to clearly articulate a variety of succession planning strategies being implemented in the district. However, none of the participating districts were able to produce a sole document or artifact that outlined a comprehensive succession plan for the district. The nonexistence of a formalized succession planning document is fascinating, since all three districts truly believe they are actively succession planning. Due to the size of the districts, lack of resources cannot be the excuse. It is possible the districts do not have a formal succession plan since there is no state level requirement and succession planning is not the norm in the field of education. In fact, the institution of education could be a barrier to succession planning. The omission of a
comprehensive written succession plan could result in deceiving or problematic interpretations of what are formally considered succession planning initiatives.

For example, one of the three participating districts specifically described a program supporting teachers attaining National Board for Professional Teaching Standards licensure as a succession planning initiative. This particular district places a strong emphasis on finding leadership opportunities for teachers at the classroom level in order to encourage and support them in remaining at the classroom level, yet still feeling fulfilled and challenged on a new level. The southeastern state where this study takes place offers special incentives for teachers achieving this certification, so it is likely that the other two districts also have programs surrounding the National Board process, yet they are not considering them a succession planning strategy.

Absence of Reporting Mechanisms and Formal Evaluation

Without a comprehensive, written succession plan formally in place, it is no surprise that there is not a corresponding evaluation of succession planning in any of the districts. All three districts were able to cite specific turnover and replacement data regarding the principal position without referring to a report or other data source, but information regarding other positions was not readily available. Also, data regarding the effectiveness of the individual succession planning strategies were also not readily available. All three districts shared that their evaluations of the succession planning strategies were primarily around the satisfaction and learning levels of the participants in the initiatives, rather than the effectiveness of the strategy as a succession planning tool.
Level of Sustainability

Succession planning programs in these three districts were deemed by the district leaders interviewed as highly sustainable as a result of structures and people in place. Many of the programs are so ingrained in the culture of the districts that they are not seen as optional activities. For example, when Westin County began offering the Masters degree cohort program in 2002, half of all tuition costs were reimbursed. Due to limited budgets, this amount decreased over the years, and the last several cohorts have not received any tuition reimbursement through the program. Yet, the eighth cohort was recently selected to begin courses.

Regarding sustainability, district administrators interviewed discussed the idea of cost-sharing leadership development opportunities with the participants, so that the participants would value the opportunity through greater ownership. In addition, funding balances could shift during leaner budget times to place a greater amount on participants. This is what happened in Westin County with the Masters degree cohort and there has not been a significant decrease in participation.

Another factor contributing to the successful sustainability of succession planning programs involves the structure of the program. When developing succession planning programs, district administrators across all three districts specifically try to design the program so that if there is a change in leadership, the program can continue seamlessly.
Succession Planning Strategies Similarities and Differences

In the area of leadership development, the strategies across the three districts had a number of similarities and a few notable differences. In the area of similarities, the manner in which participants are identified to take part in the various succession planning initiatives is self-selection for almost all of the programs across the three districts. Many of the programs described involve an application and selection process, but application was typically open to anyone meeting basic pre-requisites. Only two succession planning activities described, one in Carrington County and one in Westin County, involved district leaders inviting applicants to take part in a rigorous selection process.

Another similarity is that all three districts offer a variety of programs utilizing the cohort concept, including Masters degree programs accompanied by principal licensure. The cohort approach allows participants to build relationships that outlast the tenure of the cohort. Participants network with one another and are able to take advantage of each others’ areas of expertise. Using the cohort approach in degree programs, as well as other leadership development opportunities, emphasizes the socialization approach that research has proven effective in the business sector.

Other similarities included induction programs. Two of the three participating districts described their teacher induction programs as succession planning strategies. Two of the three districts also listed a principal induction program as a strategy and all three districts utilized some form of principal coaching or mentoring for new principals. Only one of the
districts described an induction program for new assistant principals. This district also offers a mentor program for new assistant principals.

One of the notable differences involves the mentor and coaching programs for new principals. Two of the three districts provide paid coaches for new principals, while the third district provides a buddy-coach who is not paid for their services. That same district also provides mentors for new assistant principals who are also not financially rewarded for their services, but receive rewards in the form of professional development opportunities.

Another notable difference among the three districts is the position of emphasis in their succession planning efforts. Carrington County described the most programs for teacher development than any of the other participating districts. Carrington County listed nine different programs in their succession planning strategies available to teachers, while Glendale County described four programs and Westin County described two programs for teachers. Westin County emphasizes the development of assistant principals through five different programs; while Glendale County listed three programs and Carrington County had two programs for assistant principals.

**Alignment to Existing Research**

The three participating districts’ succession planning strategies were in alignment with both the conceptual and empirical literature. Though the three participating districts had some similarities in their succession planning strategies, they all had some very unique aspects to their individual plans. Karaevli and Hall (2002) analyzed thirteen organizations known for strong succession planning and leadership identification and development
programs and determined there is no best way to manage succession planning. They found that the results of a needs assessment, coupled with the context within each organization will assist in developing the most appropriate plan. This work of Karaevli and Hall (2002) serves to validate why there are some similarities across the three districts in this study, yet some very distinct nuances within each district.

One similarity among the three districts that is in alignment with the literature is the value placed on the role of the principal. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) completed a meta-analysis of 70 studies involving 2,894 schools, approximately 1.1 million students, and 14,000 teachers and discovered there is a substantial relationship between school leadership and student achievement. Years ago, Hord (1993) wrote about the principal being the most significant factor regarding the success of change initiatives at the school level. Both Elmore (2000) and Fullan (2001, 2005) have written about the role leadership plays in creating and sustaining change in schools.

All three school districts participating in this study have succession planning strategies focused on the role of the principal. Goodlad (2004) believed that the first priority for all superintendents should be selecting and developing people who demonstrate high potential for the role of the principal. Large school districts around the nation, such as Fairfax, Long Beach, and Boston have leadership programs in place to develop effective principals. Boston’s Principal Fellowship is one of the most notable programs of Boston’s School Leadership Institute. Program leaders credit the success of the Principal Fellowship to three essential factors: the cohort model, residency experience, and coursework specifically
aligned to the challenges of the district (Takata, 2008). Two of these factors are evident in all three of the participating districts. The cohort concept is found in all three districts and in numerous instances within each district. In addition, developmental opportunities in the three districts are typically focused on specific district issues.

Each district participating in this study sponsors a Masters of School Administration cohort. These programs are available to current district employees and successful completion results in principal licensure. Schlueter and Walker (2008) believe one of the most important tasks facing school districts today is recruiting and selecting building level administrators. These cohort programs assist in this matter by creating internal pools of candidates with principal licensure.

Browne-Ferrigno (2003) discussed the importance of providing support once the position of principal is attained. All three districts utilize some form of a coaching or mentoring program. The Wallace Foundation (2007) determined five elements critical for success of a mentoring program: (a) formal criteria to select mentors, (b) formal training, (c) purposeful assignment of mentees, (d) compensation for mentors through financial means or professional growth opportunities, and (e) the program should be designed as a growth experience for all involved. All three participating districts follow these five elements. It should be noted that Glendale County and Carrington County provide financial compensation for their mentors and coaches, while Westin County provides compensation through a variety of professional growth opportunities.
A final strategy focusing on the role of the principal employed by all three districts is some type of leadership academy. In Glendale County and Westin County, the leadership academy is designed to assist in developing skills in preparation for the principalship. In the Carrington County, the leadership academy focuses on honing the skills of current principals, as well as other leaders.

In alignment with the work of Conger and Benjamin (1999), all three participating districts utilize a socialization approach. A socialization approach emphasizes the organization’s climate and style of doing business. Between the variety of induction, coaching, leadership institute, and cohort programs implemented by the three districts, the socialization approach is being clearly and overtly implemented. In fact, Westin County administrators often refer to their way of doing business as “the Westin Way.”

Using the socialization approach and providing in-house leadership development programs will allow for an internal pool of potential candidates to be developed. Bower (2007) and Collins (2001) studied different data sets and both determined that organization performance is significantly better when in-house candidates are successors to prominent leadership roles. By providing employees with programs to develop their leadership skills and even obtain principal licensure, all three districts are building their own internal leadership pipelines.

The research of Conger and Fulmer (2003) introduced the phrase “linchpin positions” referring to the “jobs that are essential to the long-term health of the organization” (p. 79). Conger and Fulmer’s research revealed “by monitoring the pipeline for these jobs, companies
can focus development programs on ensuring an adequate supply of appropriate talent” (p. 79). It is clear that all three districts believe that the principalship is a “linchpin position.” However, based on currently implemented succession planning strategies, two of the districts appear to consider other roles in this way as well. Westin County places considerable emphasis on the role of the assistant principalship, since it is the first positional role of leadership. Westin County offers a variety of developmental opportunities for the various levels of assistant principals: novice, intermediate, and expert. Carrington County emphasizes the role of the teacher in their succession planning strategies. Among other opportunities, Carrington County provides a variety of professional growth possibilities for teachers to develop their content knowledge, pedagogical expertise, or leadership skills.

When specifically considering individual positions, the work of Sobol, Harkins, and Conley (2007) promotes the grooming of successors for these important leadership roles. With this prior preparation, the hope is that when the time comes, the change in leadership is as seamless as possible. Carrington County is exploring this idea in some pilot initiatives within one of their Central Services divisions. Each senior level leader in this division is expected to be grooming their successor within the district, preferably within the department.

All three districts mentioned the desire to use technology to assist in their succession planning endeavors. Discussion in all three districts revolved around aligning core competencies to each position and tracking individuals’ progress along these competencies. They described the boundless possibilities database tracking could offer human resource departments. All three districts maintain online databases of attendance in professional
development activities, but none of these databases are being utilized to assist in filling positions as the need arises. In fact, district level administrators in Glendale County and Carrington County have already collaborated in conversations and exploration on this topic and have been in contact with a district leader in Chicago Public Schools. The district in Chicago maintains a human resources database of employees, including their qualifications and experience. When a position with specific requirements comes available, district administrators can query the database to determine the internal candidate pool of employees who satisfy the job requirements. Conger and Fulmer (2003) described the use of technology in making succession plans more transparent, so that employees understand the system and where they are in it. At the same time, senior leaders would be able to see with ease where there are gaps and where there is overflow.

Specifically regarding succession planning in education, one particular study stands out. Stutsman (2007) explored the shortage of well-qualified principals and succession planning policies in 67 different Florida school districts using a survey method. A total of 36 districts of various sizes participated with 64% of the participating districts having written succession planning policies in place. One of Stutsman’s (2007) most interesting findings revolved around the research question: Is there a relationship between the shortage of well-qualified candidates for principal vacancies and the presence of written succession planning policies? At both the elementary and middle school levels, regardless of district size, there was a significant relationship between the shortage of well-qualified principal candidates and the presence of written succession planning policies. Where there were written succession
planning policies in place, fewer shortages of well-qualified candidates were experienced. At the high school level, shortages of well-qualified candidates were reported regardless of whether or not there were written succession planning policies in place.

Stutsman’s (2007) findings are very interesting in regards to this study. All three of the districts have a variety of succession planning strategies in the implementation phase, yet none of the three participating districts have a comprehensive, formal, written succession plan. All of the participating districts have a variety of written documentation, but it is inconsistent, not only from district to district, but within each district, from succession planning strategy to succession planning strategy.

**Evaluating the Effectiveness of Succession Planning**

It has been previously mentioned that none of the participating districts had a formal, comprehensive written succession plan and corresponding evaluation in place. Regardless, all of the participating district administrators feel that succession planning is generally working in their districts, but they all gave the impression they were interested in improving their efforts. The researcher agrees that the succession planning strategies in these three districts do appear to be effective, but how do we really know? How do we know which areas can be improved?

Succession planning efforts and their impact can be measured, but you have to know where you began the journey. Completing an initial district needs assessment for a variety of positions would give you baseline data to understand the district’s current status. After this assessment is completed, historical trends for the district can be studied to predict future
turnover and then you can assure that the district has a ready pipeline by providing programs correlated to the specific needs. The implemented programs should be individually evaluated for effectiveness. Then, once the pipeline is in place, turnover and internal hire rates can be monitored to evaluate effectiveness of the plan as a whole.

As mentioned earlier, the superintendent of one of the participating districts has appointed 96 principals in his 40-month tenure with 90 principals being from the district, for a 93.75% internal hire rate. The superintendent specifically hired six principals from outside of the district, even though there were candidates available in the internal pipeline. He knew that these particular schools would be better served by an individual new to the district. These schools needed their status quo to be disturbed and it would be easier for someone without a history in the district to productively accomplish this task.

For every district, there is a different, ideal mix of internal and external hires. The context of the vacant position, within the larger context of the district, plays a key role in determining whether an internal or external candidate would be better suited for the job. If a district is low-performing, should they be internally grooming all of their future leaders? Or, would they be better served bringing in an outsider to get things moving in a new direction? Every district is different and each position must be evaluated independently in order to make the correct decision.

Similar to succession planning, evaluation is not a one-time event. It is an ongoing process. There should be both formative and summative components for the entire succession plan, as well as the individual strategies within the plan. Data from the various evaluations
should be used to drive decisions regarding programming efforts. In addition to assessing whether or not the pipeline is at the appropriate capacity, the readiness of the pipeline and the effectiveness of the leaders once they depart the pipeline should also be examined.

**Recommendations and Implications for Educational Practice**

Based on the literature review and the findings from this particular study in the area of succession planning, it is recommended that succession planning programs be based on a common framework at the state level, be a written plan that is comprehensive in nature, be housed in one department or division, and be made transparent to all stakeholders. Implementing these few items will make succession planning significantly more coherent and effective for districts. These items have specific implications at both the state and district levels.

*State Level*

In 2006, the Division for Leadership Development of the Maryland State Department of Education published a *Leadership Succession Planning Guide for Maryland Schools*. This document contains a rationale detailing the need for succession planning and its critical components. The document goes on to explore both the current and desired states in the areas of philosophy, identification, development, promotion, movement, and retention. There are overview questions that were considered when developing this guide that should be considered when developing any succession plan. This document also contains an outline and process questions to be used as guiding tools when creating a succession plan. The end of the document contains surveys, assessments, and other forms that administrators in this state may
find useful (Maryland State Department of Education, 2006). Using this guide as a common foundation, school districts in Maryland have a common vocabulary and a shared understanding of what should be considered when embarking on the task of developing a succession plan.

A common framework at the state level and housing succession planning in one department or division would allow for better collaboration in the area of succession planning across the southeastern state where this study took place. In addition to the common vocabulary and shared understandings, it is likely that comparable divisions or departments across districts would handle succession planning and people in similar positions across the state would be tasked with the responsibility of developing, implementing, updating, and managing each district’s succession plan. People in similar positions across the state often meet at state or regional level meetings and could collaborate by sharing successes and determining best practices in the context of the state. Two of the three participating districts already have staff members communicating with each other, as well as with others outside of the state, trying to determine the most effective approach to succession planning. These individuals showed strong interest in continuing the conversation and increasing the participants in order to enhance the learning and final outcomes.

These study participants bring to the forefront another significant difference across the three districts: the different types of district level staff that were interviewed for this research project. Personnel from various departments including professional development, induction, and human resources, were interviewed. Roles of those interviewed varied greatly
ranging from district senior leadership all the way down to the ground level of a person responsible for implementing the strategies by providing the leadership development opportunities themselves. Since there are no state guidelines or best practices to be followed in the area of succession planning, districts handle the task in a variety of ways and place the responsibility and project ownership in different departments. A state level framework has the potential to increase the likelihood of formal, written succession plans being in place, as well as similar staff working on the initiatives to encourage collaboration across districts within the state.

Another benefit to having one specific person responsible for the plan is that by having all of the succession planning strategies compiled in one place, in a single written document, a district can easily determine whether it is addressing all of its needs. Stutsman’s (2007) research showed a positive correlation between having written succession planning strategies in place and having a sufficient pipeline of qualified candidates for the principal position.

Part of developing this state level framework would involve a thorough study of all of the positions that should be addressed by a district succession plan, as well as the skill sets required to be effective in those positions. By having a common understanding of which skills are necessary to be successful in various roles, professional development programs to effectively prepare people to serve in these leadership roles must be developed.
District Level

With or without a state level framework, before implementation of any succession planning strategies occurs, a significant amount of prior planning must first take place. Districts must assess their current status in the various leadership positions and also assess their available internal pipeline of talent. Once this is determined, specific professional development strategies and other programs to meet the needs of the district can be planned and implemented.

Based on this research study, as well as the literature reviewed, cohort models and socialization opportunities should be utilized as components of succession planning strategies at all levels of the organization. Socialization opportunities should extend beyond the induction programs and be integrated into all professional growth opportunities to allow professionals experienced in the various roles to hone and enhance their skills based on the successes of their colleagues. Cohort models will assist in building strong networks and relationships across the district that will outlast the tenure of the cohort. Implementing these two approaches and ensuring the strategies utilized provide skills and knowledge that can be used in current, as well as potential, leadership roles would be most beneficial to the district.

The last recommendation is based on a combination of the literature and the researcher’s professional experience with succession planning strategies in one of the three districts. This final recommendation is to make the succession plan transparent to all stakeholders. In the past, succession plans were often highly secretive in order to maintain the motivation of the average employee who was not on the fast track. However, Conger and
Fulmer (2003) discovered “people will contribute more if they know what rung (of the corporate ladder) they are on” (p. 81). With this factor in mind, it is important for people to understand the system, where they currently are in it, and how to move through it to meet their career goals. If there is a barrier to an individual’s progress through the system, the individual must be conscious of it in order to be successful. A well-written, accessible succession plan can provide this guidance to employees at various levels within an organization.

Modified Theoretical Framework

After completing this study, the theoretical framework used to guide this study was re-evaluated. While the core components of the framework are still solid, some details need be added to clarify the structure of the framework, make it more substantial, and allow for greater alignment when replicated across districts.

The original model emphasized the individual succession planning strategies and their subsequent identification and development of participants and evaluation. The revised model, as represented in Figure 2, still includes the individual strategies, but places a greater emphasis on succession planning at the macro level. At this macro level, there should be ongoing planning, monitoring, and evaluation to assure that the needs of the district are being met.

The revised model delineates succession planning by various positions, such as classified staff, teacher, assistant principal, principal, and central services administrators. For each position, a needs assessment should be completed and various strategies developed and
modified based on the results. Completing a thorough and accurate needs assessment is crucial in order for the appropriate succession planning strategies to be developed.

Similar to the original model, once each strategy is developed, participants must be identified for that particular strategy. Employing identification methods beyond self-selection is highly recommended. After participants are identified, the next step is to develop them. The researcher advocates utilizing a cohort model where participants are grouped together and progress through the developmental activities together.

Finally, each strategy should be evaluated. It is strongly suggested that both formative and summative evaluation be used to monitor and enhance each strategy. When evaluating each strategy, the concept of sustainability should be addressed, as well as the effectiveness
of the individual strategy. The compilation of strategies for each particular position should also be evaluated as a whole to determine effectiveness of the succession planning strategies. Once this evaluation is complete, district needs should be re-assessed for the position and the cycle continues. The same cycle is repeated for the various positions.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

While this study accomplished what it was designed to do, there is a significant amount of room for further research in the area of succession planning in the field of education. The No Child Left Behind legislation pushes for the implementation of research-based strategies and in the area of succession planning in education, that research base is too shallow to hold much substance. School leaders and even education lawmakers readily acknowledge the value of recruiting and retaining high quality personnel. In the southeastern state in which this study took place, there is currently a requirement for all administrators to acquire licensure renewal credits in the area of retention and recruitment.

Since the sample size for this particular study was small, expanding the study to include more school districts will provide additional information and perhaps further insight into the concept of succession planning in school districts. To begin with, expanding the study to other districts in the same state, which would be operating within the same context, would be interesting. It would be of specific interest to explore districts of various sizes and locations in the state to include rural, suburban, and urban districts and analyze what type of role these factors play in the level of succession planning taking place in the district.
Expanding this study outside of the state to include districts of similar sizes and demographics across the nation is also likely to provide additional information.

This same study could also be replicated with a few minor adjustments to obtain the building-level perspective of district succession planning strategies. Staff at the school level may have a very different perception of the district’s succession planning strategies. It would be interesting to compare the perspectives of district level administrators, principals, and teachers. It would also be interesting to explore the perspectives of succession planning strategy participants.

This study utilized a qualitative methodology to explore the concept of succession planning. Further research, perhaps using a quantitative methodology, to analyze the effectiveness of succession planning in school districts would provide education leaders with data to support why they should be engaging in succession planning activities in their districts. This survey could collect information regarding succession planning strategies for a variety of positions and turnover rates. Again, it would be interesting to survey all of the districts in this particular state. The results of this quantitative study could provide a framework of what specific succession planning initiatives are the most effective and yield the highest returns, so that districts just beginning to develop succession plans can match their needs to strategies that have already been proven effective.

A final area to explore would be the idea of organizational capacity and the effectiveness of succession planning. Are districts actually strengthening the organization through their succession planning strategies or are they merely developing the participating
individuals? A qualitative study examining the effectiveness of succession planning strategies, along with the perspectives of participants and district level leaders could have some ramifications for the manner in which strategies are implemented.

Summary

This research study explored the concept of succession planning in the field of education. This concept, which has been a mainstream idea in the business world for some time now, is relatively new in the education realm. This particular study explored the concept in three large school districts in one southeastern state. Large school districts were chosen with the hypothesis that they would be likely to have some succession planning strategies in place as a result of their sheer size. The hypothesis proved correct and a variety of strategies were found across the three districts, though none of the districts had a formalized, written document outlining a comprehensive plan.

All of the participating school districts offered some type of succession planning strategy at the teacher, assistant principal, principal, and central services levels. Almost all of the strategies utilized self-selection into the initiative itself, or the application process into the initiative. All of the participating districts reported high sustainability of the strategies as a result of the people involved in the strategies, the culture of the district, and the structure of the strategies. Also, all of the participating districts reported limited evaluation of succession planning as a whole program, though they did all evaluate succession planning strategies in the areas of participant satisfaction and learning levels.
In conclusion, recall the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning’s 2005 research which reported that 51% of principals in one southeastern state are or will be eligible for retirement in the next five years (Waters, 2006). This data shows there is a significant need for succession planning in education for the principal position. The research study outlined in this dissertation demonstrates there is inherent, significant value in implementing succession planning strategies for other leadership roles as well.

Whether the need is a result of retirements, turnover, or growth, school districts must have a strong bench of candidates to fill leadership positions as the need arises so they are not caught in a reactive crisis mode wherein they are forced to hire less-than-ideal personnel to fill openings. As previously mentioned, succession planning is a process, not an event, and it takes time, planning, and effort. Similar to a successful athletic coach, forward thinking school districts, their school boards, superintendents, and senior leaders would be well-advised to regularly consider the question, “What is your district’s bench strength?”
REFERENCES


Appendices
Appendix A: Complete List of Documents and Artifacts Examined

Glendale County Schools

- Alternative Certification Track (brochure)
- Alternative Certification Track (PowerPoint presentation)
- Alternative Certification Track Alignment to State Professional Teaching Standards (matrix)
- Alternative Certification Track Curriculum Alignment to State Professional Teaching Standards (matrix)
- District website
- Executive Mentoring Interim Report
- Fact Sheet-By the Numbers (document)
- Lateral Entry Resource and Advising Center (brochure)
- Leadership Academy Proposal
- Mentor Resources Handbook
- Organization Chart
- Pay for Performance Teacher Incentive Plan Evaluation Plan
- Pay for Performance Teacher Incentive Plan External Evaluation Report year one
- Pay for Performance Teacher Incentive Plan External Evaluation Report year two
- Pay for Performance Teacher Incentive Plan Overview (brochure)
- Pay for Performance Teacher Incentive Plan Overview (PowerPoint)
- Pay for Performance Teacher Incentive Plan Overview (video)
- State Report Card for District
- Strategic Plan 2012

Carrington County Schools
- Achievement (flyer)
- Annual Report
- Board of Education Vision, Mission, and Core Beliefs and Commitments (document)
- District website
- Diversity (flyer)
- Geographic Learning Communities (flyer)
- Learning Community Demographics
- Learning Community Organizational Chart
- Organization Charts for Central Services
- Principal Mentor Program (overview report)
- State Report Card for District
- Strategic Plan 2010
- Strategic Plan 2010 (PowerPoint presentation)
- The Achievement Zone Learning Community overview
- Theory of Action for Improved Student Achievement (document)
- WOW! Did you know? (flyer)
Westin County Schools

- A Framework for School Leadership Succession Planning (PowerPoint presentation)
- A Stepwise Model to Create and Sustain Systematic School Leadership Succession Planning (document)
- Building Future Leaders through Succession Planning (document)
- District website
- Leadership Skills Development Highlights (document)
- Leadership Succession Planning Critical Transition Points (document)
- Leadership Succession Planning Proposed Programs (document)
- Organization Chart
- School System Statistics and Maps (document)
- Seven Critical Functions of Leadership Model (document)
- State Report Card for District
- Succession Planning and 7 Critical Functions of Leadership (PowerPoint presentation)
- Succession Planning Data Points (document)
- Superintendent’s Performance Goals Implementation Status Report
- Superintendent’s Plan for Student Success
Appendix B: Structured Interview Guide

Structured Interview Guide

Describe your role in the district and your responsibilities in regard to succession planning.

1) How is succession planning defined in your school district? (research question #2)

2) What factors led your district to develop succession planning strategies? (research question #1)

3) Describe any program your district may have in place to recruit and train new assistant principals and/or principals. (research question #2)
   a) Describe any formal socialization programs, including, but not limited to, induction or mentoring, your district may have for new assistant principals and/or principals. (research question #2)
   b) How does your district identify participants in this succession planning initiative? (research question #2)
   c) Can you describe to me what you feel are the greatest strengths of this succession planning strategy? (research question #2)
   d) What makes this succession planning strategy sustainable over time? (research question #3)
   e) In what ways does your district assess the effectiveness of this succession planning strategy? (research question #3)
   f) If you had the power to change one or two things about this succession planning strategy, and there were no other obstacles in place (such as finances), what would you change? (research questions #2, #3, and #4)

4) Describe any other components of succession planning in your district we have not already discussed. (research question #2)
   *Repeat sub questions 3b-3f as necessary*

5) In what ways does your district assess the effectiveness of its succession planning model as a whole? (research question #3)

6) Is there anything else I have not covered that you would like to add?
Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: What is your bench strength? An exploration of succession planning in three large school districts in a southeastern state.

Principal Investigator: Francine Riddick       Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Lance D. Fusarelli

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher named above.

What is the purpose of this study?
This study is being conducted to explore how three large school districts in one southeastern state, employ various succession planning strategies to assist in filling principal and assistant principal vacancies. This study is important because large school districts have numerous principal and assistant principal positions and in recent years these roles have become extremely complex and less desirable. In addition, previous research shows that a large proportion of people currently in these positions will be retiring in the next few years and the current supply will not be able to meet anticipated demand. This study will examine how three different large school districts in a southeastern state are preparing people to fill these roles in their districts.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an initial interview, provide access to relevant documents and other materials, and be available for further follow-up and clarification. Approximately 60-90 minutes of your time will be needed. Interviews will take place at a time and location of your convenience. It is preferred the interviews take place in person within your district, but it is possible due to unforeseen circumstances they may occur via telephone or video conference. All interviews will be digitally recorded and stored on the researcher’s personal computer with a backup on CD. All recordings will be destroyed at the completion of the dissertation process.
Risks
There are no known risks. This is a voluntary project and no subject is expected to participate if uncomfortable.

Benefits
There is no direct benefit to be gained by the subject. An indirect benefit will be access to the final report which will contain information that can be useful to the participants’ school districts. To date, very little research has been conducted on succession planning in the K-12 education setting. The final report will include information on prior research regarding succession planning in both the private and public sectors, as well as new information collected and analyzed from three large school districts in a southeastern state.

Confidentiality
The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored by the researcher in a secure location with all references to individuals removed. The state in which the study is taking place will be masked, as well as district identity. In addition, personal identifiers, including specific names and job titles will not be used.

Compensation
You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

What if you have questions about this study?
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Francine Riddick, at 120 Torrey Pines Drive, Clayton, NC 27527, fpriddick@juno.com, or 919-218-6535.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514), or Joe Rabiega, IRB Coordinator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-7515).

Consent To Participate
“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time.”

Subject's signature_______________________________________Date __________

Investigator's signature___________________________________Date __________