

ABSTRACT

SMITH, DAMESHA ASHAWN. To the Principal's Office, A Case Study of the Challenges and Experiences of First Year School Principals. (Under the direction of Dr. Lance Fusarelli).

The job of the principal has changed drastically and new principals must be prepared to lead in the 21st century. One of the major changes in the principalship has been the range of expectations placed on the position; these expectations have moved from demands for management and control, with presumptions for forced compliance, to the demand for an educational leader who can foster staff development, program improvement, parent involvement, community support, and student growth (Sybouts & Wendel, 1994). The principal is expected to be an expert in numerous arenas to effectively lead a school.

The purpose of this case study is to examine the challenges and experiences of first year principals in an effort to provide insight into the issues and problems faced by new principals working in a high-stakes accountability environment; specifically, what problems they encounter and what they identify as professional development needs to address those issues. This research study will focus on a multiple case study. The researcher will seek to understand the experiences, challenges, and preparation of first year principals. The research questions, data collection, and findings will revolve around first year principals. This multiple case study will describe the experiences of first year principals in an effort to expand the research on this topic.

The findings indicate that the key areas of concern for first year principals include fiscal management, the importance of building relationships, human resource management, having difficult conversations, the importance of having a mentor, time management, and creating and implementing vision/expectations in the school.

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To the Principal's Office: A Case Study of the Challenges and Experiences of
First Year School Principals

by
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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my first teachers, father and mother Alton and Doris Smith. They have been my friends, supporters, role models, and the co-presidents of my fan club. Additionally, they have been consistent passengers along the road of life encouraging me to continue even when I didn't think it was possible.

I am eternally grateful for their love and continuous support.

BIOGRAPHY

Damesha Ashawn Smith was born and raised in Goldsboro, North Carolina. She matriculated through the Wayne County Public School System and graduated in 1999 from Goldsboro High School. She went on to pursue her Bachelors of Arts in History Education from Winston-Salem State University, where she graduated with honors in 2003.

Upon graduation, she began teaching 8th grade language arts and social studies at Brogden Middle School in Dudley, NC. After teaching for several years she accepted the position as literacy coach. She later became a teaching and learning coach where she served as a mentor for the beginning teachers in Wayne County. After completing her Master of School Administration degree from East Carolina University, she became an assistant principal at Eastern Wayne Elementary School in Goldsboro, NC. In 2013, she accepted the position of Title I Coordinator for Wayne County Public Schools.

She currently resides in Goldsboro, North Carolina.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

During the early 1800s attendance in schools began to increase: therefore the need for more schools and an individual to lead the school was needed. With this need, schools were divided by grade level and the position of the “principal teacher” was established. Kafka (2009) states, “This person, almost always a man, was a teacher who also carried out some clerical and administrative duties that kept the school in order, such as assigning classes, conducting discipline, maintaining the building, taking attendance, and ensuring that school began and ended on time” (p. 321). Because of the responsibilities of the principal he was also responsible for communicating with those who were in charge of the school such as the superintendent or the board of education. Later, the principal lost the teaching responsibilities but gained the responsibilities of manager, administrator, supervisor, instructional leader, and even politician (Kafka, 2009). Kafka cited Pearce’s (1935) role of the first principal. The role of the principal was as follows:

He gave orders, and enforced them. He directed, advised, and instructed teachers. He classified pupils, disciplined them, and enforced safeguards designed to protect their health and morals. He supervised and rated janitors. He requisitioned all educational, and frequently all maintenance, supplies. Parents sought his advice, and respected his regulations. (Kafka, 2009, p. 321)

School principals were managers of the schools. They provided support to teachers while ensuring the general running of the school. During this time principals were independent.

Kafka (2009) argues principals were able to lead their schools because the superintendents of this time granted them independence and autonomy in their schools.

Upon entering the principal's office for the first time, the men and women who are newly appointed as principal experience many emotions. They may feel excited about the upcoming school year, yet unprepared for the task at hand. Many school administrators have previously been assistant principals dealing with the three Bs: books, buses, and behinds. The job of assistant principal often did not adequately prepare the principal to assume the position as the leader of the school. Therefore, a principal's first day on the job is often full of anxiety. School administrators are handed the keys to the school and are expected to lead the school into excellence with little guidance.

School administrators leading in the 21st century are required to lead in many capacities. In a Southeastern State, principals must be strategic, instructional, cultural, human resource, managerial, external development, and micro-political leaders (DPI, 2010). These qualities are necessary to create a school culture that is conducive for learning and promotes excellence by students and staff members. The State and the superintendents of school districts require and evaluate principals on these leadership qualities; therefore, principals must possess these qualities on day one of entering the principal's office.

In addition to being proficient in the areas of leadership required by the state and superintendent, the principal must also be proficient in the day-to-day areas of running a school. Principals must handle the physical and financial management of the school. Principals must work with teachers, staff, parents, and students in the school. The community is another stakeholder group with whom principals must interact to create a

successful school. All of these stakeholders are necessary for the success of a school. The job of principals has changed drastically and new principals must be prepared to lead in the 21st century. One of the major changes in the principalship has been the range of expectations placed on the position; these expectations have moved from demands for management and control, with presumptions for forced compliance, to the demand for an educational leader who can foster staff development, program improvement, parent involvement, community support, and student growth (Sybouts & Wendel, 1994). The principal is expected to be an expert in numerous arenas to effectively lead a school. Walker and Qian (2006) state “principals are expected to restructure schools and implement new educational paradigms that focus on pedagogical findings, foster the ideals of a just and humane educational system and prepare the populace to make moral and ethical decisions in an ever-changing society” (p. 298).

Most principals are prepared through school leadership programs. In these leadership programs principals are required to write papers, analyze cases, and discuss happenings that could possibly occur during the regular school day. However, the preparation given by a school leadership program does not fully prepare principals for the day-to-day demands of the job. Lovely (2004) states, “In a university class, you might read a case study on searching a school locker for drugs and debate with classmates whether the search should be conducted. As a principal, you hear about possible drugs in a locker 10 minutes before dismissal and you need to act quickly” (p. 1). Principals must be able to interpret the methods learned in the university classroom and apply it to the individual school they have been assigned to lead. Lovely (2004) argues many professions require a simulated learning

experience before licensure can occur. She cites teachers, doctors, pilots, and police officers as professionals who have an on-the-job training program to better equip those professionals to be prepared to complete their job. She then goes on to state that principals are required to be successful without any “behind-the-wheel” experience. This lack of experience can often hinder the success of K-12 school principals. Principals are required to promote success in their school building without training on how to make this happen.

Upon entering the principal’s office for the first time, the principal must decide their vision and mission of the school. In addition to the vision and mission, they must also determine their leadership style. The expectations of the staff and students in which he/she leads must also be established. Sybouts (1994) states leadership is the first and most important essential element for a good principal. The principal must be a leader. The principal must have the ability to provide direction and to motivate the people whom they lead. Martin Luther King Jr. and Winston Churchill were cited by Sybouts (1994) because of their leadership skills and their ability to inspire their followers. School principals must possess the same leadership qualities to create success in a school building.

Although the role of the principal has changed drastically, principals are still required to manage their school in addition to other responsibilities. New principals must be equipped to manage the school, be instructional leaders, manage finances, and provide meaningful professional development, along with several other responsibilities.

Statement of the Problem

Because there is no national curriculum or national licensing requirements for training for new principals, training and licensure programs vary by state. Magee (2011)

attributes this lack of training to the feeling of isolation and being overwhelmed as they transition into a new leadership role. Little research is available to provide novice principals with a guide into the principalship during their first few years. Therefore, principals are often left to blaze new trails on their own. In many instances, new principals receive their jobs and a ring of keys in which they have no idea which key goes where or how to open anything. Given this situation, and the enormous pressure principals are under to produce results quickly, effective training and professional development programs are more important than ever.

Alvy and Robbins (1998) identify three developmental stages for new principals: the anticipatory socialization stage, the encounter stage, and the insider stage. In the anticipatory stage the principal has first been selected and has decided to take the job as principal. They must realign themselves to the new school in which they have been chosen to lead. Mentally, they must transition into the new position, leaving their old job, friends and co-workers behind. In the encounter stage, the principal begins their new position and must learn the routines of the new school. The insider stage allows the principal to develop relationships in the school and the principal is accepted as a member of the new school. This process takes time and effort on the behalf of the principal. Many principals are leaders in their former schools and must leave their comfortable positions to move to a school where they are unfamiliar and unknown. This fear of the unknown creates anxiety for the principal. Novice principals must understand that these feelings are normal and are felt amongst most new school administrators.

Williams (2011) argues that the school principal is the key to achieving excellence in schools. Because of the importance of the principal in the success of a school, school principals should be better prepared to lead especially in the beginning years when they are least experienced. This preparation must be in addition to the training given in principal preparation programs. Principals will benefit from professional development that specifically discusses situations relevant to their county rather than a more generalized approach.

Principals must have ongoing professional development that provides research based strategies and ideals that can better prepare them for leadership in their schools. Keith (2011) cites several topics for professional development for principals. These topics include creating a high stakes accountability environment, data-driven decision making, prioritizing daily challenges, distributed leadership, parental involvement, amongst several others. Keith (2011) argues effective programs should be long termed, carefully planned, job embedded, and focus on student achievement and how it is reached. Programs should support reflective practice, provide opportunities to work, discuss and solve problems with peers and coaching.

Purpose of the Study

School principals are required to meet high expectations but are often not properly skilled to achieve the goals required by their county or state. At the completion of the university program and working as an assistant principal, administrators are expected to be prepared for their first position as school principal. Novice principals entering the principal's office for the first time must be prepared to manage a school and must be equipped with the necessary tools to lead in today's schools. According to Walker and Qian (2006), "At the

very least, they are expected to have a clear understanding of their role, including how to exercise power, appropriately, how to maintain and/or establish professional relationships, and to design process and structures to facilitate goal achievement” (p. 299). This is not always the case.

The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges and experiences of first year principals in an effort to provide insight into the issues and problems faced by new principals working in a high-stakes accountability environment; specifically, what problems they encounter and what they identify as professional development needs to address those issues.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be explored in the study.

1. What are the challenges first year principals face?
2. What types of experiences, training, or preparation do first year principals perceive as necessary for their success?

Significance of the Study

In anecdotal discussions with principals in their first year, the main concern prevalent was the lack of preparation that was provided prior to obtaining the principal’s office. These principals would have benefited from a training program, staff development, or mentoring program for the beginning of their career as principal. In many cases, counties do not have a program or support system for novice principals. This study will highlight and identify needed areas of experience, training, or preparation for preparing new principals. Williams (2011) stresses the importance of supporting and nurturing first year principals in an effort to understand the challenges facing new school principals. She quotes Leithwood, Louis,

Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004), “Leadership not only matters, it is second only to teaching among school related factors in its impact upon student learning” (p. 5).

While some research exists on the needs of new principals, it is widely recognized that the job of the principal had changed dramatically with the advent of high-stakes testing, accountability, and data driven instruction. According to Keith (2011):

The operational demands that principals have always faced- school safety, keeping the buses on a running schedule, contending with mounds of paperwork, disciplining students, mediating adult interpersonal relationships, handling central office request and requirements, etc. have not gone away. However, the principal also needs special capabilities for leadership in order to be an instructional leader: recruiting teachers loyal to the common task of teaching a specific group of children, knowing individual teachers well enough to suggest specific improvements, and creating a culture in which a deep knowledge of instruction and learning serves as a foundation for an interdependent professional community. (p. 98)

In an effort to obtain effective school leadership, school principals must have necessary professional knowledge and skills to lead the school.

New principals are often unaware of the best methods to address issues that arise. New principals work to address the issues to the best of their ability, but later learn better methods to address these issues. Routines, professional development, management of fiscal services, and human resource development are addressed by novice principals. The study will highlight the challenges and experiences of first year principals. This study will provide tools necessary based on the day to day experiences of first year principals, and interviews of

first year principals to shed insight into the types of training, professional development, and support most needed by novice principals.

Overview of Methodological Approach

This research study will focus on a multiple case study. The researcher will seek to understand the experiences, challenges, and preparation of first year principals. The research questions, data collection, and findings will revolve around first year principals. This multiple case study will describe the experiences of first year principals in an effort to expand the research on this topic. A multi-case study may strengthen the findings through deliberate and contrasting comparisons of the data (Yin, 2003). In this study, the multiple case studies will describe the experiences of first year principals in an effort to expand research on this topic. Each first year principal will represent a separate case.

Principals in their first year in the principalship will be chosen to participate in this study. The principals will be chosen because of their year of experience in the principalship. They will vary in total years of experience in education and will lead in varying levels of schools.

Data will be collected through the use of interviews, and the examination of the day to day experiences of the principals. Interviews will be the secondary method for collecting data during the study. Each principal will be interviewed to share his or her individual experiences and challenges that they face as a new principal. The examination of the day to day experiences of the first year principals through social networking will be the primary focus of this study. Finally, the examination of documents will be essential to this study.

Any document that is beneficial to new principals as they transition into the principalship will be archived for this study.

Organization of the Study

This study will be organized into five chapters. Chapter One presented the background, purpose, significance of study, and overview of methodological approach. Chapter Two will present current research on novice principals, including their preparation and experiences in the position. Chapter Three will present the methodology to be used in the study. Chapter Four will present the findings of the study. Chapter Five will conclude the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to examine tools and strategies needed to create effective leadership practices for 21st century school administrators. This literature review will explore the methods of preparation, job descriptions, school administrator as leaders, socialization, mentoring, the role of the principal, building relationships, instructional leadership, leadership styles, and the evaluation of leadership for school administrators.

School principals are required to complete the enormous task of effectively running school buildings. However, in many instances principals are in their fourth or fifth year of being a school principal before they are aware of the best practices for running a school. New principals are provided with the keys to the building and often have no idea how to run the school. Lovely (2004), argues in university programs, an extensive amount of time is spent developing leadership skills, but in the principalship a situation occurs that needs a resolution in ten minutes. New principals may feel unprepared to run schools because of the lack of university preparation and the lack of support from veteran principals. Alvy and Robbins (1998) state “newcomers often feel vulnerable because they are unsure of how the new system or operation works as they are learning the ropes” (p. 4). This study will highlight the process of preparing new principals to be successful as principals.

School administrators are often not equipped with the tools necessary to lead schools in the 21st century. Bottom, O’Neill, Fry, and Hill (2003) of the Southern Regional

Education Board state, “School district leaders frequently report that the supply of principals is diminishing rapidly. However, the problem is not a lack of certified principals but rather a lack of qualified principals. Every state has plenty of people with certificates as school administrators. No state has plenty of people with the knowledge and skills to lead schools to excellence” (p. 1). Creating a clear understanding of the job task will create greater understanding and preparation for school administrator to become effective leaders. According to Bartholomew and Fusarelli (2003), “The need to transform schools into learning communities focused on student achievement, preparing students for higher education, the workforce and to become productive citizens has brought much attention to the role of school leadership” (p. 291).

School Administration Training Programs

School administration training programs have been required to redesign their training programs to focus less on creating efficient managers and focus more on developing leaders who are capable of leading schools to high levels of student performance (Educational Development Center, 2009). Current administration programs must include a rigorous and relevant curriculum that has a strong focus on instructional leadership. The Educational Development Center (2009) argues, “Course content is moving away from traditional lecture formats to more project based learning experiences that are directly linked to schools and aligned to principal performance standards” (p. 1). Aspiring principals must be prepared to be instructional leaders and must be trained to provide support to their teachers and students. “Principal preparation programs are, in theory, designed to ensure that aspiring principals

develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for job success” (Briggs, Cheney, Davis, & Moll, 2013, p. 20).

Colleges and universities across the nation recognize the need to train school administrators; therefore, school administration programs are offered to provide licensure for school leaders. The content of the programs vary by school and state. Because of the variation in programs the rigor of the programs has been questioned. Murphy (2006) cites several issues that plague school administration programs. “Critics have uncovered serious problems in (a) ways students are recruited and selected into training programs; (b) the education they receive once there-including the content emphasized and the pedagogical strategies employed; (c) the methods used to assess academic fitness; and (d) the procedures developed to certify and select principals and superintendents” (Murphy, 2006, p. 34). The discrepancy in the methods for educating potential school administrators creates reasons for questioning the effectiveness of the school administrator because the administrator may or may not have received the lessons needed to effectively lead a school. Depending on the rigor of the program, the principal may or may not be prepared to assume the role of the principal with all of the duties and responsibilities that it entails.

School administration training programs are designed to prepare school administrators to become effective leaders. The programs must prepare leaders to lead, which is done through a relevant and rigorous curriculum. Murphy (2006) suggests a focus on teaching and learning in addition to technology integration for school administrators. School administrators must work to ensure the staff members are creating lessons that prepare students for life in the 21st century. The use of technology is imperative in the

preparation for this century. In addition to teaching and learning, Murphy (2006) places an emphasis on internships and principal simulations. Experience is often the best teacher; therefore, principals who have prior experiences under the supervision of another principal will be more familiar with topics and situations that may occur.

In addition to technology school administration training programs must have professors who are in touch with the day-to-day experiences of school administrators. Murphy (1991) provides literature on the importance of professors providing more real life application for practitioners. He begins by stating “It is difficult to understand how we can justify employing large numbers of professors to educate and train perspective school leaders about experiences of which they have no firsthand knowledge, issues to which they have received minimal exposure in their degree programs and working conditions that may show very little willingness to try to understand” (Murphy, 1991, p. 22). Murphy (1991) suggests several strategies that will better assist professor in effectively preparing school administrators.

- Establish clinically based sabbaticals
- Develop positions for clinical professors
- Reestablish/rejuvenate service units
- Develop publications that are focused on clinical issues

Murphy argues these strategies will provide more meaningful experiences for school administrators in training programs. Professors will have a more realistic concept of the day to day occurrences of school administrators, therefore providing aspiring administrators a more practical view of administration.

Mitgang (2012) of the Wallace Foundation presented five lessons for leadership training. Of these five, lesson two states that “aspiring principals should attend pre-service training that prepares them to lead improved instruction and school change, not just manage buildings” (p. 9). The lesson presents the idea that aspiring principals should be prepared to create processes to increase high quality teaching, enhance teacher productivity, and to provide teachers with the tools necessary to implement classroom strategies that increase student learning. Aspiring principals should have the knowledge and understanding to provide staff development and use data to further enhance the skills of teachers. This training should be conducted in school administration programs, which prepare principals to be leaders in their schools.

The Rainwater Leadership Alliance was created to provide quality support to the leadership of the public school system. The Rainwater Leadership Alliance website (2013) states “RLA exists to share data, provide exemplars, and promote and scale effective methods to develop and support PK–12 school leaders” (p. 1). The RLA has implemented principal preparation programs that focus on coursework, a residency and coaching. All three of these areas are vital and mutually dependent on each other. Five cohorts have been established which focus on the principles of strengthening the leadership of aspiring principals, yet focus on the individual needs of the areas represented. “RLA members believe strongly that fellows learn the most from actually engaging in the work, making mistakes, and building on successes. Ongoing feedback from a mentor-principal, a coach, a cohort peer, and/or others accelerates this learning and is something RLA programs universally value” (Cheney, Davis, Garrett, & Holleran, 2010, p. 80).

Because of the range of curriculum in school administration training programs, in 2009 the Education Development Center designed Quality Measure rubrics which measure the quality of indicators that are essential for an effective principal education program. The rubrics are designed to portray the latest information concerning principal preparation, advancements in the field of administration, information concerning the ISLLC standards, and the evaluation of principals. “The Quality Measures approach is based on the premise that effective, high-quality leadership development programs are standards-based and prepare school leaders with the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to lead schools to high levels of student performance” (Educational Development Center, 2009, p. 5).

School administrator training and internship programs are based on the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium. According to Militello, Alsbury, Fusarelli and Warren (2013), the ISLLC standards provide national standards for administrator training programs. They went on to suggest school administrators were in need of guidelines that outline knowledge necessary to be an effective school administrator. The ISLLC Standards provide a basis and commonality for school administration training programs. Fusarelli, et al. (2010) state, “The research foundation upon which the ISLLC standards were developed suggests high levels of student academic achievement link directly back to school-leadership influences. Therefore, leaders who are trained in, licensed under, and evaluated on their effective implementation of the ISLLC standards should link to improve student achievement” (p. 9). These standards were designed in 1996 and revised in 2008 and 2012 to create consistency among school principals across the United States. The ISLLC standards are presented in Table 1 below.

<p>Table 1: 2012 ISLLC Standards</p>
<p>Standard 1: Setting a widely shared vision for learning An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.</p>
<p>Table 1 Continued</p>
<p>Standard 2: Developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.</p>
<p>Standard 3: Ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.</p>
<p>Standard 4: Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.</p>
<p>Standard 5: Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.</p>
<p>Standard 6: Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and cultural contexts An education leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.</p>

School Administration Training Programs in the South

In a southern state there are 13 institutions offering programs in School Administration. According to the Department of Public Instruction (2010) school administration programs should prepare leaders who have the knowledge, skills and dispositions to create success for all students. The requirements for acceptance into school administration programs vary by university; however, most require a prescribed or recommended grade point average and a satisfactory score on a standardized exam. In addition to these requirements, several schools also require references and an essay (DPI, 2010).

According to DPI (2010), there are no regulations on the specific classes necessary to obtain a degree in school administration. Therefore, courses necessary for licensure vary by school. “Several assistant principals believed courses such as school finance, the superintendency, and school boards were meaningful because the coursework gave them practical knowledge that could be readily applied in their daily work environments” (Bartholomew & Fusarelli, 2003, p. 296). Bartholomew and Fusarelli (2003) also suggest courses in school budgets, staffing, and working with diverse groups would also be helpful to future administrators.

Many colleges and universities offer internship programs which prepare educators for leadership roles. These programs are designed to present the candidate with practical day-to-day experiences, support the candidate’s leadership development, and other competencies as needed (Internship Manual, 2011). Among the considerations on which reflective decisions should be based is the need for preparing educators. Additionally, the educators are prepared

to help promote the vision of learning in a school community, promote and maintain a positive school culture for learning through effective instructional programs, best practices to student learning, collaborate with all stakeholders, and advocate for all students. Fusarelli, et al. (2010), argue that “new school leaders must be prepared to be change agents, and therefore the nature of leadership preparation must change as well” (p. 2).

After completing a school administration program, to become a practicing administrator, licensure must be obtained. Some states still require applicants to pass the School Leaders Licensure Assessment; however, others such as have eliminated the testing requirement and will grant an administrative license upon the recommendation of the preparation or alternative license program (DPI, 2010).

With the Race to the Top funding, Regional Leadership Academies have been developed. The purpose of these academies is to “increase the number of principals qualified to lead transformational change in low-performing schools in both rural and urban areas” (CERE, 2012, p. 2). The academies are designed to prepare school administrators, provide support during their first administrative years and provide professional development to novice principals. The academies differ from traditional licensure programs because they are more cost effective, are specifically for those who will lead in low-performing rural and urban schools, provide early career support and ongoing professional development for school administrators in the program according to the Consortium for Educational Research and Evaluation (2012). Three leadership academies have been established to create transformational leaders for low-performing schools. The participants of these academies receive Principal Licensure at the conclusion of the school administration program.

Job Description

Ubben, Hughes, and Norris (2001) outlined five functional aspects that describe the principalship inside and outside of the school. “The inside functions include staffing and instructional improvement, curriculum development, student services, and resource procurement and building utilization, including budgeting and maintenance. The outside function is public relations” (Ubben et al., 2001, p. 11). The job description of a school principal is enormous and may vary from day to day however, several factors remain constant. Ubben, et al. (2001) cited the National Association of Secondary School Principal’s six abilities that every school principal must possess, which are:

- The ability to plan and organize work
- The ability to work with and lead others
- The ability to analyze problems and make decisions
- The ability to communicate orally and in writing
- The ability to perceive the needs and concerns of others
- The ability to perform under pressure

The job description of a school administrator is outlined by the state and by individual school districts; however, the overview of the job of a principal has been outlined by several researchers. The Wallace Foundation (2011, p. 6) outlined five key responsibilities that principals must possess which are:

- Shaping a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards.
- Creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail.

- Cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision.
- Improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn at their utmost.
- Managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement.

The Wallace Foundation has outlined the previous principles that school administrators must have to fulfill their job responsibilities. The vision must be established and implemented by the school administrator to create buy-in by the remainder of the staff. Prior to the years of academic accountability, Wallace (2011) describes principals as school managers; they must now assume the role of instructional leaders. School principals must create a learning environment that is conducive for learning. Students and staff must understand school is a place where they are able to learn in a safe and orderly environment. In addition, principals must also create leadership opportunities for others to create teacher leaders in their school.

The State Board of Education adopted the job description of a principal and assistant principal in 1987. Table 2 presents the job descriptions for the school principal and assistant principal (DPI, 2011).

Table 2: Job Description of School Administrators, (DPI, 2011)	
<i>Principal</i> To serve as chief administrator of a school in developing and implementing policies, programs, curriculum activities and budgets in a manner that promotes the educational development of each student and the professional	<i>Assistant Principal</i> Serves as a member of the administrative team to develop and implement the total school program.

Table 2 Continued	
development of each staff member.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports to the superintendent • Supervises all school personnel • General planning • General coordination • Enhancement of personnel skills • School objectives • Curriculum objectives • Establishes formal work relationships • Facilitates organizational efficiency • New staff and students • Community • Supplies and equipment • Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports to the principal • Supervises those assigned by the principal • Pre-class orientation • Planning school program • Implementing school program • Evaluation and remediation of school program • Involving the staff in budgeting allocations • Keeping professionally competent • Coordinating budgets and schedules • Handling disciplinary procedures • Coordinating and communicating school formal structure • Coordinating school services and resources • Facilitating organizational efficiency • Assisting in record keeping.

The contents of Table 2 identify the basic job functions of the principal and assistant principal. The contents of the table are not all inclusive of the job of a school administrator. School administrators are required to wear many hats on a daily basis. Ubben et al. (2001) believes “today’s school principals have been charged with the task of shaping their schools to become outstanding beacons of productive learning. They are challenged to clarify their own values, beliefs, and positions and to engage proactively with others in the redesign and improvement of their schools” (p. 3). School administrators are required to work well

beyond the scripted job description. They must possess qualities that will shape their school environment and be prepared to lead in various capacities daily.

Mentor Programs

School administrators are trained in graduate level programs across the world. When they are hired to their first position as a school principal they are given a job description that has a list of jobs they are required to do. In many instances, novice school principals need additional support to be successful in the principal's office. One method of offering support to school principals is mentoring. Mentoring provides a less experienced person with the expertise of a more experienced person in a particular field or subject area. Young, Sheets, and Knight (2005) argue that mentoring is a partnership of learning in which learning is the primary focus and must be ongoing.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2003) produced "*Making the Case for Mentoring*" in which the rationale for mentors for school principals was presented. In this literature the beginning of mentoring is presented. According to the NAESP the word mentor originates in Homer's *The Odyssey*. In the business world, mentors are used to present the organization to the less experienced members of the organization. Even in the field of education, beginning teachers are mentored as they enter the profession of teaching.

The mentor must possess certain qualities that will make them an effective mentor. Palmero (2004) offers the importance of listening for mentors. He suggests effective mentors should be active listeners who help guide novices to a greater understanding of their own circumstances. Young et al. (2005) highlighted several of these qualities that mentors must

possess to establish a meaningful mentor/mentee relationship. These qualities include the need for deep reflection on the behalf of the mentor allowing them to share their thoughts and feelings with their mentee. They must be able to admit their mistakes and use the mistakes as a method for teaching. The need to clone their mentee must be avoided; it is imperative to allow their mentee to be themselves and to learn from their mistakes. Support during these mistakes is most beneficial to the mentee. Commitment, collaboration, trust, mutual respect, and support are all qualities that are shown to enhance a mentoring relationship, according to Palermo (2004).

The National Association for Elementary School Principals (2012) offers a mentor training program for retired or seasoned administrators who would like to assist novice principals coming into the position. The first section of the training program is a 2-½ day program that integrates best practices for mentoring and creating adult learning experiences. Mentors are also offered an opportunity to complete a mentoring certification program which is completed after a nine-month training program. The NAESP has designed mentor competencies that all mentors in training must complete, which are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3: Mentor Competencies	
Competencies	Strategies
Competency One: An effective mentor sets high expectations for self-development in high quality professional growth opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continues adult learning practices and seeks ongoing professional development • Practices professional reflection and networking
Competency Two: An effective mentor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilizes effective oral and written

<p>Table 3 Continued</p> <p>has knowledge of and utilizes mentoring and coaching best practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communication skills • Applies effective listening skills and provides constructive feedback • Possesses the ability to communicate a clear vision • Understands and practices adult learning theory
<p>Competency Three: An effective mentor is active in instructional leadership.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeps current on educational and leadership issues • Participates in professional organizations and local, state, and national events, i.e. conferences, workshops, seminars, etc. • Takes a leadership role in the development and study of professional practice
<p>Competency Four: An effective mentor respects confidentiality and a code of ethics in the mentor protégé relationship.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiates routine discussions pertaining to confidentiality • Exhibits trustworthy behavior • Encourages open and reflective conversations initiated by protégé
<p>Competency Five: An effective mentor contributes to the body of knowledge as it pertains to principal and administrative mentoring.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducts action research in collaboration with protégé • Utilizes assessment information to adjust the mentoring process as needed • Maintains reflection portfolio for self and encourages the protégé to do the same
<p>Competency Six: An effective mentor fosters a culture that promotes formal and informal mentoring relationships.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engages in professional outreach activities which include the use of technology and networking • Acknowledges the need for mentoring and coaching throughout the career continuum

These competencies are to prepare mentors to work with principals around the United States to better support novice school principals.

Socialization

In 2004, Palermo described his matriculation into school administration. He began by discussing the theoretical preparation that he received from the university during his masters program, but then portrayed the loneliness and isolation as an assistant principal. He believes that the university did an exceptional job preparing him for to be a school administrator, however when he received the job the day-to-day occurrences of a school administrator were not covered in the textbooks. He questioned the school systems' ability to better support new school administrators. Feelings of loneliness and isolation are not uncommon amongst novice administrations; however it can be addressed through the socialization of new administrators with other school administrators.

Novice school principals often find the office of the principal lonely. In 2001, Williams defined socialization as the learning of new social roles through the acquisition of skills and behaviors that are necessary to survive and thrive in a new situation. Socialization for school principals provides the principal with opportunities to learn more about themselves and their role in the organization.

Novice principals must realign themselves to the new school in which they have been chosen to lead. Mentally, they must transition into the new position, leaving their old job, friends, and co-workers behind. Williams (2011) believes novice principals who utilize their experiences as a teacher, counselor, or assistant principal have an easier transition period because of these previous experiences, as opposed to those who do not have these

experiences. The anticipatory socialization stage requires school principals to develop new loyalties with the members of the school in which they are leading.

In the encounter stage, the principal begins their new position and must learn the routines of the new school. During this stage principals are building relationships with members of the school to determine routines and the culture of the school. Novice principals must work through the encounter stage in an effort to assimilate into the culture of the school.

The insider stage allows the principal to develop relationships in the school and the principal is accepted as a member of the new school. This process takes time and effort by the principal. Communication with community and staff members will produce a positive relationship and assist in the transition to the insider stage for new principals. Novice principals must understand these feelings are normal and are felt amongst most new school administrators.

The Role of the Principal

The role of the principal is enormous. Piraino (2008) creates a vivid description of the role of the principal. The principal must be a teacher leader and the primary change agent. They must prepare children for a diverse social climate. Principals must fulfill managerial and supervisory roles, while being model teachers, good fiscal managers, strong communicators, and responsible citizens. They must recognize the needs of their students, teachers, and the community. They must remain abreast of governmental regulations and accountability standards. All of these characteristics plus many more are a partial description of the role of the principal.

The principal is ultimately responsible for the wellbeing of the staff and students of the school in which they are assigned. Blaydes (2004) presents three R's that must be mastered as a novice school principal.

- Resiliency- The ability to recover quickly from a change or misfortune or to resume original shape after being bent, stretched or compressed.
- Renewal- The act of becoming new again, of replenishing, restoring, or regaining physical or mental vigor.
- Reflection- The act of taking time for careful consideration, contemplation, and meditation.

School administrators must learn to master these three R's. Principals are often the face of the school. They must be resilient and must always be proactive in situations. Principals must always use good judgment in situations that affect the school. Renewal is imperative because of the many requirements of the job. Veteran and novice administrators must take time to reflect and renew themselves to preserve their physical and emotional wellbeing. Reflection is necessary daily to ensure the best decisions were made during the school day.

Blaydes (2004) suggest high stakes accountability as one reason for the change in the role of school principals in recent years. School principals are forced to ensure proficiency on state standardized tests. Blaydes (2004) continues, "Wave after wave of change flows over schools, never allowing full implementation and success before the next wave of change inundates teachers and classrooms" (p. 3). With the change in schools year after year, the school principal must enforce the rules and ensure the compliance of the school. Mandates

continue to increase and standards are raised often which consistently changes the role of the principal. Blaydes (2004) offers several roles and characteristics that principals must possess in an effort to lead 21st century schools.

- Does the right thing and is not just doing things right
- Recognizes teaching and learning as the main business of the school
- Inspires in others a shared vision
- Communicates the school's mission clearly and consistently to staff members, parents, and staff
- Fosters standards for teaching and learning that are high and attainable
- Provides clear goals and monitors the progress of students toward meeting them
- Spends time in the classrooms interacting with students and observing teachers
- Promotes an atmosphere of trust and sharing
- Builds a good staff and makes professional development a top concern by creating a community of learners

Transformational leadership is a vital attribute of school principals.

“Transformational leadership is the practice of leading an organization through change; primarily through soliciting teachers to internalized a school's mission and willingly participate in a collaborative team that transforms the school culture and practice” (Fusarelli, et al., 2010, p. 7). Transformational leadership provides the teachers to have ownership in the decision making process of the schools. This leadership style allows the principal to present shared leadership between administration and teachers. Although the principal must

remain the authority in the school, transformational leadership creates a culture in which instructional improvement is the focus, according to Fusarelli, et al. (2010).

School administrators must wear many hats and serve in several roles to ensure the success of the school. The roles listed above are a small sample of the roles that school administrators must play in an effort to increase teaching and learning for the students in their school.

Building Relationships

Relationships are most essential to the success of a school principal. When accepting the job as principal, the principal is often assigned to a new school in which they must build new relationships and establish trust amongst the faculty and staff members of the school. School principals are given the keys to the school with no instructions to the culture of the school. Building relationships with key personnel are essential in establishing the culture of the school. In many instances the school secretary and custodian are key personnel that are vital to the success of the principal. Alvy and Robbins (1998) advise veteran teachers are crucial to the relationships of novice principals with staff members. Honest relationships must be established between the veteran staff and the school principal. Alvy and Robbins (1998) go on to state as one develops relationships and learns the norms of the schoolhouse, he or she experiences gradual inclusion in the school, which is the goal of the principal.

In addition to school personnel, the novice principal must work to establish positive relationships in the community of the school. Blaydes (2004) proposed today's families are created from a wide variety of configurations: two-parent families, single-parent families, blended families, same-sex parents, grandparents who are raising their grandchildren, and

possibly children who have no family and are in foster care. It is essential that the school principal work to build relationships with all of the families whose children attend the school. Being visible is a method to meet the families and to emphasize the importance of building relationships in the school.

School Administrators as Leaders

In an interview on principals and leadership, John Gardner (1988) states “principals are leaders who have to deal persuasively with various constituencies...Other characteristics are physical vitality; willingness to accept responsibility; capacity to manage, decide, set priorities flexibility to approach; confidence skills in dealing with people” (p. 72). Because school administrators must be prepared to lead in various situations they must be willing to place themselves on the line. According to Heifez and Linksky (2002), it is possible to put ourselves on the line, respond effectively to the risks, and live to celebrate our efforts. Leadership is a quality that expands to every walk of life. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) provide examples of presidents of countries, presidents of organizations, everyday managers, politicians, and parents who demonstrate survival and are thriving amidst the dangers of leading. They discuss “getting on the balcony,” stepping back to get perspective while remaining fiercely engaged, thinking politically, keeping the opposition close, but watching your allies, too, orchestrating the conflict, using stress productively to work the issues, giving the work back, putting the responsibility on those who need to make the change and holding steady, and maintaining your focus while taking the heat.

It is imperative that school administrators be able to place themselves on the line and become the leader in all situations. Schroer and Baughn (2006) suggest school

administrators must work to implement fair and consistent student discipline and keep positive relationships with parents and stakeholders. Calabrese (1991) highlights the leadership responsibilities for an assistant principal as disciplinarian, instructional leader, change agent, prescriptive agent, motivator, ethical model, community relations agent, care agent, and innovator. School administrators are required to wear several hats, often many at one time. Leadership plays a vital part in the success of the school.

Becoming an Instructional Leader

Preparing students for life in the 21st century requires school administrators to become instructional leaders. Glickman (1995) defines instructional leadership in five areas: working directly with teachers, group improvement, professional development, curriculum and improvement, and action research implementation. Supovitz (2000) describes effective habits of instructional leaders:

- Visit classrooms and talk with students about their academic work. Active involvement in the classroom sends the signal to teachers and students that teaching and learning is important.
- Analyze the results of student assessment with faculty members. With this data goals can be developed and strategies for assessing the goals can be created.
- Reduce the mobility of the instructional staff by creating an atmosphere of organizational autonomy.
- Encourage faculty members to exchange instructional strategies, visit each other's classrooms, and openly discuss instructional practices and problems.

Alvy and Robbins (1998) suggest visibility is a must for instructional leadership. The principal must be up and down the halls of the school and in and out of classrooms allowing him/her to have a clear picture of the teaching and learning in classrooms. Principals must work diligently to leave their office to visit classrooms and discuss what is being taught with teachers and students. Once teachers realize principals are not visiting classrooms, they become more relaxed. However, principals who make a habit of visiting classrooms, not just for supervising but also to support the classroom experience, send a strong message that they are interested in teaching and learning and that the classroom is the center of the school (Alvy & Robbins, 1998).

Instructional leaders are aware of the professional development that will best benefit the staff and students in the school. Alvy and Robbins (1998) argue new principals are often unaware of the interests and needs of the faculty in the school; as instructional leaders, principals must work to find the best professional development for their staff members.

In addition to providing professional development, scheduling is another area of concern for an instructional leader. Novice principals may not have an option to rearrange the schedule during their first year; however as an instructional leader, they may note changes that are necessary in upcoming school years. Instructional leaders will plan the master schedule that creates the most effective learning opportunity possible for the students in which they lead. The instructional leader may take an independent class and realize another teacher is stronger in a subject area and require the two teachers to team-teach. Another option may be co-teaching for two teachers who have varied strengths. However, in both instances it is imperative that the school principal move about in the school and in

classrooms to recognize the strengths in the school to best serve the students in the classroom.

Distributed Leadership

Fusarelli, Kowalski, and Petersen (2011) identify distributed leadership as a means for requiring stakeholders to be active participants in school governance. Distributed leadership requires the school administrator to inform stakeholders of events and occurrences which will allow them to make informed decisions on the best method of progression for the school. “As a more open, democratic leadership model, distributive leadership recognizes the varieties of expertise to optimize organizational performance. By providing opportunities for everyone to participate, and by utilizing in a collective fashion their individual strengths distributed leaderships fosters inclusively, dynamism, community deliberation and engagement, professional growth, and may promote systematic sustainable organizational excellence” (Fusarelli, et al, 2011, p. 48). The goal of school principals is to create an atmosphere where all stakeholders are welcomed and involved in the decision making of the school.

As 21st century educators, school administrators are encouraged (and in some places required) to empower teachers to be leaders, distributing leadership throughout the school to teachers and other staff members in the school. Childs-Bowen, Moller, and Scriver (2000) suggest the following strategies that should be used to create teacher leaders:

- The principal must create opportunities for teachers to lead.
- Encouraging autonomy and reducing restrictions opens many possibilities.

- Teachers must have the flexibility to implement curriculum and instruction without using scripted programs but to develop their own approaches with their peers through teaming.
- Teachers can create action research involving data collection and analysis to validate their innovations and evaluate results of their efforts.

Empowering teachers to lead in schools can strengthen the relationship between teachers and principals. This leadership for teachers also demonstrates the strength of the school principal as a leader. Providing teachers with encouragement also promotes leadership and encourages teachers to assume more leadership responsibilities. This distributed leadership is important for a novice principal because it exhibits the relationship established between the principal and teachers in the school.

Effective principals allow assistant principals to exhibit leadership qualities in the designated areas. Williams (1995) argues assistant principals are a part of the administrative team. They share administrative responsibilities such as evaluation of staff members, supervision of curriculum, and discipline of students. The assistant principal should be viewed as a visionary leader for the school. Williams (1995) states that effective team leadership between the principal and assistant principal will empower teachers to make decisions and become teacher leaders.

Effective leaders are confident and work to create other leaders. “An important part of an effective administration is developing a team concept. The staff should be a part of the educational team” (Schroer & Baughn, 2006, p. 10). Teacher buy-in will increase and the vision of the school will be strengthened with the inclusion of the whole staff on the

educational team. School principals who effectively establish demonstrated leadership will increase the productivity of the school because the stakeholders will be more supportive due to the utilization of their input and expertise.

Evaluation of Leadership

In September 2010, the State Board of Education adopted the School Executive Principal and Assistant Principal Evaluation Process. In this process educators are required to demonstrate their leadership qualities through the presentation of artifacts. This evaluation process requires administrators to demonstrate leadership that “is distributed among all members of the school community, consists of open, honest communication; is focused on the use of data, teamwork, researched-based practices; and uses tools to drive ethical and principled, goal-oriented action” (DPI, 2009).

School administrators may receive a rating of developing, proficient, accomplished or distinguished. The ratings are defined as follows:

- Developing- Demonstrated adequate growth toward achieving standards during the period of performance, but did not demonstrate competency on standards of performance.
- Proficient- Demonstrated basic competency on the standard of performance
- Accomplished- Exceeded basic competence on standards for the performance most of the time.
- Distinguished- Consistently and significantly exceeded basic competence on standards of performance.

Administrators are evaluated on the Executive School Standards. The seven standards are qualities that a school administrator should demonstrate and were adapted from the Wallace Foundation Study *Making Sense of Leading Schools: A Study of the School Principalship* (DPI, 2010). Table 4 highlights each of the executive standards and a summary of purpose from DPI (2010).

Table 4: School Administrator Executive Standards
<p style="text-align: center;">Standard 1: Strategic Leadership</p> <p>School executives will create conditions that result in strategically re-imagining the school’s vision, mission, and goals in the 21st century. Understanding that schools ideally prepare students for an unseen but not altogether unpredictable future, the leader creates a climate of inquiry that challenges the school community to continually repurpose itself by building on its core values and beliefs about its preferred future and then developing a pathway to reach it.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Standard 2: Instructional Leadership</p> <p>School executives will set high standards for the professional practice of 21st century instruction and assessment that result in a no nonsense accountable environment. The school executive must be knowledgeable of best instructional and school practices and must use this knowledge to cause the creation of collaborative structures within the school for the design of highly engaging schoolwork for students, the on-going peer review of this work and the sharing of this work throughout the professional community.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Standard 3: Cultural Leadership</p> <p>School executives will understand and act on the understanding of the important role a school’s culture contributes to the exemplary performance of the school. School executives must support and value the traditions, artifacts, symbols and positive values and norms of the school and community that result in a sense of identity and pride upon which to build a positive future. A school executive must be able to “reculture” the school if needed to align with school’s goals of improving student and adult learning and to infuse the work of the adults and students with passion, meaning and purpose. Cultural leadership implies understanding the school as the people in it each day, how they came to their current state, and how to connect with</p>

Table 4 Continued

their traditions in order to move them forward to support the school's efforts to achieve individual and collective goals.

Standard 4: Human Resource Leadership

School executives will ensure that the school is a professional learning community. School executives will ensure that processes and systems are in place that results in the recruitment, induction, support, evaluation, development and retention of a high performing staff. The school executive must engage and empower accomplished teachers in a distributive leadership manner, including support of teachers in day-to-day decisions such as discipline, communication with parents, and protecting teachers from duties that interfere with teaching, and must practice fair and consistent evaluation of teachers. The school executive must engage teachers and other professional staff in conversations to plan their career paths and support district succession planning.

Standard 5: Managerial Leadership

School executives will ensure that the school has processes and systems in place for budgeting, staffing, problem solving, communicating expectations and scheduling that result in organizing the work routines in the building. The school executive must be responsible for the monitoring of the school budget and the inclusion of all teachers in the budget decisions so as to meet the 21st century needs of every classroom. Effectively and efficiently managing the complexity of everyday life is critical for staff to be able to focus its energy on improvement.

Standard 6: External Development Leadership

A school executive will design structures and processes that result in community engagement, support, and ownership. Acknowledging that schools no longer reflect but in fact build community, the leader proactively creates with staff opportunities for parents, community and business representatives to participate as "stockholders" in the school such that continued investments of resources and good will are not left to chance.

Standard 7: Micro-political Leadership

The school executive will build systems and relationships that utilize the staff's diversity, encourage constructive ideological conflict in order to leverage staff expertise, power and influence to realize the school's vision for success. The executive will also creatively employ an awareness of staff's professional needs, issues, and interests to build social cohesion and to facilitate distributed governance

Table 4 Continued

and shared decision-making.

Table 4 presents the executive standards that each school administrator must possess. The standards listed in table 4 provide the administrator with a guide for administrators to reflect upon their performance in an effort to improve their effectiveness as a school leader. The standards outlined in Table 4 are aligned to university and alternative licensure programs according to Militello et al. (2011). These standards have provided school leaders with a guide for leadership. Universities, alternative licensure programs and daily practitioners are all required to lead based on these executive standards.

Conclusion

School principals are required to complete the enormous task of effectively running school buildings and providing the best possible education for children. The task school administrators face may be enormous; however, the job can be mastered. Effective leadership takes practice and time. School administrators should strive to be lifelong learners, forever working to increase their leadership skills. Effective school administrators are not afraid of change, even in leadership styles because they recognize change is necessary and a vital part of the success or failure of their job as a school administrator. Chapter Two presented a review of the literature on preparation for school administrators, the job of the principal and the leadership of school administrators. Chapter Three will present the methodology to be used in the study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This is a qualitative study that highlighted the experiences and challenges faced by first year principals. The major objective of this study was to examine the experiences and challenges of school administrators in their first position as principal. Qualitative research was chosen as the method for studying the role of a new principal. Creswell (1998) describes qualitative research as a valuable tool for researchers who attempt to understand groups of people the way they want to be viewed, despite what most of society would consider as normal. During this research study school principals in their first year had an opportunity to express their ideals and visions as a new principal.

There are several pre-conceived notions about the principalship. Members of the community, the staff members of the school, and central office administrators' perspectives of the principal may vary. For example, central office personnel require principals to be instructional leaders and to increase the academic success of students. The staff members of the school may request the principal to be supportive of instructional strategies, increase technology, and to be supportive of disciplinary actions. The principal may have other objectives running the school or trying to balance often competing demands of district administrators, teachers, staff, parents, students, and other stakeholders. Qualitative research reviewed the ideals of the principal to provide insight to the experiences and thoughts as they continue on the journey of school leadership. Because qualitative researchers are in search of

meaning, the significance of the experiences of the first year principal was of interest to this study.

Creswell (2007) described several characteristics of qualitative research that were relevant to this study, which were natural setting, the researcher as the key instrument, participants meaning, emergent design, and interpretive inquiry. In this qualitative study interviews were performed in the natural setting. School principals were interviewed by telephone. The researcher was the key instrument in this qualitative study. The researcher collected all data from interviews with school principals. School principals were interviewed and were provided insight to their meaning and the relevance of the study to the principalship. This study provided emergent research for the field of education on the principalship. The data collected in this study provided insight to school districts and superintendents on best practices for preparing school administrators for their first principalship. In this study the researcher interpreted what was seen and/or heard and created understanding based on these elements. Interpretations were offered at the conclusion of the data collection process.

Oftentimes the experiences of first year principals are ignored because of the lack of experience of the principal. This was the basis for this study. According to Creswell (2007), “We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices and minimize the power relationships that often exists between a researcher and the participants in the study” (p. 40). This quote proves to be beneficial with this study because of the possible lack of support for first year principals. Novice principals are often isolated in their position. This study provided a voice to new principals.

Qualitative researchers gather data through interviews, collection of documents and other forms of note taking. Creswell (2007) describes qualitative research as an investigation of a problem faced by society, but researched without using numbers, instead using incidents and words to create an overall picture of the subjects in their own, realistic setting. Through interviews, school principals were able to provide a clear depiction of the experiences of a new principal. Through the perspective of a new principal, new administrators have had an understanding of what is needed to be successful during the first year of the principalship.

The Case Study Approach

Case study is a qualitative method that provides a holistic understanding of a problem, issue, or phenomenon within its social context (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Creswell (2007) defines case study as research that involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system. Case studies assist researchers in observing and interviewing a particular group to produce research findings on the topic presented. Yin (2003) says “the case study is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political and related phenomena” (p. 1). Qualitative researchers who use the case study method are in search of data that will present several factors that provide insight to processes or participants.

The researchers must determine the type of case study that will best match the goal of the research. According to Yin (2003), there are several different types of case studies. Case study research can be used when conducting single or multiple case studies. A single case study focuses on one case study. Multiple case studies will include two or more cases within the same study. In addition to single and multiple case studies, exploratory, descriptive, and

explanatory are also methods of case studies that are used. Exploratory case study focuses on a question and hypothesis for research. Descriptive case studies seek to describe a phenomenon. Explanatory case studies reflect cause and effect relationships, explaining how events happen.

This research study focused on a multiple case study. The researcher pursued understanding of the experiences and challenges, along with the needed preparation of first year principals. The research questions, data collection and findings revolved around the first year principals. The multiple case studies described the experiences of novice principals in an effort to expand the research on this topic. Each principal represented a separate case. A multi-case study may strengthen the findings through deliberate and contrasting comparisons of the data (Yin, 2003).

Research Questions

The following research questions were explored in the study.

1. What are the challenges that first year principals face?
2. What types of experiences, training, or preparation do first year principals perceive as necessary for their success?

Sampling Criteria and Site Selection

Criterion sampling was used because the participants in this case study were in their first year of the principalship and are members of the Novice Principals Support Academy (NPSA). The case studies were to be collected with interviews during one NPSA training meeting and with an individual interview with each principal, however due to time constraints of the principals, the first year principals were interviewed by telephone. The

criterion for choosing the principals for this study required the principal to be in their first year of their first principalship and participants in the NPSA. The level of school (elementary, middle, or high) was not a factor in the selection of the principal; all levels were considered. To create the clearest picture possible for the experiences of first year school principals, an attempt was made to balance race, gender, and level of school.

The Novice Principal Support Academy

The Novice Principal Support Academy was designed as a school administration program sponsored by State University that leads to a Master of School Administration and Principal Licensure. NPSA was developed to increase student achievement by preparing and retaining quality school administrators in thirteen counties. These administrators are prepared to lead in rural, high-poverty, hard-to-staff, historically low-performing schools. Fusarelli (2014), argues, “Research indicates that principals have more of an impact on student achievement in the most challenging schools – specifically, high-poverty, high-minority, low-performing schools than principals in less challenging schools” (p.3). According to NPSA (2013), the academy was designed to create a balance between theory and practice and inquiry and action. Participants in this program were provided with coursework that will specifically prepare them to lead in turn around schools, participate in specialized leadership, instructional and micro-political trainings, field experiences, and are provided with ongoing support. The objectives for the Novice Principal Support Academy are (Fusarelli, 2014, p.1):

1. Develop and provide a high-quality continuing professional development and individual executive coaching program focused on instructional leadership and

management for digital learning. The Principal Academy will help principals who serve in rural, geographically isolated, high-need schools become instructional leaders and master the essential leadership skill of providing targeted, corrective feedback to teachers that enables them to improve their teaching practice.

2. Recruit and rigorously select exemplary teachers with high leadership potential for participation in a context specific field-based preparation program designed to prepare new 21st Century school leaders for rural, high-need, hard-to-staff schools.

At the end of the two-year program, participants will earn a school principal license and a Masters degree in School Administration. Graduates make a three-year post degree commitment to lead high-need schools.

3. Develop and provide an induction and early career support program that includes individual executive coaching focused on instructional leadership strategies and the development of leadership Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

4. Develop processes that allow project designed training methods and materials to be incorporated into both university leadership preparation programs and leadership professional development nationally.

Data Collection

Yin (2003) cites six types of information that can be collected in case study research which are documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts. Of the six types of information cited by Yin, in this case study data was collected through interviews.

Interviews- Seidman (1998) argues interviews should be conducted in three series. The first interview should focus on the life history of the participants. In this interview the interviewer will highlight as much as possible about himself or herself on the topic from the participant. During the second interview the participant is asked for details of the experience on the topic. In this interview details of the topic are examined by the interviewer. The final interview focuses on the reflection of meaning for the topic. The participant is asked to make connections with the participant's life and work.

In the interview process Creswell's (2007) steps for interviewing will be followed which are: (a) identify participants based on purposeful sampling procedures; (b) determine the type of interview helpful for answering the questions; (c) determine the use of recording actions; (d) design the interview guides; (e) determine the setting for interviewing; and (f) obtain consent from the interviewees and followed the questions, worked within the timeframe in a polite fashion.

Weiss (1994) suggest interviews can be formal or informal. Informal interviews are identified as conversational and narrative interviewing. "All of these terms draw attention to the relaxed, conversation like appearance of qualitative interviewing, in contrast to more formal and distanced appearance of survey interviewing" (p. 207). Although conversational interviewing does provide a more relaxed interview, the designed interview guide must be followed to address the goals of the study.

Face to face semi-structured, conversational interviews were attempted with the principals. Because of the time constraints, face to face interviews did not occur. One focus group interview with the six participants followed by an individual interview with each of the

principals was attempted to be conducted. However, because of scheduling issues, the researcher was unable to find a time when all participants were able to be in one place. Several attempts were made, yet the group interview did not occur. Through the interview process, a depiction of first year school principals was gained in an effort to assist future school principals. During the interview the principals were able to respond and elaborate on the questions asked. The principals were audiotaped during the interview process. At the conclusion of the interviews the audiotapes were transcribed by the researcher to provide written documentation of the interview.

Examples of the interview questions are listed below. The complete listing of questions can be found in Appendix A.

- What types of experiences, training, or preparation did you have to prepare you to be a principal?
- What are some of the experiences that you have had as a new principal?
- What knowledge, skills, or experiences do you wish you had received prior to becoming a principal?
- In what areas were you best prepared to become principal (and how)?
- In what areas were you least prepared (and why)?
- What advice would you give to new principals?

Data Analysis

Merriam (2009) suggests data analysis is simply the process of making sense of data. Making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing a feeling or phenomenon, or as large as several pages of field notes describing the particular incident. Merriam goes on to

state data analysis must reveal information relevant to the study and should be a small, yet inclusive sample of the study.

Interview questions were designed based on the research questions outlined earlier in chapters one and three. Interviews conducted identified the experiences and challenges of first year principals. The research questions and review of the literature shaped the data collection and analysis process. The data was analyzed with a focus on the propositions outlined in the research questions.

The data collected was examined and analyzed according to the research questions. In the analysis phase, the six step process as outlined by Creswell (1998) which include: (a) organizing and preparing data, (b) carefully reading and studying the data, (c) designing a detailed analysis of the information with coding, (d) generating a description of the findings by themes, (e) representing the descriptions in a narrative and visuals, and (f) analysis-making meaning of the data will be followed. At the conclusion of the data analysis phase a story was presented which presents the experiences and challenges faced by first year school principals.

Research Validity and Reliability

Internal Validity- Creswell (2007) argues validity is the researchers attempt to gain the “accuracy” of findings. This is imperative to educational research because efforts must be made to present the most accurate depiction of issues and occurrences. The researcher must work to find the perspectives of those involved in the study. Merriam (2002) said “it is important to understand the perspectives of those involved, uncover the complexity of human behavior in context, and present a holistic interpretation of what is happening”(p. 25).

As a qualitative researcher establishing internal validity is imperative in creating a transparent picture of the study. There are several methods in creating internal validity in a research study. Triangulation uses multiple investigators, sources of data or data collection methods to present findings. Member checks require the researcher to take the interpreted data back to the participants and having them reviewed for accuracy. Peer reviews allow the research to be read and discussed by the peers of the researcher to assess the findings of the study. Finally, the researcher must saturate the data and findings; therefore ample time must be allowed to fully explore the study.

Internal validity was created in this study with all of the methods stated previously. Triangulation was achieved with the use of interviews by the principals. Member checks were established by the principals reviewing the transcripts of the interviews. Several of my peers reviewed the study in addition to my committee. The research was saturated through interviews, providing a holistic, more complete understanding of the study presented.

External Validity- External validity examines the extent of the application of the findings to other situations (Merriam, 2002). In qualitative studies, external validity becomes evident when the reader thinks of the lessons learned from the analysis of a particular situation and how that analysis can be transferred to other situations. Methods for creating external validity include maximum variation and rich, thick descriptions. Maximum variation sampling seeks variation in the sites selected for interviews, times, places, visits, etc. Rich, thick description enables the researcher to provide enough information to allow readers to understand and apply their situations to the research.

In this research study to establish external validity, rich, thick descriptions were used to ensure the understanding of the study and to produce findings that were applicable to school systems across the country. It is imperative that the readers were able to relate and understand the research in this study, enabling them to draw important lessons to improve the preparation of principals.

Reliability- Merriam (2002) views reliability as the extent to which research findings can be replicated. She further states, reliability asks whether the results of the study are consistent with the data collected. The methods used to obtain internal validity can be used to obtain reliability. An audit trail is another method to obtain reliability. An audit trail is a detailed account of methods and procedures needed to carry out the study. In addition to triangulation and peer review, audit trails was used to create reliability in the study.

Ethical Issues

As required by State University's Institutional Review Board a consent form was received from all participants before research is conducted. In the consent form participants were provided with the option to opt out of the study at any time without penalty. All participants were assured anonymity in the study. They received a detailed description of the study and had full access to the findings of the study.

Limitations of the Study

The study examined first year principals in various counties in the northeast section of the state. The administrators in this program have been together throughout the academy and have built relationships with each other, coaches, mentors and professors. The researcher is an outsider to the program and to the academy. Because of this, the principals

were hesitant about sharing their challenges and experiences. In the initial meeting, two of the principals were willing to participate, but as the school year progressed time constraints became an issue. At the time of the interview, the principals were willing to assist in one session, but were unavailable for additional meetings.

Initially, a group and individual interview was planned. The researcher contacted the participants on several different occasions, attempting to find a common time and date to meet for the group session. Once it was determined that a common place for meeting was unlikely, a conference call was created for the group. The researcher then made unsuccessful attempts to create a date and time for the group session via conference call. Every effort was made to create an environment in which first year principals were open to be honest and comfortable sharing experiences and challenges.

Observation and analyzing documentation proved to be a limitation also. Documents were to be requested from the principal that will benefit the study. The documents that were collected would demonstrate the experiences of the novice principals and allow the reader more insight to the experience of the principal. The documents collected could have been, but were not limited to the opening letter to staff members, a letter to the advisory council introducing him/herself as the new principal, notes or agendas from beginning principal meetings.

Each participant was to be observed during a variety of periods. The site for observations varied according to experiences by the principals. In instances such as new principal meetings, several principals were observed at one time. Observations could have

taken place during principal meetings, principal professional development sessions, staff meetings, and in conversations with other principals.

Due to scheduling conflicts and lack of time from the principals interviewed the observations and review of documents did not happen. The researcher made herself available whenever the principals would allow, but the meetings were never held because of various other obligations.

Additionally, this study was conducted in several counties. Names of programs, staff development and terms vary by county. Programs and processes vary by county. Although all of the researchers had the support of the NPSA, their backgrounds and levels of district support varied, which provided a more diverse perspective in the study. If all of the principals would have been in the same county, a more in-depth view of that particular county could have been obtained, however this was not the case. The researcher made every effort to present a clear depiction of the county of participants.

The limitations presented did not compromise the findings of the study. The limitations were recognized by the researcher, and precautions or plans were made to ensure the validity of the study.

Chapter Summary

Chapter three outlined the methodology used in this study. In chapter three a multiple case study researching the preparation and experiences of novice principals was presented. Data was collected using interviews. Data was analyzed by organizing and preparing data, carefully reading and studying the data, designing a detailed analysis of the information with coding, generating a description of the findings by themes, representing the descriptions in a

narrative and visuals, and analysis- making meaning of the data was followed. Reality and validity was established through triangulation, peer review, multiple data sources, member checks and audit trails. The study was conducted in an ethical manner and limitations to the study were presented. Chapter four presents the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

School principals are required to meet high expectations but are often not properly skilled to achieve the goals required by their county or state. At the completion of the university program and working as an assistant principal, administrators are expected to be prepared for their first position as school principal. Novice principals entering the principal's office for the first time must be prepared to manage a school and must be equipped with the necessary tools to lead in today's schools. According to Walker and Qian (2006), "At the very least, they are expected to have a clear understanding of their role, including how to exercise power, appropriately, how to maintain and/or establish professional relationships, and to design process and structures to facilitate goal achievement" (p. 299). "Research indicates that principals have more of an impact on student achievement in the most challenging schools – specifically, high-poverty, high-minority, low-performing schools than principals in less challenging schools" (Fusarelli & DPI, 2014, p.1).

The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges and experiences of first year principals in an effort to provide insight into the issues and problems faced by new principals working in a high-stakes accountability environment; specifically, what problems they encounter and what they identify as professional development needs to address those issues.

This study of first year principals took place over several months, with the initial meeting held in September of 2013. The principals are all members of the Novice Principal Support Academy (NPSA) at State University. The Novice Principals Support

Academy was designed as a school administration program sponsored by State University that leads to a Master of School Administration and Principal Licensure. NPSA was developed to produce quality school administrators in rural, high-poverty, hard-to-staff, historically low-performing.

The participants are all principals in rural areas of the state. Over half of the states' schools serve rural communities. This area suffers from issues such as inter-generational poverty, and racial segregation. In addition to inter-generational poverty and racism, this area also has the highest teen pregnancy and infant mortality rate in the state (Fusarelli, 2014, p.6). The states' lowest performing schools are also disproportionately clustered in this region, according to Fusarelli & DPI (2014).

Chapter four highlights the participants and the common themes from the interviews of first year principals along with the responses to the research questions provided through interviews.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants are members of the Novice Principals Support Academy. Participants were recommended by superintendents or principals who recognized their leadership potential or through their leadership in the Teach for America program. The participants chosen were model classroom teachers who could become successful school leaders. According to Fusarelli & DPI (2014, p. 23), "we strategically recruit highly effective teachers who have excellent leadership potential, strong pedagogical skills and deep content knowledge, with a particular focus on recruiting teachers successful with historically underserved populations."

Once chosen the participants participated in a context specific field-based program to enhance school leadership skills. At the end of the two-year program, the participants earned a school principal license and a Master's degree in School Administration. Participants made a three-year post degree commitment to lead in eligible schools (Fusarelli & DPI, 2014 p.2).

The participants in this study are all first year principals who agreed to participate in a structured phone interview. Each participant received the interview questions prior to the interview. At the conclusion of the interview, the participants reviewed the transcripts and had the option to provide comments or agree with the transcripts. All of the participants agreed with the transcripts and did not provide any additional feedback. Table five demonstrates the sample of participants.

Table 5: Sample of Participants			
Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Grade Level
Austin	Male	Caucasian	High School
Jennifer	Female	Caucasian	Elementary
Melanie	Female	African American	Elementary
Justin	Male	African American	Elementary

Austin is a Caucasian male in his first principalship at an Early College High School. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and Bible Theology. He began his teaching career as an English teacher at the school in which he is currently principal. He later received his master's degree in School Administration from State University. He spent one year as an assistant principal before moving into the principalship. Austin believes he is

well prepared to be an administrator at the Early College because of the experiences as a teacher in that same school prior to coming into the principalship. “I graduated, and spent a year as an assistant principal at another school. I’m glad that I didn’t go right into the principalship. I knew the design. There are a lot of intangibles just because I’ve been there before, that I brought to the table that made me very comfortable,” says Austin.

Jennifer is a Caucasian female in her first principalship. She is currently serving in an elementary school and comes to the principalship from Teach for America. Jennifer received an undergraduate degree in English, and then taught English for two years in a high school. After teaching for two years, Jennifer moved on to work for Teach for America. During her tenure at Teach for America, she served as the program director. In this position she was a teacher and leadership coach for other teachers in grades kindergarten through 12. Following her position as program director, she was promoted to executive director of Teach for America. Jennifer believes her time as executive director prepared her for the principalship. She states, “In my job with Teach for America, I did a lot of fund raising, so I had experiences building relationships externally and with people who are different from me, have different priorities, and are looking for different things.” Jennifer then, began to pursue a Master of School Administration from State University, where she graduated in May of 2012. During her tenure in the School Administration program, Jennifer fulfilled her internship responsibilities in a Magnet Elementary School. After graduation, she received the position as assistant principal at an area high school and was then promoted to principal of an elementary school.

Melanie is an African American female in her first principalship and is currently serving an elementary school. She is a former middle school teacher with 13 years of experience teaching language arts. After serving as a classroom teacher, Melanie was an Elementary School Instructional Coach where she designed professional development, created curriculum guides and mentored teachers at an elementary school. Melanie then served as an assistant principal for two years. She received her Master of School Administration from State University and then was promoted to principal of an elementary school. Melanie believes her graduate school program and internship prepared her to be successful as a principal. She states, “All and all I haven’t had a situation that I didn’t feel I could handle whether it was from some of the trainings that I have had with crucial conversations or facilitative leadership. With my internship and my grad school program we did a lot of hands on application and real world examples. I have times where I can flash back to the things that we have practiced.”

Justin is an African American male in his first year as an elementary principal. He received his Bachelor of Arts in English, secondary education. He spent 17 years as a classroom teacher and has a total of 20 years’ experience in education. Justin cites his years as a teacher leader as a reason for his preparation as an administrator. He says “For the last ten years, because of being a teacher leader, I always worked with the School Leadership Team and School Improvement Team on the vision and goals. I feel that as an administrator I knew what I needed to do in that area. That is a plus.” Justin left the classroom to serve as an Interim Assistant School Executive where he was lead administrator for the Freshman Academy and served as graduation coordinator at an area high school. He then became the

administrative intern while completing his Master of School Administration degree, and then served one year as an assistant principal. After he received his Master of School Administration from State University, he was promoted to principal of an area elementary school.

NOVICE PRINCIPAL SUPPORT ACADEMY

All of the participants are members of the Novice Principal Support Academy. The objectives of the Academy, as outlined by Fusarelli & DPI (2014) are:

1. Develop and provide a high-quality continuing professional development and individual executive coaching program focused on instructional leadership and management for digital learning. The Principal Academy will help principals who serve in rural, geographically isolated, high-need schools become instructional leaders and master the essential leadership skill of providing targeted, corrective feedback to teachers that enables them to improve their teaching practice.
2. Recruit and rigorously select exemplary teachers with high leadership potential for participation in a context specific field-based preparation program designed to prepare new 21st Century school leaders for rural, high-need, hard-to-staff schools. At the end of the two-year program, participants will earn a school principal license and a Masters degree in School Administration. Graduates make a three-year post degree commitment to lead high-need schools.
3. Develop and provide an induction and early career support program that includes individual executive coaching focused on instructional leadership strategies and the development of leadership Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

4. Develop processes that allow project designed training methods and materials to be incorporated into both university leadership preparation programs and leadership professional development nationally.

Through these objectives the participants were provided with high-quality continuing professional development, individual executive coaching, rigorous context-specific year-long summer intensive program, a coach to work with them throughout the academic year, and induction support seminars. This will be provided for all NPSA participants in addition to a Masters degree in School Administration and principal licensure.

Justin believes, “I feel I was well prepared for this principalship because of the preparation that I received from the Novice Principal Support Academy, my mentoring principal and the coach that I had from the Novice Principal Support Academy. For the last two years and a half the constant dialogue with my coach, my NPSA professors, and my mentoring principal gave me the skills or improved/enhanced the skills that I had to make me become a successful principal for my first year.” Jennifer attributes her internship and mentors with preparing her for the principalship, she says “So, there are lots of things I wasn’t prepared for but I feel like I had a lot of preparation. Certainly through NPSA having those internship opportunities was tremendous. I have been fortunate to have amazing mentors.” Melanie also credits the NPSA as an added layer of support. She believes, “I also, not through the school system, but through the NPSA have a coach, mentor for the last three years that have been provided to me, such as an executive coach. We meet monthly and talk a lot through emails. I have a chance to run a lot of issues and problems through him. He is an unbiased; he doesn’t have any ties to the school. He’s been an administrator, and a former

superintendent. So, he's seen a lot and experienced quite a bit, so I get a lot of advice through him. My superintendent is a big supporter of the NPSA program, so that's another source of support."

The Novice Principal Support Academy differs from traditional Master of School Administration programs because of the continued support offered after graduation. According to DPI (2010), there are no regulations on the specific classes necessary to obtain a degree in school administration. Therefore, courses necessary for licensure vary by school. "Several assistant principals believed courses such as school finance, the superintendency, and school boards were meaningful because the coursework gave them practical knowledge that could be readily applied in their daily work environments" (Bartholomew & Fusarelli, 2003, p. 296). Bartholomew and Fusarelli (2003) also suggest courses in school budgets, staffing, and working with diverse groups would also be helpful to future administrators.

Many colleges and universities offer internship programs which prepare educators for leadership roles. These programs are designed to present the candidate with practical day-to-day experiences, support the candidate's leadership development, and other competencies as needed (Internship Manual, 2011). Additionally, the educators are prepared to help promote the vision of learning in a school community, promote and maintain a positive school culture for learning through effective instructional programs, best practices to student learning, collaborate with all stakeholders, and advocate for all students. Fusarelli, et al. (2010), argue that "new school leaders must be prepared to be change agents, and therefore the nature of leadership preparation must change as well" (p. 2). After completing a school administration

program, the graduates are released from the university system and do not benefit nor receive additional support or guidance.

Through the support and leadership of the Novice Principal Support Academy, the principals have made noteworthy growth in their schools. One NPSA principal has been recognized as Top Ten School for African American Male Student Performance. Additionally, other schools led by NPSA graduates are listed in the top 5% of the schools in student growth in the state (Fusarelli, 2014). Fusarelli & DPI (2104) continues, “NPSA schools were recognized for gains in student achievement. Students gained +7.9% points more than other schools. Graduation rates also improved ranging from +7.3% to +20%.” The graph below compares composite test scores for schools with NPSA graduates as principals after one year (Fusarelli, 2014, p.1).

Figure 1 compares the composite scores from the 2012-13 school year, and the 2013-14 school year, the first year with the NPSA principals leading the school. The graph demonstrates the growth prevalent within the schools under the leadership of the NPSA principals. According to figure 1 all of the schools listed received at least twenty points of growth on their composite scores.

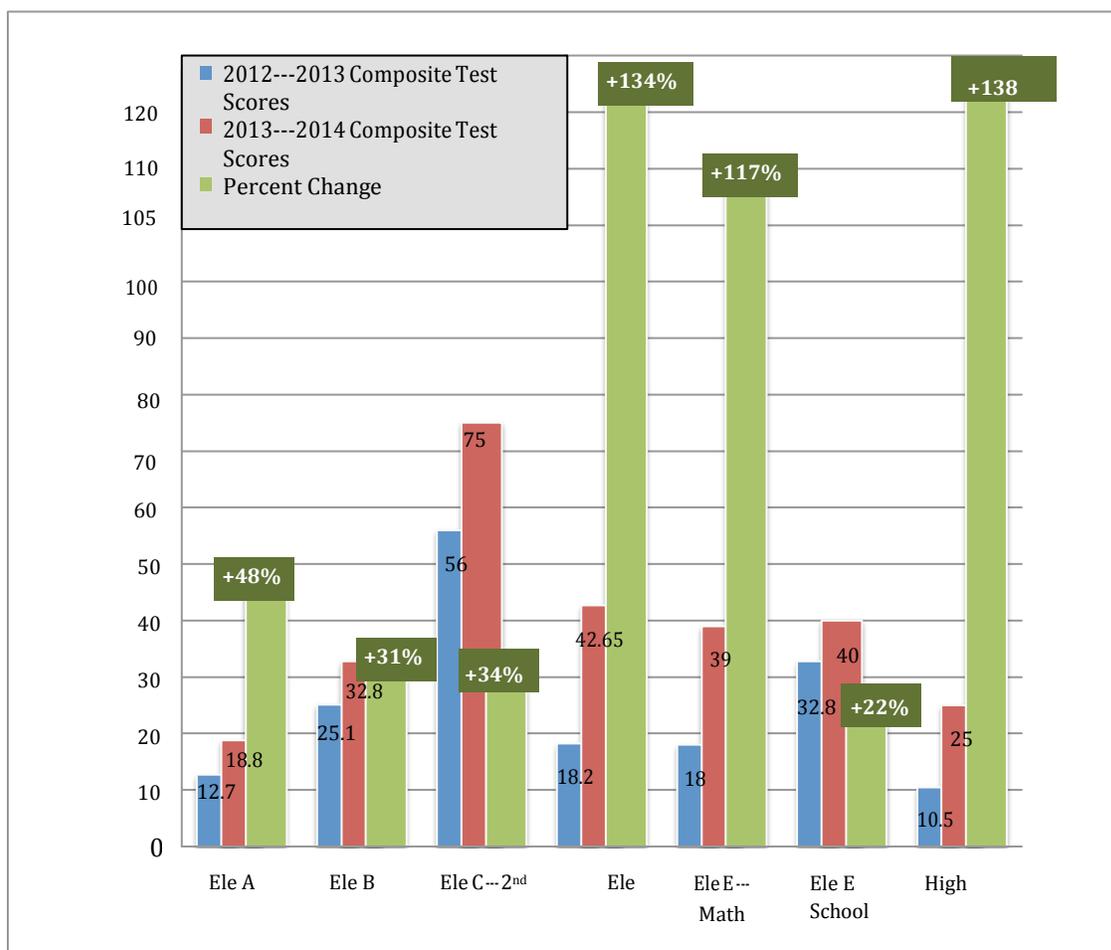


Figure 1: Composite Score Comparison For elementary schools, the composite test scores for 3rd grade are reported except for Elementary C, which is a K---2 school and grade 2 is reported. Six (6) NPSA graduates were principals in 2013-2014: 5 Elementary School principals and 1 High School principal. (Fusarelli, 2014, p.1).

THE INTERVIEWS

The participants in this study are all first year principals who agreed to participate in a structured phone interview. Each participant received the interview questions prior to the interview. At the conclusion of the interview, the participants reviewed the transcripts and had the option to provide comments or agree with the transcripts. All of the participants agreed with the transcripts and did not provide any additional feedback from the transcripts.

When asked of the *major concerns* when accepting the position as principal, several concerns were presented. Jennifer discuss her anxiety about being the head of the school and whether she was prepared. She states, “You are responsible to students, to families to the community, to your staff. After being an assistant principal for a year, I felt like it was a job that I was capable of, but it’s different when you are in the assistant principal seat, than when you are in the principal’s chair and the buck really stops with you. I had concerns about whether I was ready for that, whether that was the right fit for me. Whether I had what it took to really be able to work with all of those different stakeholders effectively. It’s a lot of responsibility and was I the right fit.” Justin’s major concerns include coming into a low performing district and being prepared for the unknown. Austin agreed with the concern for the unknown. Anything that could possibly present itself, that he may be ill prepared. Melanie’s apprehension was her lack of experience. She says, “Well, my major concern was that I didn’t have a lot of experience. Right after teaching I did an internship in an elementary school as an assistant principal intern. Then I was an assistant principal the year after that and now I’m a principal.”

Most administrators strive to become a successful leader. The principals interviewed provided ideas on the *traits of a successful administrator*. Justin states, “I believe that those traits that a successful administrator must possess being able to be a visionary, being able to have a vision of where they would like to see the school go or achieve. Communication, being able to have an open communication with all stakeholders. Customer service, being able to meet the needs of the customers as students to the stakeholders and the community.”

Patience was the key for Austin. “I think the patience when dealing with very difficult situations, especially personal situations with students and staff. The patience to not respond, or to feel like you have to respond in a moment, right away. The patience to know when to make a decision, when to take some time to take a breath before you say something. Also patience goes into, patience as it relates to budgetary practices, patience as it relates to planning practices. When I first took this job, I kind of knew some of things that I wanted to do at this school, but I was told by the superintendent and his colleagues not a whole lot needed to be changed, to kind of go slow and then when I got into the role, I thought oh man, this would be so great to improve here or change that, but in hindsight that would have disrupted things simply for the purpose of disrupting.”

Jennifer believes in the power of relationships as a trait for a successful administrator. She argues, “I feel like successful administrators must be able to build strong relationships, with a variety of stakeholders; students, families, parents, staff members, community leaders. There are a lot of people that you are accountable to and serve every day. I think being able to effectively communicate with different people is critical. Relationships building trait or skill, and communication skills, I think are really critical. I think you have to be able to set, articulate a clear vision, build that vision with other people, and to help other people understand that vision as well. Being able to communicate that in the community and to all those stakeholders, I think that’s huge. I also think you need to be able to prioritize, you have a million different things that need to be done all of the time. There are probably a thousand strategies to use to get to that vision that you want to achieve, but you have to be able to say okay, given where we are right now, and when I look at the landscape of my

school, when I look at my staff, when I look at the needs of my students, what is most important? What is it that we can do as a team right now that will help us get closer and closer to that vision? What are the things that we are not going to do right now? While they may be great things to do they may not be top priority. I also think, you have to be an instructional leader. 15 to 20 years ago you probably get by without being must of an instructional leader, being more of a manager and be relatively successful. At a school like mine, where a lot of our kids are pretty significantly behind, I feel like I have to understand how students learn. What they need to know, how are they going to learn those things, how can I support my staff, provide the right tools, the right resources, and again the right support to help them get to that place. When I think of instructional leadership, I think about understanding the curriculum, understanding student developmental levels, and I also think about being able to play a big role in coaching and developing staff to get there.”

During the interview, the participants were asked about the *challenges that have been experienced* during their first year. The challenges vary by participant. Austin explains, “You know in my position finding time to, or finding the things that need to be delegated and finding time for the things that my masters program and I believe are the most important for me to be doing. That has been a great challenge. These things have to get done. In another school there would be someone else doing them, a data manager or a finance person, or assistant principal. For me, all of those things are mine, unless I can find someone else to do them. We have a guidance counselor, a data manager, a secretary and teachers, so it’s all me. You may think it’s a small school, you’re right. Discipline referrals are low, and teacher’s evaluations are a little bit less, but everything else that needs to be

done, I have to do it. Figuring out what things can be taken on by teacher leaders has been important.”

Melanie begins by citing tough conversations as a challenge. She says, “Just a lot of the tough conversations that I have had to have. Trying to balance the climate where teachers are feeling underpaid and unappreciated. We had a lot of new initiatives piled on us at once. Trying to go through that is tough as a new principal. Also trying to be supportive of my teachers but at the same time trying to keep them focused and not dwelling on the things that are not within our control. Trying to help them push forward regardless. Trying to deal with change in general. There are a lot of different systems that have not been the most effective, so having put different procedures in place to correct those different things. For example, I have a lot of veteran teachers who are not use to technology. Our district has a one to one initiative for grades 4 and up. So, I’m trying to impress to them the importance of getting our little ones ready and using the technology to engage them. Some of them are really struggling. They don’t know how to use the technology therefore, they don’t embrace it. The kids are ready for it and know how to use it. They can teach their teachers, but some of them are so fearful of losing that control and taking risk in the classroom. That has been challenging, explaining to them that it’s okay if you try and you fail. It’s about reflecting and getting back to the drawing board. That has been a challenge, but it’s one that I am willing to take on.” Justin argues his major challenges have been teacher apathy, low expectations and the lack of parental involvement.

When asked of her challenges, Jennifer says, “I think, certainly there are some of those big picture challenges. For example, I came in and there was an outdated school

improvement plan. As a new principal I needed to come in and figure out what our priorities were going to be for the year, and ideally for the next few years, but didn't have much context yet for the school, staff, students, or community. I really tried to quickly gain context and build those relationships. I tried to understand where we were by looking at our data. I had to talk to people about where they saw us and where they wanted us to go. Then work with our school improvement team and other stakeholders to really make a plan that was actually meaningful, living, and data driven. I didn't want to just write things down on paper that we were never going to do or use. I also had never been in a school that had a really strong and functioning school improvement team so I wasn't quite sure how that should work or what they will look like, just trying to figure that process out so we could land somewhere with a solid plan for the year was tough initially. I think that was an initial challenge that I faced. Additionally, I'm an outsider, and I'm not from the county. I'm a white woman, I serve, most of my students are African American or Latino. Most of my teachers are white and most of them are from this area. So, trying to establish myself as a leader, trying to build relationships to get across those lines of difference for lack of a better term, I think that is a challenge anytime you come anywhere new. I wanted people to know who I was, where I came from, and what was important to me. I wanted to do that in a way that wasn't overbearing and didn't turn people away. That was a challenge that I faced and continue to work on. The challenge of culture is huge. I think when I came to the school the staff culture at an all-time low. People were not feeling really good and there was a negative vibe amongst the staff and there was a variety of reasons for that. I think trying to get underneath that to figure out what was causing that and trying to figure out what we were going to do

about it to increase morale. Also with student culture, trying to work with people in doing this but also to assert myself and my own leadership philosophy on how we want to develop our students as leaders. How we want to provide them opportunities. How we want to keep them in school, and not suspending them for every infraction. Trying to first figure out what that need to look like challenging and is still very challenging with the student culture piece. That's something that we continue to work on."

As in most interviews strengths and weakness or *what areas where you most and least prepared* were the final two questions of the interview. Justin felt most prepared in area of Human Resource Leadership and Instructional Leadership. He states, "Areas that I was best prepared according to the evaluation tool were basically Teacher Leadership and Human Resources. For the last ten years, because of being a teacher leader, I always work with the School Leadership Team and School Improvement Team on the vision and goals. I feel that as an administrator I knew what I needed to do with that so I feel that was one of my plus. Also, when I served as assistant principal, the principal with the vacancies allowed me to be able to be instrumental in the interviewing process. That built my capacity. When I took on this position, when I was able to interview I knew those questions that I needed to ask. Those were my two areas that I feel strongly in."

Jennifer was most prepared to set the tone for the school. She believes, "I was prepared, I have a sense of the tone I wanted to set with my staff and the tone I want to set with my students. I had a sense of how I wanted to go about setting priorities for the year. I think through the year I have learned a lot about time management and about prioritization within my own schedule so I feel like I was prepared. I knew this was going to be a very

intense job and I've had other intense jobs so I was well prepared for that. I've had managerial experience before, which was helpful. I was prepared in the area of managing adults. In my job with Teach for America, as executive director I did a lot of fund raising, so I had experiences building relationships externally and with who are different from me, have different priorities, and are looking for different things. I've learned a lot about determining what our goals should look like for our kids. Tracking and holding people accountable for that. I had a sense of how to go about doing that."

Austin believes his success as a teacher proved to be a strength as principal. He argues, "I felt like I was pretty good in the classroom. I could see the levels that amount to student achievement and good instruction." Melanie expounds, "I feel like I was very well prepared for it. Of course some things only experience could prepare you for some of the things that I've gone through. All and all I haven't had a situation that I didn't feel I could handle whether it was from some of the trainings that I have had with crucial conversations or facilitative leadership. With my internship and my grad school program we did a lot of hands on application. In the real world I would have times where I can flash back to the things that we have practiced. I developed really, really good relationships with my cohort, so if I go into potentially sticky situations, I have a number of people that I can reach out to and run ideas by to say this is what I'm thinking about what do you think? Through my grad school program I felt like I was pretty well prepared. Plus I had a yearlong internship before, my second year in my grade school program. I was a middle school teacher and I hadn't had a whole lot of experience in an elementary school. My internship year, I spent at an elementary school and I learned a lot. That helped me too."

In reference to being least prepared, Justin begins by saying, “The area that I was least prepared was the external development. I felt that I needed to be a little bit stronger with the federal, state and district mandates and being able to develop programs and opportunities to be able to reach out to the community. Also, those managerial needs, school resources, budget, being able to make sure that I have that down packed.” Jennifer was least prepared working with the elementary curriculum. She says, “In some ways I feel like, some people come into being a principal from being a teacher for so many years, and that wasn’t my background so in some ways. I’m not an elementary school teacher by trade and so I was not as prepared in curriculum. I feel like I was not prepared, I had a lot to learn about young learners. Also some technical stuff that I wasn’t prepared for, like managing the budget. We took a budgeting class, but every district is different. I think it takes a while to get used to being in the principal’s seat.” Austin would like to be better in the area of fiscal management. He believes, “The financial stuff, because things that are specific to the school and the district.” Melanie was least prepared for the interpersonal situations that she experienced. She says “The heartbreaking experiences that you go through. Just listening to some of the stories. I don’t think that you can ever be emotionally prepared for some of the things. Then the balance of home and work. I wasn’t prepared for that. Another least prepared, was the budget. I’ve heard a lot of people say you don’t really get the preparation for that until you get in the role.”

THEMES

In interviewing the members of the Novice Principal Support Academy who are currently in their first year as principal, when reviewing the interview transcripts, several

common themes arose. The themes that are presented are topics that were present and expounded upon by all of the interviews with the first year principals. These themes were fiscal management, the importance of building relationships, human resource management, having difficult conversations, the importance of having a mentor, time management, creating and implementing vision and expectations in the school.

Fiscal management is often provided as an instructional course in many School Administration programs; however, it is not until an individual is in the position as principal that true understanding of fiscal management occurs. Jennifer states, “Some technical stuff that I wasn’t prepared for, like managing the budget. We took a budgeting class, but every district is different. I think it takes a while to get used to being in the principal’s seat.” In today’s high stakes accountability world, principals are required to provide more educational services and opportunities with less funding. Melanie agrees, stating, “We have experienced quite a few budget cuts. There are a lot of things that we can’t do anymore because of the financial limitations, but at the same time there are higher and more expectations, and the two just don’t go along. That makes it pretty tough.” It is imperative that principals feel confident in this area; however, according to the principals interviewed all agreed that fiscal management was a major concern or the area in which they were least prepared. When asked in what area they felt least prepared, Austin concurred, stating, “Some of the financial stuff, because things that are specific to the school and the district, some of those things that I had to recruit extra help for.”

As a new principal, *building relationships* with all stakeholders is imperative to the success of the administrator. Melanie provides advice to first year administrators, which was

given to her by her superintendent. She says, "Listen, learn, and lead - in that order. You have to listen to your stakeholders and learn about your environment before you know what you're leading." First year principals must learn the culture of the school through the relationships of those who are members of that culture. Jennifer believes the administrator must work to build relationships with all stakeholders and that is an important skill to possess. "I feel like a successful administration must be able to build strong relationships, again with a variety of stakeholders; students, families, parents, staff members, community leaders. There are a lot of people that you are accountable to and serve every day. I think being able to effectively communicate with different people is critical. Having a relationships building trait or skill, and communication skills, I think are really critical." Melanie cited her training in her master's program as her source for understanding and providing her with meaningful insight on building relationships. Because of the practice and exposure that she received, she feels she is confident to build relationships with all of the stakeholders vital to her school.

Melanie argues the importance of all stakeholders to the success of the school. She specifically highlights the importance of reaching out to community members who may not have students in the school, but are still vital to the success in the school. In planning for the upcoming school year she states, "I plan to positively promote my school more to the community. Majority of voters have no significant connection with public schools. I need to get the word out about what's going on at our school and how community support benefits everyone in the long run whether you have kids at public school or not. The community needs to know the impact that they have and how they can help."

In reflection of the school year, Jennifer cites building relationships as a priority for the upcoming school year. “I will think bigger in the coming year about opportunities for our students that will broaden their horizons and provide them with leadership opportunities. I will do a better job of engaging parents and guardians in authentic ways.” Jennifer argues building relationships with staff, students and parents is imperative to creating an atmosphere of trust in the school. She believes, “trust is critical.” Justin also believes in the importance of building strong relationships with parents and the community. In his reflection, he cites this as an area for growth in the upcoming school year.

As the principal and leader of the school it is imperative to be in sync with the needs of the staff. Melanie alludes to this when discussing watching her teachers struggle with change due to a change in human resources. Jennifer also provides an example of Human Resource leadership when talking about the various personal situations that have occurred with her staff. Human Resource is defined by the School Executive Principal Evaluation Process:

Principals will ensure that the school is a professional learning community. Principals will ensure that process and systems are in place which results in recruitment, induction, support, evaluation, development and retention of high performing staff. The principal must engage and empower accomplished teachers in a distributive manner, including support of teachers in day-to-day decisions such as discipline, communication with parents/guardians, and protecting teachers from duties that interfere with teaching, and must practice fair and consistent evaluations of teachers.

The principal must engage teachers and other professional staff in conversations to plan their career paths and support district succession planning. (DPI, 2011)

According to this definition *Human Resource Leadership* is essential to the day-to-day operation of the school in working with teachers and staff. Administrators must be aware of the needs of their staff and work to ensure the staff members are working to meet the needs of their students. Principals must also work to find individuals that best fit the needs in their school. Justin stated, “When I served as assistant principal, the principal with the vacancies allowed me to be able to be instrumental in the interviewing process. That built my capacity. When I took on this position, when I was able to interview I knew those questions that I needed to ask.”

Upon the completion of Justin’s first year as a school administrator, he argues the importance of human resource leadership for school administrators. He states, “Principals must be fair, consistent and respectful.” He also believes in the importance of setting explicit and clear expectations for all staff members on day one which will set the tone for the school year.

Principals must also have the knowledge and leadership skills to know what works best for their schools. They must ensure that they have a clear vision for the human resources in their school. Jennifer provided an example of how she used her leadership skills to provide more opportunities for her students. “We had a situation where I had been given a second grade allotment where I thought I could potentially do without it if I put a few more kids in the other classrooms. So I turned that allotment into an art teacher position and I had his (the superintendent’s) full support in doing that. I think a lot of districts that would have

been this huge bureaucratic process. Whereas, in this situation the superintendent had trust in me and thought I was making smart decisions. So I was able to say here is my idea, we don't have an art teacher I think we really need one can I use this position for art.”

Communication with staff is imperative to Human Resource Leadership. The principal must ensure all staff members are cognizant of imperative information in the school. Melanie finds communication as an area of Human Resource Leadership that will be an area of improvement for the upcoming school year. She states, “While I feel communication is a strong skill of mine, I relied too much on written communication. This is not bad; I love to write and can get my ideas across better in writing. Plus there's a paper trail for when issues arise that all can refer back to. However, some messages or news I needed to deliver in person. I plan to have at least one face-to-face whole staff meeting every month next school year as opposed to bi-monthly as I did this past school year. I met with my leadership team every month and relied on team leaders to relay information. Sometimes it got misinterpreted and delivered with infused opinions. A monthly staff meeting will alleviate this issue.”

Providing support for teachers and staff is another branch of Human Resource Leadership that must be provided by principals. Melanie believes, “Your employees are humans first and employees second. Don't forget that they have families and themselves to take care of. There is nothing wrong with being empathetic and kind.” The principal must ensure teachers and staff are supported regardless of the external factors that are present in the school. Melanie stated, “Not just having tough conversations with the parents, but with my teachers. Watching my teachers kind of go through some serious struggles due to the

limitations. For example, my first grade teachers went from having full time teacher assistants to half time teacher assistants. That was a big blow to them, it wasn't something that they knew how to deal with, and they are still struggling with."

In any type of leadership role, conversations must be held in a professional manner in which all parties feel valued, heard and respected. As a school principal many of the conversations held may be difficult due to the topics discussed or because of the individuals concerned. *Difficult conversations* is another common theme that all of the first year principals discussed. According to Melanie, "Administrators must be willing to have tough conversations. Not just having tough conversations with the parents, but with my teachers. As a first year principal, a challenge is the tough conversations that I have had to have. Trying to balance this climate where teachers are feeling underpaid and unappreciated. We had a lot of new initiatives piled on us at once. Trying to navigate through that is tough as a new principal." Melanie goes further to suggest, "I had a chance to listening to the different concerns. Sometimes it's just venting from the teachers about the different things they are being impacted with. Sometimes I have to serve as an advocate for them arguing some of the different points they are coming up with, especially if it's something that was in our control."

With the difficult conversations that first year principals encounter it is imperative for the administrator to remain patient, have a listening ear and to keep all communication lines open. "Patience. I think the patience when dealing with very difficult situations, personal situations with students and staff. The patience to not respond, or to feel like you have to respond in a moment, right away. The patience to know when to take time to make a decision, when to take some time to take a breath before you say something. I mean being at

the end of the line means everything that comes to you is already at that point, going to be emotionally charged and so what I've found is that depending on what I say, I can either can escalate or deescalate a situation. I can respond positively or negatively depending on the words that I choose", Austin believed. Melanie agreed, "I also think they (administrators) need to be a listener. Listen to what people are trying to say. The administrator must be a learner or observer of their environment, especially if they are new to the school." Justin believed in the importance of communication. "I believe that those traits that a successful administrator must possess include communication, being able to have an open communication with all stakeholders.

Learning how to handle difficult conversations is a skill that is often learned from a more seasoned professional, such as a mentor. Mentors provide sound knowledge and skills needed to be a successful principal. "I feel like I have had some fantastic mentors through the years. I learned a lot in my first role as a principal intern, I had an amazing mentor principal and also an assistant principal at that school that were hugely instrumental in helping me understand what great leadership is and what I envisioned for my school in the future. Then as an assistant principal I worked with another leader who was very different from those that I worked with before but also just taught me a ton about leadership and about the type of leader I wanted to be as principal."

Mentoring is a key factor which all of the first year principals that were interviewed cited as a contributing factor to their success. As Jennifer stated above she has had different mentors in the varying roles leading up to her current position, yet they all provided some sort of leadership and support. Jennifer went on to discuss the importance of her current

mentor. “My biggest source of support has been my director. We have a director of elementary education, who is a former principal herself. She was the principal in the district, prior to that she was a teacher at the school that I am principal of. She has been in the district for a really long time. She has a lot of contacts for the school. She is awesome and has been a huge source of support for me for everything from calling her to say hey, I have this question about can this teacher take leave because here is the situation; you know like minor things. To big things like we did this survey, I surveyed my staff and here are the areas that I think are great and here are the areas that are not great. Can you help me think through what I can do next? She has been really instrumental, I think in supporting me.”

Austin mentioned his support personnel from the Central Office as a means of mentoring and support. He stated, “I have a central office person that I can call whenever I need to and it isn’t someone that I directly report to. It doesn’t have to be my Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent. I can call somebody else at Central Office and I can get feedback from them and share other issues with them without any fear of uh, retribution or retaliation for sharing a concern. That’s something really great that we do at the district.”

Although mentoring was a vital aspect in the lives of each principal the method varies for each county and individual. Melanie identified another principal in her district as her mentor principal, along with her coach from the NPSA program. She stated, “Our school district has given all new principals a mentor principal. It’s a seasoned principal that’s also in the district. I have a mentor principal that I can run a lot of ideas by. I also have my elementary school director who serves as a source of support, resource, and just a listening ear for different things, I consult her quite a bit. I also, not through the school system, but

through the NPSA program, I have a coach, mentor for the last three years that have been provided to me, such as an executive coach. We meet monthly and talk a lot through emails. I have a chance to run a lot of issues and problems through him. He is unbiased; he doesn't have any ties to the school. He's been an administrator, and a former superintendent. So, he's seen a lot and experienced quite a bit, so I get a lot of advice through him." Justin also credits the NPSA program for his preparation and continued support. According to Justin, "I feel I was well prepared for this principalship because of the preparation that I received from the Novice Principals Support Academy, my mentoring principal, and coach. For the last two years, the constant dialogue with my coach, my NPSA professors, and my mentoring principal gave me the skills or improved/enhanced the skills that I had to make me become a successful principal for my first year."

Time management or learning to find balance as a first year principal was also identified as an area of concern for the principals. Melanie was least prepared to "find the balance between work and home". Jennifer felt she has learned to manage her time this school year. She stated, "I think through the year I have learned a lot about time management and about prioritization within my own schedule so I feel like I was prepared. I knew this was going to be a very intense job and I've had other intense jobs so I was well prepared for that." Austin does not have an assistant principal. Therefore, he must set priorities to complete tasks. He believed, "In my position finding time to, or finding the things that need to be delegated, and finding time for the things that my master's program and I believe are the most important for me to be doing. That has been a great challenge." Austin identifies several task were vital to the success of a first year administrator, that were

outlined during his master's program; such as the balance and constant review of the schools budget, along with setting and executing the vision and mission of the school. Ensuring these topics were resolved has been a constant focus during Austin's first year as principal.

In review of Justin's first year as principal, he believes in the importance of creating a calendar of events for the entire school year in July. This calendar will identify task and events for the principal and staff. With the calendar, everyone will have the opportunity to plan in advance for functions and for the completion of task.

Establishing vision and expectations as a new principal is the final theme that arose in the interviews. Jennifer asserted, "I think you have to be able to set, articulate a clear vision, build that vision with other people, and to help other people understand that vision as well. Being able to communicate that in the community and to all those stakeholders, I think that's huge. There are probably a thousand strategies to use to get to that vision that you want to achieve, but you have to be able to say okay, given where we are right now, and when I look at the landscape of my school, when I look at my staff, when I look at the needs of my students, what is most important? What is it that we can do as a team that will help us get closer and closer to that vision?" Justin agreed on the importance of setting a vision and having high expectations as the new principal in a school. "I believe that those traits that a successful administrator must possess being able to be a visionary, being able to have a vision of where they would like to see the school go or achieve."

Additionally, Melanie discussed the need challenge her staff to exceed expectations, especially with the current legislative mandates. Melanie articulates the need to execute the vision and have high expectations when referring to achieving the demands of the Common

Core standards. “They are working really hard but they are stressed out under the demands of the Common Core. The high stakes standards are not going anywhere. I can’t change the law and although I feel for them, I can’t lower expectations either. It’s a tough balance that you have to make for new principals or for experienced principals.”

The following themes were presented through the interview process, fiscal management, the importance of building relationships, human resource management, having difficult conversations, the importance of having a mentor, time management, creating and implementing vision and expectations in the school. These themes provide insight and suggest solutions to the research questions in this study.

Additional themes that were discussed include the *impact on the high stakes accountability model on the principal’s leadership*. Principals in today’s world must be instructional leaders to have teachers who are preparing students to meet the mandates of the high stakes accountability environment. Melanie and Jennifer provide insight on the effects of the high stakes accountability model on their leadership as a first year principal. Melanie argues, “The Common Core Standards, a lot of parents don’t understand. When they come in they have their experiences from when they were in school. The first thing that they say “Is this is kindergarten?” They are learning geometry in kindergarten. Kindergarten looks like the new first grade. I have to really listen to the venting of my teachers with the conversations that they have had with the parents. They are working really hard but they are stressed out under the demands of the Common Core. Another struggle is just the developmental readiness for some of our kids. Some of the things that little ones are expected to do, they are not developmentally ready for. I can’t change the law and although I

feel for them, I can't lower expectations either. It's a tough balance that you have to make for new principals and experienced principals."

Jennifer offers, "In general, I am a proponent of accountability. I think we need to have some way to hold people accountable, students, teachers, and administrators. I am fan of that because it helps us stay focused, if the assessments are good assessments, it helps us stay focused on what's important in the curriculum for our students. In that way I do think that's affecting me as a principal. I understand what the assessments are asking of our kids. We spent a lot of time in the school this year looking at our K-2 math assessments, looking at what Reading 3-D is asking of our kids, looking at what the End of Grade test is going to ask of our students. I think it's pretty solid. Certainly there are a million other things that I want our kids to know as well, but I also think those assessments are a decent gage of student mastery of the standards. In that way, I think accountability creates a bar for us and gives us a bar to strive for. Certainly, I want our students to meet and exceed that bar. In that way I think accountability is fine. I'm not one of those people, who think, let's just get rid of it, I think there have been some definite benefits. On the con side, Read to Achieve has impacted us significantly this year. It's been tough for the 3rd grade. It's been hard for our teachers. It's been hard for our students. It's been hard for their parents. To digest it, and fully understand what the expectations are for Read to Achieve. Then to come to terms with the fact that still half of our kids are not at grade level right now. That's tough, because we have a long, long way to go. I really feel the pressure. The nature of Read to Achieve adds a lot of managerial sorts of task. These passages take a tremendous amount of logistical time. Our teachers don't have a lot of time. Our assistant principal doesn't have a lot of time. I

don't have a lot of time. So, we're managing the paperwork; that is challenging. I think people are frustrated right now. I see one of my roles as principal is to try to shield my staff as much as I can, from that sort of managerial work, but it's been harder this year. We want our kids to be proficient. We don't want our kids to be socially promoted. We want to give them every chance to be proficient, but we need the capacity for three more staff members. We've got this mandate and we've got these things we have to do. I think everybody is feeling really stretched."

Justin added, "It drives me, motivates me to make sure I understand beginning with the end in mind. Sometimes it causes me to lack the people skills that I need or having the empathy or compassion that I need at the moment because I understand where we need to go. One of the things that I shared with our staff at our first meeting is sometimes I may appear not to be concerned when they are talking but I'm really concerned but I have that drive of being able to make sure we reach our destination. That's one of the areas that I feel has affected me as a person, being compassionate and understanding. Sometimes the causes of the high stakes accountability are that I don't have that empathy when I should have."

Austin has conformed to a more rigid nature because of the high stakes accountability requirements. He believes, "What it has done it has made everyone a little leery of being innovative. As a school that is based on a lot of principles of innovation there are things that we want to do, and decisions that we want to make. So for instance, even if we want to amend our calendar differently, plan units, or projects, everything has to be aligned with the district benchmarks, and we still have to be aligned with the state accountability measures. It's an extra mound or extra level of bureaucracy and red tape, when you want to make a

decision to be innovative, to increase student learning, and do something different. It just kind of dumbs up the work a little bit. That's without even focusing on the fact that the accountability measures in the secondary school are very strange. How you can hold a social studies teacher responsible for merits that were determined based on a student's English and math scores from a previous history, I don't think we are quite where we need to be with this whole system."

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were explored in the study.

1. What are the challenges first year principal's face?
2. What types of experiences, training, or preparation do first year principals perceive as necessary for their success?

According to the first year principals interviewed *the challenges that first year principal's face* can be numerous and vary depending on the individual. The common challenges that arose during my interviews included establishing the vision for the school as a new principal, building relationships with stakeholders, and instructional leadership.

As a first year principal it is imperative to go into the school and set the tone for leadership. The ability to articulate the vision to all stakeholders is imperative to first year principals. Jennifer identified establishing a clear vision was a major challenge for her as a first year principal. She stated, "I came in and there was a school improvement plan that had been written and it was outdated and as a new principal I needed to come in and figure out what our priorities were going to be for the year, and ideally for the next few years but didn't have much context yet for the school, the staff, the students, the community. I think really

trying to quickly gain that context and build those relationships. Try to understand where it is we were, look at our data. Talk to people about where they saw us and where they wanted us to go. Then work with our school improvement team and other stakeholders to really make a plan that was actually meaningful, living and data driven.” Austin spoke of an instance where he wanted to make drastic changes that could possibly change the vision of the school. He stated, “When I first took this job, I knew some of things that I wanted to do at this school, but I was told by the superintendent and his colleagues not a whole lot needed to be changed, to go slow and then when I got into the role I thought, this would be so great to improve here or change that, but in hindsight that would have disrupted things simply for the purpose of disrupting.”

Many first year principals are faced with the task of continuing in the path of the previous administrator or blazing new trails as the new school principal. It is imperative that the school principal be knowledgeable of the schools practices and climate to ensure the vision is in line with the districts vision and works in the best interest of the students. Justin added, “My major concern when accepting the position as principal was coming to a county with low test scores and the unknown. Talking about the unknown, was basically what were the expectations of the staff and being able to have those crucial conversations with the staff looking at where we were and where we are trying to move student achievement to.” Establishing vision is imperative in efforts to drive instruction to increase student achievement.

As a new principal, building relationships provides stakeholders with an opportunity to be a vital part of the vision for the school. The principal must be visible and personable in

an effort to build relationships. Melanie asserted that the principal must be a people person. “I think the successful administrator must be a people person. This is not a job you can do if you are not a people person.” As a new principal, having an open line of communication is vital to the success of the principal. Justin agreed, “Some of the experiences that I have had as a new principal include improving community involvement, parent involvement and maintaining high expectations for teachers and students. One of the things is, basically being able to have that open communication with parents, having a greater response of parental participation.” Jennifer said, “The position of principal is a job with a tremendous amount of responsibility. You are responsible to students, to families to the community, to your staff. It’s different when you are in the assistant principal seat, than when you are in the principal’s chair and the buck really stops with you.”

Because of the newly formed relationships with stakeholders, it is important for new principals to demonstrate their ability to be instructional leaders. Time management was cited as a theme earlier in the chapter. In today’s accountability world, principals must find the time to be instructional leaders. Jennifer stated, “I also think, you have to be an instructional leader. 15 to 20 years ago you probably could get by without being must of an instructional leader, being more of a manager and are relatively successful. At a school where a lot of our kids are pretty significantly behind, I feel like I have to understand how students in grades pre-K though 3 learn. What they need to know, how are they going to learn those things, how can I support my staff, provide the right tools, the right resources, and again the right support to help them get to that place. When I think of instructional leadership, I think about understanding the curriculum, understanding student developmental

levels, and I also think about being able to play a big role in coaching and developing staff to get there.”

Justin believed because of his effort to be an instructional leader, he often lacks the empathy needed as principal. “I understand beginning with the end in mind. Sometimes it causes me to lack the people skills that I need or having the empathy or compassion that I need at the moment because I understand where we need to go. One of the things that I shared with our staff at our first meeting is sometimes I may appear not to be concerned when they are talking but I’m really concerned. I have that drive of being able to make sure we reach our destination. That’s one of the areas that I feel has affected me as a person, being compassionate and understanding. Sometimes the causes of the high stakes accountability are that I don’t have that empathy when I should have.” In several instances school administrators are required to be data driven because of the accountability requirement, therefore compassion and empathy are nonexistent. Although it is important to be a good listener and be patient with staff members as the leader of the school, empathy must not interfere with one’s ability to fulfill the job of as educator.

Instructional leadership is imperative in the high stakes accountability time in education. Jennifer emphasizes, “I also think, you have to be an instructional leader. 15 to 20 years ago you probably get by without being must of an instructional leader, being more of a manager and be relatively successful.” That is no longer the case for school administrators. Melanie provides an example of how she has had to explain the curriculum to parents. She states “With the Common Core Standards, a lot of parents don’t understand. When they come in they have their experiences from when they were in school. The first

thing that they say ‘Is this is kindergarten?’ They are learning geometry in kindergarten? Kindergarten looks like the new first grade. It’s really tough, it’s really hard. I have to really listen to the venting of my teachers with the conversations that they have had with the parents, because they really just don’t understand.” An instructional leader must work to ensure the readiness of all students and to ensure all stakeholders understand the efforts to accomplish the vision and mission of the school.

In reference to *the types of experiences, training, and preparation first year principals perceived as necessary for their success*, responses varied based on the principal. Austin and Justin credit the Novice Principal Support Academy (NPSA) in assisting them to be prepared to be a principal. Justin has not received any professional development through his county, but has received a mentor to further support him. He argues, “I feel I was well prepared for this principalship because of the preparation that I received from the Novice Principal Support Academy, my mentoring principal and the coach that I had from the Novice Principal Support Academy. For the last two years and a half the constant dialogue with my coach, my NPSA professors, and my mentoring principal gave me the skills or improved/enhanced the skills that I had to make me become a successful principal for my first year.” Austin feels he is best supported in the areas of Teacher Leadership and Human Resources.

Jennifer attends an elementary education meeting monthly with all of the elementary principals in the county. During this meeting time, they have an opportunity to collaborate and discuss issues that specifically pertain to elementary principals. In addition to the monthly meeting, the principal participate in “power hour”. During this time the principals

visit another principal's school and conduct walkthroughs together. Jennifer states, "We also have an informal network, so I feel comfortable calling other principals in the district, asking questions, and getting that support."

Melanie credits her NPSA coach for providing her with an unbiased opinion on topics that arise throughout her tenure as a first year principal. In addition to her NPSA coach she attends a quarterly professional development session for new principals in her county. In this session the new principals read various articles related to educational leadership. "Well, our school district has given all new principals a mentor principal. It's a seasoned principal that's also in the district. I have a mentor principal that I can run a lot of ideas by. I also have my elementary school director who serves as a source of support, resource, and just a listening ear for different things. The district also does a new principal's PLC once a quarter. All of the new principals get together and have discussions on topics and questions that they give us. I also, not through the school system, but through the NPSA have a coach, mentor for the last three years that have been provided to me, such as an executive coach. We meet monthly and talk a lot through emails. I have a chance to run a lot of issues and problems through him. He is an unbiased; he doesn't have any ties to the school. He's been an administrator, and a former superintendent. So, he's seen a lot and experienced quite a bit, so I get a lot of advice through him", Melanie states.

The participants were provided with high-quality continuing professional development, individual executive coaching, rigorous context-specific year-long summer intensive program, a coach to work with them throughout the academic year, and induction support seminars according to Fusarelli & DPI (2014). Jennifer attributes her internship and

mentors with preparing her for the principalship, she says “So, there are lots of things I wasn’t prepared for but I feel like I had a lot of preparation. Certainly through NPSA having those internship opportunities was tremendous. I have been fortunate to have amazing mentors.”

Conclusion

The common themes from the interviews with the first year principals were fiscal management, the importance of building relationships, human resource management, having difficult conversations, the importance of having a mentor, time management, and creating and implementing vision/expectations in the school. In Chapter Five, I will discuss the findings of this study in relation to the existing research, note the similarities and differences found in this study and offer recommendations for practice and further research in this critically important area of school leadership.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The role of the principal has evolved drastically since the beginning of public education. Kafka cited Pearce's (1935) role of the first principal. The role of the principal was as follows:

He gave orders, and enforced them. He directed, advised, and instructed teachers. He classified pupils, disciplined them, and enforced safeguards designed to protect their health and morals. He supervised and rated janitors. He requisitioned all educational, and frequently all maintenance, supplies. Parents sought his advice, and respected his regulations. (Kafka, 2009, p. 321)

Currently school principals are required to be strategic, instructional, cultural, human resource, managerial, external-development, and micro-political leaders. Therefore, the role and requirements to be a principal have created a new horizon for school administrators. The goal of this study was to highlight the experiences and challenges of a first year principal in an effort to provide more research and practical implications to strengthen the training process and ongoing support for this position.

DISCUSSION

As cited in Spillane and Lee (2014). "Newcomers to the occupation, who are informed by the expectations of diverse school stakeholders as well as their own expectations for their new position, are socialized into a new role identity in particular schools. Whereas teachers primarily teach students, principals assume a multifaceted job that includes overlapping instructional, managerial, and political roles. School principals struggle to

manage these competing roles and for newcomers, this role conflict potentially creates identity dilemmas as they transition into the principal position” (p.435). In interviewing four members of the Novice Principal Support Academy who are currently in their first year as principal, several common themes arose. These themes were fiscal management, the importance of building relationships, human resource management, having difficult conversations, the importance of having a mentor, time management, and creating and implementing vision/expectations in the school. Research on school administration training programs, building relationships, instructional leadership, distributed leadership, and mentoring was presented in Chapter 2 which correlates with the themes that arose during the interview process.

Preparation for the position as principal was highly discussed in the interviews with first year principals. School administration training programs have been required to redesign their training programs to focus less on creating efficient managers and focus more on developing leaders who are capable of leading schools to high levels of student performance (Educational Development Center, 2009). The principals often referenced the school administration program in which they were trained and continue to receive support through mentoring. The participants cited the lessons on handling critical conversations and building relationships as reasons for their continued success in these areas.

School administration training programs must have professors who are in touch with the day-to-day experiences of school administrators. According to Spillane and Lee (2014), “Principal work also tends to be fragmented, fast-paced, and varied; it involves long hours and a relentless workload, along with demands from multiple, diverse stakeholders” (p. 432).

The professors in the Novice Principal Support Academy effectively prepared the first year principals interviewed for this study. The first year principals interviewed discussed the real world preparation that they received in the NPSA cohort, yet cited the need from the district to provide more district professional development for district initiatives and procedures. Murphy (1991) provides literature on the importance of professors providing more real life application for practitioners. He begins by stating, “It is difficult to understand how we can justify employing large numbers of professors to educate and train perspective school leaders about experiences of which they have no firsthand knowledge, issues to which they have received minimal exposure in their degree programs and working conditions that may show very little willingness to try to understand” (Murphy, 1991, p. 22). In the interviews all of the principals agreed experience has proven to be the best teacher; however, better preparation by the school districts on district procedures is needed.

Building relationships with all stakeholders of the school was a critical area for all first year principals interviewed in this study. Through the relationships the principals felt the need to establish trust with parents and staff. Alvy and Robbins (1998) believe as one develops relationships and learns the norms of the schoolhouse, he or she experiences gradual inclusion in the school, which is the goal of the principal. It was imperative to articulate the vision and mission of the school to all stakeholders through the relationship building process.

School principals are no longer managers of schools, but must also be instructional leaders. Mitgang (2012) of the Wallace Foundation presented five lessons for leadership training. Of these five, lesson two states that “aspiring principals should attend pre-service

training that prepares them to lead improved instruction and school change, not just manage buildings” (p. 9). As cited in Chapter 2, Supovitz (2000) describes effective habits of instructional leaders:

- Visit classrooms and talk with students about their academic work. Active involvement in the classroom sends the signal to teachers and students that teaching and learning is important.
- Analyze the results of student assessment with faculty members. With this data goals can be developed and strategies for assessing the goals can be created.
- Reduce the mobility of the instructional staff by creating an atmosphere of organizational autonomy.
- Encourage faculty members to exchange instructional strategies, visit each other’s classrooms, and openly discuss instructional practices and problems.

The first year principals interviewed cited these instructional habits as part of their day- to-day activities. In an effort to increase student achievement the principals believed they must be in the classrooms to be aware of the instruction taking place. They must be data driven instructional leaders, who are utilizing data and reflecting on the data to drive instruction.

Human resource management is imperative to instructional leadership. As an instructional leader, it is vital to place staff members in the areas in which they will best serve students. Teachers should be placed in the grade and content area that they are highly

qualified, but also where they will provide the best student outcomes. The principal must provide leadership to Professional Learning Communities, encouraging teachers to collaborate and support each other. According to Bartholomew and Fusarelli (2003), “The need to transform schools into learning communities focused on student achievement, preparing students for higher education, the workforce and to become productive citizens has brought much attention to the role of school leadership” (p. 291). This transformation must begin with the instructional leader.

One of the hardest lessons to learn as a first year principal is distributed leadership. Fusarelli, Kowalski, and Petersen (2011) identify distributed leadership as a means for requiring stakeholders to be active participants in school governance. Because of the need to build relationships, many first year principals are unaware of the abilities of their staff members; therefore, they complete all tasks themselves. “As a more open, democratic leadership model, distributive leadership recognizes the varieties of expertise to optimize organizational performance. By providing opportunities for everyone to participate, and by utilizing in a collective fashion their individual strengths distributed leaderships fosters inclusively, dynamism, community deliberation and engagement, professional growth, and may promote systematic sustainable organizational excellence” (Fusarelli, et al. 2011, p. 48).

The goal of school principals is to create an atmosphere where all stakeholders are welcomed and involved in the decision making of the school. The first year principals interviewed cited distributed leadership as an area of improvement because of the lack of expertise of the staff. The lack of distributed leadership has decreased the ability of principals to effectively manage their time. The principals stated time management was a

significant issue because of the attempt to complete everything. In most instances, with the principals interviewed, this is their first experience at the school; therefore they did not know and were not comfortable allowing others to assist with task to be completed. Because this was their first year in the school, the principals had not developed the trust in the staff to complete task and felt personally responsible to ensure everything was done correctly and on time. With time, distributive leadership will increase because of the relationships built with staff members.

In many instances, once school administrators graduate from university programs and become school administrators they no longer receive the support of the university instructors. The Southern Regional Education Board (2007) argues, “Too many new leaders are left to learn on the job. Their first opportunity to plan and implement school improvement actions will be as head of a school — typically without much guidance from successful peers. In an environment of increasing accountability from the statehouse to the schoolhouse, this “sink-or-swim, stumble through it” approach to principal leadership development not only is counterproductive but helps explain why school reform efforts so often sputter and die out” (p. 9).

First year principals must manage and lead in schools with no assistance. This is not the case with the first year principals interviewed. The principals interviewed have the continued support of the instructors, mentors and coaches of the Novice Principal Support Academy. Through the support of academies, such as the Novice Principal Support Academy, school districts in dire need of quality principals receive the principals and support needed to increase student achievement.

According to the Wallace Foundation (2012), academies such as the NPSA are prevalent throughout the country and are producing quality candidates for hard to staff school districts. The Wallace Foundation (2012) argues, “Early indications are that there may be payoffs for students in having better-trained principals. The NYC Leadership Academy, for example, launched in 2003 to supply the city’s most challenging schools with highly qualified new leaders, was the subject of an independent evaluation looking at student achievement test scores. The study found that elementary and middle schools led by academy trained principals had demonstrated more accelerated growth in English language arts and math than comparison schools led by other novice principals” (p. 5).

All of the principals interviewed cited an individual that has been influential in their professional life and has provided guidance through their first year as a principal. This mentor has come in the form of a central office director, professor from the Novice Principal Support Academy, or fellow principal. Mentoring has provided all of the principals with added support throughout the school year. Young et al. (2005) highlighted several qualities that mentors must possess to establish a meaningful mentor/mentee relationship. These qualities include the need for deep reflection on the behalf of the mentor allowing them to share their thoughts and feelings with their mentee. They must be able to admit their mistakes and use the mistakes as a method for teaching. The need to clone their mentee must be avoided; it is imperative to allow their mentee to be themselves and to learn from their mistakes. Support during these mistakes is most beneficial to the mentee. Commitment, collaboration, trust, mutual respect, and support are all qualities that are shown to enhance a mentoring relationship, according to Palermo (2004). These qualities were imperative to the

success of the first year principals interviewed. The principals believed their success as a first year principal was partially because of the guidance they received from their mentors.

The role of the principal is enormous. Piraino (2008) creates a vivid description of the role of the principal. The principal must be a teacher leader and the primary change agent. They must prepare children for a diverse social climate. Principals must fulfill managerial and supervisory roles, while being model teachers, good fiscal managers, strong communicators, and responsible citizens. The interviews with the first year principals in the Novice Principal Support Academy supports the research outlined in Chapter 2 concerning various aspects of the principalship. The principals provided examples of their experience in their role of principal that further supports the research. Socialization and evaluation of leadership were the two areas in Chapter 2 that the first year principals did not provide support. Although there is a plethora of research on the effects of socialization on a new principal none of the principals interviewed cited the lack of socialization as a theme. All of the principals interviewed, have the support of the professors in Novice Principal Support Academy. Evaluation of leadership was also not mentioned by any of the principals. This could possibly be because the interviews were conducted before the end of the year, and because at the conclusion of the year when the principals were revisited, evaluation was not a major issue in reflection.

Socialization is one area that was presented in the research that was not discussed by the principals. The principals did offer information concerning the relationships that were established with mentoring principals. Jennifer describes the opportunity to meet with other elementary principals during the monthly principal's meeting held by her district, but that is

the only interaction that was cited by the principals. Novice school principals often find the office of the principal lonely. Spillane and Lee (2014) argue that, “New principals often struggle with feelings of professional isolation and loneliness as they transition into a role that carries ultimate responsibility and decision-making powers” (p. 433). Spillane and Lee (2014) go on to suggest the importance of meetings and support groups with other principals to eliminate loneliness and isolation. In 2001, Williams defined socialization as the learning of new social roles through the acquisition of skills and behaviors that are necessary to survive and thrive in a new situation. Socialization for school principals provides the principal with opportunities to learn more about themselves and their role in the organization. None of the principals cited socialization as an issue, which differs from the research.

None of the first year principals mentioned the evaluation of their leadership through the Executive Principal and Assistant Principal Evaluation Process. In this process educators are required to demonstrate their leadership qualities through the presentation of artifacts. This evaluation process requires administrators to demonstrate leadership that “is distributed among all members of the school community, consists of open, honest communication; is focused on the use of data, teamwork, researched-based practices; and uses tools to drive ethical and principled, goal-oriented action” (DPI, 2009). There was an accountability question, which asked “How has the high stakes accountability environment affected your leadership as principal?” With this question, there was no mention of Standard 8, which evaluates school wide growth. There was no mention of the evaluation process in any of the interviews.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

This research study focused solely on first year principals. As principals remain in the field their knowledge and expertise increase. Generally, first year principals do not know what they do not know until the second year as principal. Therefore, research which includes novice principals in their first three years of the principalship would be effective in an effort to further increase knowledge of school administration programs and to provide support for new principals.

The researcher made several attempts to find a date and time for interviews. The principals were hesitant to be active participants in the study. As an outsider, the researcher contacted the participants by email and by phone in an attempt to build relationships and rapport with the participants, allowing for a more open conversation. This was ineffective. Because of the lack of relationship with the participants, it was obvious that time was of the essence during the interview process.

The first year principals interviewed cited mentoring as a positive aspect of support; however the types of mentoring and the levels of support varied by principal. As cited in Chapter 2 by Young, Sheets, and Knight (2005) argue that mentoring is a partnership of learning in which learning is the primary focus and must be ongoing. One principal cited a mentor that is communicated with by email. This particular mentor is from the university and offers an unbiased opinion when providing advice. This mentoring relationship supports the efforts of the Novice Principal Support Academy to provide continued support to school administration candidates during their first year as principal.

Another principal cited a mentor that is a superior. With this relationship the principal is leery or hesitant about the questions asked. Young et al. (2005) highlighted several of these qualities that mentors must possess to establish a meaningful mentor/mentee relationship. These qualities include the need for deep reflection on the behalf of the mentor allowing them to share their thoughts and feelings with their mentee. They must be able to admit their mistakes and use the mistakes as a method for teaching. The need to clone their mentee must be avoided; it is imperative to allow their mentee to be themselves and to learn from their mistakes. Having a supervisor as a mentor could create conflict with the mentee. Young et al. provides qualities that are hard to fulfill with a supervisor supervisee relationship because of a conflict in interest. Mentoring can be beneficial depending on the mentor and the amount of support received by the principal. This is an area in need of extended research.

Schroer and Baughn (2006) suggest school administrators must work to implement fair and consistent student discipline and keep positive relationships with parents and stakeholders. Building positive relationships was imperative to all first year principals interviewed. Although the principals acknowledged their School Administration program for providing valuable training, more research to further provide best practices on building relationships with all stakeholders is needed.

Additionally, all of the principals interviewed served as assistant principals prior to being principal. The assistant principalship has been historically viewed as the position in which preparation for the principalship occurs. In reality, this is often not the case. “The jobs of principals and assistant principals are so different that the role of the assistant

principal does not provide appropriate training for the principalship,” as cited in Bartholomew and Fusarelli (2003, p. 293).

In many instances, the assistant principal is consumed with menial tasks such as buses, books, and discipline, which does not provide the experience needed to become principal. Additionally, the principals interviewed served as assistant principal for one year before being promoted to principal. There are several different tracks to becoming principal. Individuals can range from no experience to several years of experience as assistant principals. Of the principals interviewed, three were promoted from positions within a school, while the other was promoted from Teach for America. The role of the assistant principal should be researched in an effort to find best practices for school districts to better prepare educators to become effective principals. Although the principalship has received quite a bit of attention and has been the topic of much research, the assistant principalship has been an important though far less studied area. According to Bartholomew and Fusarelli (2003), “Compared to the voluminous research on principals and superintendents, relatively little research has been conducted on assistant principals,” (p. 292).

Several of the principals interviewed discussed the enormous presence of accountability measures on the day-to-day activities of the school. School administrators must work to ensure student are proficient in reading and math and are growing in each grade level. “District and state high-stakes accountability policies that hold the school principal accountable for school performance as measured by student achievement on standardized tests most likely contribute to novices’ sense of ultimate responsibility,” Spillane and Lee (2014, p. 456).

The presence of high stakes accountability systems has changed the role of the principal. Principals are now required to be instructional leaders and must be aware of the instructional practices that are present in the classroom. Research on the effects on high stakes accountability would be insightful to other educators. Methods of creating successful schools, minimizing stress on administrators and staff, and providing best practices for improving test scores are all areas of research that could be explored from the view of the principalship in the high stakes accountability world.

In the interviews, Justin shared his lack of compassion or empathy for his staff because of the need to drive instruction. He believed, “Sometimes it causes me to lack the people skills that I need or having the empathy or compassion that I need at the moment because I understand where we need to go. One of the things that I shared with our staff at our first meeting is sometimes I may appear not to be concerned when they are talking but I’m really concerned. I have that drive of being able to make sure we reach our destination. That’s one of the areas that I feel has affected me as a person, being compassionate and understanding. Sometimes the causes of the high stakes accountability are that I don’t have that empathy when I should have.” The idea of principals becoming engrossed with raising student achievement at the cost of providing human encouragement, support and sympathy is an area that should be researched. Many principals are forced to become data driven at the cost of the human aspect of being principal because of the importance of increasing student test scores and because of teacher and principal evaluation systems. With the implementation of standard 6 on the teacher evaluation and standard 8 on the principal evaluation, performance is directly tied to evaluation, which has placed an emphasis on

student test scores. For job security it is imperative to produce student growth for teachers and for administrators, which has become the general focus of principals and teachers.

Finally, a group and individual interview was planned. The researcher contacted the participants on several different occasions, attempting to find a common time and date to meet for the group session. Each participant was to be observed during a variety of periods. The site for observations varied according to experiences by the principals. Due to scheduling conflicts and lack of time from the principals the group interview and observations did not occur. The lack of time by the principals is another method for research. Time management is a theme that arose in the interviews. The first year principals did not have any time to spare because of the numerous required demands. When the researcher attempted to schedule times, families came into the picture, other district meetings, Board Meetings, and several other occurrences prohibited the principals from being observed and from participating in a group interview session.

The implications for research listed above will provide future administrators and school districts with insight on how to better prepare principals. The research should then help improve practice.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The implications of this research are imperative to the retention and longevity of first year principals. The first year principals in this study all served as assistant principals for one year and were all fast-tracked into the principalship, perhaps without sufficient time to develop and grow into school leaders. In an effort to increase the sustainability and overall

success of first year principals, based on the findings of this qualitative study, the researcher offers the following recommendations that will have a positive impact on school principals.

The position of assistant principal can serve as the preparation period prior to becoming principal. It is imperative that the time served as assistant principal is used appropriately. It is essential to school districts, that assistant principals be educated on the day to day running of a school outside of discipline and working with difficult parents. Principals must work to provide leadership opportunities for assistant principals and find time to allow the leadership skills of an assistant principal to grow and flourish. The principal must be responsible for training their assistant principal. This may include, but is not limited to demonstrating appropriate leadership qualities, interviewing potential staff members, modeling completion of required documents such as the School Improvement Plan or personnel recommendation forms and everything else that a new principal needs exposure. The principal must provide learning opportunities for the assistant principal in their school.

Based on the study's findings, district leaders may benefit from the creation of a leadership academy for all first year principals that will strengthen the leadership skills of the principal. This academy will have several elements. The academy will provide opportunities for principals to dialogue and collaborate with other novice principals. A leadership academy was created based on the Executive Principal and Assistant Principal Standards in an effort to better prepare school administrators based on the needs of the participants. The following table represents an outline for the Administrator Leadership Academy.

Table 6: Administrator Leadership Academy	Dates
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<p>Table 6 Continued</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Standard 1: Strategic Leadership</i></p> <p>Speaker- District Superintendent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District and School Vision • Roles and Responsibilities for Principals • Assessing Resources / Who is at the district level • Professional Growth 	September
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Standard 2: Instructional Leadership</i></p> <p>Speakers– District Associate Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction & District Assistant Superintendent of Accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making student learning a priority • Data analysis and usage • Guidelines for Special Programs (ESL, 504, EC) • Increase knowledge of the SIP and how to use it 	October
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Standard 3: Cultural Leadership</i></p> <p>Speakers- District Directors or Veteran Principals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Title I • School Improvement Plan • Scheduling 	November
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Standard 4: Human Resource Leadership</i></p> <p>Speaker- District Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating positive, caring and purposeful schools • Creating effective professional learning communities • Communicating with students, staff and parents (Having difficult Conversations) • Strategies and methods for managing conflict • Stress Management 	January
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Standard 5: Managerial Leadership</i></p> <p>Speakers- District Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Hearing Officer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Finance • Facility Management 	February

<p>Table 6 Continued</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discipline 	
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Standard 6 & 7: External Development and Micropolitical Leadership</i></p> <p>Speakers- Director of Public Relations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing the needs of underserved populations or at risk children • Communicates the school’s accomplishments to the district office and public media • Educational Agencies • Business Partners 	<p>March</p>

The opportunity to visit the schools of other principals and observe their leadership styles and the day to day operation of the school could prove to be an asset to novice principals because it will provide opportunities to observe and gain a different perspective of school procedures. Jennifer discussed a PLC exercise in her county called power hour. She states, “Then once a month, sometimes it’s more than once a month, we also do power hour. We will visit another principal’s school, and do walkthroughs together and discuss what we see, which is awesome.” Allowing new principals to walk through other principals schools and dialogue with the principals about the programs, polices, and procedures of the school will provide further insight and eye opening experiences for the novice principal, which will with reaffirm what is happening in their school or create thoughts of change.

Another section of the academy should allow participation in professional development that will increase knowledge of district initiatives and practices such as budget and time management. Budget was a theme that all principals interviewed referenced as a

weakness. It is not a topic that the university can properly cover, because of the varying practices by district. “Other, more technical challenges—such as managing the budget and maintaining the school building—also loom large for novice principals, as well as difficulties related to implementing new government initiatives,” according to Spillane and Lee (2014, p. 433). In the leadership academy that is offered by the district, the finance officers for the district could visit the academy and provide professional development and best practices for the first year principals. For example, the first year principals should have a clear understanding of which funds can be used to purchase certain items. First year principals should be informed of the district’s policy or best practices for collecting money by parent organizations. The finance officer can provide information on mistakes that have been made in the district to prohibit the first year principals from making these errors. This practice will allow the principals to receive the most up-to-date information from the individual who is in charge of finance in the district.

A mentor who is a veteran school administrator in the county in which the principal serves could be provided to each first year principal. This mentor can provide support, advice and general knowledge of day-to-day operations of running a school in the district. This person should be a person who is willing to assist a novice administrator in achieving professional growth and learning their craft. Trust should be the cornerstone of the relationship, producing a level of comfort between the veteran and novice principal. In addition to the director and/or other central office personnel, the new principal should have a colleague in which they can confide and feel comfortable asking professional questions.

External mentors, as the ones present in the NPSA, provide a nonbiased opinion for new principals. The principals interviewed cited their NPSA coaches and mentors as a professional voice that provided advice and direction. This person was instrumental because they had no ties to the district. In most cases, the external mentor had administrative backgrounds and had been a principal for several years providing understanding and knowledge of the role of the principal. For school districts that are financially able to provide external mentors, first year principals will benefit from the unbiased opinion and support that the mentors provide.

School systems could make an effort to provide opportunities for principals to network with other principals in the county. This will allow novice principals to have another sounding board other than the principal mentor. Forming a spirit of collaboration amongst new principals will provide a strong allegiance amongst administrators in the county. The new principals will learn the work habits of other principals and begin to share ideas and best practices that occur within their schools. The new principals may also be able to problem solve each other's problems and provide an additional layer of support for each other.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges and experiences of first year principals in an effort to provide insight into the issues and problems faced by new principals. Qualitative methods were used to examine these challenges and experiences to assist future principals in obtaining knowledge and using the information presented to better prepare them to enter the principalship.

The idea of “To the Principal’s Office” came from an assistant principal who was fearful of a lack of preparation for an appointment to the principal’s office. In many instances school administration training programs do not adequately prepare individuals for the day-to-day operations of being a school principal. As an assistant principal the most important factors are not shared such as budgeting, handling human resources issues, etc. A manual of best practices for school administrators was not found in the researcher’s own district, therefore research was needed.

Through this process, school principals can now review information from the research and interviews of first year principals on the experiences and challenges of other first year principals. The principals interviewed provided candid responses to the questions asked and were open in sharing their experiences as a first year principal. Although the process of interviewing first year principals was taxing, the outcome was rewarding and provided insight into the lives of the principals interviewed.

Initially, the researcher planned to utilize the district in which she was most familiar and had extensive contacts to conduct the study. This would have provided ample research within the county and there would not have been a lack of participants. The use of the Novice Principals Support Academy was proposed which would allow more research on the academy and would remove the research from the researcher’s district. Transitioning to use the NPSA proved to be a tedious task. Because the participants had no knowledge of the researcher, and no vested interest in the research study, completing the study was a troublesome task. Several attempts were made to interview the principals, however because of time constraints only the individual interviews occurred, which was a hindrance to the

study. The group interview, review of documents and observations would have provided a more conclusive study.

The research for this dissertation was relatively plentiful. Several professional organizations for school administrators have provided resources on how to train, mentor, and supervise principals. The district procedures are often not addressed. Providing first year principals with support after graduating from institutions is the area lacking in most instances. The university system is providing the support through internships and mentoring for school administration candidates. However, after graduation and upon receiving a position as a school principal, it becomes the duty of the district to provide continued support for the principal, and in many instances, this does not happen. The lack of support by the district is a critical area in need of improvement.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Protocol and Interview Questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in research on first year principals.

You have agreed to participate in two interviews. The first interview will be a focus group interview with the second interview being an individual interview. Your focus group interview will be audio recorded. I cannot guarantee the confidentiality of the information that you share during the focus group as other people are participating; however I will protect your data. Please keep all information shared during the focus group private.

The individual interview will probably take between 45-60 minutes to complete. During the interviews, my desired outcomes are to explore the challenges, experiences, training or preparation of first year principals. The information in their interview will be used solely for research. Your responses will remain confidential. You will not be identified by your name in my dissertation. With your permission, I would like to record our conversation, so that I am able to accurately capture your responses.

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. Introduce yourself.
 - Please state your name
 - Educational background
 - Years of experience in education and administration
 - How long have you been a principal?
 - Is this your first principalship?
2. What types of experiences, training or preparation did you have to prepare you to be a principal? When did you receive that training?
3. Since your evaluation is based on the Principal Executive Standards, how familiar are you with these standards? Tell me a scenario in which two of these standards have been relevant in your role as principal.
4. How could you have been better prepared for your position as a new principal?

5. What can be done to help new principals?
6. What advice would you give to new principals?

Individual Questions

1. What was your major concern when accepting the position as principal?
2. What leadership traits do you feel a successful administrator must possess?
3. What are some of the experiences that you have had as a new principal?
4. How has the high-stakes accountability environment affected your leadership as a new principal?
5. What kind of support, if any has your school system given to prepare you to be a successful administrator?
6. Is any professional development offered in your district for new principals? Please describe.
7. What are the challenges that you have faced as a principal?
8. How well prepared were you for your first principalship?
9. In what areas were you best prepared (and how)?
10. In what areas were you least prepared (and why)?

APPENDIX B

Letter to First Year Principals Inviting Participation

Dear Participant,

I am researching the challenges, experiences, training or preparation of first year principals. As a first year principal and a member of the Novice Principal Support Academy I would like for you to participate in my research study.

Agreeing to participate will require you to contribute in a focus group interview with five other members of the NPSA cohort. This interview should take no longer than two hours. The location for this interview will be in a centralize area convenient to all participants. You will also be asked to participate in an individual interview which will take no longer than an hour and will take place at your school. In both interviews you will be asked to share your challenges and experiences as a first year principal. You will receive all interview questions prior to the interview.

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 without penalty. Professional risk may be associated with the participation of this study. Focus group and individual interview questions will focus on challenges, experiences, and preparation for first year principals. Participants are asked to be candid in their responses. All responses are confidential. No information will be disclosed that could link research data to the participants.

The benefits to this study to you are indirect. The indirect benefit includes assisting school districts and university programs in understanding the challenges and experiences of first year principals to better equip them to be successful as a school principal.

The information in your interview will be used solely for research and will remain confidential. Data will be stored securely on a password protected USB drive then will be transferred to a laptop then saved which will remain with the researcher during the duration of the research project. At the completion of the project all data will be deleted. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide.

Thank you for your consideration. An Informed Consent Form for Research is attached that can provide additional information. Please feel free to contact me if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,

Damesha Smith

APPENDIX C**INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH PRINCIPAL**

Title of Study: **To the Principal's Office: A Case Study of the Challenges and Experiences of First Year School Principals**

Principal Investigator: **Damesha A. Smith**

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 without penalty. 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(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges and experiences of novice principals to provide insight into the issues and problems faced by new principals working in a high-stakes accountability environment.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to contribute in a focus group interview with five other members of the NPSA cohort. This interview should take no longer than two hours. The location for this interview will be in a centralized area convenient to all participants. You will also be asked to participate in an individual interview which will take no longer than an hour which will take place at your school. In both interviews you will be asked to share your challenges and experiences as a first year principal. You will receive all interview questions prior to the interview. Your focus group and individual interview will be audio recorded.

Risks

Professional risk may be associated with the participation of this study. Focus group and individual interview questions will focus on challenges, experiences, and preparation for first year principals. Participants are asked to be candid in their responses. No information will be disclosed that could link research data to the participants.

Benefits

The indirect benefit includes assisting school districts and university programs in understanding the challenges and experiences of first year principals to better equip them to be successful as a school principal.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely on a password protected USB drive then will be transferred to a laptop then saved which will remain with the researcher during the duration of the research project. At the completion of the project all data will be deleted. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. I cannot guarantee the confidentiality of the information that you share during the focus group as other people are participating. Please keep all information shared during the focus group private.

Compensation

You will not receive anything for participating.

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, Damesha Smith at dasmith6@ncsu.edu.

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).

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 choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject's signature _____ **Date** _____

Investigator's signature _____ **Date** _____