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With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility: Navigating Through Year One of the Principalship

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WITH GREAT POWER COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY:
NAVIGATING THROUGH YEAR ONE OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP

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Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership and Administration

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Dedication

This dissertation is the culmination of my journey through the doctoral program, and although my name may appear on the cover, my family gave me endless support and helped turn my dream into a reality.

First and foremost, I thank God for giving me the strength and perseverance to survive this journey, which was filled with so many challenges and triumphs. Just when I thought I could not weather the storm any longer, God blessed me with the grit and determination to make it to the finish line.

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WITH GREAT POWER COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY:
NAVIGATING THROUGH YEAR ONE OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP

by

ANGELA MARIE REYNA, M.Ed., B.I.S.

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
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for the Degree of

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“Success woke me up, motivation made me breakfast, destiny gave me my agenda, and the Lord gave me His blessings.”

It is my belief that every person is need of a group of supportive, encouraging, and candid individuals who will keep them on track to achieve personal and professional ambitions, mainly because life will always get in the way. Surrounding yourself with your Board of Directors will keep you focused and on target. This journey would not have been possible without the support of my Board of Directors. First, Dr. Mungal, my dissertation chair and advisor of all things qualitative, thank you for always setting the example of excellence as a mentor, researcher, writer, and most of all a friend. Thank you for ensuring that my work is top notch and always pointing me in the right direction. I can always count on you to tell me like it is. Those Costco visits were always good times, too!

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Abstract

Given the intense pressures, expectations, and public scrutiny, school principals now undertake even greater roles and responsibilities than their predecessors (DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Kellough & Hill, 2014; Hale & Moorman, 2003; Fullan, 2003; Deal & Peterson, 2010; Koozes & Posner, 2012). New, or neophyte, principals are expected to step in and maintain or increase test scores while navigating intricacies of the new position and school. The socialization experience into a new work environment, which can be magnified for neophyte principals, is a large indicator of principal success (Shaver, 2007). Developing trustworthy relationships with the school community has direct impact on the period of socialization experienced by all new principals (Shaver, 2007). Understanding these unique challenges and working conditions faced by neophyte principals can inform efforts to promote school improvement and principal retention; however the research on neophyte principals’ experiences is limited (Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, & Ikemoto, 2012). Throughout this study, I define “neophyte principal” as an individual who is new to the principal role. For this study, “first year” refers to the first fifteen months where the principal is in his or her new role. This includes the promotion and the transition period into the new school.

Most neophyte principals have been exposed to various administrative roles, to varying degrees, relevant to the principalship. Modeling collaborative behaviors for classroom teachers and building capacity within key staff are vital practices aspiring school leaders develop over time. However, philanthropic organizations, such as The Wallace Foundation (2007) have reported that without professional guidance and reinforcement, neophyte principals may quickly feel the long-held sink-or-swim mentality, as they begin to feel the pressure to prioritize problems and develop strategies for fast results. “There are virtually no documented instances of
troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader” (Leithwood, et al., 2004). Improving public schools means addressing a broad set of complex issues and while school reform efforts are well underway across the country, only one area of policy focus, strengthening school leadership, can exert control over all of the challenges encountered in public schools in this era of accountability (Beatriz, Deborah, & Hunter, 2008).

This qualitative study examined the challenges, personal experiences, and extent of provided support, if any, for neophyte principals as they transition into their new role. The objective of this study was to provide insight into the role of the neophyte principal and specifically, how neophyte principals can be effectively supported, in order to meet all the expectations and challenges they encounter during their first year and beyond. The findings of this study will be of interest to policymakers in school districts, state education agencies, principal preparation programs, and most importantly, to principals themselves. For the success of their leadership, it is crucial that differentiated support is provided to principals through collegial, collaborative, and silent mentorship. The complex and high-stakes accountability system that determines the success or failure of neophyte principals is much more demanding that in years past. It is the intention of the researcher that the results of this study will add to the increasing focus on the much-needed support for principals, so that they may facilitate increased student learning and success.

Key Words: neophyte principals, effective principals, challenges, successful leadership qualities, educational leadership, instructional leadership, mentor, principal support, and principal preparation program
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Chapter 1
Introduction

The beginning year of the school principalship is typically full of a great amount of frustration and anxiety (Daresh, 1987; Daresh, 2015; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Wanzare & Da Costa, 2001). It is almost difficult to imagine, until it happens - being handed the school keys and being instantly responsible for a student body, faculty and staff, and the new face of a culture, not yet known. It may seem like a daunting and impossible task for an experienced principal, much less a new one. While experienced principals may already have developed a set of skills to help them transition into a new school, neophyte principals face a different set of issues.

Throughout this study, I define “neophyte principal” as an individual who is brand new to the principal role while, for this study, “first year” refers to the first fifteen months where the principal is in his or her new role. This includes the promotion and the transition period into the new school. Neophyte principals are often overwhelmed by the high expectations related to their new roles and the expectations to have solutions to a variety of school issues in a limited amount of time. Experiences as a classroom teacher or other administrative positions, such as an assistant principal or military administrative role, may not have fully prepared them for the challenges that await them as a school principal. Many factors, such as recruitment and retention of effective classroom teachers and establishing credibility as an instructional leader contribute to a sense of unpreparedness in the face of unforeseen demands on neophyte principals (Walker, Anderson, Sackney, & Woolf, 2003). Neophyte principals face pressure to assimilate quickly to a new culture (Lashway, 2003).

To be successful, principals must be able to read and understand the social dynamic of the school culture and have the ability to make quick, appropriate decisions in a variety of unpredictable situations (Lunenburg, 2012). Furthermore, escalating expectations related to
accountability, a lack of support at different levels of the administrative structure, a demanding political environment, and increasing societal dilemmas contribute to making the principal’s role undesirable (Johnson, 2013).

School principals are responsible for many duties, but the role of instructional leader is pivotal to school transformation efforts (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; DuFour, 2002; Marks & Printy, 2003; Zepeda, 2014; Fullan, 2010). It is expected that, through their leadership, teaching and learning will be improved. Superintendents, especially those new to a school district, may not recognize the unique challenges principals face and therefore, fail to differentiate support that would specifically address their individual needs. Principals within the same school district may need specific types of supports that are similar to their peers; however, different socio-economical communities call for individualized support. The one-size-fits-all blanketed support provided by district leaders is insufficient to assist principals in their quest for instructional improvement and student achievement (Peters & Pearce, 2012). Without support neophyte principals may struggle to maximize their potential as an effective leader, which has detrimental consequences for student academic achievement (Daresh, 1986; Lashway, 2003; Seashore-Louis et al., 2010).

Aspiring principals must also give consideration to the positive factors when deciding if being a school principal is the right career move. Given the perceived importance of leadership, it is no wonder that an effective principal is thought to be a necessary precondition to an effective school (Marzano, Walters & McNulty, 2005). The opportunity to make a positive difference for students and provide the students with a foundation for a post-secondary education is a very rewarding experience for principals. Before accepting principalship roles, many aspiring principals have already established unique connections with the school community as
classroom teachers, instructional coaches, or assistant principals. Also, by facilitating and modeling a culture of collective responsibility and providing effective feedback for classroom teachers, the principal has the power to greatly improve the teaching and learning process.

**Statement of the Problem**

There is a growing concern surrounding the lack of support for neophyte principals (Roza, 2003; Lashway, 2003; Villani, 2005; Eller, 2010; Sorenson, 2005). Analyzing what it will take to ensure that schools have leaders equal to the challenges that face them is the question that has placed a sense of urgency on addressing the consistent weaknesses of principal training programs, which research shows are poorly connected to school realities (Hess & Kelly, 2007). Since support for neophyte principals is not mandatory in my states, this lack of support may leave principals feeling isolated and overwhelmed as they shift into the principal role.

While the past decade has brought about improvements in preparing school leaders to be effective principals, there is still a need to provide neophyte principals with the guidance and tools they need in order to put theoretical learning into practical application, based on best practices and research. Research conducted in one state compared principal demographics and reasons for remaining or leaving the profession. Principals are older, more diverse and are largely eligible for retirement within the next five years (Reames, Kochan & Zhu, 2013). With the average age of current principals being between fifty to fifty-two years old, the sense of urgency to recruit and retain efficient principals is amplified. As principals retire and neophyte principals enter their new role, there are fewer mentors who have the professional experience and proficiency to effectively support them.

Too many neophyte principals are left to learn on the job, where their first opportunity to plan and implement school improvement actions will be as head of a school and will typically be without much guidance from successful peers (Southern Regional Education Board, 2007).
School district personnel, who are comprised of superintendents, assistant superintendents, policymakers, and school boards, are beginning to recognize that school districts can no longer afford to leave neophyte principals alone, isolated from experienced colleagues, when solving complex problems (Stephenson & Bauer, 2010). As neophyte principals encounter new challenges, such as greater accountability, being a visible role model, improving teacher quality, and serving as an instructional leader, the need for principal professional development is a crucial component for success.

However, as large numbers of principals approach retirement, fewer educators seem inclined to pursue leadership positions and those who do are often not prepared for the principal role and too few stay in the job (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). Over the past two decades, principals have reported increased levels of exhaustion, resulting in declining physical and mental health (Brock & Grady, 2002). Common stressors have been students’ lack of academic achievement, student discipline issues, declining resources, and teacher resistance (Combs, Edmonson, Jackson & Greenville, 2009).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the neophyte principals’ experiences, challenges, and extent of support they may have received throughout their first year on the job. I explored the needs of neophyte principals as they navigated through their first year and how best to provide them a system of support. Using an interview method, I analyzed neophyte principals’ testimonials regarding their first year experiences in an effort to find common themes. I collected data surrounding neophyte principals’ pre-service principal training and examined the extent, if any, of provided training and support after being hired by a school district. These findings are crucial as school districts, administrators and leadership programs seek to better prepare administrators for the reality of the school principalship.
The goal of my study was to provide insight into the role of the neophyte principalship and specifically, how best to support neophyte principals, so that they are able to meet all the expectations they encounter at the campus level. I examined the experiences of neophyte principals and how those experiences can help inform public school stakeholders, such as school boards and district leaders, how best to provide essential services to new principals. Despite the important role of neophyte principals, there is relatively little literature that focuses on this group’s first year experiences (DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Hull, 2012; Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, & Ikemoto, 2012; Bastian & Henry, 2015; Hitt, Tucker & Young, 2012; Hall, Childs-Bowen, Pajardo & Cunningham, 2015). This study will address that gap and will provide the field of educational leadership with rich, detailed data regarding the personal experiences of neophyte principals from the practitioners themselves.

**Research Questions**

The overarching question seeks to gain insight on the experiences of neophyte principals, as they navigate through their first year as a principal. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What major challenges do neophyte principals encounter in the first year of the principalship?
2. What existing supports are available to assist neophyte principals?
3. What are some lessons learned, after the completion of their first year as a principal, that the study participants consider beneficial for aspiring school principals?

While the findings of this study add valuable insight to the topic of how to properly ensure neophyte principals are effectively supported, in order to maximize their potential as school leaders, this body of work also serves as a platform to give voice to their experiences.
Participation in this study will enable neophyte principals to tell their individual stories, and possibly, have a part in refining principal support for their predecessors.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review is to examine the issues relating to the experiences and challenges of neophyte principals. I will first address the origin of the principal role, research on role of the principal and how the role has evolved over time. Second, I will explore the current literature on change management within an educational institution. Third, I discuss the federal and state accountability systems and its effect on principal. Specific challenges experienced by neophyte principals will be reviewed and the role of the principal, in terms of organizational socialization, will be explored. Fourth, I will investigate the variety of existing supports for neophyte principals. Fifth and last, I will describe the conceptual framework used for this study.

The Origin of the Principalship

During the era of the one-room schoolhouse in the nineteenth century, the principal role did not exist. It was not until the small schools began to subdivide, separating students into grades, that there was a need for any other position besides that of the teacher. The role of the principal has been much debated since its inception (Reeves, 2006). The complex role of the principal is not an accidental by-product of history; rather, the principal’s position at the center of educational policy and practice was an intentional component of the role when it was originally conceived (Rousmaniere, 2013). In public schools, the principal is the most compelling figure in the world of educational leadership. Serving as the liaison between a large bureaucratic system and the individual daily experiences of children and adults, the principal consistently works in the midst of unique challenges in an ever-changing environment.

The principal is responsible for serving in many different capacities. While social and economic contexts have changed, the main role of the principal has remained the same: to implement state educational policy to the school and to maintain the stability of the school
culture at the local level (Rousmaniere, 2013). “Every organization – because it involves by
definition a group of people brought together for a supposedly common purpose – must be glued
together in some manner designed to make all participants move more or less in the same
direction” (Morris, Crowson, Hurwitz & Porter-Gehrie, 1982).

History of the Role of the School Principal

The principalship has evolved since its inception in the early nineteenth century when the
principal was defined as “principal teacher” of a one-room school (Beck & Murphy, 1993). The
principalship has transformed to reflect the demographic, economic, social and political issues of
the time. The duties of the principal has changed from that of plant manager, the person
responsible for the day-to-day operations of a school building, to the hallmark instructional
leader responsible for continued academic achievement. (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003).

During the early years of the twentieth century, Industrial Revolution-era schools and their
 hierarchies evolved into a command and control style in which efficiency, control, and mass
production were the norms of a successful organization (Hattie, 2013). Schools were centrally
controlled, authority was hierarchical, and management functioned from a scientific perspective
(McNeil, 2013).

By the early 1960s, changes were occurring in curriculum, school structures of time and
space, methods of teaching, and budgets. Political power had shifted to groups outside of
education, which previously had exerted little influence over educational policies. These groups
sought responses to social differences and social injustice, which eventually contributed to
decentralization of power (McNeil, 2013). The very notion of school leadership remained poorly
defined, mainly because American citizens were uncertain of who should be in charge of
schools; nor was there any clarity on the nature of such leadership work (Rousmaniere, 2013).
The image of educational leadership in the mid 1800s in early America is a complex and significant example of a middle managerial structure. He, and it was almost always a male in the role of the principal (Porat, 1985) did not have the time to do much more than some basic management functions. It was formed primarily to address the need demanded by schools “seeking greater efficiency by concentrating the work of a teacher on one grade, in which students could be grouped by academic proficiency and could learn a uniform curriculum” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 89).

As separate classrooms were created, there was a need for a head teacher to act as the overarching authority. Due to the number of classrooms and growing size of school buildings, a building administrator who reported to a district office was created. Created as a channel between the district and the classroom, the principal became an educational middle manager in an increasingly complex school bureaucracy (Rousmaniere, 2013). In the late 19th century, the position of the school principal was designed to be responsible for day-to-day building operations. Standing between the district and the classroom, principals were expected to implement managerial decisions, but had limited opportunities for influencing those decisions. Power struggles begin to arise between school and district offices, principals and superintendents, and principals and their teachers, because as yet, no job description or set of legal guidelines for principals had been established (Benben, 1960).

The historical development of the principal reflects the growing pains of an emerging state school bureaucratic system (Protheroe, 2008). Soon, educational reformers begin to realign the primary attention of the principal from the classroom to the central administrative structure. As the principal role moved away from the classroom to the administrative office, the principal became less connected with student learning, and yet, more responsible for it (Rousmaniere,
Every generation of school leaders must confront the dominant forces of tradition to move schools and school systems in new directions (Bogotch, 2005).

**The Role of the Principal**

Principals are critical to school success (Fullan, 2002; Fullan, 2014; Kirtman, 2013; Robinson, 2011; Reeves, 2009; Leithwood, 2006; Daresh, 2002; Botha, 2004; Sorenson, Goldsmith, Mendez & Maxwell, 2011). The growing complexity regarding the principal’s role and associated leadership tasks, combined with the changing societal realm and educational reform dynamic, pose serious challenges to even the most experienced educational leaders (Marzano & McNulty, 2005). Principals are expected to be facility managers (Sharp & Walter, 2012; Alvoid & Black, 2014), educational change agents (Fullan, 2014; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014; DuFour & Marzano, 2015), instructional leaders (Zepeda, 2014; Sorenson, 2013; Cortez, Sorenson & Coronado, 2012), school visionaries (Sergiovanni, 2015; Mora, 2013), resource and finance managers (Sorenson & Goldsmith, 2012; Perry, 2013; Schulte & Hong, 2011) community and business liaisons (Khalifa, 2012; Green, 2015; Stone-Johnson, 2014), and all the while following all federal, state, and district policy guidelines (Davis et al., 2005; Huberman & Miles, 2013).

The most experienced principal would struggle to meet all these goals over a span of a few years; however, a neophyte principal is expected to show progress within one school year. Darling-Hammond (2010) stated, “The new mission of schools is to prepare students to work at jobs that do not yet exist, creating ideas and solutions for products and problems that have not yet been identified, using technologies that have not yet been invented” (p 2). As a result, educators have had to redefine their knowledge, skills, values and practice in an effort to meet current expectations and standards. Additionally, the increased focus on accountability has
impacted their school improvement efforts and operational decisions (Turnipseed & Darling-Hammond, 2015; Reeves, 2012; DeMatthews, 2014; Bauer, 2015).

Pressure has increased substantially on schools to improve student achievement results and there is a general consensus that principals need to be more than just building managers (Portin et al., 2009). Levine (2005) states:

No other professional school is held similarly responsible. Schools of agriculture are not faulted for the decline of the family farm; or schools of government for municipal bankruptcies; or business schools, for failing to salvage the Enrons of the world. (p. 6)

While educators are focused on preparing the next generation they are diverted with many daily challenges, many of which, are political in nature (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). While the neophyte principal brings some type of administrative experience to the table, usually as an assistant principal, and received educational leadership training at the university level, the weight of these challenges are noteworthy and require careful attention (Zepeda, 2012). The principal’s roles and responsibilities have grown and expanded over time. Sergiovanni (2009) in *The Principalship: A Reflective Perspective* discussed some conventional definitions of leadership protocols for schools to function. Sergiovanni (2009) discussed some conventional definitions of leadership protocols for schools to function, such as planning, organizing, leading and controlling.

**Planning**

Planning refers to establishing and implementing vision and goals for the school. Vision becomes an especially important condition underlying organizations during times of rapid change (Huffman, 2003). One of the first responsibilities of a neophyte principal is to establish a clear vision for the campus. Identifying the vision and mission of the school is a collaborative
effort to determine and share short term and long-term goals, so that faculty and staff understand what the expectations for success are. Empowering the school community to have a voice in how the future of the school will be restructured enables the principal to provide all individuals ownership of the process. This can positively transform the teaching and learning process.

Principal turnover often signals the end of not only existing formal leadership for school improvement, but also the gains of previous success (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Leighwood & Seashore Louis, 2012). A change in school leadership often results in growing cynicism on the part of teachers toward proposed school improvement initiatives (Hardie, 2015). As new leadership takes over a campus, a process known as principal succession occurs (Zepeda, Bengston, Parylo, 2012). Principal succession is an “interactive process through which a new principal undergoes a group membership passage resulting in varying degrees of acceptance and legitimacy by the school’s faculty and staff” (Hart, 1993, p. 2.) Through this process, the principal will work with members of the faculty and staff in a professional learning community to identify campus goals and develop a strategic plan for success.

Organizing

Organizing is defined as “bringing together the necessary human, financial, and physical resources” (Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 28) to accomplish the vision and goals of the school. Once the leadership team has established a clear design for the campus vision and goals, the principal is tasked with bringing together the essential tools to make these goals a reality. One Harvard (2001) study states that school-based hiring can be one of the most important tools for shaping professional culture and building school capacity; however, the challenge of attracting and retaining quality teachers can be very time-consuming and frustrating due to the teacher shortage being felt around the United States.
With the mainstream literature on finance equity and the predictable cuts in campus budgets (Schulte & Hong, 2011), principals must be creative and find ways to stretch their finances so that students are provided with the best opportunities possible. School leaders are responsible for understanding the relationship between educational goal development and resource allocation management (Sorenson & Goldsmith, 2012). Neophyte principals may feel overwhelmed by the topic of school budget, mainly because as assistant principals, they are not given the opportunity to work and be familiar with school budget. Petzco (2008) states that addressing school finance needs is a skill that all neophyte principals perceive to be important to their initial success.

**Leading**

Leading is portrayed as “guiding, motivating and supervising subordinates” (Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 28). Blankstein (2004) addresses the challenge of delivering change within the school system. “The human aspect of school change is the most difficult, yet essential, element for success. Perhaps because of this, it is often overlooked, minimized, or dismissed” (Blankstein, 2004, p. 8). An ability to encourage feelings of effectiveness and confidence on the part of the faculty are essential in order to maximize teacher impact on the achievement of students (Barnett & McCormick, 2004; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982).

**Controlling**

Controlling is classified by the principal’s evaluation responsibilities of performance and providing feedback. From daily interactions between principals and teachers, to teachers’ perceptions of the principal’s concern for each of them as individuals, many principal behaviors can have an impact on teacher effectiveness and on teachers’ confidence in their ability to help students learn (Barnett & McCormick, 2003; Hipp & Bredeson, 1995; Tschannen-Moran &
Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). The role of teacher evaluator should not be taken lightly (Beerens, 2000). Principals observe classroom activity on a daily basis and provide ongoing instructional feedback to teachers based on these observations. Coaching teachers on how to implement best practices within the classroom allowed principals to facilitate instructional dialogue and determine, plan, and implement relevant professional development opportunities for the faculty and staff. Providing teachers with effective feedback in a timely manner is an essential ingredient for student academic success and is a unique opportunity to create a culture of motivation and learning for the faculty.

In response to these new responsibilities, the National Policy Board for Education Administration (NPBEA) developed The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSELs) 2015, which are foundational principals of leadership designed to ensure that educational leaders are ready to effectively meet the challenges and opportunities of the job today and in the future as education, schools, and society continue to transform. The newly adopted Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, previously the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards, are innovative and vital elements of what encompasses an effective principal (Sorenson, Goldsmith, and DeMatthews, 2016). Recently, the most sought-after type of principal is the instructional leader who can create an atmosphere focused on teaching and learning to improve student achievement (Seashore-Louis, Dretzke & Wahlstrom, 2010).

It has often been difficult to identify the practices of effective principals, due to lack of data, the ability to isolate the practices, and other variables coupled with the complexity of their work (Grissom & Loeb, 2011). Attempting to create a common framework has overshadowed the research to specifically identify the affective characteristics of principals. However, some
researchers have identified effective practices of principals and deemed them crucial as they relate to student achievement (Grissom & Loeb, 2011).

Effective Practices of Successful School Principals

Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) found that the leadership of principals has a significant relationship with student achievement. Of course, principals cannot be expected to turn around a low-performing school by themselves. However, research strongly suggests they are the key ingredient to improving a school’s performance, especially low-achieving schools and those schools serving disadvantaged students. “There are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader” (Leithwood, et al., 2004).

Effective principals use their authority to break down the walls of educator isolation and create new norms for collaboration and collective responsibility for student learning (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). A highly effective principal will look for daily ways to align the process to a culture of collective responsibility for learner-focused outcomes (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Studies conducted by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995); the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (Carroll, Fulton, & Doerr, 2010); the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (2005); the Wallace Foundation (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010); and the American Educational Research Association (Holland, 2005) provide research that confirms the positive effect of utilizing a collaborative approach to student learning.

For the purpose of this research study, an “effective” principal is defined as one who demonstrates five practices, which are central to successful school leadership (Mitgang, 2012; DuFour & Mattos, 2013). These are:
1. Shaping a vision of academic success for all students, which is based on high standards;

2. Creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit, and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail;

3. Cultivating leadership in others, so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision;

4. Improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn at their utmost; and

5. Managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement.

While teachers focus on the core functions of teaching and learning, the school principal must act as a motivator and act as a filter to outside distractions, always focusing and refocusing the school’s reform agenda (White-Smith, 2012). Jackson (2005) stated, “the creation of reform agendas that will lead to success by all children requires school leaders who can learn from past lessons, heed the findings of current educational research and rely on the wisdom of their own experiences” (p. 193). It is expected that through their leadership, teaching and learning will be improved. Their role is pivotal to school transformation.

Effective principals are second, only to classroom teachers, in their impact on student success (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Mendels, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis & Wahlstrom, 2004). Effective principals create a culture focused on learning and high expectations for all students. These principals create a climate of collaboration and continuous improvement among staff (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe & Meyerson, 2005). Effective principals ensure that schools create an atmosphere in which students feel supported and responded to. For teachers, too, principals set a
tone. It is the responsibility of the school leader to work together with teachers to create a professional community that is “deeply rooted in the academic and social learning goals of the schools” (Goldring, et al., 2008, p. 7-8). Effective principals know that they cannot go it alone and make great use of the skills and knowledge possessed by faculty and other administrative staff members, encouraging the many capable adults who make up a school community to step into leadership roles and responsibilities. Effective principals “do not lose influence as others gain influence” (Louis, et al., 2010, p. 19).

The effective principal of today is one who can address a daily stream of diverse issues needing immediate attention, while concurrently creating school cultures and communities that optimize learning. Conforming to this new vision, however, leaves many neophyte principals feeling anxious, frustrated and overloaded. Neophyte principals often report difficulty in balancing technical and managerial tasks while also performing as visionary and instructional leaders who must meet the diverse expectations of superintendents and school board members (Daresh, 2002).

Throughout my tenure as an assistant principal, I have had the opportunity to work for four different principals and every principal had his/her own style of leadership. I was able to observe each principal as they interacted with school community members, created a culture around what they felt was important, build capacity within their staff members, and work towards a common goal of improving instruction for all students. However, in my opinion, the most principals who led the most successful schools were those who established trusting relationships with every person who worked in building. From assistant principals to the crossing guard, the principal valued each person equally and demonstrated this belief through daily interactions. While each principal wanted to create a positive school culture, daily behaviors
dictated the degree of relational success each one was able to achieve.

One study of principals in a large urban school district focused on identifying the range of skills needed for principals to perform their job effectively (Grissom & Loeb, 2011). The focus was on specific sets of principal behaviors and actions, using collected data from principals’ self-assessment of their effectiveness with specific tasks, assistant principals’ assessment of principal effectiveness, teachers’ satisfaction levels, parents’ assessment of school effectiveness, and student achievement over time. The study resulted in the identification of five dimensions of principal leadership, which are instructional management, internal relations, organization management, administration, and external relations. Each dimension requires the principal to view leadership through a different lens and make decisions based on different sets of data.

**Instructional Management**

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (2001) defines its mission, in part, as “strengthening the role of the principal as instructional leader.” When learning becomes the most important component in the school, when all the educators examine the efforts and initiatives of the school through the lens of their impact on learning, the structure and culture of the school will begin to change in substantive ways (DuFour, 2002). Using student data to make instructional decisions, evaluate instructional programs, and provide feedback enables school leaders to improve instruction at the campus level.

**Internal Relations**

Building strong interpersonal relationships with the school community is crucial to the work of principals within the school (Reitzug, West & Angel, 2008). This dimension included working positively with students and staff, resolving conflicts at the lowest level possible, and
maintaining positive relations within the school. Additionally, addressing social justice issues, in order to provide an equitable education for students was vital to the work (Leithwood, 1994). Grissom and Loeb’s (2011) study demonstrated that 72% of principals reported that they were “very effective” in their work with students, while 70% reported that they were “very effective” in their work with parents.

This finding aligned with the relationship leadership that Reitzug, West and Angel (2008) alluded to in their study on relational instructional leadership. Interpersonal relationships are fundamental to an effective principal and did not usually occur as a result of working directly with the instructional programs. Rather, it was a result of the principal incorporating positive relationships with teachers and students, which was used to foster motivation, pride, and work ethic.

Organizational Management

There is no doubt that by developing, implementing, and maintaining effective systems at the campus level, the ability to oversee the operation of a school and all tasks involved, will become much more manageable for the principal. While maintaining an instructional focus is important for the principal, maintaining a safe school environment, managing fiscal responsibilities, and building community relationships, just to name a few, cannot be overlooked. An effective principal will manage people, data, and processes to foster improvement of the school (Protheroe, 2008).

Administration

This area of task effectiveness is characterized by more routine administrative duties performed to comply with state or federal regulations, such as managing school records, including attendance, grades, student discipline and supervision, and other compliance-related
tasks. Much of the research on principal effectiveness focuses on measures of principals’ dispositions and feelings of overall effectiveness (Grissom & Loeb, 2009). Principals may assess themselves as more or less effective on a given dimension of job tasks, not only because of their own skills, but also because of the difficulty of the contexts in which they work (Stein & Nelson, 2003). For example, there may be more demands in schools that are located in low socio-economic areas, have an increased number of special education and English Language Learner (ELL) populations, or exhibit high teacher turnover rates. Thus, principals must focus their priorities on a narrower set of tasks (Goldring, Huff, May & Camburn, 2008).

External Relationships

Building positive relationships with all stakeholders outside the school building were also determined to be vital to the work of principals. School leaders must learn to create conditions in which trust can flourish within their school, as well as between their school and their community (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Kouzes & Posner’s (2002) study on effective leadership concluded that leadership is a shared relationship with others, where the success of the leader is dependent upon the leader’s capacity to build and sustain relationships with people. Principals must have a deep understanding of the community they serve and foster a strong relationship between the school, home and other community organizations (Khalifa, 2012). “Principals, especially urban principals, must move beyond their school walls in order to gain an understanding of the unique social and cultural conditions of their school communities. In doing so, they may find that test scores are not the primary issues at the forefront of the community-based interests” (p. 429).

Communicating with district to obtain resources, working with local community businesses and organizations, and fundraising are a few of the tasks identified as key responsibilities in which the principal must know and understand very well (Sanders & Harvey,
2002). Only 38% of principals rated themselves as “very effective” at communicating with the school district and community organizations and 18% considered themselves “effective” at fundraising activities (Grissom & Loeb, 2011). Developing strong connections with community businesses and fostering two-way communications with these organizations enables the principal to not only create a welcoming school climate, but sets the stage for potential fundraising and donation opportunities.

**The Principal as The Instructional Leader**

The term “instructional leader” originated in the 1970’s in the “effective school movement,” when schools were considered effective if they were able to educate all students, regardless of their family background (Mendels 2012). Heck and Hallinger (1999) found that while there are indirect correlations between effective leadership and student outcomes, the findings lacked specific information on how principals initiate and sustain effective school results, who and what constitutes school leadership, and why effectiveness is limited only to student achievement. Current researchers confirm Heck and Hallinger’s (1999) findings that there is an abundance of information on leadership behaviors, but few specifics on how principals sustain improvement and how specific leadership skills are utilized and contribute to education reform efforts (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004).

In essence, principals have been provided with recommended effective leadership skills, but are left to make sense of them, as they work to build and sustain student achievement within their schools. Principals, as instructional leaders, are expected to promote a learning environment that was conducive to student learning by establishing high expectations for student behavior and academic success. Their responsibilities include curriculum knowledge, promoting quality instruction, evaluating teachers, aligning instructional materials with curriculum goals, allocating
instructional time, and monitoring student progress. In short, principals are responsible to facilitate learning, collaborative inquiry, professional dialogue, and school improvement (Mitchell & Castle, 2005).

“Schools are about teaching and learning; all other activities are secondary to these basic goals” (Hoy & Hoy, 2006). The identification of the principal as the instructional leader resulted in years of research on leadership and school improvement. Being an instructional leader is a hallmark of effective principals (Hull, 2012; Protheroe, 2011; Zepeda, 2014; Mitgang, 2012; Sorenson, Goldsmith, Mendez & Maxwell, 2011; DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008). The principal must be in a position to promote continuous learning and development of teachers who are challenged to teach students to higher standards of accountability (Zepeda, 2007). Tirozzi (2001) states, “The principals of tomorrow’s schools must be instructional leaders who possess the requisite skills, capacities, and commitment to lead the accountability parade, not follow it” (p. 438).

An instructional leader must possess the following attributes:

• Set the tone for their buildings;

• Facilitate the teaching and learning process;

• Provide leadership and direction to their schools’ instructional programs and policies;

• Spend significantly more time evaluating staff and mentoring new teachers;

• Sustain professional development for themselves and their staff members; and

• Nurture personalized school environments for all students. (Tirozzi, 2001, p. 438)

Traditionally, teachers decided lesson content, delivery methods, and assessments used to evaluate student comprehension. Now, principals, collaboratively with teachers, must gather data
from these assessments to evaluate student learning. The final responsibility for the success of
the instructional program rests squarely on the shoulders of the principal, and this can be a
sobering proposition (Zepeda, 2007). As the role of the principal evolved, the principal was
considered an instructional leader and expected to have a firm grasp of the school’s academic
needs. Principals who fail to consistently increase student achievement risk their positions at the
school and district levels. President Obama’s *Blueprint for School Reform* (2010) outlines four
plans for struggling schools and all four plans include removal of the current principal.

*Shared Instructional Leadership*

Shared instructional leadership involves the active collaboration of principal and teachers
on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Within this model, the principal seeks out the ideas,
insights, and expertise of teachers in these areas and works with teachers for school
improvement. The principal and teachers share responsibility for staff development, curricular
development, and supervision of instructional tasks. Thus, the principal is not the sole
instructional leader, but the leader of instructional leaders (DuFour, 2002). Shared instructional
leadership is not dependent on role or position; rather, its value lies in the personal resources of
participants and is facilitated through interaction (Lambert, 2002).

Components of Hallinger's (2003) shared leadership theory include a) a climate of high
expectations, innovations, and educational improvement; b) a shared sense of purpose in the
school; c) a reward structure that reflects the schools mission as well as goals set for staff and
students; d) a range of activities aimed at intellectual stimulation and the continuous
development of the staff; and e) pedagogical knowledge and skills. Hallinger's (2003) theory
represents a departure from instructional leadership, which may only focus on top down
improvements of curriculum and instruction. Hallinger's shared leadership theory combines the
best of instructional leadership and transformational leadership, setting clear goals focused on instruction, and encouraging all staff members to be instructional leaders.

Principals who share leadership responsibilities with others would be less subject to burnout than principals who attempt the challenges and complexities of leadership alone (Marks & Printy, 2003). With the role of the principal constantly changing, the idea of having all teachers share the responsibility of instructional leadership may be a practical and effective way to meet academic goals and create a culture of continuous improvement. Whether the neophyte principal leans more toward instruction or transformation, clearly all neophyte principals face increasing accountability, changes in culture, and pressure to make successful changes in short time spans.

**Policy and The Era of Accountability**

*A Nation at Risk* (1983) called for the fundamental restructuring of the educational system. The reports revealed a need for a number of key changes including changes in organizational structure to result in school-based management involving all stakeholders. Creating a structure that develops a supportive culture and promotes positive relationships, while providing support to the school community should be vital practices of the principal initiating these types of changes (Malone & Caddell, 2000). Also revealed was the need for changes in professional roles, tightening teacher preparation standards while giving teachers more responsibility in decision-making and instructional arrangements. Targeted support for teachers through the utilization of professional development is essential when implementing these new initiatives. A third area of needed change was in mandated goals, accountability, and increased involvement in determining curriculum, textbooks, and assessments of students, teachers, individual schools and districts. The principal must interpret district and state accountability
policies as it relates to the school, works with teachers to prioritize issues that require change, and develop a plan for the school to achieve goals (Louis-Seashore & Robinson, 2012).

The National Commission of Teaching and America’s Future (1996) report shows that there has been no previous time in history when the success, indeed the survival of nations and people has been so tightly tied to their ability to learn (Darling-Hammond, 2015). The report noted that the successful citizen of the 21st century must be able to read, write and compute proficiently, find and use resources, frame and solve problems, and be a lifelong learner of new technologies, skills, and occupations. “America’s future depends now, as never before, on our ability to teach” (NCTAF, 1996, p.3), and successful leaders of 21st century schools are required as never before to possess a better understanding of leadership for change in schools. It is of the utmost importance to the profession (Wagner et al., 2012). When the principal acts as a change agent, his or her structured approach to leadership can support the school as it moves toward positive change (Bridges & Mitchell, 2000). Leadership for the 21st century must revolve around changes in our paradigm of learning for all educators, as well as all students. As Reeves (2006) stated: “Leadership is about change—how to justify it, implement it, and maintain it” (p. 158).

The push for greater accountability emerged within a number of commissioned reports, such as Toward Equal Educational Opportunity: The United States Senate Committee Report on Equal Educational Opportunity (1970) and A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (ANAR) (1983). During the Reagan Administration, ANAR report addressed serious concerns regarding the “widespread public perception that something is seriously remiss in our educational system” (Gardner, 1983, p. 2). The committee reported “serious lack of leadership” (Gardner, 1983, p.4) and challenged school leaders to “play a crucial leadership role in developing school and community support” (Gardner, 1983, p. 1) to implement vital change.
within their school buildings. The next decade brought even greater concerns about the quality of education. By 1994, other criticism added to the sense of urgency by stating that the quality of education in public schools in America continued to perform far behind the rest of the world (National Commission of Education on Time & Learning, 1994). The public’s knowledge of failed results and presence of inequality in American education has mounted political pressure on both federal and state governments to be more accountable (Ravitch, 2009).

*No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) of 2001 set the bar even higher for public schools in terms of standards, accountability, and highly qualified teachers. Increased standards and a demand for improved student performance on state-mandated assessments imposed various degrees of consequences for schools that did not meet the minimum guidelines. After NCLB was signed into law, accountability for student achievement became a very real problem for the nations’ public education system. Accountability is a central feature of NCLB. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is the measure that is used to hold schools and school districts accountable under NCLB. Schools that meet AYP requirements are assumed to be functioning well and enhancing student academic achievement, whereas, schools that fail to meet AYP requirements are presumed to be falling short of expectations for student academic achievement. Districts, campuses, and the state are required to meet AYP criteria on three measures: reading/language arts, mathematics, and either graduation rate (for high schools and districts) or attendance rate (for elementary and middle/junior high schools).

A campus, district, or state that receives Title I, Part A funds and fails to meet AYP for two consecutive years is subject to certain requirements such as offering supplemental education services, offering school choice, or taking corrective actions (NCLB, 2001). Sanctions increase in severity for each additional year that a school fails to meet the set goals. Examples of the
sanctions are to remove the principal and restructure the teaching staff (NCLB, 2002). Test-based accountability has significantly changed the working conditions of teachers and principals (Jackson, 2012.)

Principals entering high-poverty schools in large, urban districts are likely to encounter different challenges than those faced by principals leading more affluent schools in suburban districts (Burkhauser, S., et al., 2012; Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki & Giles, 2005; Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Noddings, 2015; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; DeMatthews, 2014). Given these powerful pressures and expectations, one would think that only experienced principals are selected for the most challenging schools; however, research shows that principals often begin their careers at low performing schools, serving minority students, and in areas of poverty (Fullan, 2007; Knapp et al., 2010; Chiang, 2009; Brady, 2003; Hargreaves, 2005; Loeb, Kalogrides & Horng, 2010).

Unfortunately, there is a strong likelihood that many inexperienced principals will fail when confronted by the first challenges essential in a position of educational leadership (Daresh, 1987). Principals are expected to achieve new levels of success for themselves, the teachers they lead, and the students they serve (Quinn, 2005). Yet, many principals have little formal support, which varies greatly from district to district. With or without this crucial support, principals must make significant changes in short periods of time.

**School District Accountability & Expectations**

Superintendents make clear that they hold new and more demanding expectations for principals (Hess & Kelly, 2005). Increased time demands, heightened accountability pressures, and the overall changed nature of the role have all had a powerful impact on principals (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). When asked about strengths and weaknesses of principal candidates, many superintendents spoke of a lack of knowledge and skills in crucial areas, such
as instruction and assessment (Whitaker, 2001). There are many areas of performance important to the principals’ role, but how they improve classroom teaching and learning in their schools is high priority (Derrington, Sharratt & Spokane, 2008).

The literature on superintendent expectations of principals’ state that there are foundational skills that are crucial for success: leadership and management skills, loyalty, ability to effectively problem solve, instructional leadership, and successful communicator (Association for Middle Level Education, 2016; Hale & Moorman, 2003; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000; Murphy, 2001; Norton, 2002; Southern Regional Education Board, 2001). In most large urban districts, designated district level administrators, who have been successful principals themselves, may be responsible for the supervision of between 10 to 15 principals. This method allows for principals to have a “go to” person, aside from the superintendent, who may be able to coach and mentor them, especially as they navigate through the first year of the principalship. This model allows the superintendent to build capacity, support, and empower all principals, which can be a difficult daily task in districts with a large number of principals to supervise.

Schools and school districts, which are highly political systems, are nested within larger social, cultural, economic, and political environments with influence that can affect circumstances faced by district and campus level administrators (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002). In my tenure as an assistant principal, I have observed, in several school districts, a common practice to have principals reassigned, demoted or fired when school scores have not improved, regardless of the population challenges facing these school leaders. This can have a significant detrimental effect on the principal’s self-image and may result in a decision to leave the education field altogether, rather than encounter public shame. With an already decreasing number of qualified principal candidates, these accountability sanctions only add to problem.
Social Justice Leadership

There has been an increased focus on social justice and educational leadership, specifically, in terms of preparing 21st century school leaders (Bogotch, Beachum, Blount, Brooks & English, 2008; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Shoho, Merchang & Lugg, 2005). Despite the wide range of definitions of social justice leadership, there is a clear consensus that social justice leadership involves the recognition of the unequal circumstances of marginalized groups with actions directed toward eliminating inequalities (Bogotch, 2002; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Furman, 2012; Gerwitz, 1998). Research focused on how principals enact social justice is relatively new and still emerging (Furman, 2012; Theoharis, 2007). DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014) state “the ability to assess and restructure school resources to support inclusive programming, maximize resources and staff expertise, or develop programs that foster collaboration and culturally relevant pedagogies is essential for school leaders” (p. 848).

Social justice leadership sets the stage for implementing change in schools based on the principal’s beliefs and high expectations for all students. Central to a principal’s vision and advocacy, social justice leadership refers to specific issues concerning race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions (Theoharis, 2007). Based on school location, finances, student population size, socio-economic factors, type of special programs, academic interventions, staff turnover, and many other considerations, the focus for the principal’s advocacy agenda may differ. However, the goal is one and the same – to address and eliminate marginalization in schools (Theoharis, 2007).

Inequality, segregation, misidentification, and poor educational achievement of students with disabilities stubbornly persist today in schools across the United States, particularly in high poverty urban schools (Blanchett, Mumford & Beachum, 2005; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Losen & Orfield, 2002). School leaders not only recognize inequality, but also must have the necessary
knowledge to take action in ways that replace existing structures of inequality with more equitable ones. Ethical dilemmas are common to school leadership. In my experience, it is through ongoing experiences as a school leader that one can begin to understand where the inequities lie. As no two schools are exactly alike, identifying social justice issues within a school environment takes time for a neophyte principal to recognize.

**Challenges of a Neophyte Principal**

In an era of results-driven school reform, in which principals are asked to take responsibility for student achievement and use data to drive decisions, their skill and knowledge matter more than ever (Hess & Kelly, 2005). Neophyte principals face a growing list of challenges. They are often assigned with little time to prepare, given inconsistent support, and are held to the same standards as their more experienced colleagues. Without proper support, principal success is unlikely (Crippen, 2004; Davis et al., 2005; Piggot-Irvine, 2004; Silver, Lochmiller, Copland, & Tripps, 2009; Wildy & Clarke, 2008). Neophyte principals may find that provided support does not adequately meet their individual needs and their site-specific issues (Davis, et al., 2005).

Neophyte principals have insufficient preparation for this new position (Bridges, 2012). Most school administrators have been trained in programs that are now both irrelevant and grossly inadequate for the current responsibilities of the principalship (Copland, 2001). Leadership preparation programs’ efforts to prepare leaders for the principalship continue to be described as “haphazard,” with deans and department chairs acknowledging inadequate coursework and ill-prepared graduates (Epstein, 2013). Campus issues often present a challenge to neophyte principals, as they require access to information that many times may not be readily available to an incoming leader (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Watkins (2003) states, “Given the
stakes, it is surprising how little good guidance is available to new leaders about how to transition more effectively and efficiently into new roles,” (p. 3). School systems have proclaimed, “You’re the boss. Fix your own problems… If you cannot do the job on your own, you’re a failure… the image of the leader as the Lone Ranger is very much alive in the world of school administration” (Daresh, 2001).

In response to these new demands on principals, the role, in many contexts is being re-conceptualized (Browne-Ferrigno & Shoho, 2002), changing from a traditional authoritarian, top-down hierarchical position to dynamic leadership models with management tasks dependent upon contexts and challenges. At the doctoral level, traditional preparation programs effectively prepare leaders as scholars; however, such programs many not prepare candidates effectively as practitioners capable of applying research to practice in real world settings with real world problems (Hochbein & Perry, 2013).

To add to the complexity of the problem, most neophyte principals who come from the teaching ranks bring with them the knowledge of the classroom environment and information that they have acquired in administration preparation programs and university courses. As in the case of most neophyte principals, many of their experiences may have been limited to classroom experiences with approximately 30 students. They may or may not have had much experience in administrative-like roles, such as department chair or campus curriculum coach. Their lives may have been directed and influenced by school administrators and their perceptions on what administrators do may be limited by these interactions. They are then, when appointed to an administrative position, thrust into the role of the principal and are expected to make the transition from classroom teacher to campus administrator, where their levels of responsibilities are magnified. Moving from the collegial context of their classrooms, where they felt secure and
competent, into areas that challenge their most basic beliefs about themselves as school leaders, leave many feeling isolated, overwhelmed, and disenchanted with the job (Aiken, 2001).

As promising new principals move into these "treacherous waters" of school administration (Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1994, p. 42), they find themselves struggling with feelings of isolation, problems of time management, a complexity of student/family problems, and unfamiliar challenges associated with working through the art of political compromise, as they learn how to deal with school boards and teacher unions. As a result many neophyte principals may not only feel that they are inadequately prepared for their new roles, but they also experience difficulties and challenges understanding their role.

One of the major concerns highlighted in The Wallace Foundation (2008) report was the realization that there is a “chronic mismatch between the daily realities of school leadership and the training those leaders typically receive” (p. 4). For example, supporting teachers, responding to student issues in a timely manner, being visible throughout the school building, and addressing parent concerns are daily tasks that require a large amount of time and attention by the principal. These are all duties that the principal cannot afford to ignore or delegate to other team members. In my personal experience, these types of responsibilities were rarely addressed in my principal preparation program at the university level. I learned how to manage these obligations on the job. The gap between theory and practice of the principalship is one that must be addressed if individuals are to be properly prepared for the role of the principal in the 21st century (Latucca, 2012). The impact of education reforms, changing needs of students’ diverse needs and the expectations of teachers, parents, and the community all contribute to the complexity of the job of principalship (Ng & Szeto, 2016).
The principal must be effective at motivating others by providing for each person’s individual needs, while keeping the bigger picture of the whole school in mind. Principals are regarded as the chief executive officers (CEOs) of the school organization (Ng, 2013). As the principalship is becoming an ever more demanding role, neophyte principals have to endure pressures in performing their duties, while understanding that their role is characterized by limited control, nested in a context of relentless accountability (Ng & Szeto, 2016). Leaders who get the best results are those who can employ various leadership styles depending on the challenges their institutions are facing.

Research finds that the emotional intelligence of leaders, based on the relationship between their self-perceptions and rater-perceptions, somewhat supports the predictive value of their effectiveness (Barbuto & Burbach, 2006). The concept of emotional intelligence includes a person’s ability to recognize one’s emotions, to control one’s impulses, to use rationale, to keep one’s composure and optimism when faced with difficulties and to be able to attentively listen to others in a self-conscious manner (Brina, Zimianiti & Panagiotopoulos, 2014). The first year in a new position seems to be a series of events that serve to redefine individuals in terms of their role and personal adjustments (Murphy, 2002). Subsequently, a principal should be able to understand and cooperate with all members of the team, in order to influence behavior. Lending support to this premise were Daresh and Alexander (2015) who believed that one of the most important aspects of principal preparedness was the development of self. Developing and knowing one’s self encompasses a capacity to take risks, to listen to others, and to be authentic in relationships. Daresh (2002) adds, "knowing one's self is viewed as an even more critical responsibility than knowing how to do the job or fitting in (p. 6)." Consequently, it is clear that there is a close relationship between culture and human capital; therefore, it is most important
that the principal develops emotional intelligence skills for him/herself, as well as for the teachers that are part of the organization (O’Boyle et al., 2010).

**Building Relationships**

Research finds principals especially influential over the organizational climate of the school where they are able to foster trusting, cooperative, and open environments where input from staff is welcome (Bryk et al., 2010; Hoy & Henderson, 1983; Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990, 1999; Thapa et al., 2013; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2014). This same research identifies that the trusting, cooperative, and open characteristics in schools generate higher levels of satisfaction, cohesion around school goals, and commitment among faculty. Principal–staff relationships and interpersonal interactions are found to be central factors for these outcomes (VanMaele, Moolenaar & Daly, 2015).

Principals are expected to cultivate a culture of high trust and model through example. Trust matters because principals cannot single-handedly either create or sustain many of the systems and structures within a campus. By establishing positive relationships with the faculty and staff, the neophyte principal can begin to foster a culture where commitment, trust, and communication are guiding forces towards the school's vision for success. One important element of building and establishing relationships is the formation of trust. "Trust is pivotal in the efforts to improve education. Yet, trust seems ever more difficult to achieve and maintain" (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Creating an organizational culture of cooperation is likely to have a significant impact on the trusting and trustworthy behavior of individuals; furthermore, schools with high levels of trust have been found to be more likely to seek new ideas, reach out to the community, and commit to organizational goals (Sergiovanni, 2015). Principals high in emotional intelligence are able to know and understand the pulse of the organizational culture,
based on behaviors by staff members. Specifically, school leaders must be able to "offer intellectual stimulation through challenging assumptions, to provide individualized support by showing concern about personal needs, and to act as a model that is consistent with organizational values" (Daly, Liou, Moolenaar, 2014, p. 286).

Whether the principal is new to a site or new to the principalship itself, the specific history of the school, and the dynamic of the staff relationships create unique challenges for principals. The teachers a principal inherits may be ready for change, or they may be upset about the loss of the previous principal. The administrative staff may accept new ideas, doubt levels of expertise, or even try to sabotage the work of the neophyte principal. Principals set the culture of the school, and when the principal changes, so does the culture (Bolman & Deal, 2014; Reeves & Hargreaves, 2014). The new principal may walk into a close-knit culture of teachers who support each other and doubt new arrivals. The new principal may get a veteran staff that doubt the new, young principal or resent the changes being implemented; they may feel the school was running perfectly and nothing needed to change. No matter what the neophyte principal encounters, there will be the challenge of getting to know the new faculty and staff, along with developing a new culture for the school.

**Principals as the Change Agent**

The principal plays an important role in bringing about change in schools (Dhuey & Smith, 2014; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Fullan, 2014; Aydin, Sarier & Uysal, 2013; Manna, 2015; Reeves, 2004; Reeves, 2006; Spillane & Lee, 2014; DuFour & Marzano, 2009; Zimmerman, 2006). Understanding the role as a change agent is critical for principals; yet, as central as the principal is to the change process, the principal needs cooperation and ownership of change initiatives from others in the school to bring about long-
term improvement. The school is influenced by the principal’s personal vision and values, whether or not they are spoken of directly (Hallinger, 2011). In this aspect, it is vital that neophyte principals do not force their personal vision in a manner that may be perceived as aggressive or brash by the school community. Neophyte principals must find ways to subtly use their personal vision to influence others first (Hallinger, 2011).

School leaders of the 21st century must abandon old models in order to meet the critical educational needs of this time (Richardson, 2003). As a result, leaders adopt a new concept of schools as learning organizations (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000). Recommending standards for school principals, the National Association of Elementary and Secondary Principals (2001) echoed that concept stating, “No one is free to avoid dealing with change or to stop the clocks to prepare for it, but a community of learners provides the...tools and resources to manage and adapt to that change” (p. 25). Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, and Kleiner (2000) noted that two key components of systemic change in the school setting involve a principal who believes in the potential of a learning organization and has the skills to build a community of collaborative learners. If principals are to be leaders who reculture schools into communities where all teachers and students learn, then foremost is the capacity to collaborate (Huffman & Hipp, 2003). The importance of alignment between actual and expected leadership practices has been highlighted in studies that showed that principals’ leadership practices are the best predictors for the presence of either high or low participation by teachers in change efforts (Huffman & Jacobson, 2003). Given the right conditions, individuals will adapt their leadership practices to different situations (Kouzes & Posner, 2000).
Organizational Socialization

The organizational socialization of a neophyte principal is a complex process that can be described as the "internalization of norms, beliefs, and values of a school" (Weindling & Dimmock, 2006, p. 332). Normore (2004) states that a significant challenge for neophyte principals is to form a new professional identity as they transition into their new role in a new school community. The early stages of principal socialization requires significant adapting and time is required for the building of relationships prior to reforming campus structure (Aiken, 2002).

Becoming an effective principal requires more than the completion of educational and credentialing requirements. It requires the professional and organizational socialization of the novice to the new position. Organizational socialization, according to Van Maanen (1976) refers "to the process by which a person learns the values, norms, and required behaviors, which permit him or her to participate as a member of the organization" (p. 67). Organizational socialization has been linked to a number of important organizational outcomes, including increased organizational commitment, job involvement, role orientation, and tenure; furthermore, organizations that accelerate the transition of newcomers into their new roles are at a competitive advantage, as they can start benefiting from the newly hired employees sooner (Perrot, Bauer, Abonneau, Campoy, Erdogan, & Liden, 2014).

Daresh's (2002) notes that socialization and an awareness of the role that culture plays within any organization is a major theme of principal effectiveness that represents a challenge for neophyte principals. Neophyte principals often struggle with feelings of professional isolation and loneliness as they transition into a role that carries ultimate responsibility and decision-making powers (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Often times, neophyte principals may have difficulty dealing with the legacy, practice, and style of the previous principal. Creating a positive and
productive school environment for effective learning to take place requires a capable principal (Fullan, 2014; Lenarduzzi, 2014; Sergiovanni, 2009). With such large numbers of low-performing students and the high turnover in leadership in these environments, understanding the neophyte principals’ experience in these contexts is especially critical for retaining and better supporting them.

In her study of neophyte principals, Aiken (2002) wanted to build an understanding of the socialization of neophyte principals and how these administrators made the necessary cultural transitions that continued to sustain them in their work. Her findings led to a number of themes that shaped how her participants were influenced by the cultures of their schools and became socialized to their roles. Those participants who were deemed successful in the socialization process exhibited a number of common characteristics. Some of the recommendations as a result of the study were: administration preparation programs need to integrate more clinical field work into their programs, graduate and post-graduate formal mentorship programs and critical friends groups need to be created and formally implemented for both aspiring and new principals, and districts should look to "grow their own" and offer more formalized "on the job" training.

**Mentoring**

Receiving pre-service principal training is essential. However, equally important is the training and support campus leaders receive after they are hired. “No matter what preparation anyone has, being the principal is not the same. Nothing prepares you for the job” (The Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 24). In the current era of high stakes accountability, paired with the decreasing number of candidates able to meet the challenges of school leadership effectively, the nurturing and supporting components for neophyte principals has become particularly relevant (Brown-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004). These higher expectations, combined with the potential for administrator shortages, and the diverse learning, social, and emotional needs of students has
placed an enormous amount of pressure on those who choose to lead our schools (Hopkins-Thompson, 2000).

Research on Mentoring Principals

Mentoring is defined in the literature as an extended process of support from a more experienced colleague to help a beginner for personal and professional growth (Silver et al., 2009). Mentoring is a widely accepted means of helping those new to a field and is used in a variety of fields including medicine, law, business, and teaching. Over 30 states have requirements for teachers to receive mentors, but districts are just beginning to consider mandatory mentor programs for new principals (Wallace Foundation, 2007). The recent evidence supports investing in programs to help new principals succeed in their increasingly complex jobs.

Research on principal mentoring programs shows support varies widely and there are significant barriers to providing quality mentoring to principals (Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Gettys, Martin & Bigby, 2010; Sciarappa & Mason, 2014; Daresh, 2004; Daresh, 2001). The Wallace Foundation (2007) study found most mentoring programs have "vague or unclear goals, insufficient focus on instruction, little training for mentors, insufficient mentoring time, lack of data to assess results, and little funding” (p.4.). Mentoring new principals is a difficult endeavor for several reasons. One, principals have limited time for extra meetings, districts want their initiatives pushed in addition to general support topics, accountability increases the pressure, and new principals must balance their managerial and instructional tasks while building a new school culture. Two, mentoring new principals is complex because it involves serving the emotional needs of the new principal, the managerial needs of the district, and it also must prepare new principals for the increasing pressure of academic accountability.

Hansford and Ehrich (2006) conducted a research study that included 40 cases on
principal mentoring. They found both positive and negative outcomes. Among the positive outcomes, were increased feelings of support, empathy, counseling, sharing ideas, problem solving, professional development, and increased confidence among mentored principals. The negative outcomes were most often associated with lack of time for mentoring activities and/or an expertise mismatch (Hansford & Ehrich, 2006). The findings suggest programs should include support, trust, and respect. Mentees valued mentors who were good listeners and kept confidentiality. The best programs also encouraged reflection, networking and sharing ideas with a professional role model.

History of Mentoring Principals

The first movement of mentoring for neophyte principals emerged in the 1980’s, but soon diminished in the early 1990’s, mainly due to a lack of clear focused goals for the program, insufficient funding, inadequate training for the mentors and the decreasing belief of the importance of leadership development for new school leaders (Daresh, 2004). However, in the late 1990’s, with the anticipation of imminent principal shortages and emerging federal and state accountability, the idea of supporting new principals through mentoring began to re-emerge across the country. The call to develop instructional leadership, requiring principals to have a thorough knowledge of the teaching practices, observe teachers, model lessons, and provide specific feedback and professional development brought the concept of mentoring principals to the forefront of leadership growth (Knight, 2014).

Since 2000, more than half of the states have implemented requirements for mentoring neophyte principals, prompted by the growing recognition of the importance of principals to initiate school reform, especially in high-needs schools (The Wallace Foundation, 2012). In meeting the key challenges (socialization, technical skills, and self-awareness) identified by
Daresh (2007), of central importance in this study is the concept of mentoring. The literature suggests that mentoring can be used as an effective tool in assisting neophyte principals in meeting the challenges as new school administrators. According to the Wallace Foundation (2007) article, *Perspective: Getting Principal Mentoring Right: Lessons from the Field*, no longer is there a mindset for neophyte principals to *sink or swim*.

Principal mentoring is an emerging national trend with increasingly popularity. The Wallace Foundation added, "The growing popularity of mentoring can also be reasonably taken as a sign of heightened appreciation and understanding by education policy-makers and funders of the critical role school leaders can play in sparking improvements in learning. And by extension, it signals an acceptance of the idea that the professional development of new principals is a worthwhile public investment." (p.6.).

Principal mentoring is not necessarily a new idea. Most principals may credit their first-year survival on the job in part to a relationship with an informal mentor. Unfortunately, the mentoring received by most neophyte principals is often inconsistent and suffers from some severe limitations (Bloom, Castagna, & Warren, 2003). In the private industry, mentoring tends to be provided for those individuals interested in seeking career advancement, but in education, mentoring "tends to be on immediate survivorship and skills needed to ensure personal enhancement” (Daresh, 2004, p. 501). Mentoring supports the socialization of the neophyte principal by having the mentor work with him or her to gain knowledge about the school district’s policies, procedures, and practices and to provide continuous feedback. Equally important is support for the mentee’s professional growth as the mentor guides the mentee to form his or her own” moral and ethical stances regarding educational issues” (p. 502).
Professional Learning Communities

Research and practice supports the power of professional learning communities (PLCs) in implementing reform and sustaining educational improvement (Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Blankenstein, 2010; Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe & Orr, 2009; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2006; Brady & McColl, 2010; Sicone, 2012; Fullan, 2009). School leaders and teachers are at the core of student learning, achievement, and school improvement. The PLC concept can be used to gather groups of principals for professional support, or create structures for teachers to work together within departments and across grades and disciplines. The literature has clearly shown the positive impact of PLCs, structured time focused on successful collaboration, on student learning (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2014). DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many (2006) emphasized the need for PLC members to be interconnected and working toward a common goal. In their efforts to provide clarification and consistency of the concepts of professional learning communities DuFour and Eaker (1998) defined each word in the phrase. Professional is defined as one with current expertise or advanced training in a specialized field; learning is defined as a continued action characterized by unending curiosity; the authors define community as a group of people linked by common interests. Richardson (2003) highlighted the investigative nature of learning communities, in which professional educators utilize research findings to better achieve established goals.

The actions of PLC principals are summarized by DuFour and Eaker in a list often actions (p. 186-199).

1. Attend to the building blocks of a PLC.
2. Communicate the importance of mission, vision, values, and goals on a daily basis.
3. Create collaborative structures with a focus on teaching and learning.
4. Shape the school culture to support a professional learning community.
5. Foster an approach to curriculum that focuses on learning rather than teaching.
6. Encourage teachers to think of themselves as leaders.
7. Practice enlightened leadership strategies.
8. Establish personal credibility.
10. Recognize that continuous improvement requires continuous learning.

Principals who develop a PLC culture at their sites allow teachers the opportunity to learn from each other and learn on the job. This is similar to what Hallinger (2003) describes as shared instructional leadership.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework used to guide this study was originally derived from Michael Huberman’s (1989) work on the evolution and developmental cycle of teachers. Huberman’s five phases of teacher development are career entry, stabilization, experimentation/stock-taking, serenity/conservatism, and disengagement. Each identified phase had very distinct characteristics and associated behaviors, which teachers demonstrated at different points in their careers. It is important to note that these phases are not linear and teacher development cannot be seen as sequential (White, 2008). Personal experiences and the social environment are powerful factors, which influence teachers’ development. In fact, teachers move in and out of the various phases so that a late career teacher can return to being a novice if given the right circumstance, such as given a new and innovative teaching assignment (Hattie, 2003).

Daresh (2007) modified the stages from five to four stages, in order to apply them to the careers of principals. The four stages are career entry, stabilization, and then risk taking or risk avoiding. The journey through these four stages, while unpredictable and individual, can be
affected by an array of variables (Daresh, 2007). Factors, such as school conditions, school culture, and the effectiveness of support given to a first year principal can all affect the timeline as the individual progresses from career entry to stabilization.

**TABLE 1: COMPARISON OF HUBERMAN’S FIVE PHASES OF TEACHER DEVELOPMENT AND DARESH’S MODEL OF PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Huberman’s Five Phases of Teacher Development</th>
<th>Daresh Model of Principal Development</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career Entry</td>
<td>Career Entry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stabilization</td>
<td>Stabilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimentation/Stock-Taking</td>
<td>Risk Taking or Risk Avoiding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serenity/Conservatism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disengagement</td>
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The first stage of Daresh’s model is initial career entry, where the first year principal is a beginner, surviving day-to-day tasks and still trying to understand fully the role of being a principal. Much energy is focused on trying not to fail, rather than trying to succeed. Much of this time is spent observing systems already in place, meeting faculty and staff members, understanding the budget process, and may feel overwhelmed with the pressure to succeed the previous principal. Although surrounded by people all day, the principal is only one person. Neophyte principals may work late into the evening and on weekends to finish paperwork and the balance between professional and personal times is compromised.
In the second stage, stabilization, the neophyte principal begins to feel a sense of personal and professional satisfaction in his/her new role. There is realization that being an effective principal is possible and his/her confidence increases. There may be a formal or informal mentoring plan in place, which is providing the neophyte principal with a number of benefits for overall success in this first year. The principal feels comfortable in the new school environment, has established trustworthy relationships with key employees, and has an understanding of how to lead the school towards student academic achievement.

The final stage, the choice between becoming a risk taker or risk avoider, is considered to be the most critical (Daresh, 2007). Risk takers will use their leadership skills to motivate the school community to be innovative and work towards continually improving student achievement. Risk takers are proactive in their thinking and foster an educational environment where they inspire faculty and staff to “think outside the box” and implement initiatives that will positively impact students’ experiences in school. Risk avoiders are portrayed as those who consistently look for excuses when performance is less than desired. Risk avoiders are reactive, not proactive, to campus issues.

Principals are often not equipped with the tools necessary to lead schools in the 21st century (Davis, Hess & Kelly, 2007). Times of uncertainty and relentless pressure prompt a focus on continuously improving instructional practices in light of accountability measures. Creating a better understanding of the principals’ role expectations will create greater understanding and preparation for neophyte principals to become effective leaders. The leadership role played by the school principal is critical. While principals wear many different hats during the school day, the most effective school principals are instructional leaders who provide a common vision of what good instruction looks like and always has an eye on the
overall goal (DuFour, 2002). 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 the principal (Bartholomew & Fusarelli, 2003).
Chapter 3
Research Design

Creswell (2007) defines research design as the “entire process of research from conceptualizing a problem to writing research questions, and on to data collection, analysis, interpretation, and report writing” (p. 5). While there are many definitions of research, the common goal is to investigate a problem or phenomenon in a systematic manner (Merriam, 2009). This study on the experiences of neophyte principals used applied research, to focus on improving the quality of practice of a particular discipline. Since the goal of educational research is not merely to contribute to a body of knowledge, but to generate a solution, it easily falls into the category of the social sciences (Hammersley, 2002). Merriam (2009) states, “Applied social science researchers hope their work will be used by administrators and policymakers to improve the way things are done” (p. 4).

Despite the important role of neophyte principals, there is relatively little literature that focuses on this group’s first year experiences (DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Hull, 2012; Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, & Ikemoto, 2012; Bastian & Henry, 2015; Hitt, Tucker & Young, 2012; Hall, Childs-Bowen, Pajardo & Cunningham, 2015). This study presented a valuable opportunity to further explore this field and add to the body of literature. To identify the essence of neophyte principals’ experiences, this study incorporated qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research is an “endlessly creative and interpretive process” (p. 35) where the researcher provides an opportunity for participants’ voices to be heard (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Qualitative research allowed me to investigate the neophyte principal experience. This qualitative study comprised of a descriptive and analytic process of interaction between the researcher and the study participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).
Qualitative research focuses on the interpretation of phenomena in their natural settings to make sense in terms of the meanings people bring to these settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). I explored unique interactions in a particular situation, to understand in depth, the meaning brought by participants about their first year experiences as a neophyte principal. In order to gauge the credibility of the participants’ interpretations, the context under which these interpretations are made must be “richly and thickly described” (Gertz, 1973). This analysis is based on theoretical framework made obvious through the study, as well as recurring patterns found in the interview data (Merriam, 1998). This qualitative data collected from neophyte principals involve one-on-one face-to-face interviews, which allowed me to document their challenges and experiences through their individual perspectives.

**Phenomenology Research**

A phenomenological study involves identifying participants who have experienced or are experiencing the phenomenon that is being explored (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). The goal of phenomenological research is to describe a lived experience of a phenomenon (Waters, 2015). After analyzing all collected interview data, I ultimately developed a description of the experiences about the phenomenon that all individuals have in common – the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013).

The basis of phenomenology is rooted in the multiple ways of interpreting the same experience, and the meaning of the experience to each participant, is what constitutes reality. Researchers in the phenomenological mode attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions of ordinary people in particular situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Phenomenological data analysis consists of bracketing one’s own thoughts and experiences, selecting significant statements from the data and developing themes (Moustakas, 1994). My
experiences in school administration as an assistant principal did not interfere with the knowledge and perspectives from the participants of this study.

**Research Questions**

The researcher needs to consider whether the research questions are clear, of value and interest, and how they relate to existing research (Mason, 2002). Qualitative researchers have hunches and working ideas, but they need to remain open to emergent concepts and themes (Layder, 1993). It was important that I did not go into the data collection burdened with preconceived theories and ideas, as my current position as a campus administrator could potentially limit my perspective. As the researcher, my intent was to provide educational stakeholders with a contextual understanding of the challenges, support systems, and experiences of neophyte principals, with the ultimate objective of creating a set of recommendations beneficial for prospective principals to ascertain before entering the principal role. The overarching research question shaping this study is: How can neophyte principals navigate through their first year of the principalship successfully?

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What major challenges do neophyte principals encounter in the first year of the principalship?
2. What existing supports are available to assist neophyte principals?
3. What are some lessons learned, after the completion of their first year as a principal, that the study participants consider beneficial for aspiring school principals?

**Participant Criterion**

The participants in a phenomenological study are selected because they have lived the experiences being investigated, are willing to share their thoughts about the experiences, and can articulate their conscious experiences (McMillan, 2004). Creswell (2007) discusses the
importance of selecting interview candidates using criterion-based sampling, in order to obtain qualified candidates who will provide the most credible information to the study. Creswell (2013) recommends that researchers interview from five to twenty-five individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. A good qualitative research study design is one which has a clearly defined purpose where there is a consistency between the research questions and the method, and which generates data which is reliable and valid. It is also one, which is realistic, with regard for practical constraints and limitations, which may stem from the reality of the research context and setting (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2013).

Criterion based, or purposive sampling is defined as sample units chosen because they have particular features or characteristics, which enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes which the researcher wishes to study (Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002). In purposive sampling those identified by virtue of their relationship with the research questions, are able to provide the most relevant and rich information (Bryman, 2001). In purposive sampling, decisions about which criteria are used for selection are often made in the early design stages of the research and the process requires clear objectivity, so that the sample stands up to independent scrutiny (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2013).

For my study, I interviewed eleven principals in total. Due to the limited number of neophyte principals, per school year in the two chosen school districts, I also interviewed principals who were appointed within the past five years to participate in the study. Participants were selected from two local school districts with predominately Hispanic student populations, which are located in a United States border town in Southwest Texas. Participants were not limited to any particular ethnicity, age, or gender, possess a variety of years of education experience and have pre-service backgrounds in either principal alternative certification or
university preparation programs. All participants are certified by the Texas State Board of Education as a K-12 principal in the state of Texas and are currently principals at either elementary or secondary level campuses. I chose these interviewees because they provide a multidimensional perspective on the role of the principalship in the 21st century.

I also looked to other districts to better understand my information. I investigated six local school districts to understand the demographics of the faculty, staff, and students. My objective was to find out how many neophyte principals were currently employed by local school districts. I began by accessing publicly available information from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), school district, and campus websites to create a database of potential interview candidates. As I began to gather school district data, I explored perspectives from principals who work in a large urban school district with principals who work in a smaller school district. The purpose for doing so was to determine if there was a relationship between neophyte principals’ experiences and school district size. Analyzing these complex relationships allowed me to study variations in principal data and form conclusions based on their input. I chose two specific school districts within 25 miles of each other where I would conduct my research.

Apple School District

Apple School District (ASD) is the third largest employer in the city with 6,203 full-time employees, 1,648 part-time employees, and 3,024 teachers. ASD serves over 42,000 students and is the second largest school district in the city. There are a total of 64 school principals and within the last two years, there have been eight brand new principals appointed to campuses. See Tables 2-4 for specific information related to ASD.
### TABLE 2: ASD CAMPUS BUILDING NUMBERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Schools</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Kindergarten Schools</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Campuses</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Campuses</strong></td>
<td><strong>64</strong></td>
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### TABLE 3: ASD STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

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<th>Student Demographics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic: 96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White: 2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American: .08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged: 81.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4: Number of Neophyte Principals by Campus Level Between 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 School Years in ASD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus Level</th>
<th>Number of Neophyte Principals Appointed</th>
<th>Total Number of Principals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pecan Valley School District

Pecan Valley School District (PVSD) is located 25 miles outside of the city and is home to a growing suburban population. The district employs 1,450 full-time staff members, with 700 teachers on staff. Of the nine school districts in the county, PVSD is the largest in square mileage with great potential for growth. With an enrollment of 11,800 students, PVSD has a total of 14 school principals and within the last two years, there have been four brand new principals appointed. See Tables 5-6 for specific information related to PVSD:

**Table 4: PVSD Campus Building Numbers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Schools</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Schools</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Schools</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Campuses</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5: PVSD Student Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Demographics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic: 96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White: 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American: .07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged: 86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_School District-Level Administrators_

I interviewed six school district-level administrators, including, superintendents, associate superintendents, and directors in order to gain an understanding of the district-level support provided to neophyte principals. The interview questions focused on three specific areas surrounding neophyte principals – indicators of success, major challenges, and support systems. Triangulation involves the use of different methods and sources to check the integrity of inferences drawn from the data (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2013). I triangulated information gathered from these participants with two vital sources – data presented in the most current literature and from the principals, themselves. This will allow me to investigate possible gaps between these three sources of information and add to the literature base concerning neophyte principals. Due to the small number of school district-level administrators in the area, this multi-layered approach will offer a slender view of the data collected.

_Access to Participants_

Negotiating access to the participants of this study was a key part of early stages of the research. Approval of research was a necessary process through my university’s Office of Research and Sponsored Projects (ORSP). Research conducted with human subjects is required.
to be reviewed and overseen by the university. I obtained the necessary approval from the ORSP and completed the required process to conduct research in both school districts. Each school district provided me with a comprehensive list of possible participants, based on my study criteria. I contacted each participant candidate by telephone or email with a description of my research and a request to participate in the interview study on a volunteer basis. All participant candidates from both school districts responded in a very positive manner and agreed to participate fully in the study. Participant candidates in both school districts received a hard copy of the Research Study Cover Letter (Appendix A) and Informed Consent Form for Research Involving Human Subjects (Appendix B) in person. The next section examines how the data of this study was collected.

**Data Collection**

I utilized an interview method for this study, specifically a standard face-to-face in-depth interview design. There are various forms of interview design that can be developed to obtain thick, rich data utilizing a qualitative investigational perspective (Creswell, 2007). The standard face-to-face in-depth interview is very structured in terms of question wording, participants are always asked identical questions, and it allows the researcher to ask probing questions as a method of follow-up (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). My follow-up response to each question was usually determined by the participant’s answers. For example, if I felt that the interviewee possibly had more to contribute, I would ask him or her to clarify the response. I found this technique to be extremely useful in order to achieve depth of an answer, especially at the beginning of the interview, when the participant tended to be a bit nervous. An initial response is often at a fairly surface level and use of follow-up questions can obtain a deeper and fuller understanding of the participant’s meaning (Thompson, 2000).
The face-to-face in-depth interview is often described as a form of conversation with a purpose (Fontana & Frey, 2000). In preparing for data collection, the researcher should give thought to the likely circumstances of participants, their possible value systems and social worlds (Mason, 2002). My goal was to understand the perspective of each participant, be non-judgmental, and maintain confidentiality. From the early stages of this research study, my intention was to combine structure with flexibility, when preparing for the face-to-face in-depth interviews with the participants.

I had completed an immense amount of research surrounding the topic of the principalship. This allowed me to recognize a number of important themes to explore further; however, my objective was to also ensure that the interviews were sufficiently flexible to permit topics to be covered in the order most suited to the interviewee and to mine for unique information that would provide clearer insight into the role of the principalship. At times, I used probing questions to extract responses that were more detailed, especially when the interviewee’s responses were very “surface,” most likely because of the nature of the question. For the most part, participants spoke passionately about their personal experiences as neophyte principals.

Although I wanted to follow the direction taken by the participants, my intent was always to impose some structure to the interview. I began each interview with a brief overview of my research and all ethical considerations for participants. I had a copy of the interview questions available in front of the participant, in case they needed to reference it at any time. I outlined the sequence of the question sections and asked the participant if they had any questions regarding the interview process before I began audio recording. As the interviews progressed, I did, at times, have to refocus the participant on the question asked. Sometimes, the interviewee would become very involved in his or her answer and stray from the focus of the question. I always
validated their response and used a different approach to ask the question again. Interviewees were forthcoming with the information and almost all interviewees encouraged me to contact them if I needed any further input. I had no need to follow up with any interviewee for clarification of interview data, as I had audio recorded all interviews.

Overall, the interviewees were extremely positive about the research and exhibited a great deal of attentiveness and interest in the topic of study. The interviews took place at a neutral location of the interviewee’s choosing to make them more comfortable. On average, the interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. All interviews took place with no issues requiring postponement.

The research questions and themes emerged from the current literature on the experiences of neophyte principals, as well as from experiences as an administrator. The questions designed for principal interviews were different than those selected for school district-level administrators. Since my research objectives for principals were different from the school district-level administrators, it was necessary to develop two different sets of questions. The principal questions focused upon their emotions, experiences, challenges, and support systems surrounding their first year in the role while the school district-level administrator questions focused on their unique perspectives surrounding neophyte principal experiences, such as what they perceived to be indicators of success, examples of how they felt neophyte principals could best be supported, and how they personally serve as a resource of support for principals.

Creating the right rapport involves demonstrating interest and respect, being able to respond flexibly to the interviewee, and being able to show understanding and empathy (Thompson, 2000). All interviewees responded positively, as I verbalized the purpose and significance of this study. My real desire to understand their perspectives as principals was
evident, as I created a climate of trust with all participants. I established credibility with participants by asking relevant questions, where were seen as meaningful by the participant, and because of my background in educational leadership. As part of creating an atmosphere of trust, I gave each participant a brief, one-minute overview of my professional background.

Immediately, I could see evidence of participant’s anxiety diminish and almost all of them thanked me for choosing to study the role of the principalship as part of my dissertation research. I informed the interviewees when there were five to ten minutes left in the interview to allow the interviewee to verbalize any lingering thoughts or feelings that were left unexpressed. At the end of each interview, I gave reassurances about confidentiality and how their contribution will help the current research. As the researcher, I adhered to the Internal Review Board rules on human subjects, that all interviews were managed productively and the data collected was a true representation of the interviewee perspective.

**Principal Interview Questions**

These interview questions were created in order to capture participant responses to prompts that are aligned with the research questions. Interview questions were categorized into four general areas: overview of the principal role and responsibilities, perceptions about major challenges during the first year, opinions regarding provided support, training, or mentoring during the first year, and recommendations for aspiring administrators. The interview questions have been designed to capture authentic data regarding professional experiences of neophyte principals and have been sorted in an intentional sequential order. I have structured the interview into three different categories: Part I: The First 30 Days, Part II: The First Academic Year, and Part III: Recommendations for Aspiring Principals. Each principal interview began with a “warm-up” question – meant to make the participant feel comfortable. My purpose was to
establish initial rapport by asking about their family support, so that the interviewee felt more at ease and allowed for the rest of the interview to flow smoothly.

For this study, the first 30 days timeline commences on the first day of the neophyte principal’s contract. Normally, principals are appointed one to two months before the first instructional day for students begins. However, principals tend to work a 226-day contract or “year-round”, which means they work throughout the summer months. This allows for neophyte principals to adjust to the new school, meet with key members of staff, and finalize hiring decisions. The completion of the first academic year is defined as one full year as campus principal, normally ending in June, as students, faculty, and staff begins their summer vacation. It is important to keep in mind that some principals are also promoted later or during the school year, forcing them to learn and adapt while on the job.

_School District-Level Administrator Interview Questions_

As an added dimension to this study, I wanted to examine the topic of neophyte principals through the lens of the school district-leader administrator. The interview questions focused on three specific areas surrounding neophyte principals – indicators of success, major challenges, and support systems. I wanted to explore how school districts prepare, hire, train, and support neophyte principals. I was also looking to find if school district size mattered in relation to effective neophyte principal support systems. Examples of questions that address these themes are: Give detailed examples of supports your school district provides neophyte principals and what do you personally do to support and ensure success of neophyte principals? (See Appendix for the complete list). I was seeking information on how their school district supported neophyte principals and how the districts served as a resource, as well. I was interested in finding out how directly (or indirectly) involved central office directors, associate superintendents, and
superintendents are to the success of neophyte principals in their respective school districts. Being that this study will contribute to the literature on neophyte principals, my intention was to provide detailed evidence surrounding school district-leader administrators’ views in regards to essential prerequisite (and desired) skills which aspiring administrators should possess, so that they are successful and effective principals.

**Ethical Considerations**

The in-depth, unstructured nature of qualitative research and the fact that it raises issues that are not always anticipated mean that ethical considerations have a particular significance in qualitative research studies (Bechhofer & Paterson, 2000). Before conducting my research, I acquired the necessary Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval through The University of Texas at El Paso. Since my study does not involve collecting student data, I was informed by both school districts that I may proceed with my research protocol and am not required to submit an application for IRB approval. Participant candidates in both school districts received a hard copy of the Research Study Cover Letter (Appendix A) and Informed Consent Form for Research Involving Human Subjects (Appendix B) in person.

The conditions for anonymity and confidentiality were made very clear to all participants. To protect the anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of the data, I have assigned pseudonyms to all participants, campus, and district names. I used general terms in place of specific organizations. To maintain the necessary ethical standards, I have provided all participants with a full disclosure of the nature, purpose, and requirements of the study. I only included participants who were willing and eager to participate in the study.

All research materials, such as audio-recordings and transcripts were labeled in a way that provided anonymity. All electronic data has been stored on a password-protected desktop computer. Data was encrypted and is kept secured in a locking file cabinet. No person, other than
the researcher, has access to the data collected. There will be a minimal risk of any breach of confidentiality.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative data are usually voluminous, messy, and cumbersome (Miles, 1979). A common procedure in the analysis of qualitative data is the identification of key themes, concepts or patterns. Labels and categories can be used to organize and analyze qualitative data, where the researcher devises a system of codes which is applied using a computer software program across the whole data set and used for searching and retrieving chunks of labeled data (Ritchie, Lewis, Nocholls & Ormston, 2013). The primary tool I utilized to analyze my data was a qualitative data analysis (QDA) software called MAXQDA. MAXQDA is a comprehensive data analysis tool that works with a wide range of data types and offers users the ability to code, retrieve, transcribe, and visualize information. The researcher is able to import interview data, such as transcripts, and organize this information using a manageable approach.

I used a digital voice recorder to audio-record all 17 interviews conducted for this study. Since most interviews lasted between 45 minutes to one hour, with four interviews lasting almost two hours, I had almost 20 hours of audio recordings, which I needed to transcribe. I began by transcribing the audio recordings myself; however, I then hired a transcription service to allow me to continue interviews while transcribing was completed by the service. I was concerned about the timeline to complete the collection and analysis. Due to my demanding work and home schedules, using an online transcription service provider to transcribe all 17 interviews was a time saving decision for me. The quality of the transcriptions exceeded expectations after I reviewed the product. The transcriptions were completed within 3-5 days. My process was to conduct the interview, audio record it, and upload the file for transcription. By utilizing this process, the data collection process was conducted in a very timely manner.
At this point, I was not entirely certain which QDA software I was going to utilize for my data. I printed the first three interview transcriptions at home and begin to read through the data to find common themes. However, this quickly became quite cumbersome and lengthy in time. I realized I had over 400 pages of interview transcriptions on my computer that needed to be reviewed. I began looking at different QDA software to assist me with the massive amount of coding required for data analysis. I first looked at using NVivo, as I had been exposed to this software during my qualitative classes at the university. I downloaded a trial version and begin uploading my first transcription file for data analysis. I found this software to be user-friendly and seemed to meet my needs. However, a few days later, I decided to download a trial version of MAXQDA, which I had heard about from a peer who was currently using it to code data for a study. I uploaded one transcription file and discovered it to be extremely easy to use and understand. Using support videos from the MAXQDA website and with help from my colleague, I became very familiar with this software and decided to use it to complete the coding process.

Before I started the interview process, I had created a list of repetitive concepts, or codes, which were key themes and emerging ideas taken from the current literature on neophyte principals. I scripted these repetitive themes in a notebook, based on the different research articles and studies I was reading for my literature review. I noticed that certain words, such as instructional leadership, challenges, time management, and support systems were key terms that were used quite frequently within other studies on neophyte principals. By the end of this process, I had 53 codes, but more importantly, I had a good idea of the themes that were possibly going to surface within the course of the interviews. I ensured that I wrote down all of this repetitive language because I had already planned to create a list of codes after conducting the interviews and this preparation exercise was extremely beneficial. I transferred the codes written
in my notebook to an excel spreadsheet, where I was able to color-code them depending on relevance to my research questions. This assisted me greatly as I transferred my information into the MAXQDA software shortly thereafter. The pre-codes I had created gave me a good start and gave me perspective on how to start formulating codes within my study.

By utilizing MAXQDA, I imported all interview transcripts and marked important information within my data with different codes, which were detailed responses from interviewees. Intricate relationships between all data collected were uncovered and a thematic matrix was created, which helped me organize and consolidate the data. MAXQDA counts automatically how often a code is attached to text segments and how many text segments of particular texts have been coded. The code system and the document system automatically display this information, which allowed me to have a visual representation of the most common themes. As I observed some interconnection between codes, I was able to merge several codes together and create one consistent theme. Once I had the majority of the coding completed, which totaled approximately 249 codes, I used the code-matrix browser to see at one glance the codes of different texts. The type of display allowed me to switch from numbers in order to see the exact counts for different codes, is vastly sped up the process and gave me accurate representations of the most widely used codes. By assigning a different color to each code, I was able to maneuver between the thematic matrices quite easily. While the coding process is extremely time-consuming and at times, felt tedious, the process of organizing and sorting through codes brought me a deeper sense of familiarization with the data. By unpacking the content in the nature that I did, I am confident that my findings are conceptually pure and provides content that is meaningful.
**Limitations of the Study**

As with any research, there are limitations of this study. First, this study focuses primarily on public school K-12 neophyte principals in one area in the state of Texas. While the study will provide a wealth of information regarding neophyte principals in this one area in the state of Texas, one must use caution when attempting to generalize across the profession.

Second, the number of individuals who met the criteria to participate in the study was limited in this one area in the state of Texas. Third, the researcher has professional relationships with several of the participants, which could affect their willingness to share candid testimonials.

Fourth, the researcher is currently an assistant principal in a public school in the same area where the research was conducted, which may, on some level, produce some bias.
Chapter 4
Findings
Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the neophyte principals’ experiences, challenges, and extent of support they received throughout their first year on the job. I explored the needs of neophyte principals as they navigated through their first year and examined how different systems of support helped them transition into the new role. Using an interview method, I analyzed neophyte principals’ testimonials regarding their first year experiences in an effort to find common themes. I collected data surrounding neophyte principals’ pre-service principal training and examined the extent, if any, of provided training and support after being hired by a school district. These findings are crucial as school districts, administrators and leadership programs seek to better prepare administrators for the reality of the school principalship.

As an added dimension to this study, I examined the topic of neophyte principals through the lens of a school district-level administrator. I interviewed one director, four associate superintendents, and one superintendent. The interview questions focused on three specific areas surrounding neophyte principals – indicators of success, major challenges, and support systems. I was seeking information on how their school district supported neophyte principals and also, how they personally served as a resource. I explored how directly (or indirectly) involved central office directors, associate superintendents, and superintendents are to the success of neophyte principals in their respective school districts. Considering study will contribute to the literature on neophyte principals, my intention was to provide detailed evidence surrounding school district-administrators’ views in regards to essential prerequisite (and desired) skills which aspiring administrators should possess, so that they are successful and effective principals. I was also looking for the gaps between the neophyte principals’ experiences and the views of the
school district-leader administrators. Most importantly, I wanted to see where to bridge these gaps.

The goal of my study was to provide insight into the role of the neophyte principalship and specifically, how best to support neophyte principals, so they are able to meet all the expectations and new challenges they will experience during their first year experiences. I examined the experiences of neophyte principals and how those experiences can help inform public school stakeholders, such as school boards and district leaders, to recognize how best to provide essential support to new principals. Despite the important role of neophyte principals, there is relatively little literature that focuses on this group’s first year experiences (DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Hull, 2012; Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, & Ikemoto, 2012; Bastian & Henry, 2015; Hitt, Tucker & Young, 2012; Hall, Childs-Bowen, Pajardo & Cunningham, 2015). This study will address that gap and will provide the field of educational leadership with rich, detailed data regarding the personal and professional experiences of neophyte principals from the practitioners themselves.

**Research Questions**

The overarching question seeks to gain insight on the experiences of neophyte principals, as they navigate through their first year as a principal. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What major challenges do neophyte principals encounter in the first year of the principalship?
2. What existing supports are available to assist neophyte principals?
3. What are some lessons learned, after the completion of their first year as a principal, the study participants consider beneficial for aspiring school principals?
Major Challenges of Neophyte Principals

Interviewees were asked about the major challenges neophyte principals encounter in the first year of the principalship. Principals and school district-leader administrator interviewees all spoke about the major challenges of assuming leadership in a new school. These challenges included issues with instructional leadership, principal succession, time management, and the effects of increasing accountability on the incoming school leader. Neophyte principals are often overwhelmed by the high expectations related to their new roles, including providing solutions in a limited amount of time to a variety of school issues. The principals spoke about a love for their profession, despite the daily challenges they encountered, which produced increased stress levels. These instances often resulted in negative self-reflection about job performance. The following section will detail my findings surrounding the interviewees’ perspectives on instructional leadership.

Instructional Leadership

Research clearly demonstrates a link between the quality of school leadership, the instructional climate of the school, and student achievement (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2012; Coelli & Green, 2012; Grissom, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012; Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Similarly, research shows that teachers are more likely to stay in a school where they feel the principal is a strong instructional leader (Allensworth, 2012; Boyd et al., 2011; Grissom, 2011; Ladd, 2011). Eighty percent of principal interviewees emphasized similar views and talked about how their role as principal has evolved from building manager to instructional leader in a very short time. Several interviewees talked, in depth, about how their instructional leadership skills were a driving force behind daily behaviors.
Principal J stated:

So, I try to model as much instructional leadership as I possibly can… I had my teachers turn in lesson plans through the Google Classroom as assignments, just like they were going to have to go and do for their kids, so that they could see what the kids were seeing and do what the kids were doing. I'm not going to ask you to do it, if I'm not going to do it myself. I'm not going to ask you to do cooperative learning strategies if I'm not going to do it myself. So we pushed cooperative learning strategies this August professional development. I had teachers talking to one another the whole time and I got feedback that this was the best professional development that they’ve ever had and I did not feel like I worked very hard. But that's how I wanted the teachers to feel after a day of teaching.

Principal F understood this expectation for strong instructional leadership and set high expectations for his faculty from the beginning. He articulated:

You have to be the most instructional savvy person in your campus. You have to know instruction, everything from assessments, to alignments, to backward design, to PLC, not just the lingo. You need to be able to teach people and teach your APs about instruction. I feel like in order to be an effective principal, you had to be a great teacher... So, instructional leadership, if you want to be good at this job and keep your job, you got to know everything about instruction and be a great teacher. I told my teachers this on day one.

Some of the principals expressed their difficulty adjusting to the role of instructional leader on their campus. Many had come from campuses where they were not expected to work
side-by-side with teachers on instructional matters. The principals said these conversations were typically left to department chairs and instructional coaches. Several worked in secondary campuses, where they were tasked with duties such as, athletics, textbooks, inventory, and maintaining the school facility. The principals who felt comfortable working collaboratively with teachers were those who had worked under a school leader who had modeled this behavior. As assistant principals, the principal interviewees were held accountable by their principal to demonstrate an instructional mindset, which directly supported student academic achievement. Today’s principals are forced to concentrate on student learning as the central focus of reform and keep an eye out for ideas that further the thinking and vision of the school (Fullan, 2002).

Principal G said:

Instructional leadership? That’s the one piece that I did not have that much experience with because I was always in charge of athletics and I did not really get down to the nitty-gritty of the instruction. So, that was a big learning experience for me. It still is.

Principal E voiced a similar opinion, “If anybody wants to get a job as a principal, that’s what everybody is looking for. They’re looking for somebody who comes in with instructional background. They’re not looking for managers because those days are long gone.” Principal D added, “You need to be involved. You know, it’s no longer managerial style, like you truly need to be an instructional leader, right? It needs to be a balance between you doing the managerial things and also being a strong instructional leader.” Principal A summed it all up, “The number one focus of the principalship is you have to be an instructional leader and there is nothing, there is nothing, there is **nothing** more important than that.”

The principals spoke about the importance of instructional leadership and the need to demonstrate deep knowledge of content fields and instructional methods. The expectations to be
well-versed in state standards, offer teachers leadership and support to improve instructional practices, and keep a constant focus on quality classroom instruction are non-negotiable for today’s school principals. A high school principal expressed just how important these skills are:

You have to be the most instructional savvy person at your campus. You have to know instruction, everything from assessments, to alignments, to backward design, to PLC, not just the lingo. You need to be able to teach people about instruction. I feel like in order to be an effective principal, you had to be a great teacher. You never stop being a teacher. Never.

Several of the principals said they recognized they did not possess all the necessary skills associated with instructional leadership, so they sought out resources and found that they were learning just as much as the teachers were. One principal said, “Surround yourself with people who are experts. Like I say, as a principal you think you are supposed to know it all and you cannot. There is no way.” To add to that, another principal remarked, “If you need help, you need to make sure that you ask for it. Demand it. Take inventory of what you feel you need and do not be afraid to keep asking until they give it to you.”

Another principal talked about how encouraging meaningful dialogue with teachers generates opportunities for teacher buy-in, “So, do not take yourself so seriously. Do not think like, I am the principal and I cannot get my hands dirty because when your teachers see you learning right alongside them, it creates an opportunity for dynamic collaboration.” A third principal agreed, “You have to participate, not just tell them what to do. I'm not going to ask them to do it, if I'm not going to do it myself. If you do not walk the walk, do not expect your teachers to do it.” Successful instructional leadership requires skills in leading a community of learners and serving as a model of a professional life-long learner themselves. By sharing ideas
and innovating ways to meet the school’s mission surrounding student success, the principals said everyone develops ownership over the mission and work together to achieve the goals.

Due to accountability demands at the federal, state, and local levels and the volume of available data collected, managed, and distributed, data-driven decision making has become school leaders’ center of attention (LaPointe et al., 2009). Using assessment data to monitor and adjust instruction is no longer an option; it is a necessary part of the teaching and learning process. Again, all principals conveyed the significance of engaging in data-driven decision making collaboratively with teachers to identify areas of academic success and refinement. Although the principals had opportunities to review district and campus data, in general, during their principal preparation program, they asserted that those experiences were very “surface” and “not realistic.”

According to an elementary principal, her previous experience as a central office special education coordinator proved to be beneficial in the long run:

Looking at student data is everything, but you have to learn how to look at this information. I think what really helped me transition into the role of principal is that I had my special education background. I know for a lot of principals it’s like, okay, what do I do with all this data? Where do I start? How do I guide my teachers what to look for when I do not even know myself? It can be very overwhelming. (Principal J)

One principal used data analysis opportunities to foster teacher ownership:

Everything revolves around data-driven decision-making because what is the purpose of implementing initiatives if it does not help us reach our campus objectives? Data is powerful. Numbers do not lie. When teachers see growth (or not), they take ownership when you include them in the process. Principals cannot possibly know all the answers,
but we need to know enough to facilitate and have intelligent conversations about the data.

The principals also stressed the importance of instructional supervision to the teaching and learning process. Teachers must have sufficient knowledge in their areas of study; furthermore, effective instructional methods must be consistently implemented within the learning environment for successful school outcomes. The role of the teacher within a school’s instructional capacity cannot be underestimated (Tesfaw & Hofman, 2014). To continuously supervise the teaching and learning process is, perhaps, the principal’s most important role. One principal stated:

You need to be involved. The one thing that I’ve always learned is don’t expect what you don’t inspect. So, if you’re expecting certain things and you’re not checking up on them, don’t be surprised if not everyone keeps up the pace. It’s human nature. People will fall back into old habits. You need to be involved during their planning time, having conversations on an ongoing basis with them, and getting inside those classrooms. It’s time-consuming and a daily commitment, but necessary to keep your people on course.

Daily direct and indirect actions by principals have a profound effect on the school’s overall achievements. These behaviors, intended to support teachers, can overwhelm the principal because the other daily responsibilities still need to be addressed. One principal says:

I know I have to get in those classrooms. I have a responsibility to see what is going in within the four walls of the classroom. I just can’t seem to keep up with everything on my plate on some days. If I don’t visit classrooms then how can I truly know that my teachers are being effective?”
One principal commented how his lack of active instructional supervision turned out to be an eye-opener for him during a teacher meeting:

One day I was sitting with my math department discussing the common assessment data, which was really low that grading period. I wanted to know why one teacher’s scores were so much lower than everyone else’s. She asked me if I had been in any of her classes this semester and I realized I hadn’t stepped into her classroom in over 4 months. I was humiliated. How could these teachers see me as a credible resource? How could I really give her any type of feedback? I had none. There’s just no way around it. You have to be in those classrooms.

Principals can help shift the focus from teaching to learning, as they are in a key position to lead systematic collaboration in their schools. They understand that they must create a collective expectation among teachers concerning student performance; therefore, they must develop and sustain school cultures that foster high levels of learning. Teachers are more likely to pursue these campus goals when they are provided with supportive conditions, such as effective instructional leadership (English, 2008; Northouse, 2010).

The focus on principal effectiveness is crucial as evidence demonstrates that principals can create school environments conducive to teaching and learning (Seashore-Lewis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010). The school district-leader administrator interviewees agree - the most important indicator of success of an effective principal is one who possesses and demonstrates instructional leadership skills. All school district-leader interviewees stated that instructional leadership is a “must have” for all aspiring principals. One school district-leader interviewee stated, “They need to know what good instruction looks like and how to help guide their teachers to what good instruction should be in the classroom. There is nothing more
important than what happens in those classrooms.” Another interviewee articulated a similar thought, “We are really looking at true instructional leaders. The managerial piece anybody can do. I think it’s important that principals really know and understand their craft. I rely on them to be the go-to person on that campus for all teachers, so they must be able to sit and have intelligent conversations surrounding instruction.”

The principal acts as the instructional supervisor and must evaluate faculty members for teaching effectiveness. An associate superintendent talked about how she looks to principals to not only improve student achievement, but also sustain it, in this era of increased accountability:

The principal must be an efficient instructional supervisor and evaluator. How can a principal uphold excellence in teaching, sustain student achievement, and promote high competency levels of teachers if he or she doesn’t walk in with a solid foundation? There is just no way around it. The accountability placed on our shoulders now is too great to take chances with someone who doesn’t come in with a strong foundation for teaching and learning. (SDLA C)

Effective instructional leadership is the catalyst for student achievement. School districts are required to demonstrate student growth, meet minimum requirements for proficiency, and sustain improvement (USDOE, 2010). Districts can be penalized for lack of improvement and these penalties almost always trickle down to individual campuses and principals. School restructuring and principal removal is a common practice (Meyers, 2012). One school district-level administrator interviewee describes this process:

Hiring a principal is always such an intense process for me. I put faith and trust into this individual and expect results. Sure, the demand for student achievement is high. Everyone feels the pressure – from the superintendent to the associates to the principals.
to the teachers to the students. So, if a principal can’t produce results, I have to have those crucial conversations and sometimes make hard moves. This is why they have to bring it with instruction. If they have that, then everything else falls into place. Bottom line, they just won’t even get an interview without these necessary skills.

Very similar to a teacher’s job, much of the principal’s work is learned by doing. All principal and school district-level administrator interviewees agree that effective principals provide leadership in instruction, coordinate instructional programs, and emphasize high academic standards and expectations. All school district-level administrator interviewees agree on one crucial factor - the principal must model and lead effective instructional practices at their campus. This should be the focus of everything, from professional development to the school culture. They also stated that in order to successfully achieve these levels of continuous improvement, it is necessary for the principal to have a clear understanding of what encompasses an environment where curriculum, instruction, and assessment play a key role in raising student performance.

Compounded with the latest best practices on teaching and learning, principals are now responsible for making key decisions surrounding at-risk populations, such as special education and English Language Learners, which can be extremely challenging due to the ever-changing requirements and differentiation needs for students. One school district-leader administrator stated, “The biggest challenge a principal will encounter is ensuring their instructional leadership game is top notch. Teachers will look to them for guidance and support and they have to be able to have intelligent conversations surrounding instruction.”

Principals can improve student achievement by improving instruction; however principals cannot be expected to know everything (Hoy & Hoy, 2003). Therefore, it is assumed
that principals will make an effort to stay knowledgeable about effective instructional practices and that they will encourage and support faculty and staff to implement instructional strategies that impact student achievement. “I know a principal does not know everything. Heck, I don’t know everything. However, the principal must seek to find answers, while juggling a million other job duties at the same time. It’s tough, but necessary” (SDLA B).

Accountability has changed nearly everything in education and has raised questions such as, “What do successful leaders need to know and be able to do? How do we prepare and develop effective school leaders?” (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001). There was a time when principals were expected to do little more than keep order in schools. If student failure occurred, it was regrettable, but not unforeseen. Standards for schools were not high priority and the burden of school success did not have a place on the principal’s shoulders. However, the school principals now have the ultimate responsibility for the success or failure of their students.

Educational supervision continues to evolve and the changing trends of heightened responsibilities of the school principal are exacerbated by increased demands, ever-changing standards, and diverse issues in student populations (Pollack & Ford, 2009). In the 21st century, school principals are tasked with duties, which require them to prepare students for post-secondary educational institutions and career-readiness. Increasingly, state accountability systems are placing the burdens of school success – and individual student achievement – squarely on the principal’s shoulders (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001). Sorenson (2005) notes that the principal is expected to be the legal leader who stays abreast of changing laws and school board policies; the instructional leader who sets the campus course for academic achievement; the visionary leader who focuses the team on current research and emulates best practices; and the
inspirational leader who ensures that teachers, students, parents, and community continually progress toward educational excellence.

Principal supervisors acknowledge this massive responsibility, such as one assistant superintendent who stated:

Being a principal in today’s world can be the best or the worst job on the planet. You carry the weight of the world on your shoulders and the buck stops with you. As much as I work with my principals, especially my new principals, I know they need more… more professional development… more support… more guidance. This accountability system is no joke. You show growth or else. It’s brutal.

Across the United States, state legislators are responding to rising expectations in the workplace and the demands of a global economy by setting higher standards for schools. The high-stakes assessment systems created to enforce these standards are driving forces behind school (and principal) quality control. Federal legislation, such as The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which was passed in 2015 and replaces NCLB, allows states to have a bigger role in holding schools accountable.

One superintendent voiced his concerns:

We thought NCLB was a monster, but now with ESSA, we have even more on our plates. Principals not only have state assessments to worry about… they must also factor in college readiness, school climate, drop out rates, and chronic absenteeism… all of these require an immense amount of daily work in schools. We are already seeing a rise in principal retirements and resignations across the state of Texas… it’s a very stressful environment right now. Today’s principal must be equipped to meet rising expectations, set by federal and state legislatures; however, before we can redesign schools, we must
ensure that these principals have a comprehensive understanding of effective and consistent instructional leadership, creates a school organization where faculty and staff understand that every student counts and establishing a personalized learning environment for all students is key, and recognize the importance of using data to initiate and sustain academic achievement for all students.

The principal interviewees understand their responsibility, as the school leader, for the success or failure of students in their schools. They verbalized their awareness of their role in promoting the learning and success of each student. Overall, they are working towards becoming more focused on learning, encouraging collaboration, using data to improve learning, and providing support for their teachers. The next section will look at how principal succession proved to be another challenge for neophyte principals.

Principal Succession

Several principals talked about the initial challenge of principal succession and immersing themselves within an established campus culture. Some principals were aware they were appointed to change the status quo, to lead educational reform, and for some, to create discontinuity, in order to move the school in a new and different direction from his or her predecessors. A new principal who strives to maintain the progress of an improving school tends to face challenges that are quite distinct from one whose job is to turn around an underperforming one. The challenges of succession are particularly acute for neophyte principals who must struggle simultaneously with transitioning into a new occupation.

The principal interviewees talked about some of the difficulty they encountered, when dealing with the legacy, practice, and style of the previous principal. Members of the school community not only compared the new principal to the previous one, but also often resisted
changes to the routines and culture to which they have become accustomed. Principals stated that the early stages generally involved challenges related to shock, survival, and personal insecurity. They talked about how as time passed, they were trying to “fit in” and achieve role clarity while also trying to gain control and authority. By the end of the year, most principals finally felt like they reached some sort of professional actualization, stabilization, or integration into the school.

One interviewee talked about his unique transition experience. He started his first day as a principal, while the previous principal was still physically on his new campus. While this situation could have served to be extremely helpful for the new principal’s transition, it was a major obstacle for him. The out-going leader was very assertive about still being in charge and the neophyte principal had heard about faculty and staff confusion. He stated:

My experience was different than any other principal probably, because my first day, previous principal was still the principal and so I was like a shadow basically for probably two weeks until she left and then I finally got to take over. So, the transition was so not normal. (Principal G)

In a similar vein, another principal stated:

The principal previous to me retired, however, they retired very abruptly. So that’s another thing, is that I was getting information from various people, various parties about the status of the campus, the way the campus was left, the morale, the climate. So when I was named their new principal, you know, not only was I was super excited, it was just a matter of not knowing the true picture of what had happened and so there was a lot of hurt feelings, a lot of broken relationships and that was also a major challenge to start with. (Principal H)
I found that the rotation of too many leaders within a short amount of time or sudden leadership changes created a great deal of stress for teachers and incoming leaders. Based on the principal feedback, one of the most significant events in the life of a school is when it undergoes a change in leadership and principal transitions present challenges that affect the entire school community. If principals are viewed by teachers, parents, and students as merely interchangeable puzzle pieces, then the kind of leadership required for long-term, sustainable student achievement will remain elusive (Fink & Brayman, 2006). Furthermore, perceptions about a successor’s experience influence the transition during a leadership change. “Teacher morale is a critical factor that influences the ability of the new principal to carry out their responsibilities and to initiate change” (Meyer, 2009, p. 184).

One of the principals talked about how a change in school leadership can be seen as a considerable change for the school community:

Well, I knew that I would be the fifth principal in five years, so I knew that that would be a definite challenge for the fact that there had been a lot of inconsistency for the past several years and part of it was because there were some or quite a few veteran teachers there that were kind of stuck, you know, and I knew the gist of it. Of course I didn’t know all the ins and outs and details of it, but of course I learned that within the first several weeks of the job. You don’t get to see it right away just because a lot of people are trying to, you know, impress and they don’t want to be on that radar, but you can tell, you know, you can kind of tell when people are not being truly genuine and the responses of parents and responses of students. So that was a big challenge, you know, there were, I’m going to say about a handful of people that, you know, were very resistant to change and
kind of keeping up with our set expectations. So that was for sure a challenge that I dealt with when I first started there. (Principal D)

Another principal stated:

The parents were used to the previous administration. The parents were probably the biggest challenge because the previous principal had been in that community 13 years. So, he had seen an entire generation of siblings go through and so when I came in, it was something different for the parents and so again just trying get to know them I would say that took a good seven, eight months for them to finally feel comfortable. And I can say now that I started the second year it's a lot better, you know, parents know me more, they’ve accepted me, or I guess they accepted that the other principal is gone and now it's somebody new. (Principal E)

Ineffective and resistant staff members posed significant challenges for the principals.

One principal talked about how his teachers reacted to change:

For the people who stayed and the people who had been there a while and worked with me and had a certain pride and level of understanding of how hard you're supposed to work, they were appreciative that the people that weren’t cutting it were now leaving. Obviously, the people that were leaving weren’t happy, but I think it took the campus to the next level or gave the campus the ability to go to the next level. (Principal J)

One interviewee talked about how his secretary gave him a hard time whenever he gave her a directive:

She told me right away, “We don’t do that here.” I told her, “I, see, but we are now and here’s what I need for you to do.” When she saw that, she started telling other staff members, “This guy is not playing.” Needless to say, people got the message pretty quick
that my vision was very different from the previous principal’s vision. It was a start.

(Principal B)

Principal C spoke about his experience with difficult faculty members and how he spent quite a bit of time addressing these concerns:

A couple of things were very evident to me that, that there were certain people that were in charge of the campus and it wasn't me. That's a situation that had to be addressed and so in doing that, it is going to be difficult because it's a new philosophy, you know moving people’s cheese and so people are going to react in one of two ways – one of three ways. There are going to be compliant, there are going to be compliant, but rebellious, or they are going to be just fine. So I had to deal with all those three, and I didn’t know who was what and what was going on and so I took the precautionary measures and gave them the opportunity to change… as principal you have to change and mold the campus into what your vision is.

The principal interviewees consistently stated that when personnel issues arose, they took up an inordinate amount of both time and emotional energy. Interacting with difficult or resistant employees cannot only be stressful, but documenting and remediating them is often a drawn-out process that requires significant time and paperwork. Furthermore, eight out of eleven participants felt they were not well prepared or well supported in managing these personnel issues. Principal H stated, “Sometimes, it is a better use of my time to ignore certain staff behaviors because I know they will eat up my time. I have so many other things to attend to.” Principal K added, “Documenting a teacher who is not meeting my expectations is so stressful. The teacher unions get involved and treat me like I am a bully, when I am just trying to make this campus a better place for kids. How fair is that?”
Understanding the role as a change agent is critical for principals; yet, as central as the principal is to the change process, the principal needs cooperation and ownership of change initiatives from others in the school to bring about long-term improvement (Martinez, 2017). Many of the principals voiced similar feelings regarding teacher buy in. In this aspect, it is vital that neophyte principals do not force their personal vision in a manner that may be perceived as aggressive or brash by the school community. Neophyte principals must find ways to subtly use their personal vision to influence others first (Hallinger, 2011).

One principal talked about he implemented change at his campus:

So there has to be a common idea about why we need to change and then that’s how you change. You have to go slow then move faster. You have to come in here and act like you’re not going to do anything. You have to listen and observe to know what you want to change. They have to want the change and you have to make them think that they are the one who thought of the change in the first place. They have to feel like they’re – that they are a part of change… oh, and you’re not going to accomplish everything you want to change in the first year. So, if you want to change ten things, you might only get six, you might only get four, you might only get five, and you need to be okay with that.

Involving faculty and staff in the change process was a successful model for several interviewees. Principal D shared his method:

For sure, you need to do it in phases. You can’t do it all your first year, you can’t. So you pick a couple of things that are really truly important to you and they’re really non-negotiable and work on those first. More importantly it may not even be things that are number one to you, but you feel that the campus needs to have and you start with those and it should be just a couple, maybe two, maybe three things that you want to focus
on… in order for that change, you really need to involve those high, strong stakeholders, the ones that usually have the louder voice and that tend to be a little more resistant. If you involve them in that process as far as putting that structure in place and how it’s going to be communicated then you’re going to have far less resistance through that process.

Principal C supported this by adding,

I really thought about how I would roll out immediate change. I think my way was very effective. I made contact with the department chairs in my first week about the new program I wanted to implement for tardies, I spoke to each one of them, asked what their concerns were, what their goals were, and they are very, very honest with me. So that’s when I introduced the program to them. I had them review it for a week and then asked for their feedback. Within three days all of them responded and they all wanted to do it immediately because they had addressed several different issues that were going on concerning student safety. I was very proud of that because I had no push back at all and it was quite the opposite, it was more acceptance and excitement about implementing and the program worked. You’re always going to have people that are not going to be too excited about doing this or that because of the extra work that’s required and it is extra work. But you know what? The results are the results and you can’t argue with success.

I found that the issues associated with principal succession are not only very real, but deeply affect the transition of the new school leader. The changing dynamics of social relationships inside the campus can be one of the most serious challenges for neophyte principals, especially if they are succeeding a principal who was well liked by the faculty and staff. The next section will address the principals’ view on time management issues and how
increased accountability for student achievement affected their first year on the job.

Time Management Issues and Increased Accountability

All eleven principal interviewees expressed time management as a daily challenge, especially within the scope of their first year as a principal. My research indicated that time management was mentioned over 294 different times as a major challenge during the principal interviews, which indicates that this is an issue that deserves some attention by school districts. Creating an effective learning organization requires a highly organized approach to operations and management founded upon the vision, mission, and values of the school (Sorenson, Goldsmith & DeMatthews, 2016). In the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), vision and mission are firmly associated with time, one of the scarcest resources in a school. Sorensen and Goldsmith (2013) indicate that principals have to become experts at doing more with less and time is definitely not in abundance for a school principal.

“The principal’s job is complex and multidimensional, and the effectiveness of principals depends, in part, on how they allocate their time across daily responsibilities” (Rice, 2010, pg. 2). Rice reported that on average, principals spend less than ten percent of their time on tasks traditionally defined as instruction, such as classroom observations and professional development for teachers. Almost thirty percent of their time was spent on administrative activities, including student supervision and compliance duties and twenty percent of their time was spent on organizational management responsibilities, including working on school budget and personnel issues.

The principalship has been expanded to include significant responsibilities, ensuring that all students achieve to meet high standards. The principals reported that as these responsibilities have increased tremendously, the managerial tasks have also been expanded. Tasks, such as
district reporting requirements, campus financial responsibilities, and increased usage of email communication have not been reduced and principals need to find better ways to manage all these tasks in a timely and effective manner.

“One of the issues I am facing is the sheer number of diverse tasks that pull my time and attention on a daily basis,” stated Principal K. This study found that there are newfound concerns on the stark reality of the job responsibilities and the sheer range of expectations placed upon them. Task diversity was a significant theme for thirty-six percent of the interviewees. Furthermore, for sixty-three percent of the principals, work diversity intensified as testing approached in the second half of the school year.

Principal F, a new high school principal remarks, “I was an assistant principal for a while, so I knew what I was walking in to, so I thought. I knew it was going to be a lot of work, but I didn’t realize how many different directions I could be pulled into.” For Principal J, another high school principal, the feelings were quite similar. He talked about how he was always pulled in all these different directions, but what made it hard was that they were all very different directions. He explained the challenge of being everything to everyone, “One minute you are a counselor, the next you are an instructional leader, the next you are figuring out where to find money to pay for teachers to attend a training, then an angry parent storms in, and so on and so on. It’s crazy!” (Principal J)

Because the principals’ work is so diverse, it can be extremely unpredictable. Unpredictability levels were expressed by eighty-two percent of the participants as a problem of practice, especially when beginning their new role at a campus where they have never worked before. Principal G states, “I wake up, drive to work, and have this plan of what I need to accomplish for the day. Over ninety percent of the time, that goes out the window because within
the first hour I have five new fires that have to be addressed. Before I know it, it’s 5:00 pm and I feel like I accomplished nothing on my to-do list. It is so frustrating.” “I remember, working as an assistant principal, I would have so many things going on and I just felt like I had more control. As the principal, I feel like I have to solve every problem by the end of the day because I do not want any of these problems going to central office and they think I can’t handle it.” (Principal H)

The principals talked about how they feel a sense of ultimate responsibility, which brings increased stress, a perpetual sense of urgency of what might go wrong, and an inability to leave the job behind when they walk out of the school doors. Physical exhaustion, sleep loss, health issues, frustration, and constant worrying were repetitive feelings expressed in interviews. Principal E stated, “I felt like this instant pressure of having to improve scores, not even knowing what the scores were and so my fear was, “Can I do it? Am I going to be able to increase the test scores to where they expect them to be?” Principal G added:

My campus was a pretty high performing school to begin with, excellent in co-curricular and sports and those kinds of things. So the fear was like not to let it down. It is harder to take over some place that is already doing really well because you kind of figure that you’re going to let – have a let down. There is not a whole other room for improvement. If I had taken over a school that was, you know, struggling, I could show a lot more gains. I just couldn’t stop thinking about this.

Over half of the principals articulated their anxiety about letting upper management down. Principal B said, “I think the biggest fear is, you told the superintendent how good you
are, you have shown him through being an assistant principal and so my fear is, am I going to move the school where it needs to be.”

So, he (the superintendent) put all of his faith in me and so the fear is, have I made a difference, have I done the job that he has wanted me to do, and I still reflect and think that all the time, he put all his faith into me, there were a whole bunch of other people that applied for this job and certainly that went for interviews. Am I going to be able to do what he wants me to do, to move the school and get it to where I want, where he wants it to be? (Principal A)

Principals talked about waking up in the middle of the night and worrying about decisions they have to make or figuring out ways to address perplexing issues. Principal K voiced concerns over her health, “I knew it was going to be a lot of pressure, but I really had no idea. I find myself waking up at 2 or 3 am thinking about how I am going to fix this or that. You know, it just like, sometimes really gets to you. Like I seriously thought I was going to have a panic attack right before state testing.” Other principals voiced similar reflections. Principal Z, who took his first principal job in a neighboring district, stated, “Having gone to a new district as a new principal definitely brought fears to mind. I wondered what were their systems like? Would this superintendent be as supportive as my previous one? What if I made a mistake leaving what I knew – with all my networks and connections? There were lots of sleepless nights.” All principals articulated a sense of accountability for their school’s performance, which manifests into their personal time (after work hours).

When asked how this sense of accountability affected their time management skills, all principals said they took work home every night. Every principal verbalized they are doing work-related tasks, or thinking about them, every single day, including weekends and district
holiday breaks. Two principals talked about how they entered “social isolation” during that first year as a principal. Principal H stated, “I was pretty isolated that first year. Mainly because I didn’t want to become too attached to anyone who I might have to have a serious conversation with, but also because I had no down time. I was always in principal mode.”

Principal F voiced a similar reflection:

I was so scared to fall on my face and get called in to my superintendent’s office that I worked day and night. I just couldn’t fathom the thought of getting demoted or worse. It didn’t just affect me at home; I noticed a change at work. My “open-door policy” wasn’t working because people were in and out of my office constantly. I couldn’t get anything done. So, I shut myself out at least one day a week to everyone. I didn’t know what else to do.

Principal C added, “So that’s – that was my first fear and all I could ever think about, okay, I have to get ready for registration and then I know I have professional development and I wasn’t really – I didn’t know what really to expect with the rest of the year, because it was middle school and I have never taught or been in a middle school setting.

“Kids don’t learn the same way they did twenty, ten, or even five years ago. So, how can we teach the same way we did twenty, ten, or five years ago? Change is coming. Change is here,” stated an associate superintendent. This was such a powerful quote and resonated what the other interviewees believed – we must continually change and evolve our school practices, in order to keep up with the evolving student population we serve. Serving all students, in the way that helps them meet higher standards, requires schools to change the way they think and work. “Not doing so would only be a disservice to kids,” said a superintendent, “principals must lead the charge to prepare these kids for college and career readiness. Sometimes, we are even
preparing kids for jobs that haven’t even been created yet… how’s that for boosting a sense of urgency?”

Because of change, issues inevitably arise. People’s reactions to change most often include fear, anxiety, loss and even panic – factors that lead to resistance. Effective principals are aware that people are experiencing two kinds of problems, the “social-psychological fear of change and the lack of technical know-how or skills to make the change work: (Fullan, 2000, p. 41).

Principals have to be ready to lead this change. However, many are either scared to have these crucial conversations with their staff or don’t know how to talk to them about job performance. In my experience supervising principals, some of them have simply ignored or swept these undesirable behaviors from staff under the rug and then don’t know how to resolve these conflicts later on when things are out of control. There has to be a balance between what we expect and what we monitor. This is where trust comes into play and if you have established those relationships with your staff… they will go to the ends of the earth for you. (SDLA C)

Research has shown a direct relationship between trust levels in schools and student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Goddard, Salloum & Berebitsky, 2009). In summary, faculty trust in the principal is more likely when principals are competent in their role and responsibilities, create a vision for improvement, demonstrate integrity in their actions, and show concern for others (in a positive way) in the process. “Leaders who are open with teachers, treat them as colleagues, allow them to be part of the process, are considerate, even when offering constructive criticism, and have a shared responsibility in the achievement of students will encounter a more positive experience when bringing in reform” (SDLA D).
Two of the principals used the phrase, “Jack of all trades, master of none,” which resulted from their sense of ultimate responsibility for the success of their campuses. “Being a principal is taking that next step, when others don’t. If someone doesn’t do his or her job, the principal has to do it because at the end of the day the buck stops with me. I have to deliver – no excuses.” Due to the nature of the principal job, I asked principals to give me their input on what systems of support were offered and proved to be beneficial for them. They were also asked to give feedback on what types of support they were not offered, but would have aided their first-year journey. The next section will report my findings surrounding systems of support.

**Systems of Support**

Interviewees were asked about the types of support they received during their first year as a principal. They were also asked to elaborate on what type of support they would have liked to receive from their respective school district. In the current era of high stakes accountability, paired with the decreasing number of candidates able to effectively meet the challenges of school leadership, the nurturing and supporting components for neophyte principals has become particularly relevant (Brown-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004).

Forty-five percent of the principal interviewees stated that they were assigned a formal mentor when hired as a principal. However, all of these principals stated that the mentoring process was not structured at all and therefore, was not helpful. Principal E stated:

I had a formal mentor assigned to me, but there were no guidelines. We didn’t really have any expectations, as far as how many times we had to meet. So, it was up to us to get together when we had time. Well, she had a busy schedule, just like I did and the two times I called her she wouldn’t call me back for several hours, sometimes days. By that time, I would just call someone else. If I saw her at a meeting and had a question, I might
Principal D, a middle school principal, stated, “There was a new principal mentoring program, so they partnered me up with a veteran principal, but the funny thing is that we never even talked until months into my first year. Like why even bother now?” Principal A articulated similar feelings, “The mentor assigned to me was a well-known veteran principal, but I don’t think she wanted the mentoring job. She never called me and when she would see me it was just a venting session for her. So, I learned to find other pockets of support.”

Developing and maintaining a professional network was highly encouraged by the interviewees. Because principals are extremely busy attending to a million different challenges each and every day, these trusting and cooperative professional relationships are perceived as “indispensable” and “necessary.” Simply put, neophyte principals cannot possibly know everything there is to know. These pockets of support are crucial and have allowed the study participants to enhance their technical skills in a supportive, collegial way.

While these principals showed evidence that they were optimistic of the opportunity to develop collegial relationships with a formal mentor principal in the district, the majority of them expressed their disappointment with the reality of the process. While several respondents indicated that developing collegial relationships with their mentor principal did change their perspectives about the principalship, it was not a significant impact. Therefore, their professional practices were not affected. One of the interviewees said, “Okay, I get it. I am not alone in the issues I am facing and my mentor has gone through similar challenges, but shouldn’t she have some type of guidance for me? So, I don’t make the same mistakes she did? That’s what I wanted to get out of the experience.”

While formal mentors have significant responsibilities to their mentees, such as providing
constructive guidance, willing to engage in reflective dialogue, and able to communicate honestly and openly about their own personal and professional experiences, the lack of proper training by the school district may contribute to the mentors’ failure to properly support neophyte principals. A mutually beneficial mentoring relationship requires special skills and personal commitment from both mentors and mentees (Williamson & Hudson, 2001). Three of the principals talked about how their assigned mentors did not demonstrate an attitude of willingness to participate in this initiative. One of those three principals stated, “The mentor assigned to me wasn’t well-respected by her peers and was often referred to as ‘old school.’ During my tenure as assistant principal, I had heard that she was just coasting to retirement. Why would they assign someone who obviously didn’t want the responsibility?”

Because of the uneven support from the school districts and the hit or miss quality of the formalized mentorship, many neophyte principals either tried to problem solve by themselves or they turned to trusted colleagues. Informal mentoring is a spontaneous relationship prompted by the mentee’s need or by informal assignment, without explicitly stated goals, activities, or outcomes (Hudson, 2009). Both mentor and mentee decide when to initiate and proceed with an informal mentoring relationship and there are no structures bound by time limits or set arrangements monitored by upper management. Informal mentoring takes place because two people have formed a supportive relationship, which fosters facilitation of positive exchanges of ideas and advice.

A recent study showed that most principals credit their survival on the job, at least, in part to a relationship with an informal mentor (Bloom, Castagna, & Warren, 2003). Fifty-five percent of the principals indicated that they were not assigned a formal mentor and sought out others to help them survive their first year as a principal. One principal talked about his expectations for
mentoring and how he realized he was truly on his own:

In terms of support, I always imagined that and have heard that, you know, you’d be assigned a mentor. That never happened to me. I know we had a mentor program for new teachers, so I assumed they would provide one for new principals, but nobody ever reached out to me. I never really asked about it either. I didn’t want my superintendent to think I wasn’t prepared for the job, so I didn’t say a word about it. My associate superintendent only visited me two times that year. Totally like out of sight, out of mind.

In a similar manner, another respondent stated:

I wasn’t assigned a mentor and I didn’t understand why. Just because I have been in the district for a long time, as an assistant principal, doesn’t mean I know what I’m doing as a principal. I needed help and struggled with whom I could call. Do I really want my associate superintendent to think he made the wrong choice? Heck no. So, I made some really good contacts at central office and called on them when I needed help. I can tell you who the unsung heroes are at central office – the budget and human resource clerks. They know more than most principals!

When identifying who would serve as a resource, the majority of the participants looked to someone with whom that had already established a personal and professional relationship. For example, four of the participants reached out to the principal who they had previously worked for as an assistant principal. These relationships did not require any down time for introductions or time to establish rapport. Both individuals had already worked together before and the trust was already established. No one felt the need to impress the other or try to pretend they possessed skills they did not have, mainly because they had already worked as a cohesive team and knew each other quite well.
An example of this type of professional relationship, which was articulated mainly by secondary principal interviewees, was the network they had established with individuals who they had previously worked with as assistant principals in past job assignments. They had spent the majority of their day operating a campus together as colleagues and felt they could be honest and forthcoming with them about issues they were facing as a neophyte principal. Loyalty and trust had already been built between these colleagues and they not only received advice, but compassion, as well.

Others established informal support systems with one or two colleagues who either worked in the same feeder pattern or had campuses with similar demographics. Participants talked about how these informal support systems, especially with those principals who were sharing the same issues, proved to be quite useful for gaining fresh ideas and perspective. One principal talked about how he had formed a running group with a few other principals and they would use this time to seek advice from each other or share ideas. Another principal formed a breakfast club with two other colleagues and every month they met on a Saturday morning at Village Inn to discuss different topics related to their campuses. They would bring their budgets and sit together to compare expenditures about four times a year because as he shared, “Before I was hired, I hadn’t looked at a school budget since I took a budget class in my master’s program at the university. I was completely lost. At least, we were lost together.”

Due to the numerous challenges that neophyte principals will encounter, support systems play a vital role in their success (Dukess, 2001; Hallinger & Heck, 2000; Young, 2007; Portner, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2007). One of the key purposes of this study was to investigate the perceptions of school district-leader administrators and neophyte principals in regards to support systems. The following section will address what school district-leader administrators believe to
be effective systems for supporting neophyte principals and will examine how the interviewees, themselves, currently support the principals they supervise.

I asked each of the school district-leader administrator interviewees to provide me with an example of a support, formal or informal, that their respective school district provides neophyte principals. Here are a few examples of the responses:

“In our district, we tier our principals and a lot of times, they don’t even know they’re tiered. We provide additional support and that comes in different ways… like more visits from the associate superintendent. The biggest things are those face-to-face meetings, where the associate superintendents can go in to a school and take a pulse of what’s going on.” (SDLA B)

“My colleague and I are starting an initiative where we meet with new principals once a month, just to check on how they are doing and if they need anything from us. That is just starting this month. I try to go by the new principals’ schools once a week to do a walkthrough with them – unannounced visits.” (SDLA C)

“We don’t have anything formal yet. Informal visits every once in a while are normal. I want to start meeting with only new principals next month. The group will be quite small and I am hoping they won’t feel intimidated by each other, since they are all in the same boat. I tell them no question is a stupid question.” (SDLA E)

“You know… I am looking at this question and I feel sad because to say that we do something different with our new principals… we don’t. They really just jump in from day one and start to swim. I assigned a mentor and really that’s not even that formal. I called a couple of principals who have been around for a while and told them to check in every once in a while on the new ones.” (SDLA F)
None of the school district-leader administrators responded with any formal supports they provide neophyte principals. Most supports offered are very informal and vary, even within the same school district. While several verbalized the intent to create formal supports for neophyte principals, there were no established ones at the time that this study was conducted. While effective formal or informal mentoring can have positive impacts on neophyte principals, such as protection from making damaging decisions, encouragement to undertake challenging and risky actions (which may be otherwise avoided), and increase confidence and competence, the opportunity for professional self-reflection and self-analysis is abundantly enhanced (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006). As part of these efforts, central offices have begun to convene principals in networks or principal professional learning communities (PPLCs) to strengthen principals’ instructional leadership. While these PPLCS are now becoming increasingly popular as a way to support principals, I found that some principals felt they can be better structured to meet their specific campus needs.

Opportunities for principals to be actively engaged with peers increase their understanding of sometime, abstract instructional leadership concepts (Barnes et al., 2010). One hundred percent of the participants stated that they participate in one or more PPLC in their respective school district. All eleven principals attend monthly principal meetings, where half the day is dedicated to “whole group” presentations on a variety of topics and the other half of the day is structured so that elementary and secondary principals are separated for grade-level specific professional development. All of the participants also participate in a learning community PPLC, where principals from the same feeder pattern host each other on a monthly basis to discuss issues that are specific to their area of the community. The principals expressed both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the way these meetings are conducted. One principal
describes the structure of the PPLCs she participates in:

In my case, I attend three different meetings. We have the monthly principal meeting at central office with district admins, monthly middle school principal meetings led by the associate superintendent in charge of middle schools, and the vertical PLC in our learning community where we talk about issues that are of interest to elementary, middle and high schools in the area. Some are more relevant then others, but attendance at all of them is mandatory, so I go.

While the majority of the participants had very positive things to say about these PPLCs, there were three principals who did not feel they were a good use of their time. They said some of the their colleagues used these smaller PPLCs, which were not usually run by central office administrators, as gripe sessions. “Our job is difficult enough. I don’t need to be around negative people who complain about this and complain about that,” commented an elementary principal.

Many of the principals expressed their frustration with the “whole group” principal meetings. Principal K noted:

When I was a first-year principal attending the monthly principal meetings, it was quite pointless. My district had almost one hundred principals that year and the sheer numbers were overwhelming. There were so many principals sitting in one room that there was no way to properly network effectively. So, we would just show up and get information overload and leave. Nothing was really done in a purposeful way and there were very little opportunities for professional growth. Those were the longest days ever.

Another principal felt the same way, “Our district monthly principal meetings, in my opinion, are not structured very well. Everything they are telling us is very managerial, which I find funny because they are always telling us to not run our campus PLCs in a managerial way.
Most of the information they give us could have gone out in an email.” One study found that several central office PPLC facilitators lacked expertise in instructional leadership, resulting in incomplete explanations of the material, which did not facilitate principal learning (Hubbard et al., 2006). This may not be very surprising, as several central office administrators have not assumed major leadership roles in teaching and learning improvement for the last few years, so they may struggle to establish credibility and relate to the principals (Honig et al., 2010).

However, the smaller PPLCs, in grade levels or feeder patterns, are found to be more productive. “This is where I gathered some of my best ideas – the smaller PLCs. I work in middle school, so I want to know what other middle schools are doing,” said one principal. Another principal shared, “What I love about this feeder group is they’re all young and very energetic. So we actually have like this group text going on amongst the four of us and we’ve shared a lot of ideas.”

The principals said they experienced intense, unrelenting stress as they adjust their current leadership skills to the real world of practice. They are frequently haunted by the fear that a moment of inattention will turn into a major crisis. Every school is a unique organization with its own history, environment, and cast of characters. Neophyte principals not only have to learn how things are done, but how things are done at that particular campus. They must go from “stranger” to “insider” and quickly discern the situation, while identifying the real movers and shakers (Aiken, 2002). This is where the sense of isolation can begin to sit in and unlike new teachers, who usually find an empathetic colleague down the hall, neophyte principals have no peers in their school building. In addition, the isolation can be magnified when they receive little feedback from supervisors.

During this period, emotional support is crucial and has an astounding impact on the
neophyte principals’ transition and adjustment. This support can come in many forms and smaller PPLCs, sometimes comprised of two to three principals, can prove to be a beneficial form of support. One principal talked about how she looks forward to these meetings because there are times when she just wants a little bit of moral support:

Sometimes, I just need to know that I can vent, where I can get it all out on the table and get what I need the most, moral support. As principals, we are all in the same boat and we forget that. At times, this job makes you feel so alone. My husband always asks how my day was and does his best to support me, but I can’t expect him to relate to certain issues. Plus, sometimes I need a mental break from principal mode when I get home and I don’t want to talk about anything work-related with my family.

With the benefit of emotional support as one of the positive factors within PPLCs, there are also opportunities for neophyte principals to gain a wealth of knowledge from other principals in and outside of their school district. While this section looked at the systems of supports available to help neophyte principals’ transition into the job, the next section addresses the specific skills, which the participants felt were vital as they journeyed through their first year.

**Preparation for the Role of the Principal**

My purpose was to examine principals’ perceptions surrounding their professional training and growth. I wanted to explore the participants’ perspectives concerning his or her principal preparation program and opinion about the effectiveness of these programs. I was looking for any gaps between the knowledge they already had when they started their new role and what types of skills did they perceive as necessary for their success by the end of that first year. I asked neophyte principals, “What types of experiences, training, or preparation do neophyte principals perceive as necessary for their success?” The principal interviewees talked about two areas, in particular, which they felt were vital for principal preparation – conflict
resolution and effective communication skills. While all of the principals expressed that many of
the skills required in their role are mostly self-taught, or in other words, must be learned on the
job, they believe that there were some definite gaps in their principal preparation program. These
skill gaps proved to be an obstacle, on different levels, for all principals interviewed.

The principals felt that their new role as principal is strongly tied to their ability to
communicate and manage conflict. With the changes taking place in schools, there is a high
demand for educational leaders who are prepared to address the effects of change and complexity
that exist in their schools (Coke & Goldsmith, 2011). Principals said they are expected to manage
conflict between various school stakeholders and, although conflict cannot be eliminated, it must
be controlled. One elementary school principal noted, “If I don’t allow my employees to express
their emotions, and sometimes they are negative, they can trigger destructive behaviors and
unresolved conflicts, which ultimately lead to an unhealthy work environment. Yet, how do I toe
the line between healthy and unhealthy behaviors without them feeling repressed? Nobody
taught me how to do that and I deal with this issue constantly.” She talked, at length, about how
the campus she worked at had a group of veteran teachers who resisted and questioned every
change, big or small, she implemented:

In order to manage my own emotions, I always made sure to be positive and calm. I
would use humor to diffuse tense situations with these staff members. I really do try to
hold back annoyance and anger because I know all eyes are on me, but sometimes I just
can’t make any progress because of the constant conflict these employees create. I never
took a class on conflict resolution or crucial conversations. How do I tell these people
that they need to be on board or move on without having them grieve me for a hostile
work environment? I just don’t know how to handle these types of situations without
being the bad guy. This is an area where I definitely needed further training and practice.
Recognizing verbal and non-verbal behaviors of others are essential when building personal
connections with the school community, especially when the school leader is a catalyst of change
(Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

The principals understood the importance of developing and maintaining professional
relationships and establishing trust; however, all of the interviewees reveal they never received
specific training on how to address conflict with uncooperative parents.
One principal stated:

I remember a time where a parent showed up extremely irate to the campus because she
did not agree with our dress code policy changes. She yelled at my secretary, who had
nothing to do with the dress code change. I didn’t know how to approach the situation. I
didn’t really deal with people screaming in my face when I was working at central office.
I basically hid in my office until she left. I was so ashamed. I just really didn’t know how
to talk to someone who was so irrational. I remember driving home that day crying
because I literally didn’t know what to do. I drove straight to Barnes and Noble and
bought a book on conflict resolution. I could have really benefited from training on how
to handle these types of situations. I never had the opportunity, so I taught myself.
All principals said that while they did not receive prior training on conflict resolution, they have
worked diligently to sharpen these skills as they continue to serve as a school leader. It is evident
to the researcher that allowing pre-service administrators to acquire this skill set prior to hiring
would prove to be extremely beneficial.
Advice for Aspiring School Principals

The interviewees also discussed what they needed entering into the principalship role. I asked the principal interviewees, “What are some lessons learned, after the completion of your first year as a principal, that you consider beneficial for aspiring school principals?” The principals all verbalized different factors, which they believed contributed to either their successes or failures during their first year. Similar themes that kept coming up were the importance of understanding school finance and developing meaningful relationships with the school community.

School-Based Budgeting

All the interviewees talked about how overseeing a school budget was an extremely difficult process as a neophyte principal. Managing the school budget is a challenge for many, as neophyte principals are often not exposed to this task in previous roles as teachers and assistant principals. With the amount of federal and state mandates in public education, the legalities of school finance can be quite cumbersome and require principals to know updated policies and procedures. One principal said, “I didn’t get any formalized training on how to work with the school budget. I had to reach out to the district’s finance department for help. I mean, wow, there are so many budget codes and you can’t do this or you’ll get audited… it was so scary!” Another interviewee reflected on his how he couldn’t find the right answers to his questions, which sent him into a whirlwind of emotions: “You know what I found out? People like to hold on to information. I would call veteran principals for advice regarding my budget and they either gave me erroneous information or were very tight-lipped. Like, what was that about? I was so sick of getting the run around.”
“I would definitely tell aspiring principals to get some type of exposure to school budgeting before you are actually in the driver’s seat and you don’t know where to steer. It is so critical to be on point and not drop the ball on this one.” (Principal A) “You know what I would do, if I knew then what I know now? I would go sit with a principal, look at a real school budget, and ask a whole lot of questions! (Principal D)

Developing Meaningful Relationships

All of the principals interviewed spoke about the importance of developing these relationships and shared their own experiences. The importance of school culture and the roles that leaders play in shaping this culture remains a key ingredient for student achievement. Principals spoke about cultivating a culture of high trust and model through example. Trust matters because principals cannot single-handedly either create or sustain many of the systems and structures within a campus. By establishing positive relationships with the faculty and staff, the neophyte principal can begin to foster a culture where commitment, trust, and communication are guiding forces towards the school’s vision for success. All principals also stressed the significance of building a positive school culture as adults. One principal talked about her strategy for building these relationships from day one:

My approach is to develop what I like to call heart connections. Heart connections to me are important because we spend most of our days with people we work with than with our own families. I want to let them know that despite my job, as their supervisor, I’m still a human being. I want to know them as a person and I want them to trust I have their best interest in mind. Since my school is smaller than most, my staff was very manageable. I scheduled some one-on-one time with each of my employees before school started in
July. It worked for me. I had very little resistance when implementing changes. They knew I was here for the kids and had no hidden agendas. (Principal C)

A middle school principal talked about his approach:

I have a very large staff at my campus. I knew I couldn’t meet everybody that summer, but I invited key players, like department chairs, to a meet and greet at a local restaurant. It was a way to spend some time getting to know new staff, but also giving them an inside look at who I was and letting them see that I wasn’t big, bad, or scary. Being away from the campus made it really informal and fun. You have to take time to invest in these people – the ones who have the ability to help you sell potential change. (Principal B)

Another consistent idea voiced by five of the interviewees was the notion of being responsive in a timely manner. “Communication is huge. I’m pretty good about getting back to people the same day in terms of email or text. You have to respond to your staff when they need something. I made it a point to provide answers quickly. They were so appreciative of that simple thing.” (Principal G)

Another piece of advice from a few of the principals was to just be yourself. Being new to his district, one high school principal talked about how he couldn’t rely on his past job experience to speak for him. He had to rely on establishing new relationships.

I knew absolutely no one when I came to this district. I had to just be myself and start a whole new network and that’s okay. People see who you are and they see your passion knowledge. That helps kind of let the guard up and bury it down. I stood strong for what I believed in and I’m being myself, which that allows people to be like, “Okay, well, you know what? He’s keeping it real.” People like honest, real people. I shoot from the hip. I’m honest with everybody. I do my best to be friendly. Grandma said, “Treat everybody
right.” Old-fashioned advice that works! You have to be able to get people to do things, to go out of their comfort zone. People typically trust people that they have relationships with and they will go above and beyond for you.

Another principal spoke about how her positive, supportive attitude helped her to develop trust with staff: “I made it a point to always look cheerful and approachable. I knew that the previous principal had the reputation of being very anti-social, which really has no place in education. This is a people business. Period.” (Principal E)

Although all principals agreed that developing relationships are essential; a few did admit they struggled with this process. One middle school principal expressed his frustration with developing interpersonal relationships with his teachers because he couldn’t see pass certain behaviors they exhibited:

Relationships are crucial and vital in any organization. I don’t dispute that one bit. However, this is really a focus area for me. I think I am better at it, but sometimes I get tunnel vision because I’m not very sympathetic with people that are absent or late all the time. I understand things happen…but when it becomes a trend I see that as a form of disrespect to the students in the classroom. I am not married and I don’t have kids, so I can’t speak intelligently on that… I just see the impact of the teacher being out from those classes… Unfortunately, I haven’t spent the time to talk to those individuals about what is going on, but I don’t because I don’t think I can be sincere. I struggle with that. I literally need my secretary to say, “It’s so-and-so’s birthday, so don’t forget to say happy birthday to this person.” My struggle has affected my culture, I know.

Another principal described her struggle to socialize into a campus where the previous principal was very social with the staff, whereas, she wanted to keep things very professional and
business-like:

The principal I replaced was very huggy, touchy-feely, you know baking cookies and things. I am very professional, this is your standard, you are going to get it done - goal oriented. So, you know, night and day for these poor folks… I don’t go around hugging people all day. I appreciate them. I can’t do this job without them. I think my previous experiences with people have something to do with it. When you are an assistant principal and nice to one teacher or whatever and it backfires on you, it makes you change your personality. I just keep it professional all of the time because I don’t want people to take advantage of me again. If I am too nice to them or touchy-feely, then they are going to take it as a weakness and I don’t want that.

However, she believed that her visibility and accessibility to the school community would help her establish a sense of approachability:

I try to be very predictable in my accessibility to the community. I stand in the same place every morning at 8:00 am. People know if they want to talk to the principal where I will be every morning before school starts. Everyone knows that they can text me day or night and I will respond. I think of this as a starting point. I know I need to get better.

Most principals are PR all day and hug everyone, but it is a matter of personality. This part of the job is just a little harder for people like me – Type A personalities.

Almost all of the principals I interviewed shared the importance of not only developing relationships with the campus community, but also with other principals and central office support members. One principal spoke about how she relied on fellow principals to help her get through those first few months, “At my first leadership meeting, I identified a handful of principals who were well-known in the district for leading successful schools and demonstrated
an approachable personality. They became my lifeline. I would tell any aspiring principal to do the same. Find your circle. Make sure they are people who you won’t be afraid to call for help.” Another principal talked about how she established professional networks with central office staff members:

Oh, my God! You wouldn’t believe who became my biggest allies that first year. I found that the most helpful people in the entire district were the central office department clerks. I’m talking about the budget clerks, human resources clerks, risk management clerks, and the secretaries in the associate superintendents’ office. These are the people with the helpful information! Treat them well and they can make your life so much easier!”

Principals are expected to model positive interactions among the adults, which promote productive learning experiences for the children. Marzano (2005) identified specific responsibilities that effective school principals must identify and understand in order to foster “shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation among staff” (pg. 48). An educational organization that promotes a sense of well being, developing an understanding of the shared vision and promoting cohesion between school stakeholders will have positive effects on the school community and support the academic and socio-emotional growth of students (Scheerens, 2016). Failure to do so may result in the leader encountering difficult situations as they lead people through change because it challenges what people hold dear, such as daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking.

Much of the literature on restructuring and redesigning schools is very descriptive about the turmoil, resistance, stress, anger, frustration and other emotions experienced during the process (Blankstein, 2004; Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2008; Evans, 1996; Moore, 2009). One
school district-leader administrator interviewee said, “Restructuring a school requires leaders skilled in emotional intelligence. Creating those successful relationships and being aware of people’s feelings will allow the leader to use this information to guide thinking and action. Change is hard. Principals cannot afford to ignore this if they want to implement successful change.”

Another described her personal experience with implementing change at a well-known elementary school, which was staffed with mostly veteran teachers:

People were defensive when I started introducing little pockets of change here and there. I went about it the wrong way and started moving peoples’ cheese right away. I didn’t take the time to get to know them – really know them. I learned that people get frightened when asked to change, which leads to resistance and isolation. After that first semester, I changed my whole mindset. I developed more of a coaching strategy, where I took time to initiate strong professional relationships with my teachers. I found that people were combative and resistant to change because they had never been part of the process to begin with. I listened to them when they spoke about their feelings and this gave me new information about their frustrations. By the end of the year, I had become more skillful in influencing and inspiring my staff to try new things because we had built trust and they knew I would protect them from failure. This was a learning experience for me and I tell my new principals this story because being aware of staff emotions while leading change will allow them to support them to success. (SDLA D)

School district-leader administrators indicated that they are inclined to select principals who possess a student-centered vision. The school district-leader administrator interviewees all agree that principals are essential to the school performance and school improvement; therefore,
must possess a plethora of qualities which will support his or her efforts to establish campus mission and goals, build culture and climate, lead instructional programs, and make decisions about teacher hiring and professional development, just to name a few. Means for ensuring quality in principals are of keen interest to district administrators and while there are licensure requirements, set by state boards of education, there are other considerations that must be taken when recommending an individual to serve as the new leader of a school community.

During the past several years, there has been an increased focus on the relationship between school leadership and student outcomes (Bell, Bolam, & Cubillo, 2003; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Witziers, Bosker, & Krüger, 2003). While the majority of this research found that teachers have the most direct influence over student performance, there is evidence that the principal directly affects other variables that, in turn, affect student achievement.

Another area that emerged from the interviews was the inclusion of a student-centered vision. Most notably, the principal is responsible for setting these conditions. One important aspect to consider when promoting a student-centered vision and school culture are the relationships established between adults and students. One superintendent believes that creating an atmosphere, which foster these caring relationships in schools are crucial and must be non-negotiable actions of aspiring principals in his district:

When hiring, I look for caring, loving people that really, really care about students, and especially low socioeconomic students, someone who understands them and is willing to go above and beyond to give them the education they deserve. I need people who will spend some time making connections with these kids. The scores will always be the
scores. How can you make a difference in a child’s life today? Care about them. Care about their interests. Care about their problems. If we can’t take care of them on a basic human level, then how can we expect them to care about a STAAR exam?

The reality is that increasing accountability requires that schools and educators fundamentally change their practice (Glowa & Goodell, 2016). A key finding of the study is the common perspective surrounding the importance of parents, teachers, administrators, and community partners working closely together to support student-centered practices. All of the interviewees conveyed the opinion that ideal principals will demonstrate a “what’s best for kids” vision each and every day. It is best summed up by one associate superintendent who said, “Schools should be places where students and teachers feel excited to be, where they feel safe and supported, and where they feel like they have ownership in the teaching and learning process. When students, especially, are more engaged, they feel encouraged to take more control over their own learning.”

Summary

This section sought to explore the needs of neophyte principals as they navigated through their first year and examined how different systems of support helped them transition into the new role. Using an interview method, I analyzed neophyte principals’ testimonials regarding their first year experiences in an effort to find common themes. I collected data surrounding neophyte principals’ pre-service principal training and examined the extent, if any, of provided training and support after being hired by a school district. These findings are crucial as school districts, administrators and leadership programs seek to better prepare administrators for the reality of the school principalship.

As an added dimension to this study, I examined the topic of neophyte principals through the lens of a school district-leader administrator. I interviewed one director, four associate
superintendents, and one superintendent. The interview questions focused on three specific areas surrounding neophyte principals – indicators of success, major challenges, and support systems. I was seeking information on how not only their school district supported neophyte principals, but how they personally served as a resource, as well. I explored how directly (or indirectly) involved central office directors, associate superintendents, and superintendents are to the success of neophyte principals in their respective school districts. Being that this study will contribute to the literature on neophyte principals, my intention was to provide detailed evidence surrounding central office district administrators’ views in regards to essential prerequisite (and desired) skills which aspiring administrators should possess, so that they are successful and effective principals.
Chapter 5
Summary of Findings

Introduction

The overriding purpose of this study was to explore the challenges, personal experiences, and extent of provided support, if any, for neophyte principals as they transition into their new role. The objective of this research was to provide insight into the role of the neophyte principal and specifically, how neophyte principals can be effectively supported, in order to meet all the expectations and challenges they encounter during their first year and beyond. The findings of this study will be of interest to policymakers in school districts, state education agencies, principal preparation programs, and most importantly, to aspiring and current school principals. For the success of their leadership, it is crucial that differentiated support be provided to principals through collegial, collaborative, and silent mentorship. Related to that effort, the complex and high-stakes accountability system that determines the success or failure of neophyte principals is much more demanding than in years past. It is the intention of the researcher that the results of this study will add to the increasing focus on the much-needed support for principals, so that they may facilitate increased student learning and success.

This chapter will begin with the study’s research findings, as it pertains to each of the research questions. While there were repetitive themes throughout the data analysis, there were several key discoveries, which are crucial to the effective development of neophyte principals in today’s schools. The second section will identify implications of the research findings for educational policymakers in school districts, state education agencies, principal preparation programs, and most importantly, to aspiring and current school principals. This second section will be followed by recommendations for practice, focusing on principal development, best
practices, and support systems for neophyte principals. Finally, the third section will conclude with recommendations for further related research in the field of educational leadership.

The overarching question utilized in this research study was to gain insight on the experiences of neophyte principals, as they navigate through their first year of the principalship. The research questions, which guided this study, were:

1. What major challenges do neophyte principals encounter in the first year of the principalship?
2. What existing supports are available to assist neophyte principals?
3. What are some lessons learned, after the completion of their first year as a principal, that the study participants consider beneficial for aspiring school principals?

Key Findings

With the goal to prepare college and career-ready students, it is vital that school principals are adequately prepared to meet the diverse needs of all students. Recently, the emphasis on federal and state educational mandates has made educational leadership more challenging than ever before (Varner, 2007). There is growing evidence to suggest that recent school reform may have left principals behind (Wilson, 2014). The purpose of this part of my research was to examine principals’ perceptions surrounding their professional training and growth. I wanted to explore the participants’ perspectives concerning their preparation program and their opinion about the effectiveness of these programs. I looked for any gaps between the knowledge they already had when they started their new role and what types of skills did they perceive as necessary for their success by the end of that first year.

The conceptual framework used to guide this study was originally derived from Michael Huberman’s (1989) work on the evolution and developmental cycle of teachers. Huberman’s five
phases of teacher development are career entry, stabilization, experimentation/stock-taking, serenity/conservatism, and disengagement. Each identified phase had very distinct characteristics and associated behaviors, which teachers demonstrated at different points in their careers. It is important to note that these phases are not linear and teacher development cannot be seen as sequential (White, 2008). Personal experiences and the social environment are powerful factors, which influence teachers’ development. In fact, teachers move in and out of the various phases so that a late career teacher can return to being a novice if given the right circumstance, such as given a new and innovative teaching assignment (Hattie, 2003).

Daresh (2007) modified the stages from five to four stages, in order to apply them to the careers of principals. The four stages are career entry, stabilization, and then risk taking or risk avoiding. The journey through these four stages, while unpredictable and individual, can be affected by an array of variables (Daresh, 2007). Factors, such as school conditions, school culture, and the effectiveness of support given to a first year principal can all affect the timeline as the individual progresses from career entry to stabilization.

I expanded Daresh’s model to include a transitional period, which is a crucial phase of the principal development process. As the incoming school leader begins to enter a new school environment, the dynamics of the current school culture and issues concerning principal succession have a powerful impact on leadership style and adaptation. The manner in which the neophyte principal acclimates to these aspects of transition will have short and long-term outcomes, which not only affect the school leader, but the entire school community.

The study participants talked about three skills, in particular, which they felt were vital for principal preparation – conflict resolution, effective communication, and instructional
leadership skills. While all of the principals expressed that many of the skills required in their role are mostly self-taught, or in other words, must be learned on the job, they believe that there were some gaps in their administrator preparation programs. These skill gaps proved to be an obstacle, on different levels, for all principals interviewed.

Principal preparation programs are the pathway for aspiring principals to develop the knowledge and skills they need to be effective school leaders (The Wallace Foundation, 2016). My findings reveal that neophyte principals found their principal preparation program, whether university or private-based, lacked rigor and relevance to the current role of the principal. I also found that four out of the five school district leader administrator interviewees strongly agree that principal preparation needs to dramatically improve. Several school district-leader administrator interviewees both articulated a number of concerns with the lack of adequate clinical experiences being a key issue. Both groups noted that the clinical experiences, potentially the most powerful learning opportunity for aspiring principals, was the prime limitation in principal preparation programs. The principal interviewees who had completed a principal preparation program within the last ten years indicated that there was a mismatch between topics taught. Some of the courses were out-of-date and irrelevant, and did not reflect the real-world skills needed by current principals.

*Finding:* Neophyte principals questioned their abilities to meet the job expectations of their new role.

Principals stated that as they begin to transition into their new role, they start to truly experience the myriad of responsibilities that come with the job. Most of the principals begin to
question their capabilities to do their job at the level that their supervisors expected. They started questioning their decision-making and experienced some level of anxiety towards being redirected, or even questioned by upper management. Self-doubt was a common emotion among the principals during their first three months on the job. All of the principals interviewed had served as an assistant principal prior to their new role as principal; therefore, had some idea of what the role of the principal was like. However, they collectively were surprised by how many different directions they were being pulled into on a daily basis. Fear served as a force of motivation for many of the principals.

I found that the participants’ understanding of the accountability factors might enable and/or confine singular and distributed approaches to leadership style. For example, some of the participants’ increasing fear of failure resulted in a self-imposed isolation period, where they assumed the sole responsibility as they struggled to repair the legitimacy of their schools, often under unrealistic time constraints. The volume and diversity of work together with the sense of ultimate responsibility was tremendously intense for these neophyte principals. The volume of demands was a prominent theme, even before they started the school year, and the intensity magnified over their first three months on the job.

In contrast, some participants used a more distributed leadership style to combat the volume of challenges in their schools. Delegating responsibilities and involving school staff in different leadership aspects allowed these neophyte principals to potentially reduce their work load and focus on the main role, instructional leadership. Work diversity, along with the large knowledge base associated with the role of the principal are likely to encourage distributed approaches to leadership (Spillane & Lee, 2014).
The principals saw the autonomy associated with assuming the principal position as an appealing aspect of the work. Specifically, seventy-eight percent of the neophyte principals interviewed indicated that autonomy was an appealing aspect of the position prior to the start of their first year in the principalship. By the end of the first year on the job, autonomy was still largely viewed favorably, although study data also shows that the lure of autonomy also brought with it the challenge of ultimate responsibility. Several principals noted how now the ‘buck stops here’ with them and this was a very big part of the transition into the role. This was a significant shift from what the participants were accustomed to as assistant principals and forced some of them to micromanage their staff. However, they quickly realized this strategy would not benefit anyone and establishing trust was a non-negotiable undertaking.

*Finding: Maintaining relationships are the most important elements of work/life balance in principals’ personal and professional lives.*

Workplace relationships are valuable during difficult times, providing counsel and support; whereas, personal relationships are vital to sustaining self-worth (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005). Of the eleven principals interviewed, all articulated the importance of family or friend relationships as the most important element to their sense of work/life balance. Strong, supportive, trusting relationships, both in personal or professional in nature, helped these neophyte principals find balance, especially during demanding and stressful situations in their lives.

In an era when school leaders are expected to interact regularly with a variety of school community members, effective communication skills are vital. Perceptions of principal quality are mainly derived from the interactions people have with him or her. Verbal and non-verbal behaviors demonstrated by the principal help shape the school culture. “No single individual is
more important to initiating and sustaining improvement in student performance than the principal” (Jackson & David, 2000, p. 157).

All of the principals interviewed felt that effective communication skills were key to their success during their first year and beyond. One principal expressed, “I never realized just how impactful my everyday behaviors were until I started getting compliments on how great it was to have a principal who was approachable and positive on a daily basis. My staff really appreciated that I took the time to get to know them as a person and listened when they had a problem – big or small. It created an atmosphere of trust almost immediately.”

Several of the principals were able to create conditions in which trust flourished within their schools because, through structures and norms to guide behavior, they cultivated a culture where school community members could express themselves without fear of belittlement or disrespect from others. A high school principal recalled how his teachers gained confidence and willingly placed their trust in him:

The one thing that helped me the most that first year was never taught to me in any classroom or training session. Simply put, make them feel like they are essential to the success of the campus. Praise them. Smile when you talk to them. Listen to them. Truly listen to what they say and validate their feelings. These teachers are in the trenches every day and they need encouragement to keep their spirits up. I’m telling you. This will go a long way for any principal. (Principal K)

In a similar vein, another high school principal said, “Be honest with your people. Do what you say. Always make eye contact and smile. You would be surprised how this simple validation from their principal will empower them to go above and beyond for you.”

*Finding: Principal turnover and stress factors affect incoming school leaders and the school*
I found that restructuring a school after a principal change is often difficult to achieve since many teachers and staff members are often resistant to any perceived change efforts. Principals stated that dialogue of all kinds, both informal and formal, must be present before a school community will determine it has reason to change. Often, when a principal is transitioning into a new campus, the faculty and staff have not been part of the decision-making process and this restructuring effort may not be received in a positive way, especially if the previous principal was well liked. This can cause extreme cases of principal succession issues, which are extremely stressful for everyone involved. My findings show that principals not only have to deal with their own emotions surrounding moving into a new work environment; they also have to be aware of the attitudes and behaviors from the school community members. Several principals stated how rebuilding positive momentum with new staff takes time, sometimes up to three years to show patterns of growth in student achievement data.

One of my most surprising findings of this study was how principal turnover often led to greater teacher and staff turnover. Principals talked about how teachers often left their campus to follow their previous principal, who had been transferred to a different school. Ordinarily, this may not seem like a concern to the incoming school leader; however, the principals talked about how costly these teacher moves are because when a teacher leaves, they take all the training investments with them. This leaves the new school leader with the task of hiring new teachers, who will need to be sent to trainings, in order to be at the same level as other teachers at that campus. This is an issue that ultimately has a long-lasting impact on the school’s achievement timeline.

One school district-leader administrator talked about how she was aware of these issues,
but had her own pressures to supervise successful schools; therefore, school restructuring was sometimes necessary in order to accelerate change efforts. Superintendents hold associate superintendents accountable for the schools they are assigned to supervise and I found school district-leader administrators are also fearful of being demoted or transferred to another position for lack of adequate progress, measured by state assessment results. School district-leader administrators talked about how they understand the principals’ challenges; however, there is a sense of urgency, coming down from the superintendent, to perform at high levels or else. One school district-leader administrator articulated how she disagreed with moving principals around every two years, especially when she had to move a successful principal to go “fix” a school. “It’s like punishing someone for doing a good job,” she said. However, these moves are still quite common from year to year in both school districts that participated in this study. It becomes clear that the hierarchy within the districts plan an important role in the training of principals at the district levels. Mid-level school district-leader administrators are dealing with pressures from above and from below. Therefore, they may not be as connected to the principals’ needs. 

Finding: Neophyte principals are not adequately prepared to handle personnel and parent conflict.

Another key finding was that neophyte principals believed their conflict-resolution skills were lacking on a variety of levels. All principals experienced some type of conflict, either with employees or with members of the school community, such as parents. They were all aware that the way they responded to conflict had a significant effect on his or her relationships with others. Contributing to the lack of conflict resolution skills, was the realization how much harder it was to lead adults than it was to lead and work with students.
Many principals in this study were unprepared for or surprised by the challenge of working with and resolving conflicts among adults, whereas they found their interactions with students as a source of satisfaction. While this may not be surprising, since many principals have spent the majority of their careers working with students, where they experienced success and a sense of accomplishment, they may not be ready for the challenges and frustrations they encountered when working primarily with adults.

Several principals talked about how small conflicts with their staff or with a parent had a way of turning into a crisis, which resulted in some relational harm. They could not make everyone happy all the time and this had an effect on relationships. Some of the principals were able to effectively communicate with the person they were experiencing conflict with, but others did not know how to approach these situations and tended to retreat to a safe zone, such as their office. This triggered animosity on both sides and their ability to engage the other party was very difficult for the principals. Three principals spoke about how they had irate parents every other day and getting yelled at seemed to be the norm for them. The principals expressed their frustration with their lack of problem-solving skills and admitted it took quite some time to get a grasp on how to handle these challenging situations.

Finding: When implementing change, the most successful principals are those who use an inclusive and deliberate approach.

My findings revealed that the principals experienced some level of resistance as they initiated change within their schools. Some principals faced resistance from either one or multiple sources. At times, it was one powerful member of the faculty who led opposition; other times, staff or community members led it. The principals realized that in order to overcome this resistance, they had to build trusting relationships with the school community and make a
conscientious effort to involve others in the change process. Some principals realized that the
opposition really had nothing to do with them, but was a result of inconsistent leadership from
previous principals. Only by assessing the culture of their schools and gauging the staffs’
readiness for change were they able to proceed with positive change.

When asked how they implemented any type of change at their new school, neophyte
principals talked about the lessons they learned, sometimes by approaching change in the wrong
way. Some principals already had a directive from their supervisors to implement a certain
amount of change very quickly, mostly because the school was not demonstrating a culture of
high levels of achievement. For these principals, initiating change was the hardest. They did not
have time to go in, observe, establish teacher buy-in, or “sell” ideas for change. They went in
with “guns blazing,” which was not well received by faculty and staff. Personal and professional
relationships suffered and several principals found it hard to come back from such a setback.

One of the challenges several principals reported experiencing at one time or another
during their first year was initiative overload. This can occur when the school implements so
many change initiatives at one time that the faculty and staff often feel confused and
overwhelmed (Abrahamson, 2004). Principals had to learn to be selective about the number and
type of change initiatives they implemented at any one time because teachers were complaining
that they were in the process of trying to manage too many initiatives at the same time.
Contributing to this challenge is the acknowledgement that some of the change initiatives were
mandated by federal or state policies and from district office. Therefore, the principal often had
no say in whether or not the school would participate in these changes, which hindered their
ability to manage the overload.
The majority of the principals emphasized the need to acquire buy-in for the change initiatives from the teachers early on in the process. The principals who did this felt they were successful in the long run and developed effective change. They recognized the correlation between acquiring buy-in from the teachers and the success of the change initiatives. Additionally, these principals formed a strong leadership team to provide valuable input and to serve as visionaries for the perceived change.

**Finding: The perception of social isolation among neophyte principals is real.**

The job of the school principal is consumed with leading people within the organization to better results; yet, principals talk of feeling a sense of loneliness and isolation. The isolation may begin as an educator moves into the role of the principal, mainly because he or she is moving away from current peers who may serve in faculty roles. The principals talked about how their rise in status caused detachments in relationships with coworkers and how they felt like they were living in an “exaggerated fish bowl.” Several principals talked about how this leadership “fishbowl” affected them in such a way that they felt like they were always “on” in a very public way. Principals described their tendency to avoid public places and to seek the privacy of their own home.

All of the participants shared specific personal experiences of isolation and loneliness encountered during their first year in the principalship. They were very aware of the impact excessive time demands had on their personal and professional lives. Some of the principals reported that the demands had caused problems in their relationships with spouses, which caused an even deeper sense of isolation and loneliness. One of the principals admitted she had lost touch with some of her close friends because of the time demands of her principalship. When
asked to describe the activities they engaged in for fun and relaxation, some of the principals described self-selected, solitary activities, such as reading at home.

Principals who were promoted from teacher to administrator within the same school felt they had established good relationships with their faculty and staff; however they witnessed a change in the nature of the relationship. One principal described an almost instantaneous experience of loneliness when he became the school leader as “a phenomenon,” where one minute people are talking and carrying on and the next minute people would not even sit next to him in the teachers lounge. The findings in this study of neophyte principals revealed that all of the principals agreed with the statement, “It is lonely at the top.” However, the degree to which they felt isolated and lonely varied from occasional situations to intense and chronic feelings of social isolation.

Finding: Principals who developed and utilized time-management strategies experienced increased levels of personal and professional success.

Principals reported that time management was an extremely important factor surrounding their success to effectively lead a school. They often found themselves understaffed and forced to find time to do it all. There were definite problematic areas of time management expressed by the principal interviewee, such as the vast amount of time needed for daily routine instructional and managerial tasks. A common theme I found was that principals thought if they were to just organize their time, they could do it all. However, they learned very quickly that this was not possible and they needed to rely on others to assist with the magnitude of duties they have. They also had to learn how to say no to people who tried to unnecessarily take their time. As one principal stated, “The days of the hero principal are over.” This misconception, while recognized by the principals, was often no acknowledged by the school community. Parents and even school
district-leader interview administrators continued to drain the principals’ time for issues that could have been handled by another member of the administrative team. Even some of the most successful principals stated that they cannot sustain the level of energy and enthusiasm it takes to do it all and they feel worn out.

Creating an effective learning organization requires a highly organized approach to operations and management founded upon the vision, mission, and values of the school (Sorenson, Goldsmith & DeMatthews, 2016). In the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), vision and mission are firmly associated to time, one of the scarcest resources in a school. All eleven interviewees expressed time management as a daily challenge, especially within the scope of their first year as a principal. Demands escalate, but available time remains constant, even as the decision-making process requires more time (Graham & Ferriter, 2010).

Strategies that enabled principals to structure their time, such as prior planning, establishing priorities, delegating managerial tasks, and utilizing technology tools were identified as instrumental. Principals learned very quickly that healthy learning organizations share ownership and accountability; yet, developing and maintaining a caring, positive school climate takes time. Developing trust and working collaboratively with school community requires investing time and there are no shortcuts; to think so is to deny reality (Sorenson, Goldsmith & DeMatthews, 2016). By being very intentional with their time, principals are able to do more with less.

**Finding:** It is essential that the new principal model instructional leadership skills and behaviors for faculty and staff.

Although principals’ leadership behaviors influenced schools’ success, continuous research affirmed that effective principals influenced the school’s climate and culture through
teacher collaboration, professional development, and policies and procedures (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Cited as the “most important duty” by all principals interviewed, instructional leadership has been identified as the most important contributor to improved teacher and student achievement gains. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) ensures that the focus remains on principals as curriculum leaders; furthermore, with the vast number of instructional changes to curriculum standards, they must serve as a knowledgeable resource and support system for classroom teachers (Glatthorn, Jailall & Jailall, 2016).

Principal responses suggest high degree of preoccupation with failure in their instructional leadership skills. These findings indicate that continued work is needed to assist principals with maintaining focus on what is happening within the four walls of the classroom, working with teachers to apply data analysis to improve classroom instruction, and providing research-based professional development focused on differentiating for at-risk students. Additionally, elementary principals reported significantly higher levels of instructional leadership skill sets than secondary principals, which demonstrated the need for further professional development among middle and high school principals.

Many principals had worked at secondary campuses their entire career, where they were not expected to work with teachers concerning instructional topics. These conversations were left for instructional coaches and district academic personnel, not the administrators, who were busy doing bus duty, monitoring Friday night football games, or supervising student events in the evenings. Consequently, the majority of neophyte secondary principals do not feel adequately prepared to guide their teachers through the instructional development that they require; therefore, rely on instructional coaches, district instructional specialists, and veteran teachers to fill in this gap.
Finding: Neophyte principals are afforded very few support systems, which are truly beneficial and formal mentoring is not one of them.

The second question guiding this study asks the following: What existing supports are available to assist neophyte principals? In the current era of high stakes accountability, paired with the decreasing number of candidates able to effectively meet the challenges of school leadership, the nurturing and supporting components for neophyte principals has become particularly relevant (Brown-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004). With the current shift surrounding the new role of the principal, it is important to not only consider how they learn to manage all of the responsibilities associated with this job, but also how do we ensure they do not fail? I asked the interviewees to tell me about the types of support they did (or did not receive) during their first year as a principal. While effective formal or informal mentoring can have positive impacts on neophyte principals, such as protection from making damaging decisions, encouragement to undertake challenging and risky actions (which may be otherwise avoided), and increase confidence and competence, the opportunity for professional self-reflection and self-analysis is abundantly enhanced (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006). As part of these efforts, central offices have begun to convene principals in networks or principal professional learning communities (PPLCs) to strengthen principals’ instructional leadership.

The findings of this study affirm the need to support neophyte principals to a greater degree than what is currently being implemented; however, several of the study’s findings were unexpected. In particular, traditional mentoring was found to be less crucial than other forms of support that neophyte principals received or would have liked to receive. The data analysis revealed that a variety of support systems were important, but need to be redefined as a need for interrelated support systems for neophyte principals. It is not enough to just provide support in
isolation; therefore, neophyte principals may benefit further with several interrelated pieces of assistance. Meaningful dialogue through the phases of principal development (see Chapter 2), which may transpire through effective coaching methods are perceived as the most effective strategy to support principals well beyond their first year of the principalship.

Social scientists have studied the distinct features of social connection offered by organizational relationships (Smith & Christakis, 2008). I found that relationships within the school organization were one of the most beneficial forms of informal methods of support for neophyte principals. As principals began to feel isolated in their role, they identified allies, mostly in the form of assistant principals, instructional coaches, or other key leadership team members, whom they felt they could rely on during stressful times. The connection between resilience and relationships within the workplace was recognized by the study participants; however, was only present in schools where strong, trusting relationships were developed. As opportunities for building and fostering relationships in the workplace increased, principals felt more supported and were able to pull themselves out of “a lonely place.”

Organizations are just a collection of individuals who have a need for good relationships (Pink, 2009). Emotional support provided by social networks enhances one’s well-being, which, in turn, may reduce the risk of unhealthy behaviors and feelings of apprehension or fear (World Health Organization, 2007). Informal connections also help the neophyte principals deal with home life because now, the neophyte principals have other allies to discuss work related issues; therefore there is less burden on family members. The next section will address my recommendations for aspiring principals, neophyte principals, school districts, educational policymakers, state educational agencies, and future research.


**Recommendations for Aspiring and Current Neophyte Principals**

This section will suggest ways that the research findings can be used to improve practice surrounding neophyte principals. The voices of neophyte principals who participated in this study can contribute to the ongoing literature used to support aspiring and current school principals. The findings also indicate that neophyte principals can take control of their own professional growth by establishing some behaviors and habits, which will help them adapt to their new role.

Principals need to have constant, hands-on involvement in leading curricular design, development, and implementation in schools in order to remain in compliance with both state and federal mandates (Glatthorn, Jailall & Jailall, 2016). My research showed that although principals recognized a broad academic conceptualization of instructional leadership, they articulated a more limited knowledge of how they defined and worked as an instructional leader. This observable gap between what principals knew about instruction and what they were expected to model for teachers is an important finding because school district-level administrators stressed the importance of not only knowing, but understanding instruction in order to be a successful principal.

With the expectation to serve as the instructional leader on campus, the neophyte principal must be trained to perform more purposeful observations of teachers that focus on the delivery and results of instruction. Observing teachers and students in classrooms is the instructional leadership activity that principals must perform to complete teacher evaluations, so it is crucial that school leader have a solid knowledge base surrounding what constitutes good teaching. It is imperative that neophyte principals prioritize these classroom observations as non-negotiable daily activities; including the opportunities to provide teachers feedback on what was
seen during the observations. With practice, principals can begin to feel at ease having intellectual conversations with teachers surrounding teaching and learning.

Establishing and maintaining relationships is, perhaps, the most important element of balance in principals’ personal and professional lives. All neophyte principals interviewed articulated the significance of these relationships for a number of reasons, mainly, for providing principals a source of counsel and support, maintaining healthy school cultures, and strengthening principals’ own personal and professional efficacy. Whitaker (2003) suggested that effective people focus on people, not programs. My data showed that relationship building with school community members created a positive school culture, which fostered an environment where the incoming school leader could more easily manage change, which can easily be an area where school leaders find the most resistance.

Neophyte principals, in particular, must take the time to gain in-depth knowledge of each and every staff member. This approach will help build a personalized school system, one in which all staff members work towards the same goals. This can translate into some simple daily routines for the principal, such as recognizing teachers for jobs well done each and every day, remaining visible and approachable throughout the school day, supporting teachers as they deal with the complexities of their job, and taking time to have meaningful conversations. The school community must feel the personal connection to the school system, which can often be seen as impersonal and faceless. This connection can often be achieved through a healthy, professional relationship with the school principal.

As neophyte principals journey through the first year, they begin to choose people who will become their “cheerleaders” or sources of positive support. While they will most likely receive some level of support from their school district, whether it be through a formal mentoring
program, or other type of provision for assistance, it is crucial that neophyte principals keep their eyes open for informal networks of support. These informal networks of support may be previous colleagues, fellow neophyte principals, mentor principals who they previously served under as assistant principals, university faculty members who they kept in touch with, or out-of-district peers they meet at educational conferences, just to name a few. More than likely, the most beneficial networks of support may be school leaders who are experiencing the same challenges or mentor principals and previous colleagues who have already established a trusting relationship with the neophyte principals. These non-threatening relationships serve as an outlet to vent, seek advice, or share ideas without the fear of belittlement.

Several of the principals interviewed acknowledged that these relationships were crucial to their success and helped them cope with the enormous pressures they encountered. Patterson and Kelleher (2005) emphasize the connection between resilience and relationships in the workplace. Since neophyte principals often feel isolated and lonely in their role, I recommend leaders identify allies and take time to develop and maintain strong, trusting relationship they can later rely on during a crisis. Some of the “unsung heroes” for neophyte principals interviewed were unexpected. Several interviewees talked about how the most difficult concept they were expected to understand was the school budget; however, they were able to get clear direction from finance secretaries and clerks. They talked about how helpful these staff members were anytime they called or stopped by to see them. While finance directors or supervisors were not always available, their office staff was always willing to lend a hand. Two of the principals interviewed said that they had established relationships with the district office staff personnel as assistant principals and as they transitioned into their new role, these relationships proved to be
extremely valuable. These informal connections, made by the neophyte principals long before they stepped into the role of the principal, contributed to their success.

Finding time, making time, and using time are all issues that school leaders can relate to (Sorenson, Goldsmith & DeMatthews, 2016). Neophyte principals will quickly learn that their time is their most precious resource and the ability to ensure their time is effectively managed is a main priority. Though responsibilities are many, effective principals can and do balance them, knowing how to use their power most efficiently. My research indicated that with the implementation of two specific strategies, utilizing a distributive leadership style and setting aside time for reflective planning, the neophyte principal was able to manage their time more efficiently.

It was evident through the interviews that the neophyte principals viewed their role as one of power; however, those who utilized a distributive leadership approach agreed that it allowed them to manage their duties in a more efficient manner. Distributive leadership should not merely be seen as a means of reducing principals’ workload. Once the neophyte principal was able to determine his or her leadership team’s strengths, delegating tasks provided opportunities to build leadership capacity in others, which is a win-win for both parties. The principal is able to free his or her time for more important responsibilities, for example, instructional leadership duties and leadership team members, most who are aspiring principals, gain experience planning and overseeing administrative duties.

Setting aside time for personal reflection and planning can have major implications for principal efficacy. One school district-level administrator talked about how she encouraged all principals to take some time each week to reflect on goal setting and priorities. She also stated how reflective practice is not being incorporated into her monthly campus visits with each school
leader as a way to keep them focused on short-term and long-term goals. By blocking out some time each week, the neophyte principal can take some time to pause, take a breath, and reflect on priorities for the upcoming week. Personal reflection combined with professional growth in time management makes for stronger, better principals (Sorenson, Goldsmith & DeMatthews, 2016). One of the most successful ways for neophyte principals to manage reflective practice is to ensure they will have a block of uninterrupted time, either at the beginning of the day or at the end of the day, to think about and write down some upcoming priorities. By reflecting on where his or her time was spent the previous week, the school leader is able to determine where the focus needs to be the following week. This is the best time to think about which tasks will be delegated to other members of the leadership team and to establish their priorities purposefully.

**Recommendations for School Districts, Educational Policymakers, State Educational Agencies and Principal Preparation Programs**

School districts can take specific actions to help neophyte principals successfully transition into the role of the principal by providing structures of systemic support and ongoing methods to ensure these school leaders are continuing to receive attention and care beyond the first year on the job. The recommendation that will have the largest impact on neophyte principals is for school districts, educational policymakers, state educational agencies and principal preparation programs to acknowledge the current role of the principal for what it is – tremendous. Once the value of the school principal is recognized, only then can effective change begin to take place to ensure they are appropriately supported and nurtured throughout their first year and beyond. While the current literature on teacher development is clear, that they must be provided with at least three years of support, assistance, and encouragement in order to avoid burnout; the same must be said surrounding principal development. School districts must recognize the principal development process and commit to a three-year commitment of
individual support. Given the amount of responsibilities and expectations that school principals experience, they must be afforded even more support, assistance, and encouragement than anyone else. While a teacher can look down the hall for a colleague to offer advice or reassurance during a difficult situation, the principal does not have that luxury. The role of the school principal is unique and warrants differentiated support to address individual challenges.

While the research is clear that school leaders matter to student achievement, this study’s findings show that principal preparation programs have not kept the pace with the need for change. I recommend frequent, continuous and formal evaluation processes for program improvement, based on graduates’ feedback data. The only way to truly know if the program is keeping up with the needs of school principals is to ask them.

District-university (or private-based alternative certification programs) partnerships are essential. A successful university-district partnership, which can serve as a model for other agencies, was developed at The University of Texas at Austin (UT). UT has partnered with school districts surrounding the Austin area to train aspiring principals, who are selected through a rigorous recruitment process. One component of the program includes an 8-week course where students, as a cohort, participate in problem-based learning by conducting a school study. By using real data to study, explore and engage in problem solving, aspiring principals are provided with a more reflective and collaborative way to understand the role of a principal in today’s schools.

There must also be action in redesigning principal preparation programs by building on what we know from current research, such as this study, and by creating stronger relationships with school districts. School districts are the ultimate employers of program graduates and should have much more to say in continuous improvement efforts. Particular concern has been
expressed about the quality of and effectiveness of principal internships. Principal internships serve as the critical link between theory and practice (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003); however, concerns about the inadequacy in these internships were articulated by many of the neophyte principals interviewed in this study. These opportunities to be mentored by current principals must be more innovative and emphasize relevant, authentic learning experiences. Rather than spending a year observing their mentor principal, aspiring principals would benefit more by being allowed to progressively assume leadership responsibilities, by observing, participating, then facilitating tasks. Guided by principal mentors and university-based faculty, aspiring principals will receive a more “real” perspective of life as a principal. It is also imperative to implement effective clinical internships that expose aspiring principals to multiple school sites, where they can get more than one principal’s outlook on the school leader experience. This process may also enable aspiring principals to broaden the professional network of administrative contacts early in his or her career.

Plainly put, the problem is this: Districts are failing to create the conditions that make it possible for principals to lead school improvement effectively (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). School districts must consider feedback from current principals as they design formal neophyte principal support programs and principal professional learning community (PPLC) meetings. It is important that school district-leader administrators complete a needs-assessment at the end of every year with their principals to truly understand how they can better support them. One of the issues articulated by the neophyte principals interviewed was their supervisors did not truly grasp the complexity of the principal role. Partly due to the fact, some of the school district-leaders administrators had not served as a principal for many years, they were out of touch with the current issues faced by their principals. It is vital that the individuals who oversee
principals spend a sizeable amount of time at the campus level, in order to comprehend the daily experiences of current principals.

School districts who choose to utilize a mentoring program for neophyte principals must ensure there is a formalized structure that is adhered to. They must choose mentor principals who (1) have demonstrated positive results during their tenure as a principal, (2) agree to serve as a mentor principal, and (3) are highly invested in developing neophyte principals’ leadership skills. If one of these three key factors are lacking, the neophyte principal may not receive the proper support he or she not only deserves, but needs to be an effective school leader. The mentoring program model must also delineate the arrangement of contact between mentor and mentee. Although there may be some phone or email exchanges between these two individuals, there should be at least four face-to-face meetings – two in the fall semester and two in the spring semester. This will enable the neophyte principal to plan, collaborate, and reflect with the mentor throughout the first full year of the principalship. Rather than providing bits and pieces of support in isolation, meaningful dialogue and effective mentorship may demonstrate higher levels of benefit for neophyte principals.

Another important recommendation is for school districts to ensure that the principal professional learning community (PPLC) meetings are seen as beneficial and meaningful to current neophyte principals. Many of the principal interviewees spoke about how they disliked the current framework of the principal professional learning community meetings held by their respective school districts because they were often irrelevant to their current needs. School districts can address this concern by affirming principals’ needs through increased collaborative and supportive relationships and by structuring formal principal meetings in such a way that they focus on support services to assist with current school improvement efforts. By soliciting
feedback from neophyte principals, upcoming principal meetings can be shaped by valuable activities to assist them with daily issues, instead of communicating managerial information that can be shared through an email. The opportunities for principals to network and collaborate at principal meetings was found to be one of the top benefits for neophyte principals and should continue to be a major component of principal professional learning community. Breaking up PPLCs into small groups, either by learning community or grade-level incites more meaningful conversations and sharing of useful knowledge between principals. This approach enables the neophyte principals to share questions and concerns in a non-threatening environment.

With remarkable consistency, neophyte principals and school district-level administrator interviewees reported that instructional leadership was their number one focus. However, over half of the neophyte principals admitted to struggling with increasing their instructional leadership skills. The secondary school neophyte principals relied heavily on their leadership team and curriculum coaches to lead the way surrounding instructional issues. School districts must do more to fill in this gap. Principals must have a solid understanding of how to prioritize matters related to instructional leadership. This will help them with time management, which is a prominent concern for all neophyte principals, as well. Providing extensive professional development on what to look for in classrooms and how to have instructionally-based conversations with teachers may empower neophyte principals to demonstrate actions and behaviors which support high-quality instruction. Without these crucial skills, principals may retreat to their offices or to other managerial tasks, which may be detrimental to the success of their campus.
Future Research

The Role of Professional Development in Promoting Reflective Practices for Principals

The findings of this study revealed the importance of self-reflection and reflective practice among neophyte principals. While the participants agree that reflective practice is extremely beneficial, as they are tasked with a multitude of duties throughout the school day, they state that this is mainly an activity practiced outside normal school hours. An area of future study is how the implementation of formal and informal support systems benefit and enhance reflective leadership practice not only for neophyte principals, but also for veteran principals. The involvement and support of school district-leader interviewees surrounding principals’ reflective practices could be examined; furthermore, a study of this nature would provide information how CODAs themselves use reflection as a leadership tool. The role of emotional intelligence and its relationship to self-reflection among principals can be investigated as a possible indicator of positive school culture.

Tapping into the Principal Pipeline: Assistant Principal Development

School district leaders frequently report that the supply of principals is diminishing rapidly (Bottoms, O’Neill, Fry & Hill, 2003). Some schools are lucky to have excellent principals and some do not. What is missing is a reliable leadership development system that takes the luck out of the hiring equation. Further research could answer the following question: Why are there so many administrators who are certified, but not qualified to lead a successful school? Earning administrative credentials will certify someone to become a principal, but he or she may still lack the criteria needed in order to lead a school to excellence. Where are the high performers? Many may already be busy helping students succeed today as assistant principals.
While the traditional path to becoming a principal has been to become an assistant principal first, many highly capable teachers avoid this path because they see assistant principals as being too far removed from instructional leadership. Only when principals view the assistant principalship as a training ground for future principals does the position mirror the principals’ work and allow these leaders to play a key role in academic achievement. The majority of this study’s participants articulated their lack of support as aspiring principals, which hindered their skills when they were hired as a principal. Mostly, due to lack of appropriate training at the district and campus level when they were assistant principals. Further studies into this topic could create awareness for the importance of building leadership capacity in schools and possibly seeing positive outcomes for early principal preparation at the assistant principal level.

*Preparation Programs for 21st Century Principals*

There is considerable case-study research identifying components of effective preparation programs for aspiring school leaders (Fuller, Young, & Baker, 2011; Braun, Gable, & Kite, 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Briggs et al., 2013; Yoder, Freed, & Fetters, 2014). The importance of preparation programs, whether university-based or by other independent organizations, and the effect of producing school leaders who will have positive impacts on student achievement cannot be overlooked. Few states currently require preparation programs to provide evidence of positive outcomes, such as principal retention rates or impacts on student learning (Briggs et al, 2013). Based on the responses of the participants in this study, it would be beneficial to explore the effectiveness of current preparation programs for aspiring school leaders and examine if these programs are providing research-based strategies surrounding the role of the principal in the 21st century. Although there are no readily available ratings or report cards for preparation programs, there are tools and rubrics available for rating program content,
pedagogy, clinical practice, recruitment and selection, and graduate performance outcomes using resources provided by The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

**Strategic Principal Placement**

One of the findings of this study addressed socialization issues for neophyte principals and the challenges associated with transitioning into a new school environment. Principal succession was also identified as an obstacle for several of the interviewees, especially when replacing a principal who had been at the helm for an extended period of time. Many of the study participants also referred to this as an ongoing challenge, since the majority of their colleagues had been moved to a new school at least five times within their careers and had shared their frustrations within PPLCs.

One area of future study is to investigate the effectiveness of replacing a principal as a necessary step to improve persistently low-performing schools, which have been done to both improve the quality of leadership and to create a disruption in dysfunctional processes that halt school-wide reform. Recent studies have indicated that principal effectiveness, just like teacher effectiveness, increases with experience. Therefore, limiting principal turnover may actually improve outcomes in the long run (Clark, Martorell, & Rockoff, 2009; Le Floch et al., 2014). Study findings may uncover the possible relationship between school achievement gains and principal turnover, as the evidence-based findings by ESSA conclude there are no positive correlations between turnover and outcomes at this time.

**Rethinking Principal Evaluations**

As part of the process to build individual leadership capacity and school effectiveness, it is time to rethink principal evaluation system. Another area of future research is to examine a framework for principal evaluations that can guide the improvement of professional practices
that leads to increased student learning. The framework may contain key elements of leadership responsibility that fall within the principal’s range of influence, such as school culture and instructional leadership. By involving principals in the creation of this evaluation system design, it allows their voice to be heard on how they perceive the evaluation system supports their career growth. Evaluation should not be something that is done to principals; however, incorporating principals as active contributors allow them to use this document as a way to receive quality feedback from school district leader administrators. For neophyte principals, this would be a valuable tool to inform them of their learning and progress.

The Effects of Principal Turnover on Student Achievement

Principal turnover is a common phenomenon nationwide (Miller, 2009). In addition, more turnover takes place at low performing schools and schools located in high poverty communities (Besley & Machin, 2008; Cullen & Mazzeo (2008). Understanding the effects that accompany principal turnover is important because it will have greater impacts on disadvantaged students. A focus area for future study are the measurement of student achievement at schools that will (1) undergo a principal transition, (2) are undergoing a principal transition, and (3) have completed a principal transition. The school’s performance data, using state assessment scores, could be studied for trends, in regards to the timeline of principal transition. It would be interesting to see if there is a relationship between student performance and principal turnover and if so, it would be note-worthy to study the effects on teacher retention.
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Appendix A
Neophyte Principal Interview Questions

Warm-Up Question

1. What was your initial reaction to becoming a principal? Describe your feelings as you told your immediate family. What was their reaction?
   a. What was your first fear after hearing the news?
   b. What did you feel excited about after hearing the news?
   c. What was your first day at your new school like?

Part I: The First 30 Days

1. Describe your first 30 days as a school principal.
   a. What professional development training did you receive after transitioning into the principalship?
   b. Was there a formal entry process for your first day of work?
   c. Were you offered any formal support after you accepted the position? If so, what types of support and were they helpful?

2. Describe the culture of the campus when you arrived.

3. Talk about the challenges you experienced when you reported to your new campus.
   a. What challenges did you face when the students arrived on campus?
   b. Who did you lean on for support?

4. What would you say were the accomplishments you are most proud off when you first arrived? How about after your first week?

5. What were the biggest mistakes you made? Why?
   a. Were you able to resolve them? How?
   b. Were there any decisions that you made that you had to revisit?
c. Did you make changes immediately?

6. Think about your transition from survival mode to stabilization mode, where you started to feel comfortable in your new role. How did you know you had made this transition?

**Part II: The First Academic Year**

1. Over the course of your first year as a school principal, what types of support did you feel were most helpful? What types of support were you not provided that would have helped you be more successful?

2. Given your experience in a principal preparation program and previous administrative roles, do you feel you were adequately prepared for the principalship?

3. Regarding university or alternative principal preparation programs, what would you suggest they need to teach to prepare new principals?

4. Did you have the opportunity to participate in a professional learning community with other district principals?
   a. If so, was this a formal or informal professional learning community?
   b. Who facilitated this group and what did you discuss?
   c. Did you find this support helpful? If so, in what ways? If not, why?

5. Did you have a mentor? If so, was he/she formally assigned to you? Describe this protocol (number of times you met, length of time, location). Did you find this support helpful?

6. Did you have any informal types of support? If so, please describe details. Did you find this support helpful?
7. Talk about how you developed interpersonal relationships with your faculty and staff. What strategies did you employ? Do you believe these relationships were crucial for your success during your first year?

8. When did you make the transition to risk taker? How did you know you were ready to make this transition?

9. What is your biggest success story after your first full year as a school principal? What are you most proud of?

Part III: Recommendations for Aspiring Principals

1. What recommendations would you offer an aspiring principal regarding:
   a. Leadership style?
   b. Instructional leadership?
   c. Relationships?
   d. Creating a culture of high standards?
   e. Implementing change?

2. What do you think an aspiring principal should take away from your experiences? What advice would you give him/her?
Appendix B

School District-Level Administrator Interview Questions

1. In your opinion, what are the characteristics of a successful principal?

2. When interviewing candidates for principal openings in your school district, what do you believe are necessary qualities in order to be considered for the position?

3. Reflecting back on conversations you had with neophyte principals within the last two years, what were their major challenges?

4. Give detailed examples of supports your school district provides neophyte principals.

5. What prerequisite information and/or skills do you think are essential for aspiring administrators, so that they are successful during their first year?

6. You serve as a resource for neophyte principals in your school district. Are you provided with professional development opportunities on how to assist neophyte principals? If so, please describe in detail.

7. What do you personally do to support and ensure success of neophyte principals?
Appendix C

Cover Letter for Demographic Questionnaire

Dear Principal/District Level Administrator,

My name is Angela M. Reyna and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Foundations Department. The purpose of my research is to explore personal experiences of neophyte (first year) principals. I will interview principals hired within the last 15 months, in order to investigate their personal experiences during the first year in the new role. I will also gather data from central office district administrators regarding district support initiatives, including how they personally support neophyte principals in their respective school district. The data collected will add to the literature on how neophyte principals can best be supported, so that they feel they have experienced a positive and successful start as principal.

You are being asked to be in the study because you are (1) a principal who was appointed to the role within the last 15 months or (2) a central office district administrator who previously or currently supervise or support principals. If you decide to enroll in this study, your involvement will be (1) completing a brief demographic questionnaire, (2) one hour face-to-face interview, and (3) possible follow-up phone call from the researcher, if needed, for clarification of interview data collected.

As part of my study, I would like to ask you to complete a brief demographic questionnaire. Your participation is completely voluntary and refusing to participate will not cause any penalties. You will not be compensated for taking part in this research study. The information collected will remain confidential and anonymous. Only I will receive the data, which will be stored on a password protected and encrypted computer stored at a secured location.

If you have any questions regarding the procedures of this study, you can contact me via telephone at (915) 258-4999 or email at angelams@miners.utep.edu. In compliance with UTEP’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol, any information you provide will be kept confidential.

Any questions regarding the conduct of this research or your rights as a research participant may be directed to the IRB administrator at (915) 747-7693. If you agree to participate in the study:

- Please sign the attached Informed Consent Form for Research Involving Human Subjects document and email the signed document to angelams@miners.utep.edu.
- I have provided you with a link for the demographic questionnaire. Please click on the link and follow the instructions to successfully complete it.

Sincerely,

Angela M. Reyna
Doctoral Student
Educational Leadership and Foundations Department
The University of Texas at El Paso
Appendix D
University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) Institutional Review Board
Informed Consent Form for Research Involving Human Subjects

Protocol Title: The Neophyte Principal: Navigating Year One
Principal Investigator: Angela M. Reyna
UTEP Educational Leadership and Foundations Department

1. Introduction
You are being asked to take part voluntarily in the research project described below. Please take your time making a decision and feel free to discuss it with your friends and family. Before agreeing to take part in this research study, it is important that you read the consent form that describes the study. Please ask the study researcher or study staff to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

_____________________________________________________________________________

2. Why is this study being done?
You have been asked to take part in a research study exploring personal experiences of neophyte (first year) principals. Principals hired within the last 15 months will be interviewed, in order to investigate their personal experiences during the first year in the new role. The researcher will also gather data from central office district administrators regarding district support initiatives, including how they personally support neophyte principals in their respective school district. The data collected will add to the literature on how neophyte principals can best be supported, so that they feel they have experienced a positive and successful start as principal. Approximately, 10-15 principals and 4-6 central office district administrators will be enrolling in this study at UTEP. You are being asked to be in the study because you are (1) a principal who was appointed to the role within the last 15 months or (2) a central office district administrator who previously or currently supervise or support principals. If you decide to enroll in this study, your involvement will be (1) completing a brief demographic questionnaire, (2) one hour face-to-face interview, and (3) possible follow-up phone call from the researcher, if needed, for clarification of interview data collected.

_____________________________________________________________________________

3. What is involved in the study?
If you agree to take part in this study, the researcher will:

- Email each participant a link for a brief demographic questionnaire (10-15 minutes)
• Contact the participant via email to schedule a one-hour face-to-face interview, which will be audio-recorded. Location, date, and time of interview will be at the participant’s convenience.
• Transcribe audio recordings of all interviews and analyze this recorded data for themes and patterns, aligned with the research questions and the literature.
• Contact participants by phone for clarification of data, if needed.

4. What are the risks and discomforts of the study?
There are no known risks associated with this research.

5. What will happen if I am injured in this study?
The University of Texas at El Paso and its affiliates do not offer to pay or cover the cost of medical treatment for research related illness or injury. No funds have been set aside to pay or reimburse you in the event of such injury or illness. You will not give up any of your legal rights by signing this consent form. You should report any such injury to Angela M. Reyna at (915) 258-4999 and to the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (915) 747-7693 or irb.orsp@utep.edu.

6. Are there benefits to taking part in this study?
There will be no direct benefits to you for taking part in this study. There are educational benefits as the research findings may help us to better understand the role of the principal, how principal preparation programs and school districts can effectively support neophyte principals, and offer recommendations to aspiring principals, so that they feel they have a positive and successful start in their role as principal.

7. What other options are there?
You have the option not to take part in this study. There will be no penalties involved if you choose not to take part in this study.

8. Who is paying for this study?
No funding from any organization or agency is being provided for this study.
9. **What are my costs?**

There are no direct costs. You will be responsible for travel to and from the research site and any other incidental expenses.

10. **Will I be paid to participate in this study?**

You will not be compensated for taking part in this research study.

11. **What if I want to withdraw, or am asked to withdraw from this study?**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you do not take part in the study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit.

If you choose to take part, you have the right to skip any questions or stop at any time. However, we encourage you to talk to the researcher, so that she understands why you have decided to leave the study. If there are any new findings during the study that may affect whether you want to continue to take part, you will be told about them.

The researcher may decide to stop your participation without your permission, if she thinks that being in the study may cause you harm.

12. **Who do I call if I have questions or problems?**

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may call Angela M. Reyna at (915) 258-4999 or via email at angelams@miners.utep.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your participation as a research subject, please contact the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (915) 747-7693 or via email at irb.orsp@utep.edu.

13. **What about confidentiality?**

Your part in this study is confidential. None of the information will identify you by name. The researcher will utilize pseudonyms for all identifying descriptors, such as school district, campus, and participant names. All records, to include audio recordings, questionnaires, and transcriptions will be kept in a secured locking file cabinet, which will be located in Dr. Angus Mungal’s (researcher’s advisor) UTEP office and will not be accessible to anyone other than the researcher. All records will be destroyed after the study is completed.
14. **Mandatory reporting**

If information is revealed about child abuse or neglect, or potentially dangerous future behavior to others, the law requires that this information be reported to the proper authorities.

15. **Authorization Statement**

I have read each page of this paper about the study (or it was read to me). I know that being in this study is voluntary and I choose to be in this study. I know I can stop being in this study without penalty. I will get a copy of this consent form now and can get information on results of the study later if I wish.

Participant Name: __________________________________   Date: ______________________

Participant Signature: _______________________________   Time: ______________________

_____ I agree to be audiotaped for interview   _____ I do not agree to be audiotaped for interview

Consent form explained/witnessed by:

________________________________________________________________

Signature

________________________________________________________________

Printed Name

Date: ______________________   Time: ______________________
Vita

Angela M. Reyna was born and raised in El Paso, Texas. She graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School in 1994. She earned her Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies degree from The University of Texas at El Paso in 2003. In 2005, she received her Master of Educational Administration degree from The University of Texas at El Paso. In 2017, she earned her Doctor of Education degree from The University of Texas at El Paso.

Dr. Reyna was the recipient of several State of Texas Public Education Grants (TPEGs) for graduate students. She has presented to aspiring UTEP doctoral candidates surrounding her personal experience in a doctoral program. Dr. Reyna has also presented at regional conferences, most recently, at Region 19’s Positive Behavior Interventions & Support (PBIS) conference. Her work with Region 19 has allowed her the opportunity to work with school leadership teams, who seek innovative ways to improve school culture, across the El Paso region. Dr. Reyna has also presented at national and state conferences surrounding educational topics, such as college and career-readiness standards, high school reform, and the effectiveness of smaller learning communities (SLCs) within comprehensive high schools.

While pursuing her doctoral degree, Dr. Reyna worked as a full-time campus administrator in the Ysleta Independent School District. She has served the Ysleta ISD community at both the elementary and secondary school levels since 2003. Dr. Reyna will begin her 15th year in education in August 2017 and continue her work in educational leadership at Ysleta ISD. Her long-term goals include continuing her research in educational administration, including publishing a book on best practices for 21st century school leader development.

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This dissertation was typed by the author.