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In What Ways do Formal and Informal Mentoring Experiences

Influence New Administrators' Leadership Practices

by

José Fuentes

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

The Degree of Doctor of Education

Seton Hall University

Department of Education Leadership Management and Policy

2021



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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & HUMAN SERVICES  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION LEADERSHIP MANAGEMENT & POLICY

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## APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

**Jose Fuentes** has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ed.D.** during this **Spring** Semester.

### DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

(please sign and date)

Dr. David Reid

**Mentor**

**Date**

Dr. Alexandra Freidus

**Committee Member**

**Date**

Dr. Maria Ortiz

**Committee Member**

**Date**

The mentor and any other committee members who wish to review revisions will sign and date this document only when revisions have been completed. Please return this form to the Office of Graduate Studies, where it will be placed in the candidate's file and submit a copy with your final dissertation.

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative study examined the ways formal and informal mentoring influences leadership practices in traditional urban schools. The PSEL standards anchored the leadership practices. Ten vice-principals and nine principals with less than 3 years of experience in their roles were interviewed. They included administrators promoted from within the district and those promoted externally. This study addressed the following overarching research questions: In what way(s) does mentoring influence new administrators' leadership practices in traditional urban schools? Five subquestions supplemented this question: (a) In what way(s) does formal mentoring influence administrator leadership practices? (b) In what way(s) does informal mentoring influence administrator leadership practices? (c) How do these experiences vary from principal and vice-principal? (d) How do these experiences vary from those administrators promoted within the district and those external to the district? and (e) How do new administrators in traditional urban schools believe that mentoring and other supports can be improved?

Findings from this study noted that mentoring influenced administrators' leadership practices in all of the 10 PSEL standards. However, mentoring influenced leadership practices in PSEL 4 Curriculum, PSEL 6 Staff Capacity, PSEL 8 Family Engagement, PSEL 9 Operations, and PSEL 10 School Improvement the most. The data showed that formal mentoring influenced PSEL 9 Operations and PSEL 10 School Improvement the most, while informal mentoring influenced leadership practices the most in PSEL 4 Curriculum and PSEL 6 Staff Capacity. The data also revealed that peer group meetings added a significant value to the administrators' formal mentoring experience and helped improve their leadership practices. Another theme that emerged was that most vice-principals and principals reported their supervisors as their informal mentors and described their relationship with their mentors with positivity. Finally, mentoring

influenced the leadership practices of administrators promoted from within the district and those hired externally differently.

The findings provide valuable insights into different stakeholders, including new administrators, mentors, district leaders, and policymakers, on how mentoring and other supports help new administrators address their jobs' challenges and complexities. This study opens the opportunity for future research in a few areas. First, it is important to explore the influence mentoring has on new administrator job performance, not just leadership practices. Second, it is necessary to expand the research to explore the ways peer group meetings add value to the vice-principal's experience and improve their leadership practices. Third, additional research should be conducted to explore the relationship between new administrators and their supervisors' role in their growth and development. Fourth, further research should be done between mentor pairing and the effectiveness of mentoring on the development of new administrators. Fifth, continue to expand on this study's findings of the influence mentoring has on administrators who are promoted from within the district and those promoted externally. Finally, this study focused on the ways mentoring influences leadership practices, but further studies should be done to determine how mentoring influences administrator performance.

Key words: principal mentoring, vice-principal mentoring, administrator leadership practices, PSEL, informal mentoring, formal mentoring, principal supports.

## **Acknowledgments**

I want to thank all of the faculty in the Executive Doctorate in Education Program for providing me with an exceptional learning experience and for helping me solidify my skills in educational leadership. You have demonstrated a genuine interest in my growth as a district leader. Your feedback and guidance have improved my practice for the past two years.

I want to thank all members of Cohort 23 for your friendship and professional support. I have learned a great deal from you, and I thank you for taking my calls to answer my questions.

I want to give a special thank you to our fabulous, courageous, and passionate principals and vice-principals who participated in this study. I have learned a great deal about mentoring from your stories and perspectives. Keep leading with grace and confidence.

Thank you to my committee, Dr. Reid, Dr. Freidus, and Dr. Ortiz, for agreeing to part of my journey. Dr. Reid, since day one, you have been supportive and kind. Your comprehensive feedback was critical to my growth, and it built my confidence. Dr. Freidus, I am grateful for helping me focus my research and for your targeted feedback. Dr. Ortiz, you have been instrumental in my successful completion of this project. Thank you for your words of encouragement, robust feedback, weekly check-ins, and friendship.

This journey could not be possible without the support of my friends and family. Omar and Adriana, your support fueled me when I felt discouraged. Gerson and Jessica, you took on many of my responsibilities while I was occupied with finishing this program. Mom and Dad, thank you for reminding me to maintain a balance in life and to keep a healthy body, mind, and soul.

Finally, I thank God. I can do all things through Him.

J. F.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my mom Edith and my dad Omar. From my first day in Kindergarten to completing this project, you have supported every step of my education. Your words of encouragement and constantly raising the bar higher and higher have inspired me to keep pushing for excellence. You left the comforts of home to afford me a better chance at life, and for that, I will always be grateful.

To my beautiful children, Eli, Valentina, Lukas, and Levi, you have been my motivation. My Eli, you are our firstborn. From the first moment I met you, you opened a new level of love in my heart. Continue to be curious, noble, and courageous in life. My Valentina, your smile fills me with pure happiness and hope. Continue to be empathic, strong, and independent in life. My Lukas, you keep me on my toes. Continue to be confident, strong-minded, and a guardian to those around you. My Levi, you are our youngest, and your calm brings me serenity. Continue to be the peacemaker, the voice of reason, and the one who brings joy to those around you. I challenge all of you to excel, aim high, and reach loftier goals than my generation. You can do it!

Finally, to my Poppa. Few can ever endure what you have. Few can ever come back from where you went. Few can ever have the courage to continue headstrong in life as you have. You have risen to a stronger, braver, and wiser version of yourself. Your perseverance and determination continue to inspire me. I love you.

To all of you, we did it!



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Context of the Study**

The role of school administrators is complex, demanding, and ever evolving. Principals and vice-principals are responsible for, among many things, effective instruction, student discipline, the development and hiring of teachers and staff, increasing student achievement, ensuring that schools are safe and clean, ensuring that the district and school goals are met, and supporting school finance and parental engagement (Harvey & Holland, 2011; Lynch, 2012; Meador, 2020; Walker & Crow, 2006). The principal's scope of practice has widened in the last few decades, and there is significant pressure on principals to perform at high levels in all these areas. Principals' responsibilities increased in 2001 with the passing of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) by Congress, which heightened accountability in school systems. The new law increased the rigor of academic standards in an effort to close the achievement gap. Closing the achievement gap is no easy feat to accomplish, especially with lack of resources and training. Critics of NCLB have asserted that the law focused too much time on testing rather than quality instruction, and it was a one-size-fits-all approach to improving education (Haller, Hunt, Pacha, & Fazekas, 2016). Congress's latest attempt to improve education in the United States came in 2015 with the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Unlike NCLB, ESSA was developed using empirical evidence and research that demonstrate the principal's influence on creating an educational environment conducive to teaching and learning (Wahlstrom, Seashore, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). The focus on principal training, support, and development are more pronounced in ESSA than in NCLB. For example, new provisions in ESSA allow states to allocate up to 3% of Title II funds to

specifically support principals and other school leaders (Haller et al., 2016). The focus on principal development and support is in response to the demands and heightened accountability in the law. The emphasis on school administrator supports and professional development opportunities also serves to retain principals in the profession.

Principal retention is an issue across our nation, especially in low-performing and urban school districts. A few national studies have shown that about 20% of principals leave public schools each year (Battle, 2010; Cullen & Mazzeo, 2008; Taie & Goldring, 2017). The studies revealed several reasons principals leave: lack of resources and funding, stricter state and federal standards and accountability, compensation and salary, and lack of professional development and support (Levin & Bradley, 2019).

Although mentoring cannot directly change the reasons principals leave the profession, mentoring can indirectly influence those factors. Mentors can profoundly influence principals' leadership practices that, in the end, can yield substantial growth in student outcomes and an improved culture of teaching and learning at their schools (Browne & Muth, 2004; Daresh, 2004). This qualitative study examined the ways mentoring influences new administrators' leadership practices in a traditional urban school district in New Jersey. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) were used to identify the leadership practices.

### **Problem Statement**

Principal retention in schools is a problem nationwide. The problem becomes even more significant as one considers the principals' retention rate in urban schools or high-poverty schools. A School Leaders Network report estimated that more than half of the principals left in the third year (Superville, 2018; Tyre, 2015). Many districts across the nation are making substantial efforts to curb the loss of principals and invest a significant number of resources into

programs and initiatives to retain principals. These initiatives include pipeline/aspiring principal programs (Gates et al., 2019), stronger principal training programs and development series (Gerew et al., 2015), and principal mentoring (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018). The principal turnover rate is significant enough that it has gotten the attention of several state legislators who have enacted several policies to reduce the number of school administrators leaving the profession (Matlach, 2015). More than half of the states have adopted or require principals to enroll in a formal mentoring program (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018).

The existing body of literature on principal mentoring across the country shows the need to have such programs and initiatives in districts and the positive impact mentoring has on new principals (Augustine-Shaw, 2015). Most districts and states require 1-2 years of mentoring for new principals or administrators (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018). Yet, research has shown that principals become more productive with time and need to remain at a school for at least 5 years before fully implementing policies and leadership (Matlach, 2015). In New Jersey, administrators need to enroll in a 2-year induction program that assigns a mentor.

Thirty-two percent of principals with less than 5 years of experience leave their schools, according to the Principal Attrition and Mobility results of 2016-2017 (Goldring & Taie, 2018). The same survey results showed that 17.5% of principals with less than 3 years of experience leave their schools. The number of principals leaving their schools after their third year is significant. This third year is around the time principal's formal mentoring period ends. New administrators who enroll in the New Jersey Leaders 2 Leaders (NJL2L) program are assigned a mentor for their first 2 years and experience informal mentoring at their school districts. However, it is not unusual for a school administrator to be in their third year while finishing the program.

There is literature on the role of the principal and principal mentoring programs. However, the literature becomes more limited in the vice-principal role and the influence mentoring has on vice-principals. The literature is less robust in examining the ways formal and informal mentoring influence the development of new administrators' leadership practices in urban schools. Most mentoring programs do not follow school administrators beyond their second year. A critique of mentoring programs is that they fail to bridge the gap between the principal's critical third year, where school districts lose most of them, and their fifth year, where most principals demonstrate effectiveness as leaders. School districts must make every effort to develop administrators who have constant support and on-the-job mentoring to ensure they stay at their schools well into their fifth year, when principal performance peaks (Gerew et al., 2015). This study explored the ways formal and informal mentoring influenced new principals and vice-principals' leadership practices in traditional urban schools.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this narrative research study was to examine the ways formal and informal mentoring influenced new administrators' leadership practices in traditional urban schools. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) were used to identify the leadership practices that lead to improved student outcomes. The study included the voices of nine new principals and 10 new vice-principals with 1-3 years of experience in traditional public schools that are part of a large urban district. Each type of administrator was divided into two categories: administrators promoted from within the district and those promoted externally. Both types of administrators participated in formal mentoring. They had informal mentoring experiences, both utilized the PSEL as a framework for identifying leadership practices, and both used the same principal certification license to be school administrators in New Jersey.



### **Significance of the Work**

The study will help district leaders identify the strengths and gaps in new administrators' formal and informal mentoring experiences. Recommendations were made on how to address those deficiencies. This study will also inform districts on developing a mentoring program for administrators, especially after their 2-year required formal mentoring program. Districts need to address the current principal turnover rate because of the negative impact on our students' achievement, school culture, and teacher retention. School districts must make every effort to develop administrators who have constant support and on-the-job mentoring to ensure they stay at their schools well into their fifth year. Student performance data from Chicago showed that principal performance peaks around 5 years (Gerew et al., 2015). The chances of improving student outcomes, closing the achievement gap, and developing stronger teachers will only increase if school districts invest in our school administrators. Finally, this study will shed light on the vice-principals' experiences in formal and informal mentoring. The vice-principal voices have been mostly absent from research conducted on the subject of mentoring.

### **Research Questions**

1. In what way(s) does mentoring influence new administrators' leadership practices in traditional urban schools?
  - a. In what way(s) does formal mentoring influence administrator leadership practices?
  - b. In what way(s) does informal mentoring influence administrator leadership practices?
  - c. How do these experiences vary from principal and vice-principal?

- d. How do these experiences vary from those administrators promoted within the district and those external to the district?
- e. How do new administrators in traditional urban schools believe that mentoring and other supports can be improved?

### **Research Design**

A qualitative study that employed a narrative research design helped me answer the research questions stated above. A narrative research was used to describe the lives of individuals through their own stories (Butina, 2015). These stories were the experiences of the individuals, and it was my responsibility to collect the stories, report the experiences, and analyze the individual stories. I then identified patterns and themes that shed light on the ways formal and informal mentoring influenced school administrators' leadership practices. The results derived from the stories are a wealth of detailed information that will lead to a deeper understanding of formal and informal mentoring and the influence that both have on new administrators' leadership practices.

### **Key Terms**

**Formal Mentoring** - For this study, the term refers to the required New Jersey Leaders 2 Leaders (NJL2L) mentoring program in which new administrators must enroll and complete before receiving their principal standard certificate. The formal mentoring period is for 2 years.

**Informal Mentoring** - A supportive relationship between a mentor and mentee that is not formally assigned but rather initiated voluntarily by either. During this relationship, "one gains insights, knowledge, wisdom, friendship, and support from the other" (Inzer & Crawford, 2005, p. 35).

**New Jersey Leaders 2 Leaders (NJL2L)** - A state-mandated 2-year mentoring and induction program for every newly hired administrator. Upon the completion of this program, the administrator/resident is issued a standard certificate.

**Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL)** - Ten standards used by the NJL2L program to ensure that educational leaders are ready to meet the challenges and opportunities of being an administrator effectively. Please see Appendix A for a list of the standards.

**Mentor** - Any present or retired New Jersey school administrator with 5 or more years of experience, who holds a principal standard certificate. This person is assigned to a newly hired school administrator to provide guidance and support while completing the NJL2L program.

**Resident** - A newly hired school administrator enrolled in the NJL2L program who is working towards a standard certificate and is under the guidance of an NJL2L mentor.

**Standard Certificate** - A permanent certificate issued to all administrators who have met the requirements established by the New Jersey Department of Education. This certificate is issued upon the successful completion of the NJL2L program.

### **Overview of Dissertation Topic**

Chapter I of this research presented the study's context, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and the significance of the work. The chapter also expanded on the significance of the work and introduced the primary research question—In what way(s) does mentoring influence new administrators' leadership practices in traditional urban schools?—along with its five subquestions.

Chapter II presents the literature review relevant to the topic. The literature review focuses on the principalship, principal turnover, mentoring and supporting principals, formal and

informal mentoring in New Jersey, and benefits of mentoring. It also focuses on the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), which set the foundation for identifying the leadership practices that mentoring influences. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the gap in the literature.

Chapter III presents the research methods as well as the data sources and collection of the data. The chapter concludes with the data analysis plan and coding scheme.

Chapter IV provides a thorough analysis of the data and findings.

Chapter V includes the summary of the findings, a discussion about the literature, and implications for stakeholders. The chapter also highlights recommendations for school districts, state organizations, and policymakers, as well as suggestions for future research. The last sections of the chapter include the conclusion and final thoughts on the research questions.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways formal and informal mentoring influence new administrators' leadership practices in traditional urban schools. This chapter reviews the relevant literature. It begins with the literature around the principalship and details the multiple responsibilities of a school administrator. Next, I present literature that describes the challenges of principal turnover, why principals are leaving the profession, and what impact this makes on student achievement. After that discussion, the literature review offers a deeper understanding of formal and informal mentoring and its benefits to school administrators. Finally, the review includes the Professional Learning Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) that ground the leadership practices.

#### **The Principalship**

The role of the principal has changed dramatically within the past few years. Although nearly all literature has focused on the principal's role and responsibilities, the vice-principal's role and responsibilities are like those of the principal in many ways. The vice-principal supports the principal in running all aspects of the school. Both school leaders use the same PSEL to guide their leadership practices; they have the same license, and both attend the same training, induction, and mentoring programs.

According to a 2012 survey, three-quarters of all principals indicated that their job has become too complex (Markow, Macia, & Lee, 2013). Federal and state requirements on testing and teacher and principal evaluations have added to the stress. School principals must demonstrate significant gains in state assessments to be considered successful. The pressure to perform is constant and overwhelming. Showing substantial gains in state assessments, this is

easier said than done, and it is notably more difficult in high-needs communities where poverty is considerable. Teacher and principal evaluations are determined not only for what is observed in schools, but the results of the state tests also determine a percentage of the overall evaluation. In New Jersey, the TEACH NJ Act, signed into law in 2012, requires teachers to have more formal observations, a midyear evaluation, and an annual evaluation. These new requirements are more than the one observation and one annual evaluation that were required before the new law. The new law now also requires that a certain percentage of the principal and teacher evaluations be determined by how well their students perform on state assessments. Running a school is no easy feat. Laws, policies, changing demographics, and lack of resources have impacted the way and the level of effectiveness with which principals run their schools (Lynch, 2012). Ultimately, principals wear many hats and are responsible for everything that happens at their schools.

Jeremy Lynch (2012) used the works of Fredrick Hess (2007), Kenneth Leithwood (2004), and Bradley Portin (2004) to describe the contemporary principal's role with seven characteristics, namely: (a) managers of personnel, (b) managers of students, (c) managers of government and public relations, (d) managers of external development, (e) managers of finance, (f) promoters of mission and vision, and (g) managers of instruction and academic performance. These characteristics are a well-rounded representation of the role of the principal. However, one should consider an eighth characteristic: advocates of student social and emotional learning (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019).

### **Managers of Personnel**

Principals must consistently demonstrate leadership in human resources. This area includes recruiting, hiring, firing, retaining, inducting, and mentoring teachers and

administrators. Further, principals must develop leadership capacity and professional development opportunities for all building personnel (Portin, 2004). Principals play a vital role in retaining effective teachers and firing low-performing teachers (Grissom & Bartanen, 2019). Principals are responsible for assessing the quality of teaching and the impact that those practices are having on student achievement. Jason Grissom's (2019) study revealed a strong link between effective principals and the retention of effective teachers. The study also showed that schools led by higher-rated principals had a higher turnover of least effective teachers.

### **Managers of Students**

One of the characteristics of a principal that has not changed over the decades is that of a disciplinarian (Vacca, 1971). Principals must create a culture of teaching and learning at their schools. An essential aspect of maintaining a nurturing environment is developing students' moral character through discipline policies (Colvin & Sugai, 2017). Without effective discipline procedures in place, it is hard for students to learn, for teachers to teach, and for the school building's daily operations to function well. School leaders have developed an increased awareness of the impact of discipline procedures on student development. It is not enough to suspend a child for violating a rule or policy; one must ensure that the child learns from the mistake and develops skills in understanding that are necessary to be a productive student.

### **Managers of Government and Public Relations**

The principal represents the school in the community and advocates for its interests (Portin, 2004). Principals need to maintain a pulse on margining educational trends; be aware of the political climate at the local, county, state, and federal level; and develop and maintain an understanding of educational laws that are current and pending. Successful principals take all this information to engage with key stakeholders to elevate the school's public perception. Principals

must control the narrative that is always being written about their school. They will often use their websites, social media accounts, newsletters, and school events to promote and enhance their school's image.

### **Managers of External Development**

Principals must build strong relationships with families, community-based organizations, and local, county, and state officials because these external entities play a role in the school's success. Maintaining strong relationships with these partners can benefit the principal in many ways, including student discipline, financial resources, material resources, donations, personal time, and overall support for the school (Meador, 2020). Through these relationships, the principal can control the perception of the school in the eyes of the external partners (Hess & Kelly, 2007). Successful principals always nourish existing relationships while also looking to establish more partnerships to benefit the school community.

### **Managers of Finance**

Principals are responsible for maintaining their school's budget and allocating funds aligned with their strategic planning. Although the district gives a pot of money to the schools, it is up to the principal to manage the funds, balance the budget, cut costs, and raise more funds (Portin, 2004). One of the most challenging obstacles principals need to overcome is the financial woes of many districts. A MetLife survey of 500 principals showed that about 70% of principals reported that managing their budget and resources was very challenging while also meeting their students' needs (Markow et al., 2013). That same survey showed that over 50% of those principals reported that their school's budget had decreased in the past 12 months (Markow et al., 2013).



### **Promoters of Mission and Vision**

Bradley Portin (2004) mentioned that principals are the promoters of the school's mission and vision as well as the creators of strategic plans to help meet those goals. Principals set the tone and direction of their school through the mission and vision, and the strategic plans set the drivers and action steps that all stakeholders will use to get there.

### **Managers of Instruction and Academic Performance**

Principals have a strong influence on the quality of teaching and learning at their schools. There is a direct link between the quality of leadership and student learning. Effective principals are responsible for creating learning environments that contribute to an increase in student academic performance (Leithwood et al., 2004). They are continually monitoring the quality of instructional materials in addition to their delivery, implementation, and overall alignment with state assessments. The schedules principals create must fit all aspects of instruction, electives, programs, lunch periods, and preparation periods in one day. In this era of state assessments and accountability, a school's success is measured by how well students perform on those assessments. School leadership has a strong and positive effect on learning environments that increase student achievement (Wahlstrom et al., 2010).

### **Advocates of Student Social and Emotional Learning**

In recent years, there has been an increasing call from school administrators to include social-emotional teaching and learning in the daily schedule. Mathew Atwell and John Bridgeland (2019) stated that in a national representative survey of 710 Grade K-12 principals, 87% believed that state standards should include social-emotional learning (SEL)—almost a double increase from the 2017 survey. Furthermore, the same survey found that 70% of principals believed that teachers should have a formal SEL curriculum to teach these non-

academic skills (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019). The push for SEL stems from principal recommendations and a meta-analysis study of over 200 studies on SEL that showed that students' attendance, test scores, and college success were linked to their level of SEL skills and knowledge (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019).

Staff development, parent engagement, facilities upkeep, hiring and retention of staff, student social and emotional health, curriculum implementation, school safety, management of school budgets, special education, and staff discipline are just a few responsibilities of school administrators. The principal is considered an expert in all these areas and must juggle these components simultaneously. In addition to these areas, there are systems that principals need to know how to navigate in order to manage their schools' daily operations. This past school year, our district hired 15 new principals. I was responsible for giving them access to these systems. By the time I was done, I had 12 items on the list. These new principals had to get their schools ready and learn all 12 systems. The demands of the job have decreased principal satisfaction over the years. In 2004, 76% of principals surveyed were satisfied with their jobs, but in 2012, this number decreased to 59% (Markow et al., 2013). The principalship's intensity and demands have reduced job satisfaction and increased the rate of principal turnover across our country.

### **Principal Turnover**

Denisa R. Superville (2018), Lauren Matlach (2015), and Peg Tyre (2015) wrote about one dimension of principal turnover and the reasons why principals leave the profession. Principals reported stress on the job, long work hours, low salary, accountability mandates, increase paperwork, increase disrespect from students, lack of autonomy, bureaucracy, and isolation as reasons why more than half of principals leave their post after their third year. This dimension of principal turnover refers to the principal's perspective and experience of leading a

school. Principals work longer hours because the demands and the role of the principalship have changed. Jeremy Lynch (2012) explained the different characteristics of the principal role, which are complex and multifaceted. The level of accountability placed on principals is overbearing and driving many principals to decide to leave the profession. The reasons for leaving the principalship might provide districts with the necessary understanding to change policies and adopt supports to prevent or lessen the turnover rate among principals. The first dimension of principal turnover, then, is that principals are deciding to leave, instead of being fired or demoted by district leaders because of low performance, which is the second dimension.

Susan Burkhauser, Susan Gates, Laura Hamilton, and Gina Ikemoto (2012) and Jason Grissom and Brendan Bartanen (2019) wrote about the district deciding to replace principals for underperforming and not improving test scores. This second dimension refers to the district contributing to the principal turnover rate, not the principal making the decision. Burkhauser and Gates studied 519 principals in six urban school districts, including Memphis City Schools, Chicago Public Schools, New York City Public Schools, Washington, DC Public Schools, Baltimore City Public Schools, and the Oakland Unified School District. They found that 22.5% of those principals left within their first and second years. Principals placed in schools that saw increases in state scores in their first year were less likely to leave after 1-2 years (Burkhauser et al., 2012). The study also found that for 78% of the principals who left after their first year, their schools showed a decline in test scores. Burkhauser et al. concluded that low-performing schools have greater scrutiny from district leaders, and the desire to have them demonstrate improvements is far greater than for those performing higher. Furthermore, the researchers found that principal turnover in these districts related to school performance rather than individual

principals' decisions to leave the position. A study of principals in Tennessee made a similar conclusion with a slight difference.

In their study, Grissom and Bartanen (2019) used longitudinal administrative data files from 2011-2015 of all Tennessee schools. The collected data analyzed the evaluations of principals for each of the schools. The data showed that principals with low ratings were more likely to be fired, demoted, or exited from the education system than those with higher ratings. The study also found that the schools with the highest principal turnover were those with the highest number of disadvantaged students and the lowest achievement scores. One of the study's significant findings was that the principal's low or high performance predicted turnover. For example, principals who performed poorly were demoted and exited out, and principals who rated high were promoted to central office positions. This study was critical because it considered the district's decision to eliminate ineffective principals and its decision to promote talented principals to central office roles, which Burkhauser et al.'s study did not do.

Whether the principal decides to leave the profession or the district chooses to replace a low-performing principal or promote a high-performing principal, there is a negative impact on school performance quality. In their study, Burkhauser et al. (2012) found that most schools that lose a principal after one year see a steady decline in student achievement scores in subsequent years. Ashley Miller (2013) conducted a study using 12 years of administrative data from North Carolina to explore the relationship between principal turnover and student achievement. One of her research findings was that student achievement scores fell for two years following a new principal's appointment. Compared to schools with zero or one principal transition, those schools with two or more principal transitions showed, on average, lower test scores (Miller, 2013).

Miller's study also revealed that schools with a higher number of eligible students for free lunch and many teachers not returning to the school had higher principal turnover.

In summary, a principal's decision to leave the profession or a district's decision to terminate or promote a principal to central office roles compounds the turnover issue at all schools. The adverse impact that a new principal has on student achievement data and teacher retention of a school is significant. The evidence has suggested that principals who serve the neediest students and the most underperforming schools require the greatest support. These schools need effective principals to lead them beyond their first, second, or third year. Nelson Gerew (2015) studied principal retention in Chicago public schools and concluded that principals' performance peaks around Year 5. Student achievement is higher when an experienced principal is at the helm (Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012). It is imperative to stop principal turnover and find ways to support them during their first few years.

### **Mentoring and Supporting Principals**

Lauren Matlach (2015), Denisa R. Superville (2014), Lee Mitang (2012), Okasana Parylo (2012), Southern Regional Education Board (Gray, Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neill, 2007), and Larry Lashway (2003) all upheld mentoring as a critical strategy for supporting and developing new principals. New principals need someone to guide them through the hectic and very demanding first few years of their profession. Mentoring programs have been most effective at building instructional skills when there is a tight match between the expertise, needs, leadership style, and school experience of the coach and the novice principal and training for the mentor. Parylo's study found that new principals reported the most positive experience through formal and informal mentoring (Parylo, Zepeda, & Bengtson, 2012).

New school principals need a more structured level of support to meet the job's demands and challenges (Sciarappa & Mason, 2014). One way of doing this is through principal mentoring. Specifically, Sciarappa and Mason focused their study on the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) mentoring program, a 9-month-long principal mentoring program. A novice principal is assigned a mentor to provide job-embedded skills, strengthen competencies, and build leadership capacity. The mentors of this program are trained by a mentor coach throughout the 9 months. They meet monthly online to discuss articles and books related to leadership coaching and mentoring. The NAESP mentor needs to have at least 5 years of administrative experience and be a current or retired administrator.

One of the strengths of Sciarappa and Mason's study is that it focused on the efficacy of the mentor program for the mentees. The study sought to find the mentors' level of effectiveness in the development of novice principals. The study found that 96% of the 54 respondents were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the mentoring they received. Furthermore, 69% of the respondents were most grateful for the mentor support around instructional leadership. Although the number of respondents was relatively low, this study helped determine how a principal mentoring program can develop a new principal or an administrator and how successful the leaders are at their schools. The study further reinforced the need for states and districts to have a strong principal mentoring program.

Another relevant study was Phyllis Gimbel's (2018) research on the perceptions of a principal mentoring initiative in Vermont. In 2011, Vermont's legislature passed a bill to support principals with mentors for the first 2 years in their new positions. Vermont is not alone in requiring a minimum of 2 years of mentorship; California, Hawaii, Missouri, and New Jersey are the other four states with the same requirement, while 11 other states that require a minimum of

one year. Delaware is the only state that requires more than 2 years of mentoring. One of the Vermont principal mentoring initiative goals is not only to offer support and strengthen the leadership capacity of new school leaders but also to help the principals stay in the profession. Gimbel's study was unique because it surveyed not only mentees but also mentors.

Furthermore, the study asked mentees if their mentors played a role in helping them stay in the profession. Most respondents indicated that the purpose of having a mentor was to reduce attrition rates. Gimbel, however, could not provide data about principal retention in Vermont since the new law came into effect. However, 93.75% of the mentees felt that their mentors had a significant and positive impact on their job performance.

The data collected also revealed that mentors who met more than twice a month with their mentees were generally more successful in their mentoring relationship. Therefore, a recommendation to improve the mentoring program is to mandate more one-on-one time between mentor and mentee. Additionally, the mentees reported that having a mentor from the same district is more beneficial than having a mentor who is not affiliated with the district. Gimbel concluded that having a principal mentoring program can positively affect teaching and learning in the school and potentially help retain principals.

Donna Augustine-Shaw (2015) detailed creating a Building Leader Mentoring and Induction task force in Kansas after the need to support the complex role and responsibilities of new principals. The task force met in 2012 to develop a shared vision for the mentoring and induction of first-year principals in Kansas. After establishing some clear goals for the program, the task force went a step further and created a survey sent out to superintendents, experienced principals, and first-year principals. All superintendents and principals in Kansas received the survey, and 65% of superintendents, 46% of all principals, and 43% of first-year principals

responded. In the narrative of responses, superintendents identified the need for mentors to receive training and structured time between mentor and mentee. Principal respondents reported the need to have rich professional development in leadership activities, community outreach, developing leadership capacity in others, and setting goals. Furthermore, 49% of principals and 46% of superintendents rated their current mentor program in their district as being ineffective. The task force utilized the results of these surveys to implement a pilot program.

The mentoring and induction pilot program included four components: (a) provision of full mentoring and induction services for districts with no or a limited principal mentoring program; (b) addressing of critical attributes of community outreach and building leadership capacity in others; (c) provision of training for mentors; and (d) provision of leadership seminars on current issues (Augustine-Shaw, 2015). The pilot program was launched in 2013, and 19 new principals and 17 practicing principal-mentors participated. This study stopped short of analyzing the pilot program's success, but it highlighted the tremendous need for novice principals to have mentors during their first years in the role.

In summary, states and districts are using mentoring to attract and train new principals. The complexities of the job, the demands placed on principals, and the principal's importance for student achievement and teacher retention are reasons why new principals need support from a mentor (Education Alliance at Brown University and the National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2003). Some states require new principals to receive mentoring services, while some school districts have designed or want to implement a principal mentoring program. In each of these examples, the goal is to attract, retain, support, and develop principals.



## **Formal and Informal Mentoring in New Jersey**

### **Formal Mentoring**

New Jersey Leaders 2 Leaders (NJL2L) is the formal mentoring and induction program for all new school leaders in New Jersey. During the 2 years of the program, the new administrators, who are residents, are paired with an experienced mentor. This mentoring program consists of school visit observations and one-on-one conferences. Furthermore, the program has monthly peer-support group meetings that provide an opportunity for team mentoring, where mentors and residents from different districts get together to network, discuss experiences, and provide collegial support (NJL2L, 2020). Residents must complete 2 years of the residency and other requirements before receiving their standard principal certification from the New Jersey Department of Education.

Mentors must have 5 years of experience as a principal and must hold a standard principal certificate in New Jersey. Mentors must apply online, submit their resumes, and attend 2 days of mentor training before becoming a mentor. Current mentors must attend an all-day recertification training each year. Once mentors are selected, the program coordinator assigns mentors to residents based on the mentor's experience related to types of positions held, experience in certain grade levels, district/community types, and school types.

Mentors are expected to meet regularly with the resident to provide support in completing residency activities and meet the challenges of leading their schools. Mentors and residents meet one-on-one for conferences, on-site visitations and observations, and during the monthly peer support or professional collaboration group meetings. Residents usually have access to their mentors through email, text, or cell phone. The mentor will conduct four formative assessments aligned to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) during their time together.

During the last month of the residency, the mentor will submit a summative assessment and recommend that the resident receive the standard principal certification. The mentor sends the recommendation only if the resident has fulfilled the residency requirements and demonstrates an approved proficiency level in the PSEL.

### **Informal Mentoring**

Research has shown that an informal mentoring experience between mentor and mentee is more beneficial to the mentee than a formal experience (Nemanick, 2000). Nemanick stated that the reason might stem from the type of relationship forged between a mentor and a mentee. In an informal mentoring experience, both mentor and mentee can identify with each other (Nemanick, 2000). The mentors might see something of themselves in the mentees, and the mentees might aspire to be like the mentors in one aspect or another. The match is mutual and can last for years. The pairing is different than formal mentoring in that the relationship is for a set period and an external party matches the mentor and mentee. Informal mentoring is a voluntary partnership that starts as a friendship first, followed by learning and career advancement (Inzer & Crawford, 2005). Additionally, Nemanick (2000) mentioned that informal mentors are more likely to engage in psychosocial activities such as counseling, facilitating social interaction, role modeling, and providing friendship.

### **Benefits of Mentoring**

A few research studies have supported mentoring as a critical strategy for developing and supporting administrators (Gray et al., 2007; Lashway, 2003; Matlach, 2015; Mitang, 2012; Parylo, 2012; Superville, 2014). However, John Daresh (2004) wrote about the five benefits that mentoring has for the mentee.

The first benefit that mentees have reported is increased confidence in their professional competence (Daresh, 2004). There is a significantly steep learning curve when individuals assume the responsibility of leading a school. They must implement a rigorous educational program, ensure that the building's operations are working properly, and navigate through the often-complicated bureaucracy of the central office and its departments. An experienced mentor helps the new administrator approach situations, conflicts, and other issues with a heightened confidence level.

The second benefit of mentoring is that it provides mentees with a faster way to link theory and practice (Daresh, 2004). All new administrators undergo coursework on educational leadership before assuming the top position at their schools. Knowing about educational theory is one task but learning how to apply it to real-world problems is another challenge that takes time to master. Mentors already have that experience, and they are in a better place to help new administrators apply what they learned in the books to their day-to-day practices.

A third benefit of mentoring is an increased level of communication by new administrators (Daresh, 2004). The regular interaction between a mentor and a leader prevents a new administrator from feeling alone and isolated from the school and other leaders. The isolation of new administrators impacts their efficacy and performance (Bauer & Brazer, 2010). The relationship between the mentor and the new administrator allows for conversations relevant to the development of both. This level of openness allows for more collaboration to happen and, according to Daresh (2004), collegiality begins to develop.

The fourth benefit of mentoring is that mentees learn the tricks of the profession directly from their mentors (Daresh, 2004). Mentors have learned the ins and outs of leading schools, and they can share this knowledge with the new administrator.

Finally, the last benefit is that the new administrator feels a sense of belonging (Daresh, 2004). The mentor has an opportunity not only to support the new administrator but also to bring them into the mentor's inner circle of colleagues and friends. The new administrators' network of supports expands from the relationship with their mentors. Daresh described the five benefits new administrators experience with mentoring; however, Grissom and Harrington (2010) mentioned an additional benefit mentoring provides.

Administrators who participate in formal mentoring experiences receive higher teachers' ratings (Grissom & Harrington, 2010). In their quantitative study, Grissom and Harrington took data from the Schools and Staffing Survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the central office to find the connection between administrator professional development and performance from a sampling of schools across the country. Principal professional development participation was defined into three categories. The first professional development category was principals who took university courses related to their role as principals. The second category was principals who participated in mentoring and/or coaching experiences. The third category was principals who participated in principal network meetings organized by an outside agency. When comparing these three types of professional development opportunities to principal effectiveness, Grissom and Harrington found that those principals who engaged in university coursework and principal network meetings were rated lower by teachers than those who received mentoring.

Mentoring helps administrators develop skills and acquire knowledge to help them run their schools better. The mentoring relationship helps new administrators feel more welcome in a profession that can be isolated and lonely. Grissom and Harrington's (2010) study highlighted the importance of mentoring for developing administrators and increasing their effectiveness.

## **Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL)**

The 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) help ground the school administrators' leadership practices. The PSEL replaced the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium Policy Standards (ISLLC) adopted in 1996 by the Council of Chief State Schools Officers (CCSSO). The PSEL aims to define the nature and quality of school leaders' work and guide professional practice (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). These standards focus on leadership practices that will help principals and vice-principals achieve positive outcomes for their students. I was interested in learning how formal and informal mentoring influences new administrators' leadership practices in traditional urban schools. The PSEL grounded and helped define the specific leadership practices that new administrators use to improve their schools.

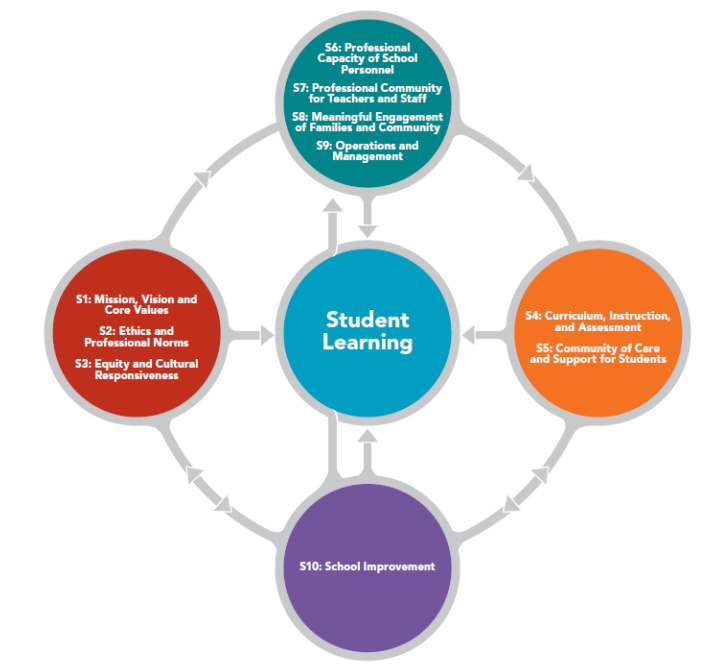
The 2015 PSEL encompass all aspects of running an effective school that yields positive student outcomes. Ten standards inform the leadership practices that school leaders must put into action to impact student learning. The standards are listed as follows:

1. Mission, vision, and core values,
2. Ethics and professional norms,
3. Equity and cultural responsiveness,
4. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment,
5. Community of care and support for students,
6. Professional capacity of school personnel,
7. Professional community for teachers and staff,
8. Meaningful engagement of families and community,

9. Operations and management, and
10. School improvement.

Each standard features a title and a short definition that describes the work of effective school leaders in that area. Each standard is followed by a series of elements which elaborate on the work that is necessary to meet the standard. The standards are organized into three clusters: the drivers, the core, and the supports. The drivers cluster includes Standards 1, 2, and 3. The core cluster includes Standards 4 and 5. Finally, the supports cluster includes Standards 6, 7, 8, and 9. It is important to note that Standard 10, school improvement, affects all the clusters, which together reflect a theory of how leadership practices influence student achievement (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Figure 1.1, Relationship of School Leadership Work to Student Learning, provides a visual that places student learning at the center of all actions of a school leader.

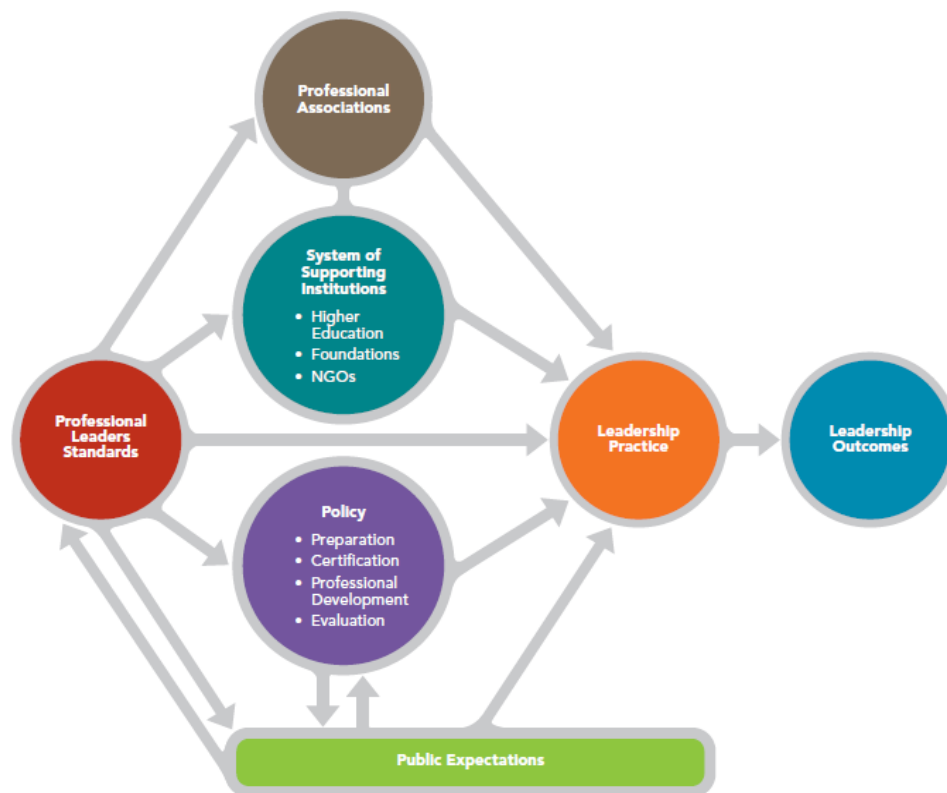
Figure 1.1. *Relationship of School Leadership Work to Student Learning*



Source: National Policy Board for Educational Administration. (2015), p. 5.

These standards can be effectively used to support and guide school leaders. Figure 1.2 shows a theory of action of how the professional standards connect to leadership practices that relate to leadership outcomes. The standards influence the way professional associations and supporting institutions such as higher education and foundations work to develop administrators' leadership practices. They also influence policy and regulation in the areas of leadership preparation programs, certification, professional development, and evaluation. Mentoring of school leaders falls into policy in the form of professional development. Lastly, the standards provide public expectations for the profession, policy, and supporting institutions, all of which connect to leadership practice (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015).

Figure 1.2. *Theory of Action of the Role of Professional Standards in Leadership Practice and Outcome*



Source: National Policy Board for Educational Administration. (2015), p. 6.

Principals and vice-principals are ultimately focused on improving their leadership skills as well as student outcomes. One way of achieving these goals is to implement leadership practices that are grounded in the PSEL. These standards that are organized into three clusters helped me to identify the leadership practices that formal and informal mentoring influences.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

After a thorough literature review of the mentoring program for school administrators, I noted specific gaps related to my research. The most notable gap is that most of the literature focuses on the principal's role, not the vice-principal's role (Hess, 2007; Leithwood, 2004; Lynch, 2012; Portin, 2004). Marshall and Hooley (2006) wrote extensively on the vice-principal's role and challenges. The existing literature and studies on the vice-principal's role lacked depth because they focused on surveys and job satisfaction, which failed to capture a holistic understanding of this role (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The literature on the vice-principal's experience in mentoring programs is also limited. Most of the studies focused on the experience of principals on mentoring programs and other professional development supports. Bruce Barnett, Alan Shoho, and Mathern Okilwa (2017) conducted a study on the vice-principal's perceptions of mentoring and other professional development opportunities. Specifically, they studied the advice mentors gave vice-principals and the professional learning opportunities that prepared them for the leadership role. Their interview question design did not differentiate between formal and informal mentoring but related to mentoring experiences in general. In the present study, I interviewed vice-principals to learn how formal and informal mentoring has influenced their leadership practices.

Another gap in the literature is the scarce focus on informal mentoring experiences. As mentioned earlier, many states require new administrators to enroll in a formal mentoring



program to receive their standard certificate, and there are many writings on the topic. However, the literature on the impact of informal mentoring on a school administrator's leadership practices is limited. Norma Mertz's (2004) conceptual model of mentoring identified supportive relationships outside of mentoring. Besides a mentoring relationship, school administrators engage in different types of associations: coach, advisor, guide, counselor, supporter, sponsor, benefactor, protector, or patron (Mertz, 2004). The present study will add to the body of literature on these informal experiences and how they influence administrators' leadership practice. In addition, my study includes the vice-principal's perspective and experience in informal mentoring.

Lastly, I was unable to find studies that compared the perspectives and leadership development of school administrators who were promoted from within the district and those recruited from outside of the district. School administrators promoted from within the district have spent many years interacting with the community, the district, and other stakeholders. They have built relationships with both members of the community and the central office. These administrators have the institutional knowledge that those hired from outside the district do not have. For this study, I recruited new principals and vice-principals who had been promoted from within the district and those who were not.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, there is a tremendous need to support new administrators during the first few years at their schools. States, universities, and school districts have come to realize that one way to stop the shortage of principals and decrease principal turnover is to offer support through mentoring. Studies have been conducted around the development and implementation of mentoring programs, and some have attempted to assess the program's effectiveness. This study

examined the ways formal and informal mentoring influenced new administrators' leadership practices in traditional urban schools. This study will add to the body of research and help district leaders identify the strengths and gaps in new administrators' formal and informal mentoring experiences. Additionally, it will help make recommendations on how to address those deficiencies. Lastly, this study will inform districts on developing a mentoring program for administrators, especially after their 2-year required formal mentoring program.

Chapter III next provides the methodology and design of the study.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter presents the purpose of the study and the research questions that guided this study. A discussion of the study's design, including the study site and the participant and sample selection, follows. Next, the chapter describes the data source and collection along with the type of data that were collected and the reliability and validity of the study. The chapter closes with an explanation of the data analysis plan and coding scheme.

#### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to learn about the ways formal and informal mentoring influence new administrators' leadership practices in traditional urban schools. While there is literature on the role of the principal and principal mentoring programs, it became more limited on the vice-principal role and the influence mentoring had on vice-principals. The literature was also less robust in examining the ways formal and informal mentoring influence the development of new administrators' leadership practices in urban schools. Most mentoring programs do not follow school administrators beyond their second year. A critique of mentoring programs is that they fail to bridge the gap between the principals' critical third year, where school districts lose most of them, and their fifth year, where most principals demonstrate effectiveness as leaders. School districts must make every effort to develop administrators who have constant support and on-the-job mentoring to ensure they stay at their schools well into their fifth year, where principal performance peaks (Gerew et al., 2015). This study explored the ways formal and informal mentoring influenced new principals and vice-principals' leadership practices in urban schools and answered the following research questions:

1. In what way(s) does mentoring influence new administrators' leadership practices in traditional urban schools?
  - a. In what way(s) does formal mentoring influence administrator leadership practices?
  - b. In what way(s) does informal mentoring influence administrator leadership practices?
  - c. How do these experiences vary from principal and vice-principal?
  - d. How do these experiences vary from those administrators promoted within the district and those external to the district?
  - e. How do new administrators in traditional urban schools believe that mentoring and other supports can be improved?

### **Research Design**

A qualitative study that employed a narrative research design helped me answer the research questions mentioned above. I used a narrative research design to describe individuals' lives through their own stories (Butina, 2015). These stories were the individuals' experiences, and it was my responsibility to collect the stories, report the experiences, and analyze the individual stories. I then identified patterns and themes that shed light on the ways formal and informal mentoring influences school administrators' leadership practices. The stories' results provided a wealth of detailed information that can lead to a deeper understanding of formal and informal mentoring and the influence that both have on new administrators' leadership practices.

### **Study Site**

The sample included 20 new school administrators who worked in traditional urban schools. These schools did not include charter or private schools because principal turnover is

higher at traditional schools than at private schools (Goldring & Taie, 2018). The urban schools were in a large school district in New Jersey that belongs in the District Factor Group (DFG) of A. Districts in DFG A have the lowest socioeconomic status. The district is comprised of over 37,000 students and employs more than 6,000 individuals. There are 39 elementary schools, 16 high schools, four early childhood center schools, and four specialty program schools. Schools that serve students with low socioeconomic status have a harder time keeping principals (Superville, 2018; Tekleselassie & Villarreal, 2011). Therefore, interviewing new principals and vice-principals from this school district helped me better understand the ways formal and informal mentoring influenced their leadership practices.

### **Participants and Sample Selection**

I used criterion sampling for the study. Participants needed to meet predetermined criteria before engaging in the research. The participants were 20 new principals and vice-principals with 1-3 years of experience. Most administrators in New Jersey participate in formal mentoring within their first 3 years in the role. Specifically, the study targeted 10 principals and 10 vice-principals. Of the 10, half were administrators promoted from within the district, and the other half were those new to the district. The vice-principal perspective was needed for the study because some of them ultimately moved on to become principals. Much of the research focused on principal turnover and retention but not the turnover and retention of vice-principals. Of the 10 principals selected, five were administrators who were promoted from within the district. For the most part, these principals were former vice-principals within the district. I sent a solicitation letter via email to principals and vice-principals interested in participating in this study. When participants agreed to be part of the study, they were asked to sign a consent form. Participants

had the interview questions in advance of the scheduled interview time. I kept track of the participants and assigned pseudonyms to protect their privacy and confidentiality.

I wanted to learn more about the new principals' formal and informal mentoring experiences to add valuable insights into those programs and relationships. Additionally, I wanted to learn more about the vice-principals' experiences with formal and informal mentoring and the influence the experiences have had on their leadership practices. The principals and vice-principals' insights and stories will help inform how best to support the principals through mentoring in the future and ultimately increase principal retention.

### **Data Sources and Collection**

#### **Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were used in the study to elicit answers about formal and informal mentoring experiences that new administrators have received and how those experiences have influenced their leadership practices. Patton (2014) considered this approach as the general interview guide approach. He described three methods to collecting qualitative data through interviews. The first one was informal conversational interviews that consisted of in-the-moment questions during the interview (Patton, 2014). The second approach was standardized open-ended interviews that contained questions prepared in advance, and each participant was asked the same questions in the same order (Patton, 2014). The third approach was the one I used, the general interview guide. This method falls between the other two approaches. I prewrote an outline of questions to ensure that the questions for formal and informal mentoring experiences were asked of all participants.

I began my interview questions with some background information that helped ease the participants into the central questions of the research. The main questions were developed to

address the study's research problem, and probing questions were designed to keep the discussion going and help clarify. As stated earlier, I used the PSEL to identify leadership practices. I created questions on how formal and informal mentoring has influenced administrators in areas such as (a) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (b) equity and cultural responsiveness; (c) ethics and professional norms; (d) mission, vision, and core values; (e) community of care and supports for students; (f) professional capacity of school personnel; (g) professional community for teachers and staff; (h) meaningful engagement of families and community; (i) operations and management; and (i) school improvement.

I also wrote follow-up questions to collect more information on ideas that were not anticipated. Once the questions were developed, I piloted the questions with people similar to the participants. Adjustments and modifications were made after the pilot period. The interviews were conducted over the phone or through Zoom for the convenience of participants who already had busy schedules. All interviews were transcribed and checked for accuracy.

I gained valuable insights from administrators with 1-3 years of experience and how mentoring has influenced their leadership practices. The study's significance was based on the need to understand how formal and informal mentoring has helped administrators become better during the first few years. Furthermore, it will inform the action steps school districts must take to provide a more informal mentoring program for administrators beyond the required formal mentoring period.

### **Reliability and Validity**

I used peer debriefing as one way to increase reliability and protect validity (Spall, 1998). For this research, I requested assistance from one principal and one vice-principal whose experience and perspectives helped shape the interview questions. Furthermore, they helped me

in testing emerging themes and patterns from the interviews. The peer debriefer had access to the participant responses in the aggregate and not individual responses.

I used reflexivity and transparency throughout this process so that readers can understand my assumptions and biases that may have influenced the questions I created and my approach to the research as well as the interpretation of data. The use of memos increased reflexivity and transparency because I explained how my findings were unexpected or surprising, based on my personal experience as a principal. This also enabled readers to understand my position within the context of the study. I am an assistant superintendent in a large urban school district; I was also a former principal and teacher in the district. In addition, I am a mentor for the state's required mentoring program.

I piloted the interview questions before initiating the study with the participants. Castillo-Montoya (2016) described the interview pilot as the final phase of developing the interview questions. The pilot interview allowed me to practice the interview protocol, obtain a sense of how long the interview would take, and make adjustments to the questions before the study's formal launch (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

I conducted member checking during the interviews. Harper and Cole (2012) mentioned that member checking can occur "during the interview or near the end of the project." During each interview, I restated or summarized the participants' responses to check for accuracy. Harper and Cole stated that if "the participants either agree or disagree that the summaries reflect their views, feelings, and experiences and if accuracy and completeness are affirmed, then the study is said to have credibility" (p. 2). At the end of the research, I allowed the participants to review the findings' authenticity. This step was essential because it enabled the participants to check if what they stated during the interviews was accurately represented (Creswell & Poth,



2016). There was no follow-up interview but rather a follow-up email with the participants. Member checking was also conducted for clarification after the collection of the data. I contacted the participants via email and sharing their transcribed responses to the interview questions. At the end of the research, I allowed the participants to review the authenticity of the findings. This step was essential because it enabled the participants to check if what they stated during the interview was accurately represented (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

### **Data Analysis Plan and Coding Scheme**

Miriam and Tisdell (2015) defined data analysis as the process of making sense of the data. The process begins with doing a deep dive into the data and to start narrowing down the data that are relevant or important to answering the research questions. The researcher then begins to look for patterns and themes in the data and makes meaning from them. These meanings become the findings of the research (Miriam & Tisdell, 2015). For this study, I used the narrative thematic analysis process. This process consisted of five stages: (a) organizing and preparing the data, (b) obtaining a general sense of information, (c) coding the data, (d) establishing categories and themes, and (e) interpreting the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The organization and preparation of the data began after completing the principal and vice-principal interviews. Although I utilized transcription software after each interview recording, I read through my notes after each interview and wrote down any themes or patterns emerging from the participants' responses. When I received the transcripts, I read and analyzed each script and began the coding process. I used inductive and deductive coding. Inductive codes were developed directly from the data by looking at the participants' responses and using their terms and phrases (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Deductive coding was used before the coding process began. The codes related to the leadership practices were predefined using the PSEL

standards. Deductive coding was helpful because it focused on what was known (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). In this case, what we know is the leadership practices as defined by the PSEL.

I grouped the codes into categories and themes to start my analysis for answering my research questions. I compared across schools, principal and vice-principal perspectives, and years of experience. The interview data were placed in the online platform Dedoose to help with the organization and analysis of the transcribed information. Dedoose is a web-based platform that helps researchers discover themes, patterns, and categories from the data coding and visualization. Some initial codes are listed below in Table 3.1.

The research question—In what way(s) does mentoring influence new administrators' leadership practices in traditional urban schools?—was answered after a detailed analysis and interpretation of the data. Administrators' leadership practices are grounded in the 10 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders. The responses from the participants were organized into themes and categories that were aligned with these standards.

### **Limitations**

The study was limited to 20 new administrators with 1-3 years of experience. The sample did not use gender as a criterion of school administrators who have experienced formal and informal mentoring in New Jersey. This study did not include administrators in the charter or private schools in a large urban school district in New Jersey that belongs in DFG A. Furthermore, the sample size may not represent the entire population of school administrators who have completed the NJL2L program. This study was limited to school administrators in New Jersey only.

Table 3.1. *Initial Codes and Definitions*

Code	Definitions
PI_#	Principals who were promoted within the district with 1-3 years of experience
PO_#	Principals new to the district with 1-3 years of experience
VPI_#	Vice principals who were promoted within the district with 1-3 years of experience
VPO_#	Vice principals new to the district with 1-3 years of experience
1	Formal mentoring
2	Informal mentoring
PSEL Mission	PSEL Standard 1: Mission, vision, and core values
PSEL Ethics	PSEL Standard 2: Ethics and professional norms
PSEL Equity	PSEL Standard 3: Equity and cultural responsiveness
PSEL Curriculum	PSEL Standard 4: Curriculum, instruction, and assessment
PSEL Community	PSEL Standard 5: Community of care and support for students
PSEL Staff Capacity	PSEL Standard 6: Professional capacity of school personnel
PSEL PLC	PSEL Standard 7: Professional community for teachers and staff
PSEL Family Engagement	PSEL Standard 8: Meaningful engagement of families and community
PSEL Operations	PSEL Standard 9: Operation and management
PSEL School Improvement	PSEL Standard 10: School improvement

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS FROM DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter includes an in-depth analysis of the individual administrators' interview responses. It begins with a review of the problem statement and the purpose of the study. It is then followed by the research questions, the study site, and participant characteristics. Next, the chapter discusses the data findings that are represented within the responses to the research questions. Finally, the chapter ends with a summary.

#### **Problem Statement**

Principal retention in schools is a nationwide problem. The situation becomes even more significant as one considers the principals' retention rate in urban schools or high-poverty schools. A School Leaders Network report estimated that more than half of the principals left in their third year (Superville, 2018; Tyre, 2015). Many districts across the nation are making substantial efforts to curb the loss of principals and invest a significant number of resources into programs and initiatives to retain principals. These initiatives include principal mentoring (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018).

There is literature on the role of the principal and principal mentoring programs, but it is much more limited on the vice-principal role and the influence mentoring has on vice-principals. The literature was less robust in examining the ways formal and informal mentoring influences the development of new administrators' leadership practices in urban schools. Most mentoring programs do not follow school administrators beyond their second year. A critique of mentoring programs is that they fail to bridge the gap between the principals' critical third year, where school districts lose most of them, and their fifth year, where most principals demonstrate effectiveness as leaders. School districts must make every effort to develop administrators who

have constant support and on-the-job mentoring to ensure they stay at their schools well into their fifth year, where principal performance peaks (Gerew et al., 2015). This study explored the ways formal and informal mentoring influences new principals and vice-principals' leadership practices in traditional urban schools.

### **Research Questions**

I designed this qualitative study to answer the following research questions. The primary question was: In what way(s) does mentoring influence new administrators' leadership practices in traditional urban schools? The subquestions were:

1. In what way(s) does formal mentoring influence administrator leadership practices?
2. In what way(s) does informal mentoring influence administrator leadership practices?
3. How do these experiences vary from principal and vice-principal?
4. How do these experiences vary from those administrators promoted within the district and those external to the district?
5. How do new administrators in traditional urban schools believe that mentoring and other supports can be improved?

### **Characteristics of the Study Site**

The sample included 19 new school administrators who worked in traditional urban schools. These schools did not include charter or private schools. The urban schools were in a large school district in New Jersey that belongs in the District Factor Group (DFG) of A. Districts in DFG A has the lowest socioeconomic status. The district was comprised of over 37,000 students and employs more than 6,000 individuals. There are 39 elementary schools, 16 high schools, four early childhood center schools, and four specialty program schools.

### **Characteristics of the Participant Sample**

This section describes the sample of new administrators who participated in this study. Nineteen new administrators from 16 schools were interviewed during the span of 1½ months. These administrators included principals and vice-principals who had between less than 1 and 3 years of experience in their current role. I used pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the participants throughout this study. For example, a vice-principal interviewed who was promoted from within the district was named VPI\_#. The hashtag symbol represents individual participants starting with participant number 1 and continuing to participant number 5. The “VP” means vice-principal and the “I” means inside. Similarly, if a principal interviewed was promoted from outside the district, the following name was used: “PO\_#.” The “P” means principal and the “O” means outside, for being promoted from outside the district.

Table 4.1 shows the new administrators’ gender, age range, type of school, and number of years in their current position. The data showed that 13 of the 19 participants were female and six were male. Most of the participants were currently leading elementary schools, and all had less than 3 years of experience in their current role. Furthermore, there was an equal mix of vice-principals promoted from within the district and promoted outside the district. The sample included five principals promoted from inside the district but only four principals promoted outside the district. The original target was to include five principals promoted outside the district in the sample. Still, after several attempts to gain participation, I could not get an additional participant.

Table 4.1. *Characteristics of the Participant Sample*

Administrator	Type	Gender	Age Range	Type of School	Years in the Role
VPI_1		Female	40-49	Elementary	<2
VPI_2		Female	30-39	Elementary	<2
VPI_3		Male	21-29	Elementary	<1
VPI_4		Female	40-49	Elementary	<2
VPI_5		Female	21-29	Elementary	<2
VPO_1		Female	40-49	Elementary	<3
VPO_2		Female	40-49	Elementary	<2
VPO_3		Female	30-39	Elementary	<1
VPO_4		Male	21-29	Elementary	<2
VPO_5		Male	30-39	Elementary	<3
PI_1		Female	40-49	Elementary	<2
PI_2		Female	40-49	Elementary	<2
PI_3		Female	40-49	Elementary	<2
PI_4		Female	40-49	Elementary	<3
PI_5		Male	40-49	High School	<2
PO_1		Female	50-59	Elementary	<2
PO_2		Male	40-49	Elementary	<2
PO_3		Female	50-59	High School	<2
PO_4		Male	40-49	Elementary	<2

## **Findings**

I collected and analyzed the interview data from the vice-principal and principal interviews. First, I looked at the ways mentoring influenced new administrators' leadership practices. Then, I conducted further analysis to answer the subquestions related to formal and informal mentoring, how these experiences varied among principals and vice-principals, and which administrators were promoted from within the district or hired externally. Finally, I analyzed the data to answer the last subquestion on how mentoring and other supports can be improved in the district.

I relied on the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) to identify the leadership practice. Table 4.2 provides a short description for each standard to understand better the leadership practices related to the PSEL standards.

I used deductive and inductive coding for the data analysis. Table 4.3 shows the deductive codes used before collecting the data to identify the leadership practices according to the PSEL.

I used inductive coding after organizing the data and obtaining a general sense of the information. Table 4.4 shows the inductive codes that were used after the collection of the data and their frequency.



Table 4.2. *Description of PSEL Standards*

Standard	Description
Standard 1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values	Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.
Standard 2. Ethics and Professional Norms	Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
Standard 3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness	Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
Standard 4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
Standard 5. Community of Care and Support for Students	Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.
Standard 6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel	Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
Standard 7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff	Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
Standard 8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community	Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
Standard 9. Operations and Management	Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
Standard 10. School Improvement	Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Source: National Policy Board for Educational Administration. (2015).

Table 4.3. *Deductive Codes Used Before the Data Collection*

Code	Definitions
PSEL 1 Mission	PSEL Standard 1: Mission, vision, and core values
PSEL 2 Ethics	PSEL Standard 2: Ethics and professional norms
PSEL 3 Equity	PSEL Standard 3: Equity and cultural responsiveness
PSEL 4 Curriculum	PSEL Standard 4: Curriculum, instruction, and assessment
PSEL 5 Community	PSEL Standard 5: Community of care and support for students
PSEL 6 Staff Capacity	PSEL Standard 6: Professional capacity of school personnel
PSEL 7 Professional Learning Community	PSEL Standard 7: Professional community for teachers and staff
PSEL 8 Family Engagement	PSEL Standard 8: Meaningful engagement of families and community
PSEL 9 Operations	PSEL Standard 9: Operation and management
PSEL 10 School Improvement	PSEL Standard 10: School improvement

Table 4.4. *Most Used Inductive Codes and Frequency*

Inductive Code	Frequency
Mentor: Different District	15
Reflection	35
Mentor: Same District	25
Safe Space	20
Strategize	15
Remote	20
Valued	25
Confident/Confidence	15
Peer Group/Collaborate	27
Inspired	10
Relationships	24
COVID/Pandemic	23
Virtual/Hybrid Learning	18
Balancing	15
Managing Expectation	18
Available	19
Compliance	16
Feedback	24
Check-ins/Talking/Convos	22
Sharing of Resources/Support	28
Advice	14
Open Honest	19
Supervisor as Informal Mentor	14

It is important to note that the interview data analysis was done within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as virtual and hybrid learning. Traditionally, the mentoring program components would be performed in person, such as school visits and peer group meetings. However, social distancing guidelines and district policies did not allow people to gather. Nonetheless, the same leadership practices applied in person as they did, except for the mechanism in which they met. For example, conversations about improving curriculum or teacher practice happened within the context of doing it virtually and not in person. The administrators were still responsible for improving instruction and teacher quality. The codes were categorized to help develop the themes, which were analyzed in relation to the primary research question and each subquestion. Nine themes emerged from this study:

- **Theme One:** Mentoring influences administrators' leadership practices the most in five key areas: curriculum and instruction, hiring and retaining staff, engaging families and community, school budget and finance, and continuous improvement.
- **Theme Two:** Formal and informal mentors are readily available and provide a safe space that is honest and transparent for administrators to grow, reflect, build confidence, and prosper.
- **Theme Three:** Formal mentoring influences administrators' leadership practices the most in two main areas: operations and finance of schools, and practices that promote continuous improvements.
- **Theme Four:** Informal mentoring influences administrators' leadership practices the most in two main areas: curriculum and instruction, and hiring and developing staff.
- **Theme 5:** Peer group meetings through formal mentoring add significant value to the vice-principals' and principals' experience, improving their leadership practices.

- **Theme 6:** The majority of vice-principals and principals identified their supervisor as their informal mentor. Administrators described their relationship with their informal mentors with positivity.
- **Theme Seven:** Mentoring influences the leadership practices of administrators promoted from inside the district the most in areas of curriculum and instruction, and hiring and developing staff. On the other hand, mentoring influences the leadership practices of administrators promoted from outside the district the most in areas of family and community engagement, and school budget and operations.
- **Theme Eight:** Principals and vice-principals place a high value on the mentor's experience in districts similar to their own. Furthermore, the vice-principals would like to see their school district assign them a formal mentor.
- **Theme Nine:** Peer group meetings or collaboration spaces among administrators in the same district can improve informal mentoring.

These themes are explained in further detail and in relation to each research question in the next section.

### **Analysis of Primary Research Question**

*In what way(s) does mentoring influence new administrators' leadership practices in traditional urban schools?*

**Theme One: Mentoring influences administrators' leadership practices the most in five key areas: curriculum and instruction, hiring and retaining staff, engaging families and community, school budget and finance, and continuous improvement.**

Participants were asked in what way(s) mentoring influenced and improved their leadership practices. Most of the participants' responses revolved around the recruitment, hiring,

and development of their staff. Results revealed that the participants sought their mentors' help and advice for improving staff capacity in their buildings and retaining the best teachers. Another critical area over which the participants reported mentors had the most influence was curriculum and instruction. Much of their time together was dedicated to analyzing student work, making sure teachers were following the curriculum, and doing instructional rounds.

Mentors also influenced new administrators in engaging families in their students' education, fostering productive relationships with families and community, and being a resource to the community. They provided new administrators with ideas on how to engage and keep families active at their schools. Mentors were also instrumental in helping new administrators on how to understand and develop the school budgets. New administrators mentioned that their mentors played a vital role in supporting them during the budget season. Finally, mentors helped new administrators by reflecting on their current practices to make them better. They encouraged new administrators to improve their current practices and systems constantly.

To better understand the influence mentoring has on new administrators' leadership practices, each participant's responses were aligned and matched with a particular PSEL. Their responses were coded to specific PSEL leadership practices. For example, here is a vice-principal's response to the question: In what ways does mentoring influence your leadership practices?

Um, I would say that it influences my leadership practice, in that I am purposely more mindful in...in leading and mentoring and coaching my teachers and my coaches with a clear plan, with specificity with um...what is the word? Tailoring! So, I tailor my support to the teachers. I am also always looking for ways to keep our best teachers because they are the ones who help move instruction. Another way mentoring has influenced my practice is that I am more focused on instruction and what is going on in the classroom. Are the students learning? (VPI\_2, 22 February 2021, Personal Interview)

The vice-principal mentioned that mentoring influences the mentoring and coaching of teachers. This portion of the response was aligned to PSEL 6 Staff Capacity—effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student’s academic success and well-being. Therefore, I placed a tally mark on PSEL Standard 6. The vice-principal also mentioned the retention of the best teachers. This position of the response was aligned with PSEL Standard 6, and so I added another tally mark to PSEL Standard 6.

Finally, the vice-principal mentioned that mentoring has influenced their practice of focusing more on instruction. This part of the response was aligned to PSEL 4 Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment—effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student’s academic success and well-being. I placed a tally on PSEL Standard 4. In total, this response received two tallies for PSEL Standard 6 and one tally for PSEL Standard 4. I followed this analytical strategy to align all of the participants’ leadership practices with a PSEL standard. Table 4.5 shows the outcome of this process.

Mentoring influences administrators’ leadership practices in all of the 10 PSEL standards. However, the data revealed that mentoring influences some leadership practices more than others. For example, participants responded that mentoring influenced leadership practices the most in PSEL 6 Staff Capacity, PSEL 4 Curriculum, PSEL 8 Family Engagement, PSEL 9 Operations, and PSEL 10 School Improvement. Mentoring had the least influence in leadership practices related to PSEL 1 Mission, PSEL 2 Ethics, PSEL 3 Equity, PSEL 5 Community of Care, and PSEL 7 Professional Learning Community.

Table 4.5. *PSEL/Leadership Practices and Frequency*

PSEL/Leadership Practices	Frequency		
	What specific leadership practices are influenced	What specific leadership practices are improved	Total
PSEL 1 Mission	2	5	7
PSEL 2 Ethics	4	3	7
PSEL 3 Equity	2	2	4
PSEL 4 Curriculum	11	12	23
PSEL 5 Community of Care	7	4	11
PSEL 6 Staff Capacity	17	22	39
PSEL 7 Professional Learning Community	3	1	4
PSEL 8 Family Engagement	9	10	19
PSEL 9 Operations	10	8	18
PSEL 10 School Improvement	9	8	17

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked: What are the most significant challenges they face as administrators? The data showed that mentoring influenced the leadership practices that administrators said were the most challenging. Most of the participants stated that some of the challenges they faced as administrators were recruiting and hiring effective staff. The development of teachers to be effective and highly effective was a challenge as well. Administrators also found it challenging to balance the priority of teaching and learning while meeting the operational demands of running a building. The quote below is one example of participants describing what they found the most challenging about their role.

The recruitment and retention of quality teachers and other staff, specifically the retention of bilingual staff, is very challenging. I feel like every year, I am hiring for a bilingual teacher or replace one that is resigning or couldn't complete their certification. Another area that is challenging is maintaining excellent standards in all areas of running the



school but still improving student outcomes. Oftentimes everything serves as a distraction, and I end up not focusing more time on instructional rounds and making sure the curriculum is being taught. (PI\_1, 22 March 2021, Personal Interview)

The participants' responses were matched to the leadership practices aligned with the PSEL using the analytical strategy described earlier. The majority of the participants' responses included topics and leadership practices in PSEL 4 Curriculum, PSEL 6 Staff Capacity, PSEL 8 Family Engagement, and PSEL 9 Operations. In particular, administrators expressed challenges in balancing being both an instructional leader and an operations manager. Table 4.6 shows the results of the administrators' responses to the question about the most significant challenges they faced in each of the four PSEL standards and frequency.

Table 4.6. *Areas of Most Significant Challenges for Administrators and Frequency*

PSEL/Leadership Practices	Frequency
PSEL 4 Curriculum	13
PSEL 6 Staff Capacity	16
PSEL 8 Family Engagement	10
PSEL 9 Operations	9

The administrators' challenges were in the areas of curriculum and staff capacity. These two PSEL standards related to teaching and learning. Administrators need to ensure that students are learning what the state standards and curriculum require while supporting teachers' skills and knowledge. According to the participants, maintaining a balance between their instructional responsibilities and the school's operations was difficult. Additionally, administrators found it challenging to engage families and other community stakeholders.

The data between the challenges administrators reported and the frequency of the PSEL standards most influenced by mentoring were aligned. Mentoring influenced the PSEL standards that administrators said were most challenging.

**Theme Two: Formal and informal mentors are readily available and provide a safe space that is honest and transparent for administrators to grow, reflect, build confidence, and prosper.**

The relationship between the mentor and administrator is an essential component of how mentoring influences administrators' leadership practices. Participants were asked to describe their mentoring experience and the relationship they had with their mentor. Most of the participants used words such as honest, open, and transparent to describe their relationship. Also, mentors facilitated their growth as administrators and helped them reflect on their actions. Additionally, when asked "Has your relationship with your mentor resulted in developing new beliefs or understandings about yourself as a principal/vice-principal?", they responded that their mentors helped increase their confidence. The sample responses below represent the general sentiment of the administrators:

I was hesitant at first when the Superintendent announced my formal mentor. But I have to be very honest, as soon as I met, Um, there is no secret, Maria Smith (pseudonym), she's awesome. I trust her from day one, actually, you know, at first, I thought, oh, here we go, somebody who is gonna take up my time, I'm a new principal here. I don't got time to spare. She's been great, she really has been great. I'd tell you, so in terms of support, um, she is always available, just even picking up the phone to ask an opinion, like, hey, this parent asked me this question, how should I answer? You know, how do I deal with this teacher? She often sits in meetings, virtual classrooms, grade level meetings. I just give her the Webex links to all the meetings and she just lets me know ahead of time. But I'm like to just sit in and provide me some feedback on how that's going. That feedback has helped me grow. (PO\_3, 15 March 2021, Personal Interview)

Um, so the first thing is that we've built a trust. We've built this relationship between us. It was almost seamless. She and I connected right away, and we seem to have a really good, open, honest working relationship. So that's been very important, knowing that I can speak freely to her. And she is always there to offer support guidance and not be

judgmental in any way. So it really has allowed me to be very reflective on my product, on my leadership practices, which sometimes it's really hard to kind of do, because you're always so busy putting out fires like taking care of this issue or taking care of that issue. You're jumping from one meeting to the next, if we were in person dealing with the day-to-day, just operations of the school building, and it's just kind of hard to kind of stop and find time to kind of be reflective. So by having her, being a part of this process with me, it just kind of makes me take a step back, like it stops, and I'm with her, and I'm able to be reflective as to how things are going, where can I go from there, and just really supporting me in that way? (PI\_2, 23 February 2021, Personal Interview)

It's definitely open. It's built on transparency, and respect and honesty. You know, if there's a moment where I might feel like, over my head or, it's something I've never experienced before, because I'm new to this role. She is very candid with best approaches of how she would do it. But also making sure that she messages, this was my way. You know, you might, you have your own way and let us see if that might work with whatever the situation is. By allowing me to take risks, I am also building my confidence. (VPI\_3, 10 March 2021, Personal Interview)

Absolutely yes! She has reaffirmed my belief that I am the right person for this job and I can do this! Like girl, you got this! You can do it, and it's OK to ask for help. (PI\_4, 17 March 2021, Personal Interview)

A mentor's ability to create an open and transparent environment is vital to the development of the administrator. Administrators build their confidence in the things they are doing through their mentors.

### **Analysis of Research Subquestion 1**

**Theme Three: Formal mentoring influences administrators' leadership practices the most in two main areas: operations and finance of schools, and practices that promote continuous improvements.**

Participants were asked in what way(s) formal mentoring influenced their leadership practices and how formal mentoring helped them improve their leadership practices. Many participants stated that their formal mentors played a vital role in assisting them in developing their school's budget. Mentors guided them to think about what resources they anticipated needing for the following year to support students and staff. Formal mentoring also exposes

administrators to experiences that help them improve their leadership practices. Administrators learn from their mentors and other administrators' best practices and strategies that they can implement at their schools. The two sample responses below represent the general sentiment of most administrators interviewed:

So it's helped me. Take a deeper dive into the logistics of running a building. Being the only administrator, there are a lot of moving parts and many things to manage. Your focus is instruction, but you can't forget about the operations of the building. You need to make sure the building is safe, clean and that students and teachers have the resources they need to succeed. My mentor was super helpful during the budget season, helping me unpack the process and make sure I have the appropriate amount of resources to run my school next year. So the process has me being more reflective as an educator and a principal. It has gotten me thinking about what I need to do next year. (PO\_1, 11 March 2021, Personal Interview)

Um, it has provided a different perspective to various topics, um, which kind of helps me reflect on my own practices, being able to listen to different point of views to different things that occur in different districts. They share strategies and best practices with us. So, it allows me to kind of take in some of that information, and kinda reflect on what I need to do, and what happens in our district, and what is actually happening in my school. It has helped me to think how I can improve the things I am currently doing. There is always room for improvement. (VPI\_1, 8 March 2021, Personal Interview)

I used the same analytical strategy described in the previous section to code the participants' responses and match them to the specific PSEL leadership practices. When looking at formal mentoring exclusively, leadership practices in PSEL 9 and PSEL10 had the highest responses from the participants. Table 4.7 shows the frequency of the participants' answers related to PSEL 9 and 10.

Formal mentoring played a vital role in developing administrators' leadership practices related to PSEL 9 and PSEL 10. Leadership practices in PSEL 9 include managing fiscal, physical, and other resources to support curriculum, instruction, and assessments. Furthermore, administrators are required to manage and monitor the operations and administrative systems of the school. In PSEL 10, administrators are expected to continue to grow and seek areas of

improvement. Additionally, they need to be the lead learners of their school buildings and serve as models for the rest of the staff.

Table 4.7. *PSEL 9 and 10 and Frequency*

PSEL/Leadership Practices	Frequency		
	What specific leadership practices are influenced	What specific leadership practices are improved	Total
PSEL 9 Operations	8	6	14
PSEL 10 School Improvement	6	7	13

It is important to note that the formal mentoring experiences for the principals and vice-principals interviewed differ. The data collected showed that nine of the 10 vice-principals interviewed received formal mentoring through the New Jersey Leaders 2 Leaders (NJL2L) Program, which is the formal mentoring and induction program for all new school leaders in New Jersey. During the 2 years of the program, the new administrators, who are residents, are paired with an experienced mentor. This mentoring program consists of school visit observations and one-on-one conferences. Furthermore, the program has monthly peer-support group meetings that provide an opportunity for team mentoring, where mentors and residents from different districts get together to network, discuss experiences, and provide collegial support (NJL2L, 2020).

On the other hand, principals receive their formal mentoring through their school district. When asked if they were receiving formal mentoring, nine of the nine principals interviewed responded yes and mentioned the Superintendent's formal mentoring initiative for new principals. For the past 3 years, the district's Superintendent has paired retired and experienced principals from the district with new principals. The district's program is not a formal mentoring

program but rather a new principal coaching program. However, the principals interviewed viewed their relationship with the principal coaches as formal mentoring. Currently, five principal coaches were assigned to new principals during their first and second years. However, current principals in their third year still have their principal coaches.

## **Analysis of Research Subquestion 2**

*In what way(s) does informal mentoring influence administrator leadership practices?*

**Theme Four: Informal mentoring influences administrators' leadership practices the most in two main areas: curriculum and instruction, and hiring and developing staff.**

Participants were asked in what way(s) informal mentoring influenced their leadership practices and how informal mentoring helped them improve their leadership practices. Most of the participants responded that informal mentoring influenced how they implemented the curricular materials at their school. Informal mentors helped the administrators improve their instructional capacity so they could best support teachers. New administrators mentioned that they could ask questions to the informal mentor on how to develop teachers in particular areas, such as improving the quality of questions and designing more rigorous tasks. Ultimately, new administrators want to grow teachers and their effectiveness to improve outcomes for their students. The two quotes below summarize the general sentiment of most participants.

Um, I would say just sharing ideas and best practices. Um, that's something that we've always done, we worked on curriculum together, you know, in the past, so we worked on instructional rounds documents together, and then just coming up with ideas and seeing them through. I would say, um, she has definitely helped me to develop my instructional lens and coach teachers on how to improve their skills. (VPI\_5, 12 March 2021, Personal Interview)

So, we just informally, discuss best practices, things that they have been implementing in other schools, like what is working for them, day-to-day management. So, we spend most of our time discussing things such as that. And then, of course, like we have, I have to make the best decision for my school and for my students. So just listening to them, and seeing, in terms of, like, even thinking about, like, my data now, and how to move

students along, how to move teachers, in terms of implementing more rigorous tasks and questioning. So what is their approach? What do they do in their schools, especially the high performing schools? How do they approach that? What are they doing, and then really internalizing that and seeing how can I then take that and implement that into my school to help my staff grow and to help my students achieve better outcomes. (PI\_2, 23 February 2021, Personal Interview)

I used the same analytical strategy described in the previous section to code the participants' responses and match them to the specific PSEL leadership practices. When looking at informal mentoring exclusively, leadership practices in PSEL 4 and PSEL6 had the highest responses from the participants. Table 4.8 shows the frequency of the participants' answers related to PSEL 4 and 6.

Table 4.8. *PSEL 4 and 6 and Frequency*

PSEL/Leadership Practices	Frequency		
	What specific leadership practices are influenced	What specific leadership practices are improved	Total
PSEL 4 Curriculum	8	9	17
PSEL 6 Staff Capacity	13	15	28

Informal mentoring played a vital role in developing administrators' leadership practices related to PSEL 4 and PSEL 6. Leadership practices in PSEL 4 include developing curriculum, supporting instruction, and analyzing assessments. Furthermore, administrators need to promote instructional environments that meet the needs of all students. Additionally, administrators need to encourage the effective use of technology to support teaching and learning. This skill is more relevant and pronounced now that they are in virtual and/or hybrid learning. In PSEL 6, administrators are expected to hire, support, develop, and retain effective educators. Additionally, they need to plan for professional development sessions to address the educators'

growth areas. Embedded in PSEL 6 is evaluating the educators' performance and supporting educator growth through coaching and meaningful feedback.

Informal mentoring experiences influenced the administrators' leadership practices around the curriculum and quality of instruction. The administrators highlighted the focus they had on what students were learning and how teachers delivered the content. Most of the participants' responses focused on how to coach and grow teachers' skills and knowledge.

### **Analysis of Research Subquestion 3**

*How do these experiences vary from principal and vice-principal?*

**Theme Five: Peer group and collaborative meetings through formal mentoring add significant value to the vice-principals' and principals' experience, improving their leadership practices.**

The data collected showed that nine of the 10 vice-principals interviewed received formal mentoring through the NJL2L. This mentoring program consists of school visit observations and one-on-one conferences. However, according to most of the vice-principals interviewed, the program's highlight was the monthly peer-support group meetings. Peer group meetings provide an opportunity for team mentoring where mentors and residents from different districts get together to network, discuss experiences, and provide collegial support (NJL2L, 2020).

Principals also reported that one of their highlights was meeting with other colleagues in smaller collaborative spaces. These meetings served as an added level of support to their growth and development. They were able to form a network of support among the principals to help each other with questions and difficult situations. The sample responses below represent the general sentiment of the administrators when they were asked about the highlights of their formal mentoring experience:



I would say the highlights is the peer groups I get to sit with, with other school leaders, and I get to hear their perspectives and their experiences. (VPI\_2, 22 February 2021, Personal Interview).

Ms. Jordan Smith (pseudonym) have been very supportive. Through their work done with the School Leadership Team, I am also able to connect with my colleagues on a daily basis through the buddy system and the Triads that we have as she has formed and placed us in. So, there's, there is an added level of support that takes place during those smaller meetings with my triad, for sure. (PI\_2, 23 February 2021, Personal Interview)

One of the biggest highlights of the experience with that program is just the vast amount of perspectives that our group has, as well as the years of experience that mentors have, and what they bring to the table, as far as no trials and tribulations that they went through to guide us as we navigate the first year or two of our administrative experience. Some of the issues that I am facing, they have already gone through them and they help me navigate them. (VPI\_3, 10 March 2021, Personal Interview)

The highlight is just meeting other people, other administrators from other districts, all across, New Jersey and learn from their experiences. (VPO\_1, 8 March 2021, Personal Interview)

I would say that the highlight is being able to, you know, have conversation with other peers and hearing, you know, some of the challenges, some of, even the successes that they've had with certain things has definitely helped. Um, I think just knowing that, um, some of the feelings that you might be experiencing, knowing that someone else or other people are experiencing the same and having that shared time to kind of share, you know, you know, what, you are experiencing. What you're going through, I think, is important. And, so, also have an outside view of people you work with, because sometimes, that is something that's needed, because it can kinda serve a little bit as an outlet. (VPO\_2, 25 February 2021, Personal Interview)

I'd say you're getting to learn how different districts operate, as well as how districts that are similar to our group. For example, Paterson, I am able to learn a lot about a district that's very similar in terms of demographic and population, and some of the initiatives that they have in place, as well as structures. I'm also able to network with different individuals, individuals that supervised special education, bilingual individuals that worked in high schools, and in schools with different demographics. Their perspective and experiences as informed mine and I feel I have become a better administrator. (VPO\_5, 24 February 2021, Personal Interview)

The collegial support vice-principals received through peer group meetings was high and invaluable to their growth as administrators. The most significant highlights of the vice-principals' formal mentoring experience were learning from peers, problem solving issues they

are facing, and improving their leadership practices. Vice-principals stated that they learned how other school leaders dealt with problems in their district that were similar to those they encountered. During those meetings, they supported and offered suggestions to each other on how to approach difficult situations. Through the peer group meetings, vice-principals created an extended network of support beyond their school or school district.

**Theme Six: The majority of vice-principals and principals identified their supervisor as their informal mentor. Administrators described their relationship with their informal mentors with positivity.**

I first asked the participants if they were receiving informal mentoring. All of them indicated yes. They were asked to describe their mentoring experience and then who was their informal mentor. Table 4.9 shows the role of the informal mentor in relation to the administrator. VPI represents vice-principals promoted from inside the district, and VPO represents the vice-principals promoted from outside of the district. PI represents principals promoted from inside the district, and PO represents principals promoted from outside of the district.

Table 4.9. *Role of the Administrators' Informal Mentor*

Role of Informal Mentor	Frequency			
	VPI	VPO	PI	PO
Principal	4	4		
Assistant Superintendent			1	2
Colleague	1		1	
Supervisor and Colleague		1	3	2

The majority of administrators identified their supervisors as informal mentors. Vice-principals viewed their principals as informal mentors, while principals viewed their assistant Superintendents as their informal mentors. In a few cases, administrators viewed their supervisor

and a colleague as their informal mentors. Only one vice-principal and one principal identified another colleague as their informal mentor. All of the administrators had a positive description of their relationship with their informal mentor. The sample responses below represent the general sentiment of the administrators when asked to describe the relationship with their informal mentor.

It's definitely open. It's transparent. It's based on respect and honesty. You know, if there's a moment where I might feel like, over my head, or it's something I've never experienced before, because I'm new to this role. She is very candid with best approaches of how she would do it. But also making sure that she messages, this was my way. You know, you might, you have your own way and let us see if that might work with whatever the situation is. (VPI\_3, 10 March 2021, Personal Interview)

Um, I mean, I feel like I can trust them with anything. I value the relationship. I respect their expertise. (VPI\_4, 10 March 2021, Personal Interview)

I think it's a good relationship. I think that it's an open relationship and that, if I need to communicate something I don't feel nervous or apprehension about communicating it. (VPO\_3, 12 March 2021, Personal Interview)

I would say, I have a really, really good relationship with them, like I said, that the trust has developed over the years, which makes it even better and more comfortable. And it's a mentor slash friend relationship. (PI\_1, 22 March 2021, Personal Interview)

In one word, honest. It's also a very respectful relationship for me. Being transparent and being real, is as strong aspects of this relationship. (PO\_1, 11 March 2021, Personal Interview)

Our relationship has always been very professional and respectful. I feel comfortable reaching out to them as needed and/or to thank them for their support. (PO\_2, 30 March 2021, Personal Interview)

Most of the administrators interviewed viewed their supervisors as their informal mentors and described their relationship with positivity. Even though the immediate supervisor was their informal mentor in most cases, the participants used words such as transparent, honest, open, respectful, comfortable, strong, and support to describe the relationship. The supervisors

evaluated the new administrators, yet this relationship did not interfere with the new administrators' positive view of their informal mentors.

However, when asked how informal mentoring can be improved, some respondents stated that they would prefer to have an informal mentor that was not their direct supervisor. Some expressed an interest in having an informal mentor that was outside of their school building but within the district. Although the new administrators did describe their relationship with their informal mentor with positivity, they felt that the relationship could be more impactful if the informal mentor were not their supervisor.

I'm having a great experience, but one way it can be improved is by, well it is something we can't control. I think it's anything at a higher level outside of the building, maybe assigning informal mentors, maybe to get a different lens outside of your building, is always helpful. Maybe like a buddy system or something. Someone that has another lens and doesn't know you like my principal does, you know what I mean? (VPI\_2, 22 February 2021, Personal Interview)

I think that having the informal mentor, perhaps, not be someone who's a direct supervisor, could lead to more impact in that relationship. (VPO\_4, 26 February 2021, Personal Interview)

The dual role that the supervisor plays can limit the benefits of mentoring because the supervisor also evaluates the new administrator. New administrators can be more reluctant to share experiences with their supervisors because they have an evaluative lens over them. New administrators might feel more comfortable sharing thoughts, ideas, or experiences with an informal mentor who is not their direct supervisor.

#### **Analysis of Research Subquestion 4**

*How do these experiences vary from those administrators promoted within the district and those external to the district?*

**Theme Seven: Mentoring influences the leadership practices of administrators promoted from inside the district the most in areas of curriculum and instruction, and**

**hiring and developing staff. On the other hand, mentoring influences the leadership practices of administrators promoted from outside the district the most in areas of family and community engagement, and school budget and operations.**

Administrators promoted from within the district were asked in what way(s) mentoring influenced and improved their leadership practices. Mentoring played a more significant role in developing their leadership practices in curriculum and instruction, and hiring and developing staff. Some of the leadership practices they stated include developing curriculum, supporting instruction, and analyzing assessments. Furthermore, administrators needed to promote instructional environments that meet the needs of all students and to encourage the effective use of technology to support teaching and learning. Administrators also recognized leadership practices such as hiring, supporting, developing, and retaining effective educators. Moreover, they planned for professional development sessions to address the educators' growth areas. Administrators also reported evaluating the educators' performance and supporting their growth through coaching and meaningful feedback. The two sample responses below represent the general sentiment of most administrators promoted from within the district and the relevant leadership practices.

Yes. So a lot of it includes norming sessions around how to give teachers feedback. She comes in and observes me, giving feedback to other teachers or through post conferences and we then have our own post-conference after to kind of reflect on some glows and grows from those meetings. (VPI\_1, 8 March 2021, Personal Interview)

I think I have improved my instructional leadership and the way to deliver it. She has helped me remain focused on ensuring that students are learning and teachers are teaching. We look at students' data together to identify the gaps in teaching and learning. It helps me to narrow down my focus when I go into lessons to observe. She exposes me to a lot of different strategies that I do not have any experience as a new principal. She has shared resources around instructional rounds and walkthrough protocols. I have been able to use those with my leadership team. So I learned a lot from her specifically around instructional leadership. (PI\_3, 29 March 2021, Personal Interview)

Mentoring played a more significant role in developing the leadership practices in family and community engagement and school budget and operations of administrators promoted from outside the district. In particular, they mentioned leadership practices that included engaging families and the community in two-way communication to promote students' academic success. Furthermore, administrators mentioned creating and maintaining positive, collaborative, and productive relationships with their school community. These administrators also stated leadership practices like managing and monitoring operations and administrative systems in schools, as well as managing their budget and other resources to support teaching and learning at their schools. Finally, they reported leadership practices like maintaining a productive relationship with the central office departments that are critical in helping the school's operations. The two sample responses below represent the general sentiment of most administrators promoted from outside the district and relevant leadership practices.

She has helped me a lot with my budget, especially a few weeks ago during the budget season. She guided me to think about the things I need to operate my building, but also how to advocate for the thing we need. She told me that if I want to keep the academic interventionist at my school that I should come to the budget meeting with student data that reflects her impact in that role. I would not have thought of that. She is also familiar with the systems and processes that the district uses, so I can always rely on her for guidance. (PO\_4, 23 March 2021, Personal Interview)

I am new to the district, so I feel I have to work a little harder than my other colleagues to gain the trust of my families and school community. Language is definitely a barrier that I face in my attempt to build those relationships with my parents. We have had several conversations about how I can overcome that barrier and win them over. Families need to be more engaged in school and that factor is really important if we want to improve student outcomes. (VPO\_5, 26 February 2021, Personal Interview)

I used the same analytical strategy mentioned before to code and match the responses to the specific PSEL leadership practices. When looking at formal and informal mentoring, leadership practices in PSEL 4 and PSEL 6 had the highest responses from the administrators promoted from inside the district. Leadership practices in PSEL 8 and PSEL 9 had the highest

responses from the administrators new to the district. Table 4.10 shows the frequency of the participants' answers related to PSEL 4, 6, 8, and 9.

Table 4.10. *Leadership Practices Influenced the Most Between Administrators Promoted from Inside the District and Those Promoted from Outside the District*

Administrator Type	PSEL/Leadership Practices	Frequency		Total
		What specific leadership practices are influenced	What specific leadership practices are improved	
Promoted from Inside	PSEL 4 Curriculum	6	7	13
	PSEL 6 Staff Capacity	11	13	24
Promoted from Outside	PSEL 8 Family Engagement	4	7	11
	PSEL 9 Operations	7	5	12

The findings revealed that mentoring experiences influenced administrators who were promoted from within the district differently than those promoted externally. Mentors had a greater influence on administrators promoted from within the district in curriculum and staff development rather than operations. In contrast, mentors had more influence on administrators hired externally in areas of operations and family and community engagement. Administrators hired externally sought more support in managing and maintaining relationships with stakeholders. These administrators also reported their mentors helped them navigate through new systems and procedures of the new district.

### **Analysis of Research Subquestion 5**

*How do new administrators in urban schools believe that mentoring and other supports can be improved?*

**Theme Eight: Principals and vice-principals place a high value on the mentor's experience in districts similar to their own. Furthermore, the vice-principals would like to see their school district assign them a formal mentor.**

The NJL21 program assigns the vice-principal's formal mentor. This mentor can be an active or retired administrator from any school district in New Jersey. Administrators enrolled in the program do not choose their formal mentor, but they would like to see this process changed. Most of the vice-principals felt that their formal mentor could not help them in many areas because their experience was not in urban education. New administrators found that mentors had a hard time relating to their needs or situations because they had not experienced them in their school district. Also, their mentors were unfamiliar with the process or systems in place at the new administrator's school district.

Additionally, most of the vice-principals stated that they would like to see the school district assign formal mentors. Some vice-principals would like the district to replicate the formal mentoring program they had for principals to all of the new vice-principals. The sample responses below represent the administrators' general sentiment when asked how mentoring and other supports can be improved.

I think it would be tough to do, but I think it would be beneficial if someone in district can provide the mentorship. I think that especially for my case, our districts are so different, that, um, that I have a hard time relating to some of the issues that my mentor has in his district. And when I discuss some of my things, they're kind of like, oh, wow, you guys do that? So, maybe if the formal mentor was from the same district, we would have an easier time relating and sharing experiences and getting more relevant feedback. (VPI\_1, 8 March 2021, Personal Interview)

I think new administrators should have the option to choose who their formal mentor is. I know we kinda just get paired with someone. But, you know, if there are people within the district that, you know, are already mentors, it would be nice to be able to choose those people, just because they're already in the work that nine times out of ten, you already know those people. They know the school district, the systems and have more knowledge about the district in general. Um, so you already have some type of you know,



informal mentoring where the relationship can fully blossom into this formal mentoring experience. If that can't happen, the district should look into assigning formal mentors from within the district to vice-principals. (VPO\_4, 26 February 2021, Personal Interview)

The biggest shift that the school district can do to support new administrators is incorporate an internal formal mentorship with someone that has had the number of years and experience with the role within the district to provide guidance and support for the new administrator coming into that role. (VPI\_4, 10 March, 2021, Personal Interview)

Principals stated in their interviews that one of the highlights or benefits of their formal mentoring experience was that their mentor was from the same district. The Superintendent assigned retired principals from the district as mentors to the new principals. The sample response below represents the administrators' general sentiment when asked how mentoring and other supports can be improved.

One of the highlights is that I have an experienced principal that was a principal in Smithtown (Pseudonym), that has experience with the same parents and groups of students that I have. She teaches me on how to navigate this complex system and difficult situations. She still knows people in the district, so she brings many connections and a lot of, just empathy. You know, even that, it's important. A lot of patience to deal with my questions. (PO\_4, 23 March 2021, Personal Interview)

The quote above highlights the importance administrators placed on mentors being from the same district. These mentors are better positioned to support the new administrators because they know the systems, people in the district, and students and families. Vice-principals indicated that they would benefit from a formal mentoring experience within the district. These formal mentors would be assigned from within the district to provide support and guidance as new vice-principals enter their new roles.

**Theme Nine: Peer group meetings or collaboration spaces among administrators in the same district can improve informal mentoring.**

As mentioned earlier, formal mentoring experiences for the principals and vice-principals interviewed differed. The data collected showed that nine of the 10 vice-principals interviewed

received formal mentoring through NJL2L, which is the formal mentoring and induction program for all new school leaders in New Jersey. During the 2 years of the program, the new administrators, who are residents, are paired with an experienced mentor. This mentoring program consists of school visit observations and one-on-one conferences. Furthermore, the program has monthly peer support group meetings that provide an opportunity for team mentoring in which mentors and residents from different districts get together to network, discuss experiences, and provide collegial support (NJL2L, 2020). The principals interviewed, on the other hand, had formal mentoring through their district.

All of the vice-principals interviewed were in the program because they were new administrators who had recently applied for their New Jersey principal certification. All of the principals interviewed had completed the NJL2L program because they fulfilled the state's certification requirement under their previous role of vice-principal. Principals can enroll in the NJL2L program if it is their first time as a New Jersey administrator and does not have their permanent certification. Also, a principal can be in the program by starting their first year as a vice-principal and then getting promoted to the principalship in their second year. In New Jersey, vice-principals and principals need the principal certification to be hired in those roles.

All 19 administrators interviewed were either enrolled in the NJL2L program or had graduated from the program. Peer group meetings were a highlight of their formal mentoring experience, and they suggested that a similar component or opportunities to collaborate should be embedded in their informal mentoring experiences.

Informal mentoring, one of the ways that it can be improved, is...and I think, this as a totality of just within the district of breaking the barriers between schools. That informal mentoring can be improved if we just promote more outreach, to other vice principals, and principals of other schools so that you have a bigger bucket of support that you could get from different leaders. There should be meetings similar to the peer groups where vice-principals from other schools come together to share ideas and problem solve

situations. As a group we would get different perspectives of how to approach a situation so that you're exposed to different types of leaders, because they're all great. And, I think that's the best way to get the most well-rounded experience. (VPI\_3, 10 March 2021, Personal Interview)

It can always be improved and again by creating opportunities for people to meet and speak with each other. So within, you know. Because that's how it happened within my school leadership team. Obviously just to partner people up and creating these small teams, um, making people, feel, comfortable enough within the team, that they can trust one another to share ideas and best practices, and realize that you're not alone. (PO\_3, 15 March 2021, Personal Interview)

Principals and vice-principals valued one another's presence in peer or collaborative meetings because those were opportunities to network. The meetings served as another layer of support that new administrators found critical to their growth and success. Furthermore, it was a chance to learn from one another and implement best practices at their schools.

### **Summary**

Chapter IV presented the study's findings. The primary research question and the five subquestions guided the study. A total of nine themes emerged from the data collection and analysis of the administrators' interviews. Mentoring influenced administrators' leadership practices in all 10 PSEL standards. However, mentoring influenced leadership practices the most in PSEL 4 Curriculum, PSEL 6 Staff Capacity, PSEL 8 Family Engagement, PSEL 9 Operations, and PSEL 10 School Improvement. Mentors in both formal and informal settings were readily available and provided a safe space that was honest and transparent for administrators to grow, reflect, build confidence, and prosper.

The data showed that formal mentoring influenced PSEL 9 Operations and PSEL 10 School Improvement the most, while informal mentoring influenced leadership practices the most in PSEL 4 Curriculum and PSEL 6 Staff Capacity. The data also revealed that peer group meetings added a significant value to the administrators' formal mentoring experience and

helped improve their leadership practices. Another theme that emerged was that most vice-principals and principals reported their supervisors as their informal mentors and described their relationship with their mentors with positivity.

The data also showed that mentoring differently influenced the leadership practices of administrators promoted from within the district and those hired externally. Administrators promoted from within the district reported that mentoring influenced them the most in PSEL 4 Curriculum and PSEL 6 Staff Capacity. On the other hand, administrators hired from outside the district stated that mentoring influenced them the most in PSEL 8 Family Engagement and PSEL 9 Operations.

The last two themes reflected the general sentiment of administrators' views on how mentoring can be improved. Vice-principals and principals placed a high value on the mentor's experience in districts similar to their own. Vice-principals would like their school district to assign them a formal mentor. Finally, informal mentoring can be improved by creating peer group meetings or collaboration spaces among administrators in the same district.

Chapter Five presents a summary of findings, discussion, implications, recommendations for policy changes, and future research.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, CONCLUSION

Chapter Five provides a summary of the study and its findings. Then, the discussion focuses on addressing the results within the context of the previous literature. Next, the chapter includes the implications of the findings for different stakeholders. Finally, the chapter closes with recommendations for school districts, state organizations, policymakers, and future research suggestions.

#### **Summary of Findings**

A summary of the study's results is presented in this section and organized by the research questions. The themes are reported under the primary research question and the five subquestions in this study.

#### **Primary Research Question**

*In what way(s) does mentoring influence new administrators' leadership practices in traditional urban schools?* Two primary themes emerged under this research question. First, mentoring influenced administrators' leadership practices the most in five key areas: curriculum and instruction, hiring and retaining staff, engaging families and community, school budget and finance, and continuous improvement. Specifically, mentoring had the most influence on curriculum, staff capacity, family engagement, and operations, aligning with the standards administrators found gave them the most challenges. The data between the challenges administrators reported and the frequency of the PSEL standards most influenced by mentoring were aligned. Mentoring influenced the PSEL standards that administrators said were most challenging. Second, mentors were readily available and provided new administrators with a safe

space that was honest and transparent, allowing administrators to grow, reflect, build confidence, and prosper.

Participants were asked in what way(s) mentoring influenced and improved their leadership practices. An analysis of their responses found that mentoring influenced administrators' leadership practices in all 10 PSEL standards. However, the data revealed that mentoring influenced some leadership practices more than others. For example, participants responded that mentoring influenced leadership practices the most in PSEL 6 Staff Capacity, PSEL 4 Curriculum, PSEL 8 Family Engagement, PSEL 9 Operations, and PSEL 10 School Improvement. Mentoring had the least influence in leadership practices related to PSEL 1 Mission, PSEL 2 Ethics, PSEL 3 Equity, PSEL 5 Community of Care, and PSEL 7 Professional Learning Community.

It was important to study the relationship between the mentor and the administrator to understand how mentoring influenced administrators' leadership practices. Participants were asked to describe their mentoring experience and the relationship they had with their mentor. Most of the participants used words such as honest, open, and transparent to describe their relationship. Also, mentors facilitated their growth as administrators and helped them reflect on their actions. Additionally, when asked if their relationship with their mentor resulted in developing new beliefs or understandings about themselves as a principal/vice-principal, they responded that their mentors helped increase their confidence. A mentor's ability to create an open and transparent environment is vital to the development of the administrator. Administrators build their confidence in what they do through their mentors.

## **Subquestion 1**

*In what way(s) does formal mentoring influence administrator leadership practices?*

Formal mentoring influenced administrators' leadership practices the most in two main areas: operations and finance of schools, and practices that promote continuous improvements. These leadership practices were aligned with PSEL 9 and PSEL 10. Leadership practices in PSEL 9 include managing fiscal, physical, and other resources to support curriculum, instruction, and assessments. Furthermore, administrators are required to manage and monitor the operations and administrative systems of the school. In PSEL 10, administrators are expected to continue to grow and seek areas of improvement. Additionally, they need to be the lead learner of their school buildings and serve as models for the rest of the staff.

Principals in this study received their formal mentoring through their school district. When asked if they were receiving formal mentoring, all nine principals interviewed responded yes and mentioned the Superintendent's formal mentoring initiative for new principals. For the past 3 years, the district's Superintendent has paired retired and experienced principals from the district with new principals. Currently, five principal coaches were assigned to new principals during their first and second years. However, current principals in their third year still have the principal coaches. The district's program is not a formal mentoring program but rather a new principal coaching program. However, the principals interviewed viewed their relationship with the principal coaches as formal mentoring.

Vice-principals experienced formal mentoring through the NJL2L program and not the district. New vice-principals must enroll in the program because their role requires principal certification. Once new administrators complete the program, the state issues a standard principal certificate. The two formal mentoring experiences that vice-principals and principals experience

influenced their leadership practices primarily in areas of operations, finance, and self-reflection and improvement.

## **Subquestion 2**

*In what way(s) does informal mentoring influence administrator leadership practices?*

Informal mentoring influenced administrators' leadership practices the most in two main areas: curriculum and instruction, and hiring and developing staff.

These leadership practices area aligned with PSEL 4 and PSEL6. Leadership practices in PSEL 4 include developing curriculum, supporting instruction, and analyzing assessments. Furthermore, administrators need to promote instructional environments that meet the needs of all students. Additionally, administrators need to encourage the effective use of technology to support teaching and learning. This skill is more relevant and pronounced now that we are in virtual and/or hybrid learning. In PSEL 6, administrators are expected to hire, support, develop, and retain effective educators. Additionally, they need to plan for professional development sessions to address the educators' growth areas. Embedded in PSEL 6 is evaluating the educators' performance and supporting educator growth through coaching and meaningful feedback.

Most of the administrators interviewed described their informal mentor as their supervisor. Therefore, the results were in alignment with the primary role and responsibility of the administrator. One of their primary roles in schools was developing curriculum, supporting instruction, and analyzing assessment data. They provided teachers with constructive feedback and coaching to develop their teaching skills and knowledge. Their informal mentors played a critical role in their development of skills around curriculum and staff development.



### Subquestion 3

*How do these experiences vary from principal and vice-principal?* Two primary themes emerged under this subquestion. First, peer group meetings through formal mentoring added significant value to the vice-principals' and principals' experience, improving their leadership practices. Second, the majority of vice-principals and principals identified their supervisor as their informal mentor. Administrators described their relationship with their informal mentors with positivity.

The data collected showed that nine of the 10 vice-principals interviewed received formal mentoring through the NJL2L. This mentoring program consists of school visit observations and one-on-one conferences. However, according to most of the vice-principals interviewed, the program's highlight was the monthly peer support group meetings. Peer group meetings provide an opportunity for team mentoring in which mentors and residents from different districts get together to network, discuss experiences, and provide collegial support (NJL2L, 2020).

The collegial support vice-principals received through peer group meetings was high and invaluable for their growth as administrators. The most significant highlights of the vice-principals' formal mentoring experience were learning from peers, problem solving issues they were facing, and improving their leadership practices. Vice-principals stated that they learned how other school leaders dealt with problems in their district similar to those they encountered. During those meetings, they supported and offered suggestions to each other on how to approach difficult situations. Through the peer group meetings, vice-principals created an extended network of support beyond their school or school district. Principals also reported that one of their highlights was meeting with other colleagues in smaller collaborative spaces. These meetings served as an added level of support to their growth and development. They were able to

form a network of support among the principals to help each other with questions and difficult situations.

The second theme that emerged from the data was that most administrators identified their supervisors as informal mentors. Vice-principals viewed their principals as informal mentors, while principals viewed their assistant Superintendents as their informal mentors. In a few cases, administrators viewed their supervisor and a colleague as their informal mentors. Of the 19 administrators interviewed, only one vice-principal and one principal identified another colleague as their informal mentor. All of the administrators had a positive description of their relationship with their informal mentor. Even though the immediate supervisor was their informal mentor in most cases, the participants used words such as transparent, honest, open, respectful, comfortable, strong, and support to describe the relationship. The supervisors evaluated the new administrators, yet this relationship did not interfere with the new administrators' favorable view of their informal mentors.

#### **Subquestion 4**

*How do these experiences vary from those administrators promoted within the district and those external to the district?* One theme emerged under this subquestion. Mentoring influenced the leadership practices of administrators promoted from inside the district the most in areas of curriculum and instruction, and hiring and developing staff. On the other hand, mentoring influenced the leadership practices of administrators promoted from outside the district the most in areas of family and community engagement, and school budget and operations. Mentoring influenced different aspects of each type of administrator in their daily practice. These leadership practices were aligned with the PSEL.

For administrators promoted from within the district, mentoring played a more significant role in developing their leadership practices related to PSEL 4 and PSEL 6. Leadership practices in PSEL 4 included developing curriculum, supporting instruction, and analyzing assessments. Furthermore, administrators needed to promote instructional environments that met the needs of all students. Additionally, administrators needed to encourage the effective use of technology to support teaching and learning. In PSEL 6, administrators are expected to hire, support, develop, and retain effective educators. Additionally, they need to plan for professional development sessions to address the educators' growth areas. Embedded in PSEL 6 is evaluating the educators' performance and supporting educator growth through coaching and meaningful feedback.

Mentoring played a more significant role in developing the leadership practices related to PSEL 8 and PSEL 9 for administrators promoted outside the district. Leadership practices in PSEL 8 include engaging families and the community in two-way communication to promote students' academic success. Furthermore, administrators need to create and maintain positive, collaborative, and productive relationships with their school community. In PSEL 9, administrators are expected to manage and monitor operations and administrative systems in schools. Additionally, they need to manage their budget and other resources to support the teaching and learning at their schools. Embedded in PSEL 9 is maintaining a productive relationship with the central office departments that are critical in helping the school's operations.

The findings revealed that mentoring experiences influenced administrators promoted from within the district differently than those promoted externally. Mentors had a greater influence on administrators promoted from within the district in curriculum and staff

development rather than operations. In contrast, mentors had more influence on administrators hired externally in areas of operations and family and community engagement. Administrators hired externally sought more support in managing and maintaining relationships with stakeholders. These administrators also reported their mentors helped them navigate through new systems and procedures of the new district.

### **Subquestion 5**

*How do new administrators in urban schools believe that mentoring and other supports can be improved?* Two themes emerged under this subsection. First, principals and vice-principals placed a high value on the mentor's experience in districts similar to their own. Furthermore, the vice-principals would like to see their school district assign them a formal mentor. Second, peer group meetings or collaboration spaces among administrators in the same district can improve informal mentoring.

The NJL21 program assigns the vice-principal's formal mentor. This mentor can be an active or retired administrator from any school district in New Jersey. Administrators enrolled in the program do not choose their formal mentor, but they would like to see this process changed. Most of the vice-principals felt that their formal mentor could not help them in many areas because their experience was not in urban education. On the other hand, principals stated in their interviews that one of the highlights or benefits of their formal mentoring experience was that their mentor was from the same district. The Superintendent assigned retired principals from the district as mentors to the new principals. Principals reported relating more to these mentors because they understood the need of the students and community. These mentors were also familiar with the district's operations and had contacts that could help principals resolve any issues more expeditiously.

The second theme that emerged was that peer group meetings or collaboration spaces among administrators in the same district can improve informal mentoring. Peer group meeting is a component of formal mentoring offered through the NJL2L program. All of the vice-principals interviewed were in the NJL2L program because they were new administrators who had recently applied for their New Jersey principal certification. All of the principals interviewed had completed the NJL2L program because they fulfilled the state's certification requirement under their previous role of vice-principal. Peer group meetings were a highlight of their formal mentoring experience, and the administrators suggested that a similar component or opportunities to collaborate should be embedded in their informal mentoring experiences.

Principals and vice-principals value one another's presence in peer or collaborative meetings because that is an opportunity to network. These meetings serve as another layer of support that new administrators find critical to their growth and success. Furthermore, it is a chance to learn from one another and implement best practices at their schools within the district.

## **Discussion**

This study was designed to explore the ways mentoring influenced new administrators' leadership practices. This section analyzes and interprets the results of this study. The discussion explores the findings relative to previous literature and discusses the unintended findings.

### **Leadership Practices**

The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) help focus administrators' leadership practices. The standards bring into focus all of the critical areas of running an effective school that promote student learning and achievement. Ten standards inform the leadership practices that school leaders must put into action to impact student learning. The standards are listed as follows:

1. Mission, vision, and core values,
2. Ethics and professional norms,
3. Equity and cultural responsiveness,
4. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment,
5. Community of care and support for students,
6. Professional capacity of school personnel,
7. Professional community for teachers and staff,
8. Meaningful engagement of families and community,
9. Operations and management, and
10. School improvement.

These standards can be used to support and guide school leaders. They also highlight the complexity of the principalship. According to a 2012 survey, three-quarters of all principals indicated that their job has become too complex (Markow et al., 2013). Federal and state requirements on testing and teacher and principal evaluation have added to the stress. School principals must demonstrate significant gains in state assessments to be considered successful. The pressure to perform is constant and overwhelming. Showing substantial increases in state assessments is easier said than done, and it is notably more difficult in high-needs communities where poverty is considerable. In New Jersey, TEACH NJ Act signed into law in 2012 requires that student performance on state testing be included in the principal and teacher annual evaluations.

The same law requires teachers to have more formal observations, a midyear evaluation, and an annual evaluation. These new requirements are more than the one observation and one annual evaluation that was required before the new law. Running a school is not easy. Laws,

policies, changing demographics, and lack of resources have impacted the way and level of effectiveness with which principals run their schools (Lynch, 2012). Ultimately, principals wear many hats and are responsible for everything that happens at their schools.

The results of this study found that mentoring significantly influences leadership practices in PSEL 4 Curriculum, PSEL 6 Staff Capacity, PSEL 8 Family Engagement, and PSEL 9 Operations. Moreover, the challenges that new administrators reported were in the same four focus areas. Research supported the vital role principals play in these four critical areas. The discussion below focuses on these four areas and how this study adds to the body of literature.

Among many roles, principals are managers of personnel. Our participants in this study indicated that mentoring influenced PSEL 6 Staff Capacity the most. This area includes recruiting, hiring, firing, retaining, inducting, and mentoring teachers and administrators, which our participants also found challenging. Portin (2004) mentioned the principal as the critical factor in developing leadership capacity and professional development opportunities for all personnel in their building. The present study found that mentors influenced new administrators' coaching and feedback of teachers. This finding paralleled Grissom's (2019) study on principals' role in retaining effective teachers and firing low-performing teachers. Principals are responsible for assessing the quality of teaching and the impact that those practices have on student achievement. Grissom and Bartanen's (2019) study revealed a strong link between effective principals and the retention of effective teachers. The new administrators in this study recognized the importance of building staff capacity in their schools because it improves student outcomes. They sought support from their mentors most often in PSEL 6 Staff Capacity. Mentors provided new administrators support in how to coach and give teachers feedback.

The results of the study also found that mentoring influenced PSEL 4 Curriculum. This standard was an area that administrators found to be one of their biggest challenges. The principal has a strong influence on the quality of teaching and learning at their schools. There is a direct link between the quality of leadership and student learning. Effective principals are responsible for creating learning environments that contribute to an increase in student academic performance (Leithwood et al., 2004). This research aligned with these findings that new administrators spend a significant amount of time and need greater support in monitoring the quality of instructional materials as well as their delivery, implementation, and overall alignment with state assessments. School leadership has a strong and positive effect on learning environments that increase student achievement (Wahlstrom et al., 2010).

Another role that the principal plays is the manager of external development. The results also showed that PSEL 8 Family Engagement was another standard that was significantly influenced by mentoring and that administrators found the most challenging. Principals must build strong relationships with families, community-based organizations, and local, county, and state officials because these external entities play a role in the school's success. Maintaining solid relationships with these partners can benefit the principal in many ways, including student discipline, financial resources, material resources, donations, personal time, and overall support for the school (Meador, 2020). According to Hess and Kelly (2007), through these relationships, the principal can control the school's perception in the eyes of the external partners. Successful principals always nourish existing relationships while looking to establish more partnerships to benefit the school community.

Finally, mentoring influences PSEL 9 Operations, and administrators found this standard one of the most challenging to manage. Principals are responsible for maintaining their school's



budget and allocating funds aligned with their strategic planning. Although the district gives a pot of money to the schools, the principal must manage these funds, balance the budget, cut costs, and raise more funds (Portin, 2004). One of the most challenging obstacles principals need to overcome is the financial woes of many districts. This study's findings aligned with a MetLife survey of 500 principals showing that about 70% of principals reported managing their budget and resources while also meeting their students' needs was challenging (Markow et al., 2013). The participants in this study said that their mentors have helped them improve the management of limited resources and their school's budget.

This study adds to the body of literature in two ways. First, this study found that administrators promoted from within the district focused on PSEL 4 Curriculum and PSEL 6 Staff Capacity the most, while administrators hired externally focused more on PSEL 8 Family Engagement and PSEL 9 Operations. The research studies mentioned above did not mention how each of the four areas influenced each administrator type. However, the present results showed that new administrators hired externally focused more on developing their family and community engagement skills than those administrators promoted from within the district who were more familiar with the community. Administrators promoted from within the district focused more on PSEL 4 Curriculum and PSEL 6 Staff Capacity and less on PSEL 8 Family Engagement and PSEL 9 Operations because they had a more solid foundation and understanding than those new to the district.

Second, the research studies mentioned above highlighted the critical roles principals play in a school. Unique to this study, however, was the inclusion of the vice-principals' voice and experience at school. Adding the vice-principals' experience enhances the understanding of their role in areas of PSEL 4 Curriculum, PSEL 6 Staff Capacity, PSEL 8 Family Engagement,

and PSEL 9 Operations. The literature on the vice-principal role is limited. Most of the literature has focused on the role of the principal (Hess, 2007; Leithwood, 2004; Lynch, 2012; Portin, 2004). The existing literature and studies on the vice-principals' role lack depth because they focus on surveys and job satisfaction, which fails to capture a holistic understanding of the vice-principals' role (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The present study was designed to look specifically at the leadership practices of vice-principals. Their responses provided more insights into their role within the context of leading schools.

### **Mentoring and Supporting Principals**

This study's results reinforced the importance of and need for mentors in the development and growth of new administrators. Gray et al. (2007), Matlach (2015), Superville (2014), Mitang (2012), Parylo (2012), and Lashway (2003) all supported mentoring as a critical strategy for supporting and developing new principals. New principals need someone to guide them through the hectic and very demanding first few years of their profession. Mentoring programs have been most effective at building instructional skills when there has been a tight match between the expertise, needs, leadership style, and school experience of the coach and the novice principal and training for the mentor. This study's theme eight supported previous research on the importance of having the right match between mentor and mentee. The participants in this study placed great value on having a mentor with similar background and experience as their own. Most of the participants indicated that mentors who do not have experience or background in the district where they lead have a more challenging time relating to them.

All of the participants in this study spoke favorably of their mentoring experience. Theme two of this study mentioned how mentors were readily available and provided a safe space that

was honest and transparent for administrators to grow, reflect, and prosper. The results of the present study reinforced Parylo et al.'s (2012) study, which found that new principals reported the most positive experience through formal and informal mentoring. Additionally, Sciarappa and Mason (2014) conducted a study on the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) 9-month-long principal mentoring program. The study found that 96% of the 54 respondents were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the mentoring they received. Furthermore, 69% of the respondents were most grateful for the mentor support around instructional leadership. The present study added to these studies because mentoring not only has a positive influence on new administrators, but it also builds their confidence. Mentors role-play situations and troubleshoot problems with new administrators so that when complex issues arise, they approach them with confidence.

Another study that Gimbel (2018) conducted focused on the perceptions of a principal mentoring initiative in Vermont. The study asked mentees if their mentors played a role in helping them stay in the profession. Most respondents indicated that the purpose of having a mentor was to reduce attrition rates. The researcher, though, could not provide data about principal retention in Vermont since the new law came into effect. However, 93.75% of the mentees felt that their mentors had a significant and positive impact on their job performance. The present study revealed that the four areas with which administrators reported having the most challenges (PSEL 4 Curriculum, PSEL 6 Staff Capacity, PSEL 8 Family Engagement, and PSEL 9 Operations) were the same areas that mentors influenced the most and helped administrators improve. The present study extended this research because it highlighted the specific areas of leadership that mentoring influenced and improved.

## **Benefits of Mentoring**

A few studies upheld mentoring as a critical strategy for developing and supporting administrators (Gray et al., 2007; Lashway, 2003; Matlach, 2015; Mitang, 2012; Parylo, 2012; Superville, 2014). However, Daresh (2004) wrote about the five benefits that mentoring has on the mentee. The previous research supported the results of this study.

The first benefit that mentees reported was increased confidence in their professional competence (Daresh, 2004). The findings of the present study highlight/ed the mentor's role in building the administrators' confidence. There is a significantly steep learning curve when individuals assume the responsibility of leading a school. They must implement a rigorous educational program and ensure that the building's operations are working properly and they can navigate through the often complicated bureaucracy of the central office and its departments. This study identified the four main areas that the new administrators found the most challenging: PSEL 4 Curriculum, PSEL 6 Staff Capacity, PSEL 8 Family Engagement, and PSEL 9 Operations. These areas were also the ones mentors influenced the most. An experienced mentor helps a new administrator approach situations, conflicts, and other issues with a heightened confidence level.

The second benefit of mentoring is that it provides mentees with a faster way to link theory and practice (Daresh, 2004). All new administrators undergo coursework on educational leadership before assuming the top position at their schools. Knowing about educational theory is one task but learning how to apply it to real-world problems is a challenge that takes time to master. The present study added to the body of literature because it included peer group meetings as a mechanism to link theory with practice. These peer group meetings served as another layer of support that new administrators found critical to their growth and success. It was an

opportunity for them to learn from one another and implement best practices at their schools within the district. Moreover, mentors already had that experience and were in a better place to help new administrators apply what they learned in the books to their day-to-day practices.

Another benefit of mentoring is an increased level of communication by new administrators (Daresh, 2004). The results of this study showed that mentors were readily available to the mentee. This regular interaction between them prevented a new administrator from feeling alone and isolated from the school and other leaders. New administrator isolation impacts efficacy and performance (Bauer & Brazer, 2010). Thus, the relationship between the mentor and the new administrator allows for conversations relevant to the development of both. This level of openness allows for more collaboration to happen.

The fourth benefit of mentoring is that the mentees learn the tricks of the profession directly from the mentor (Daresh, 2004). The participants in our study described their mentors as ones who have learned the ins and outs of leading schools, and they can share this knowledge with them. This benefit aligned with the results of the present study, especially with the principals' formal mentoring experience. Principals' formal mentors were retired principals from the same district who knew the community, families, and the district's systems.

Finally, the last benefit is that the new administrator feels a sense of belonging (Daresh, 2004). The mentor has an opportunity not only to support the new administrators but also to bring them into the mentor's inner circle of colleagues and friends. The new administrators' network of supports expands from their relationship with their mentor. The results of this study revealed the importance of networking and expanded the current research to include peer group meetings. The participants suggested that peer group meetings or collaboration spaces improve mentoring and, in particular, their informal mentoring experiences.

## **Informal Mentoring**

Previous research has shown that an informal mentoring experience between mentor and mentee is more beneficial to the mentee than a formal experience (Nemanick, 2000). The results of the present study reinforced this idea. Nemanick stated that the reason for this might stem from the type of relationship forged between mentor and mentee. In an informal mentoring experience, both the mentor and the mentee can identify with each other (Nemanick, 2000). Mentors might see something of themselves in their mentees, and mentees might want to aspire to be like their mentors in one aspect or another. Nemanick's description of informal mentoring aligned with the results of the present study; however, this study found that nearly all of the participants identified their supervisor as their informal mentor. Nemanick's research might explain this phenomenon because each could identify with the other. The present study found that new administrators valued mentors who had experience in the same or similar district as they did. According to the participants, this connection had great value for their informal mentoring experience.

According to Nemanick (2000), the match is mutual and lasts for years. The pairing differs from formal mentoring in that the relationship is for a set period and an external party matches the mentor and mentee. Informal mentoring is a voluntary partnership that starts as a friendship first, followed by learning and career advancement (Inzer & Crawford, 2005). Additionally, Nemanick mentioned that informal mentors are more likely to engage in psychosocial activities such as counseling, facilitating social interaction, role modeling, and providing friendship. The participants in this study mentioned some of these psychosocial activities as part of their interactions with their mentors, but they did not mention forging friendships with their informal mentors.

## **Implications**

Multiple themes on the way mentoring influenced new administrator leadership practices emerged in this study. These themes provide valuable insights for different stakeholders, including new administrators, mentors, district leaders, and policymakers/state organizations, on how mentoring and other supports help new administrators address their job challenges and complexities. This section provides some implications for each of the stakeholders in the discussion.

### **New Administrators**

This study underscored the need for mentoring supports for new administrators. It found that mentoring influenced administrators' leadership practices in all of the PSEL standards. The standards provide administrators with valuable actions to run effective schools. Administrators need to engage mentors in a productive way to improve their leadership practices. This study found an alignment between new administrators' challenges and the leadership practices that mentoring influenced. New administrators must communicate these challenges with the mentors so they can provide more targeted supports.

Also, new administrators need to understand that their experiences and backgrounds are valuable to other new administrators' growth and development. The results of this study revealed that the new administrators found peer group meetings and other collaborative spaces beneficial for their success. The majority of the vice-principals and principals placed a high value on these meetings because they created a network of support for them as well as a venue to learn from each other. New administrators need to know that they bring value to those meetings and enhance other new administrators' learning and experiences. New administrators benefit from each other.

## **Mentors**

This study also provides implications for mentors. First, mentors must understand that new administrators need support in many leadership practices, yet some are more prominent than others. Leadership practices in PSEL 4 Curriculum, PSEL 6 Staff Capacity, PSEL 8 Family engagement, and PSEL 9 Operations are areas on which mentors have the most influence. Additionally, mentors need to realize that formal and informal mentoring experiences influence different leadership practices. For example, informal mentors have a more significant influence on leadership practices PSEL 4 Curriculum and PSEL Staff Capacity, while formal mentoring influences PSEL 9 Operations and PSEL 10 School Improvement. Mentors also play a different role in supporting administrators promoted from within the district and those hired externally. Mentors need to understand the needs of each new administrator to be able to deliver the appropriate level of support.

Second, mentors must be aware that their experiences and backgrounds matter to the mentees. Mentors who have experiences in districts similar to their mentees heighten the quality of the mentoring experience. This study found that new administrators can relate better to mentors with similar experiences than those who are less familiar with their setting. Mentors who do not share the background of the new administrators they support need to find a way to bridge that gap. One way is for these mentors to connect their mentees with administrators who have experiences with similar districts. Mentors can provide resources to the new administrators that are relevant to the type of schools they lead.

Finally, mentors must realize that new administrators hold them with high regard. All of the participants in this study expressed their relationship with their mentors with positivity. Mentors provide a safe space that is honest and transparent for new administrators to grow, build



confidence, and prosper. The actions that mentors take to encourage and maintain such environments must continue while they also remain cautious about activities that might not benefit new administrators.

### **District Leaders**

District leaders play a critical role in facilitating new administrators' growth and development through mentoring. This study provided data from different groups of administrators. The needs of administrators promoted from within the district and those promoted externally are different. The needs of vice-principals and principals are also different, and their views about mentors must inform the district's future decision making. Many factors were identified in this study that districts must consider when developing and implementing mentoring programs to support new administrators.

This study also highlighted the various components of formal and informal mentoring that are most valuable to their growth and development. The district can utilize these components to institute programs and set times to support new administrators in their building. For example, the peer group meeting is a component of formal mentoring that New Jersey Leaders 2 Leaders (NJL2L) program provides, and it has a significant influence on the development of new administrators. This component can be implemented at the district level. District leaders must support each type of administrator through mentoring as well as the different components because their needs are different.

### **State Policymakers/State Organizations**

This study provides implications for state policymakers and state organizations such as NJL2L. The vice-principals' and principals' roles are different, yet their certificates are the same. Vice-principals and principals both utilize the principal certificate issued by the State to secure

positions as administrators and carry out the duties and responsibilities of those roles. This study showed that the needs of each type of administrator are different, and the areas of support they receive are not similar. Therefore, the requirements to attain the certificate for each role should be different.

Furthermore, once vice-principals complete their formal 2-year requirement with the NJL2L program, they will not be assigned a mentor if they are promoted to the principal role. New principals need a different level of support, and this study showed a need for continued mentoring.

### **Recommendations for School Districts, State Organizations, and Policymakers**

This section offers recommendations for school districts, state organizations, and policymakers. These recommendations include the limitations of this study and are based on the findings of this study alone. School districts, state organizations such as NJL2L, and policymakers can utilize these recommendations as a guide to help them determine next steps to address their unique needs.

**1. School districts should assign formal mentors to vice-principals.** Theme eight of this study emerged from the vice-principals' desire to have the district assign them a formal mentor. The study found that the district does not assign formal mentors to vice-principals. Vice-principals' formal mentoring occurs through the NJL2L program, and their informal mentoring occurs primarily through their supervisor. The vice-principals would be better supported if the district assigned them a formal mentor from within the district in the same way they do for principals. The principals in this study viewed their relationship with their formal mentors with positivity. Principals can relate to their mentors because they are retired administrators from the district who understand the systems, families, community, and challenges of working in an urban

district. The vice-principals would benefit from a formal mentor assigned from within the district because of the connections and experiences the mentors bring to the relationship.

**2. School districts need to streamline the process to pair informal mentors with new administrators.** Theme six emerged after the participants identified their supervisor as their informal mentors. The principals identified their assistant superintendents as their informal mentors, and the vice-principals identified their principals as informal mentors. Some expressed an interest in having an informal mentor that was outside of their school building but within the district. Although the new administrators did describe their relationship with their informal mentor with positivity, they felt that the relationship could be more impactful if the informal mentor was not their supervisor. This dual role can limit the benefits of mentoring because the supervisor also evaluates the new administrator. The district can take proactive steps and open a pool of informal mentors that can connect with new administrators to avoid this potential conflict of interest. These informal mentors would not be direct supervisors to the new administrators.

**3. School districts need to create peer group meetings or collaborative spaces for new administrators to convene.** Theme nine emerged after this study found that principals and vice-principals valued one another's presence in peer or collaborative meetings because they were opportunities to network. These meetings served as another layer of support that new administrators found critical to their growth and success. Furthermore, they were a chance to learn from one another and implement best practices at their schools within the district.

**4. School districts and state organizations such as NJL2L should conduct a needs assessment or survey for each new administrator.** This study showed that vice-principals and principals can articulate the areas they find most challenging. New administrators also know the leadership practices on which mentors have the most influence. Theme one emerged after this

study found that mentoring influenced administrators' leadership practices the most in five key areas: curriculum and instruction, hiring and retaining staff, engaging families and community, school budget and finance, and continuous improvement. Also, theme seven emerged after this study found that mentoring influenced administrators promoted from inside the district differently from those promoted outside of the district. The needs of each type of administrator are different.

Districts should create a process to collect data on the needs of each administrator and a mechanism to determine if the supports the mentor is providing are helping them improve. The needs of administrators shift as they grow into their position; thus, this process should be done periodically so that the support new administrators receive is always aligned with their needs. Asking new administrators how mentors are influencing their leadership practices will also help reinforce mentor training and the integrity of the mentoring program.

**5. School districts should extend mentoring supports to new administrators until the fifth year or until the new administrator feels they do not need the support.** Theme two emerged after this study showed that mentors increased and built the new administrators' confidence. Furthermore, mentors influenced leadership practices in the areas of PSEL 4 Curriculum, PSEL 6 Staff Capacity, PSEL 8 Family Engagement, and 9 Operations, which are critical areas of school improvement. Continued supports in these areas through the fifth year will yield benefits for the growth and development of the new administrators. Additionally, research has shown that principal performance peaks in the fifth year (Gerew et al., 2015). If school districts can keep administrators until they meet their peak year, the chances of maintaining principals in the profession will increase. Vice-principals and principals would benefit from an extended mentoring period.

**6. State organizations such as NJL2L should create a pool of mentors and have new administrators choose the mentors.** Theme eight emerged after this study revealed the importance new administrators placed on mentors who had experiences and backgrounds similar to their own. New administrators found that mentors had a hard time relating to their needs or situations because they had not experienced them in their school district. Also, their mentors were unfamiliar with the process or systems in place at the new administrators' school district. New administrators should be allowed to select the mentor they feel meets their needs and could help them improve their leadership practices. Mentors would have the opportunity to accept the match. Once the connection is established, there is a mutual understanding that both want to work with each other, with the ultimate goal of supporting and developing the new administrator.

**7. Policymakers should consider a mandatory mentoring period for new principals.** This study found that none of the principals were enrolled in a mandatory formal mentoring program. All of them had finished their mandatory 2-year formal mentoring program as vice-principals. This scenario makes sense because of how the current formal mentoring program is structured.

Vice-principals and principals both need a principal certificate to execute their duties legally. Once the State issues a principal certificate, the new administrators must enroll in the NJL2L program for 2 years to receive their standard principal certificate. When that standard certificate is given, the new administrators are not required to have a mentor. The career path of most principals starts in the classroom as a teacher, and then they get promoted to the vice-principal role. Most principals enter their new role with a standard certificate issued and therefore do not need to enroll in the NJL2L program that assigns a mentor. Because the position and type of support for the vice-principal and principal are different, policymakers need to

consider assigning a mentor to a new principal, regardless of the kind of certificate held. Additionally, policymakers need to consider two different types of certificates—one for vice-principals and another for principals. To attain the standard certification for each role, the administrator needs to fulfill the requirements relevant to the roles and responsibilities of each position. This approach will ensure that the programming and supports are tailored to the administrators' needs and aligned with the functions each performs at the school.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

This section provides recommendations for future research.

**1. This study focused on the ways mentoring influences leadership practices, but further studies should be conducted to determine how mentoring influences administrator performance.** Participants in this study reported that mentoring influenced their leadership practices and improved their practices the most in the areas of PSEL 4 Curriculum, PSEL 6 Staff Capacity, PSEL 8 Family Engagement, and PSEL 9 Operations; however, it stopped short of exploring the rating administrators received from their supervisors. This study should be expanded to include how mentoring influences an administrator's ratings and performance evaluation.

**2. This study focused on the ways mentoring influence d new administrators' leadership practices, inclusive of vice-principals and principals; however, further studies should be conducted exclusively on the vice-principals' role.** All of the principals interviewed were promoted from a vice-principal role; therefore, the key to understanding the level of supports that principals need might be in studying the vice-principalship. Much of the research conducted on school leadership focused on the principal. Many of the supports that school districts put into place focus on the principal. Understanding the role of the vice-principal better

can lead to implementing mentoring programs, leadership development sessions, and other supports tailored to the specific functions a vice-principal executes.

**3. Continue to expand this research's theme on how peer group meetings add a significant value to the vice-principals' experience, improving their leadership practices.**

Peer group meetings are a component of formal mentoring experiences for vice-principals. This study focused on the formal and informal aspects but not the components of each experience.

The majority of the participants in this study reported peer group meetings as a highlight of their mentoring experience. Peer group experiences improved their leadership practices in many areas, while also creating an extended network of supports for the new administrators. It is worth investigating the influence that peer group meetings and other collaboration spaces have on administrator practices and performance.

**4. Additional research should explore the relationship between a new administrator and their supervisor.** As noted in this study, nearly all of the vice-principals and principals interviewed reported their supervisor as their informal mentor. Principals serve as informal mentors to their vice-principals, and assistant superintendents serve as informal mentors to principals. This is a phenomenon worth exploring because a shift might happen between the supervisor and the new administrator relationship. In this study, supervisors were not just evaluating the new administrators but also mentoring them. New administrators described their relationship with the supervisor/informal mentors with positivity. An expanded study would investigate how the supervisor has shifted from an evaluative lens to a combined approach between evaluation and support for the mentee.

**5. Further research should be done between mentor pairing and the effectiveness of mentoring on the development of new administrators.** Do the mentor's background and

experience if similar to the mentees' have more influence on an administrator's leadership practices than a mentor who does not share the same background or experience? This study found that vice-principals and principals preferred their mentors to have experiences similar to their own. The participants in this study all worked in traditional urban schools, and some expressed concerns that their mentors did not have experience in large urban school districts. This difference led to a disconnect between the two and a lack of support when dealing with issues related to an urban school district. An expanded study would explore other factors other than mentors' background and experience and include their race, gender, age, or other characteristics. Do these factors influence the effectiveness of mentoring and the development of new administrators?

**6. Continue to expand on this study's findings of the influence mentoring has on administrators promoted from within the district and those promoted externally.** This study found that mentoring influenced different leadership practices for administrators promoted from within the district and those promoted externally. For example, mentoring influenced the leadership practices of administrators promoted from within the district the most in PSEL 4 Curriculum and PSEL 6 Staff Capacity. On the other hand, mentoring influenced the leadership practices of administrators hired externally in PSEL 8 Family Engagement and PSEL 9 Operations. An expanded research would explore the different needs of each type of administrator and align the mentor supports to address those needs.

### **Conclusion**

The role of school administrators is complex, demanding, and ever evolving. Principals and vice-principals are responsible for, among many things, effective instruction, student discipline, developing and hiring of teachers and staff, increasing student achievement, ensuring



that schools are safe and clean, ascertaining that district and school goals are met, and supporting school finance and parental engagement (Harvey & Holland 2011; Lynch, 2012; Meador, 2020; Walker & Crow, 2006). All of these leadership practices are aligned with the PSEL standards. Mentors could profoundly influence new administrators' leadership practices that, in the end, can yield substantial growth in student outcomes and an improved culture of teaching and learning at their schools (Browne & Muth, 2004; Daresh, 2004). This qualitative study examined the ways formal and informal mentoring influenced leadership practices in traditional urban schools. The study included 10 vice-principals and nine principals with less than 3 years of experience in their roles.

Findings from this study noted that mentoring influenced administrators' leadership practices in all 10 PSEL standards. However, mentoring influenced leadership practices the most in PSEL 4 Curriculum, PSEL 6 Staff Capacity, PSEL 8 Family Engagement, PSEL 9 Operations, and PSEL 10 School Improvement. The data showed that formal mentoring influenced PSEL 9 Operations and PSEL 10 School Improvement the most, while informal mentoring influenced leadership practices the most in PSEL 4 Curriculum and PSEL 6 Staff Capacity. The data also revealed that peer group meetings added a significant value to the administrators' formal mentoring experience and helped improve their leadership practices. Another theme that emerged was that most vice-principals and principals reported their supervisors as their informal mentors and described their relationship with their mentors with positivity. Finally, mentoring influenced the leadership practices of administrators promoted from within the district and those hired externally differently.

This study opens the opportunity for future research in a few areas. The first area is the influence mentoring has on new administrator performance, not just leadership practices. The

second area is expanding the research to explore the ways peer group meetings add value to the vice-principals' experience, thereby improving their leadership practices. Third, additional research should be conducted to explore the relationship between new administrators and their supervisors' role in their growth and development. Fourth, further research should be done between mentor pairing and the effectiveness of mentoring on the development of new administrators. Fifth, continue to expand on this study's findings of the influence mentoring has on administrators promoted from within the district and those promoted externally. Finally, this study focused on the ways mentoring influences leadership practices, but further studies should be done to determine how mentoring influences administrator performance.

Finally, this study provides a few recommendations to school districts, state organizations, and policymakers. First, school districts should assign formal mentors to vice-principals. Second, school districts need to streamline the process to pair informal mentors with new administrators. Third, school districts need to create peer group meetings or collaborative spaces for new administrators to convene. Fourth, school districts and state organizations such as NJL2L should conduct a needs assessment or survey for each new administrator. Fifth, school districts should extend mentoring supports to new administrators until the fifth year or until they feel that they do not need the support. Sixth, state organizations such as NJL2L should create a pool of mentors and have new administrators choose the mentors. Finally, policymakers should consider a mandatory mentoring period for new principals.

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## Appendix A

### Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL)

#### **Standard 1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values**

Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.

#### **Standard 2. Ethics and Professional Norms**

Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

#### **Standard 3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness**

Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

#### **Standard 4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**

Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

#### **Standard 5. Community of Care and Support for Students**

Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.

#### **Standard 6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel**

Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

#### **Standard 7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff**

Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

#### **Standard 8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community**

Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

#### **Standard 9. Operations and Management**

Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

#### **Standard 10. School Improvement**

Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being.



Appendix B

IRB Approval



February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Jose Fuentes  
Seton Hall University

Re: 2021-179

Dear Jose,

The Research Ethics Committee of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your research proposal entitled, "In What Ways Do Formal and Informal Mentoring Experiences Influence New Administrators' Leadership Practices" as resubmitted. This memo serves as official notice of the aforementioned study's approval as exempt. If your study has a consent form or letter of solicitation, they are included in this mailing for your use.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol, informed consent form or study team must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

You will receive a communication from the Institutional Review Board at least 1 month prior to your expiration date requesting that you submit an Annual Progress Report to keep the study active, or a Final Review of Human Subjects Research form to close the study. In all future correspondence with the Institutional Review Board, please reference the ID# listed above.

Sincerely,

*Mara Podvey*  
Mara C. Podvey, PhD, OTR

Associate Professor  
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

*Phyllis Hansell*

Phyllis Hansell, EdD, RN, DNAP, FAAN  
Professor  
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent



#### **Informed Consent Form**

**Title of Research Study:** In What Ways do Formal and Informal Mentoring Experience Influence New Administrators' Leadership Practices

**Principal Investigator:** José Fuentes

**Department Affiliation:** Executive Educational Leadership Management and Policy (Ed.D) Program.

**Sponsor:** This research is supported by the Executive Educational Leadership Management and Policy (Ed.D) Program.

**Brief summary about this research study:**

The following summary of this research study is to help you decide whether or not you want to participate in the study. You have the right to ask questions at any time.

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways formal and informal mentoring experiences influence new administrators' leadership practices in traditional urban schools. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) will be used to identify the leadership practices that lead to improved student outcomes. The study will include the voices of ten new principals and ten new vice-principals with one to three years of experience in traditional public schools that are part of a large urban district. Each type of administrator will be divided into two categories inside the district and outside the district. Inside the district administrators represent the principals and vice-principals that have been promoted from within the district. The outside of district principals and vice-principals are new to the district. Both types of administrators participate in formal mentoring. They have informal mentoring experiences, both utilize the PSEL as a framework for identifying leadership practices, and both use the same principal certification license to be school administrators in New Jersey.

You will be asked to answer a few interview questions. The interview questions will focus on the following areas: background questions, questions specific to formal mentoring, questions specific to informal mentoring, and wrap up questions. You will participate in one in-depth interview via Zoom. There will be a follow up email sent to you with your transcribed responses so that you can agree or disagree with the summaries. This step is critical to ensure the accuracy of your statements.

We expect that you will be in this research study for one virtual Zoom session lasting between one to two hours.

The primary risks of participation are: loss of confidentiality, social and professional risk, and psychological risk. These risks are explained in greater detail below.

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Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy  
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The main benefit of participation is the contribution your experiences will shed on the mentoring and supports given to current and future administrators. The study will help district leaders identify the strengths and gaps in new administrators' formal and informal mentoring experiences and provide recommendations to improve these experiences. This study will inform districts on developing a mentoring program for administrators, especially after their two-year required formal mentoring. School districts must make every effort to develop administrators who have constant support and on-the-job mentoring to ensure they stay at their schools well into their fifth year. The study will add to the body of literature on the ways formal and informal mentoring influences principals and vice-principal leadership practices.

**Purpose of the research study:**

The purpose of this narrative research study is to examine the ways formal, and informal mentoring experiences influence new administrators' leadership practices in traditional urban schools. The study will include the voices of ten new principals and ten new vice-principals with one to three years of experience in traditional public schools that are part of a large urban district. Both types of administrators participate in formal and informal mentoring and use the same principal certification license to be school administrators in New Jersey. You are being asked to take part in this research study because you are a principal or vice principal with one to three years of experience. No women or minorities will be excluded from this study. For this study, persons with impaired decision-making capacity, prisoners, students, illiterate persons, or children are not part of the subject pool.

Your participation in this research study is expected to be for one virtual Zoom session lasting between one to two hours.

You will be one of twenty people who are expected to participate in this research study.

**What you will be asked to do:**

Your participation in this research study will include:

On in-depth virtual interview via Zoom. If permission is given to be audio recorded, the researcher will audio record the interviews. The interviews will take no longer than one to two hours virtually with only the researcher. At the start of the interview the researcher will explain the reason for the research. The interview protocol will start as follows:

- You will be assigned a pseudonym, which will be used during the transcription of the audio recording.
- You will ask participants to describe a brief history of their background in education.
- The researcher will ask you questions related to the research questions:

In what way(s) does mentoring influence new administrators' leadership practices in traditional urban schools?

1. In what way(s) does formal mentoring influence administrator leadership practices?

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2. In what way(s) does informal mentoring influence administrator leadership practices?
3. How do these experiences vary from principal and vice-principal?
4. How do these experiences vary from those administrators promoted within the district and those external to the district?
5. How do new administrators in urban schools believe that mentoring and other supports can be improved?
  - The researcher will ask your three wrap up questions around improving formal and informal mentoring and what you would like to see in place at your school district to support new administrators. Before the interview is over, the researcher will remind you that if you wish to opt out of the study, you still have time before the researcher finalizes the study.

**Your rights to participate, say no or withdraw:**

Participation in research is voluntary. You can decide to participate or not to participate. You can choose to participate in the research study now and then decide to leave the research at any time. Your choice will not be held against you.

The person in charge of the research study can remove you from the research study without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include missing study visits, or non-compliance with the study procedures.

**Potential benefits:**

There may be no direct benefit to you from this study. You may obtain personal satisfaction from knowing that you are participating in a project that contributes to new information.

**Potential risks:**

The risks associated with this study are minimal in nature. In all research involving human subjects, there is a risk of loss of confidentiality. Your participation in this research may include the collection of your recorded responses to the interview questions. All participants will be assigned a pseudonym at the beginning of the interview. Once the data is moved to a password protected laptop computer from the iPhone X, the recordings will be deleted permanently from the phone. All documents will be password protected.

All the information, including copies of the transcripts, data stored in the computer, and USB, will be deleted and destroyed upon successfully defending my dissertation and submitting the research to the Seton Hall University Library digital repository. An exact timeline cannot be established except that I will conduct my research between March 2021 to August 2021. With assurance, the data will be destroyed by August 2021.





There is a potential of a social and professional risk involved because you will be sharing your personal feelings, perspectives, and experiences of formal and informal mentoring. These experiences with formal and informal mentors can be positive or negative. Sharing negative experiences can embarrass you because formal and informal mentors belong in the same profession as you.

There is also a potential psychological risk if you share negative formal and informal mentoring experiences. Sharing these negative memories can cause you to have some level of anxiety, distress or shock during or after the interview.

**Confidentiality and privacy:**

Efforts will be made to limit the use or disclosure of your personal information. This information may include the research study documents or other source documents used for the purpose of conducting the study. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that oversee research safety may inspect and copy your information. This includes the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board who oversees the safe and ethical conduct of research at this institution.

**Data sharing:**

Data collected from this study will not be shared with anyone and only I as the researcher will have access.

**Cost and compensation:**

You will not be responsible for any of the costs or expenses associated with your participation in this study.

There is no payment for your time to participate in this study.

**Conflict of interest disclosure:**

The principal investigator does not have any financial conflicts of interest to report.

**Contact information:**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this research project, you can contact the principal investigator José Fuentes at [jose.fuentes@shu.edu](mailto:jose.fuentes@shu.edu) email address or the Seton Hall University Educational Leadership Management and Policy department at (973) 275-2482 or [executiveEdD@shu.edu](mailto:executiveEdD@shu.edu).



**Optional Elements:**

Audio recordings will be performed as part of the research study. Please indicate your permission to participate in these activities by placing your initials next to each activity.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree

\_\_\_\_\_ I disagree

The researcher may record my [audio] interview. In understand this is done to help with data collection and analysis. The researcher will not share these recordings with anyone.

I hereby consent to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of person obtaining consent

## Appendix C

### Recruitment Letter



Greetings,

I am currently a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University in South Orange. For my dissertation, I am conducting a study on the ways formal and informal mentoring influence new administrators' leadership practices in traditional urban schools. The study has been approved by the IRB at Seton Hall and at the Newark Board of Education.

Research supports mentoring as one way to support principals during their first few years. Thirty two percent of principals with less than five years of experience leave their schools according to the Principal Attrition and Mobility results of 2016-2017 (Goldring & Taie 2018). School districts must make every effort to develop administrators who have constant support and on-the-job mentoring to ensure they stay at their schools well into their fifth year, where principal performance peaks (Gerew et al., 2015).

I am seeking to interview administrators who will meet the following criteria: 1) one to three years of experience 2.) administrators working in a traditional urban public school.

As part of the study, I am inviting you to participate in an interview. The interview should take between one to two hours. Participants will be privately and virtually interviewed at a time most convenient to them. Participant responses to the questions will be kept confidential.

Participants will *not* be videotaped or photographed. If permission is given to be audio recorded, I will audio record the interviews. The information collected from the interview will be transcribed. Upon conclusion of the study, I plan to contact participants to ensure that my analysis accurately depicts their perspectives. Participation in this study is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss further, please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone: [REDACTED] or via email at [jose.fuentes@shu.edu](mailto:jose.fuentes@shu.edu).

If you are interested in participating in this study, please respond by email to [jose.fuentes@shu.edu](mailto:jose.fuentes@shu.edu).

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

José Fuentes  
Doctoral Candidate  
Seton Hall University

## Appendix D

### Interview Protocol and Questions

#### **Protocol Scripted Introduction:**

Greetings (Name of Principal or Vice-Principal),

You have agreed to participate in a voluntary interview, and should you wish to withdraw, you may do so at any time during our conversation. As I begin my questions, if you feel uncomfortable with anything I ask, you may choose not to respond. You can refuse to respond to any questions of concern. With your permission, I will be using a recording device to capture our conversation. All recordings will be kept confidential, and no names will be used to identify you.

I appreciate the opportunity to interview you. Your story, your experiences will help my study in what ways do formal and informal mentoring experiences impact new administrator's leadership practices.

#### **Interview Protocol**

Opening: Good Day; my name is José Fuentes, a doctoral student at Seton Hall University. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I am conducting a study examining in what ways do formal and informal mentoring experiences impact new administrator's leadership practices. I will begin asking you some background questions and then a couple of questions relevant to my research topic.

#### **Background Questions:**

1. What is your current role?
2. How long have you been a principal/vice principal at your current school?
  - Were you an administrator before? How many years?
  - Were you promoted from within the district, or are you new to the district?
  - What school district?
3. What is your current age range? (21-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-70)
  - Gender
  - Race/Ethnicity
4. Can you describe your school?
  - School demographics
  - Size of school, types of special education program, ELLs
  - Achievement data
  - Attendance data
5. What are the biggest challenges you face as a principal/vice-principal?



## **Research Specific Questions:**

### **Formal Mentoring**

6. Are you currently receiving formal mentoring?
7. Describe your formal mentoring experience.
  - a. Describe the types of supports you have received
  - b. What are the highlights of your experience?
  - c. What have been the drawbacks of your experience?
  - d. About how many hours a month do you meet with your mentor?
8. In what specific ways does your formal mentor support you?
  - a. How do you and your mentor spend your time together?
  - b. What topics or information have you and your mentor spent the most time?
9. In what ways does your formal mentoring experience influence your leadership practices?
10. In your experience, do you feel that your formal mentoring experience has helped you improve your leadership practices?
  - a. What specific leadership practices?
11. Has your relationship with your formal mentor resulted in developing new beliefs or understandings about yourself as a principal/vice principal?

### **Informal Mentoring**

12. Are you currently receiving informal mentoring?
13. Describe your informal mentoring experience.
  - a. How did it start? Who initiated the relationship?
  - b. Who is your informal mentor?
  - c. About how many hours a month do you meet with your mentor?
  - d. Describe the types of supports you have received.
  - e. What are the highlights of your experience?
  - f. What have been the drawbacks of your experience?
14. How would you describe the relationship between you and your informal mentor?
15. What specific ways does your informal mentor support you?
  - a. How do you and your mentor spend your time together?
  - b. What topics or information have you and your mentor spent the most time?

16. In what ways does your informal mentoring experience influence your leadership practices?
17. In your experience, do you feel that your informal mentoring experience has helped you improve your leadership practices?
  - a. What specific leadership practices?
18. Has your relationship with your informal mentor resulted in developing new beliefs or understandings about yourself as a principal/vice principal?

### **Wrap-up questions**

19. How do you believe formal mentoring can be improved?
  - a. What areas specifically?
20. How do you believe informal mentoring can be improved?
21. What would you like to see in place at your school district to support new administrators?

### **Post-Interview Script**

Thank you (Name of Principal/Vice-Principal),  
I appreciate the time you took today to answer the questions for this study. I will be reviewing your responses, and then I will transcribe them as a part of my research. Should you wish to opt-out of the study, you still have time before I finalize my findings. As a reminder, the results of my study will be available for your review upon completion. Thank you for participating and for supporting my work in this study.