A Retrospective Study of Critical Incidents Identified By Four Novice Principals and Their Perceptions of the Impact of a School District's Standards-Based Principal Preparation Program on Their First-Year Experiences

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NOVICE PRINCIPALS AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF A
SCHOOL DISTRICT'S STANDARDS-BASED PRINCIPAL PREPARATION
PROGRAM ON THEIR FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCES

BY

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Executive Ed.D. in Educational Leadership
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ABSTRACT

A Retrospective Study of Critical Incidents Identified by Four Novice Principals and Their Perceptions of the Impact of a School District's Standards-Based Principal Preparation Program on Their First-Year Experiences

The purpose of this retrospective study was to examine the perceptions of four novice principals at the conclusion of their first year of tenure, focusing on the complexities and challenges that they faced as well as the extent to which they were able to draw from the district-offered professional development and support provided during their 3-year principal preparatory induction programs. The study employed experiential learning as the theoretical framework and critical incident technique methodology as the strategy for collecting and analyzing the data. The data obtained during the four individual interviews and one focus group session permitted identification of enabling and hindering behaviors, proactive strategies, perceptions, concerns, emotional responses, and serious contextual issues. Although the results validated the current literature in the education field regarding beginning principals, they also revealed the need for more prescriptive, differentiated professional learning in the areas of human resource management, legal and contractual issues, federal and state regulations, socialization, and emotional intelligence. The reflections from the first-year principals provided rich data concerning
11 consistent themes that can inform future programming and leadership practices during an educational era laden with pervasive economic and societal barriers and increased accountability for all students.
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Educators commonly cite the saying that it takes a village to raise a child, but I can attest that it took my entire family and an army of great friends to help me complete this doctoral program. Special thanks to the four principals who volunteered to participate in this study. They willingly shared with candor new insights so that others can benefit from their learning in the future. With enormous gratitude and boundless love, I wish to acknowledge the numerous key people who were respectfully patient and bolstered me in countless ways during the doctoral experience.

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CHAPTER I

Background and Problem

Introduction

The critical business of preparing new school leaders for success has become an urgent national priority. State governments and school districts across the nation are clamoring to ensure that a highly qualified principal is leading every school (DeVita, Colvin, Darling-Hammond, & Haycock, 2007). It is no wonder that almost every book, journal, newspaper article, or keynote speech related to leadership opens with a caveat about the extraordinary challenges and complexities that school leaders face in the 21st century. Authors cite the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, high-stakes testing and transparent accountability, changing demographics, increased public awareness, safety and security issues, mobility of student populations, economic diversity, and demand for choice as primary focal points (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Elmore, 2001; Lovely, 2004; Waters & Grubb, 2004; Wilmore, 2002; Zeitoun & Newton, 2002).

Parkay and Hall’s 1992 book on the challenges faced by beginning principal leaders references the contributing factors accelerating the increased demands faced by and stress experienced by new principals (Normore, 2004). The authors noted the rise of gangs, an increase in children with diverse needs in the classroom, a shortage of funds, a decrease in community and public support, the compounding effects of legal threats and decision, and the enormous time and energy required to lead in the role of principal. Tyack and Cuban (1995) and Roher (as cited in Normore, 2002) and Wormwell (as cited
in Wagner et al., 2006) asserted that although schools are resilient institutions that change slowly, “the current unprecedented level of dissatisfaction with schools and the public’s insistence that schools do a better job of preparing upcoming [school leaders] suggests that change is inevitable” (p. 1).

Many studies of effective leadership indicate that without commitment from the front-line leader (the principal), it is impossible to achieve lasting change. It is the principal’s passionate commitment to the students’ academic achievement that makes a difference between a highly successful school and one that is content with the status quo (Cross & Rice, 2000). Gray, Frey, Bottoms, and O’Neil (2007) posited,

Successful schools are complex, collaborative institutions requiring a high level of performance from every professional. School success critically begins with the school principal who . . . has the prime responsibility for ensuring that all students meet challenging grade-level, college and career readiness standards. More often than not, the principal’s leadership skills determine whether a school becomes a dynamic learning organization or a failed enterprise. (p. 5)

DeVita (2005), president of the Wallace Foundation, further supported the comprehensive and diverse nature of the principal role when she wrote,

More than ever, in today’s climate of heightened expectations, principals are in the hot seat to improve teaching and learning. They need to be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special program administrators, and expert overseers of legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. They are expected to
broker the often-conflicting interests of parents, teachers, students, district office officials, unions and state and federal agencies, and they need to be sensitive to the widening range of student needs. (p. ii)

Beginning a new principalship is both an exciting and apprehensive time (Fridell, 2005). Most often, new school leaders are thrilled to have earned this prestigious title and think that they are well-prepared and understand the scope of the responsibilities, but quickly become overwhelmed, exhausted, confused, and lonely among the challenges as they leave their comfort zone of familiar work (Daresh, 2006; Normore, 2006). As assistant principals, they had been intimately involved with numerous leadership responsibilities, and therefore assume that they are prepared for the role of principal. In reality, assistant principals are more often delegated more management-type activities, such as scheduling, discipline, campus supervision, and safety (Weller & Weller, 2002).

Golanda (1991) stressed that assistant principals cannot experience leadership by watching; they must be allowed to perform leadership through experiential learning. Leadership preparatory programs that sincerely strive to teach the critical knowledge and skills necessary prior to becoming a principal are essential to ensuring that a school is operating efficiently and effectively.

Hickey (2006) astutely identified the following key behaviors for successful principals in the 21st century: (a) empowering teacher to be leaders, (b) engaging in shared decision-making, (c) setting school goals and developing action plans to meet those goals, (d) analyzing student performance data, (e) involving and collaborating with parents, (f) cultivating outside partnerships, (g) leading instructional initiatives, (h)
maintaining a safe and orderly school environment, (i) managing buildings and other operations, (i) negotiating with the central office, and (k) adhering to local and state requirements. Although assistant principals attempt to obtain many of these skills, the scope of their task assignments rarely mirrors the complexity and scope of responsibilities that principals encounter daily; therefore, “when it comes to the principalship ... our future leaders are expected to conquer the motorway without any behind-the-wheel experience” (Lovely, 2004, p. 33).

Hickey (2006) suggested that the transition period during which novice principals begin their tenure is a crucial time because they are simultaneously figuring out how to lead a change process while learning a new role in a new environment. They must tackle being both a learner and a leader of a school community (Jentz, 1982). They are cast into positions where they must learn quickly while expected to be experts in everything (O’Mahony & Matthews, 2003).

Watkins (2003) asserted that the first 90 days sets the tone for the future. The actions that a new principal takes during the first 3 months largely determine whether the new principal will succeed or fail. If momentum is not achieved during this transition, the new principal faces an uphill battle from this point forward. The tendency is for new leaders to jump in and attempt to make their presence known. Frequently, they make technical changes without regard to adaptive challenges, past traditions, and rituals, and without a solid understanding of the culture, historical framework, and uniqueness of each school’s context. Heifetz (2002) reiterated this point by noting that the single most common source of leadership failure is that people, especially in positions of authority,
treat adaptive challenges like technical problems. Pressure to attend to accountability issues first often distracts a new principal away from the humanistic needs of the people who are undergoing the change in leadership.

The literature is rich with studies that focus on principal preservice preparation (Browne-Ferrigno, 2001a; Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Myerson, & Orr, 2007); aspiring and new leader professional development (Knapp, Copeland, & Talbert, 2003; Lashway, 2003; National Staff Development Council [NSDC], 2000); internships (Fry, Bottoms, & O’Neill, 2005; Normore, 2004); and the importance of strong principal leadership to student achievement (Elmore, 2000; Marzano, 2005), but few studies focus on how new principals actually use their professional learning from preparatory programs to guide their actions (Brown-Ferrigno, 2001b; Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005).

Quigley (2005) strongly suggested that school leaders intending to practice in the 21st century need a preparation program that develops the leadership skill set necessary to lead in a world characterized by increasing uncertainty, growing diversity, unprecedented accountability for all students, and exploding technology. Jackson (2001) added support to Quigley’s suggestion by stating “such demands require preparation that not only equips school leaders with cutting edge knowledge but also the ability to continually improve practice” (as cited in Quigley, p. 1).

This study retrospectively explored the first-year principalship experiences of four novice principals who had served as assistant principals within the same school district and had recently completed a 3-year leadership development program. The study
captured their insights and perceptions to gain understanding of the strategies that they employed during this critical phase of transition. The study also investigated the extent to which the district preparatory leadership development curriculum and the district support structures provided key learning experiences, knowledge, and skills from which the new principals were able to draw as critical incidents occurred during their first year.

This study incorporated the experiential learning theoretical framework (Kolb & Fry, 1975), case-study qualitative research methodology (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003), and the critical incident technique (CIT; Flanagan, 1954) as strategies for collecting and analyzing data.

Theoretical Framework

According to Michelson (1996, as cited in Fenwick, 2001), experiential learning is one of the most significant areas for current research and practice in adult education. This type of learning is often referred to as informational learning, incidental learning, self-directed learning, and situated learning. Experiential learning occurs when adults are given a chance to acquire and apply knowledge, skills, and feelings in an immediate and relevant setting. Because some on-the-job learning is inevitable when new principals assume their new roles, the leadership development programs in the school district in this study attempt to bridge the theory of classroom learning to actual daily administrative practice. Therefore, experiential learning seemed most appropriate for the conceptual framework for this research study, as this learning framework requires a direct encounter with life rather than only reflection on phenomena.
The Kolb and Fry (1975) model, one of the predominant experiential learning theories, consists of four elements: concrete experience, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts, and testing in new situations. Kolb and Fry contended that the learning cycle is a continuous spiral that can begin at any one of the four points (Smith, 2001). Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the model.

Shields, Aaron, and Wall (2002) contended that Kolb’s comprehensive and practical theory builds on the rich foundations of experience-based learning provided by John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget. Kolb (1984, as cited in Shields et al.) listed six characteristics of experiential learning. First, learning is best conceived as a process, and not in terms of outcomes. Second, learning is a continuous process grounded in experience. Third, learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world. Fourth, learning is a holistic process. Fifth, learning involves transactions between the person and the environment. Sixth, learning is the process of creating knowledge.

According to Kolb (1984), "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). The experiential way of learning involves the application of the information gained from the educator to the learner’s experiences. Learning is not based on the activities generated in the classroom alone. Students do not acquire knowledge exclusively from the teacher. Instead, through this process they take the new information derived in class and test it against real-life experiences. In this way, learners transfer both the information and the experience into knowledge of some new or familiar subject or phenomenon.
Figure 1. Kolb and Fry's experiential learning model reproduced from Jarvis (1994).
As the experiential learning model was the theoretical framework for this study, the researcher associated the four elements of Kolb and Fry’s (1975) model (see Figure 1) to crucial learning practices that increase the likelihood of success for new principals. All of the professional development in school districts for new and veteran school leaders is based on experiential learning theory. The inclusion of career shadowing, case studies, action research, internships, and project management is well aligned to this conceptual framework. Concrete experiences can be equated with field-based, on-the-job experiences that inherently accelerate the edification process.

Whitmore (2002) reiterated that “instructional practices are increasingly grounded in a more holistic, experiential, and constructivist orientation” (p. 22). Experiential learning always begins with an experience, followed by reflection, analysis, and an evaluation of the experience. This reflective process allows novice principals to translate a particular experience into concepts, which in turn might help them produce guidelines for other new principals (Parker, Webb, & D’Souza, 1995).

Overview/Background

Until 2003, the southeastern school district investigated in this study had no formal leadership development program. The superintendent at that time had the foresight to anticipate that large numbers of Baby Boomer principals would retire as well as that there would be an increasing demand for and shortage of highly qualified candidates. Projections at that time suggested that 24% of school-based and 35% of central office administrators would retire or be eligible for retirement within the next 5 years. The anticipated leadership changes in the state school district mirrored the national trends at
that time. The ramifications of the 2001 NCLB legislation were in their infancy, but the superintendent was astute enough to realize that the school district was at the dawn of a new leadership paradigm, one that foreshadowed significant changes for school leaders in the trenches. Even the most respected veteran leaders had been schooled to assume a more managerial than instructional role in the former decade.

The need for significant professional development grounded in the new leadership standards was also on the horizon. However, district leaders remained unaware of how these leadership standards would magnify the need for change, new skill sets, and higher expectations for school leaders. The situation was clearly problematic, particularly as recent national studies had found that the school leader's role had to be formally redefined in light of current expectations for schools (Wilmore, 2001) and that school leaders had to be trained in the knowledge of how to improve the core functions of a school; otherwise, the educational system would continue to fail students (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001).

An education partnership of local foundations was created in the community to address the school district priorities as defined by the superintendent and school board and develop a comprehensive leadership development program. The partnership’s research indicated that the role of the principal had reached a new height of demand and complexity. Specifically, as the numerous roles and responsibilities expected of leaders were daunting, the exhausting demand for their time, judgment, and content expertise required a rigorous investment in continuous professional learning. Even during this period, principals were expected to not only know what constitutes good teaching and
learning but also coach and guide teachers in the continual improvement of their educational knowledge and practice.

In the process of developing a grant, the partnership conducted a review of pertinent literature. The review indicated the local need for a comprehensive leadership development initiative based on research and identification of district priorities to maintain excellence in the instructional setting. These priorities were as follows:

1. The need for strong instructional leadership to ensure achievement for all students.

2. The need to respond to higher student performance standards and increased accountability in the state and national context.

3. The expectation for distributed leadership roles among central and school-based staff participating in shared decision-making processes as a part of federal, state, and collective bargaining agreements.

4. The need to shift the focus of the role of central office leaders to support and assistance.

5. The system’s need for recruitment and retention of educational leaders due to retirement and resignation.

6. The need to develop quality recognition and customer service systems that increase satisfaction and staff retention.

In November 2002, the local partnership was awarded a leadership development grant from a local bank’s foundation, which affirmed its commitment to maintaining excellence in the school district and its “high-stakes” interest in the quality of education.
This grant provided funding for 2 years to hire a Director of Leadership Development, with the aim of jumpstarting a leadership program and model that had lasting effects. These effects would be manifested in the development of a cadre of assistant principals and principals who possessed knowledge and skills well aligned with district needs and a strategic vision for closing the achievement gap and meeting NCLB expectations.

After being hired, the Director of Leadership Development conducted an in-depth needs assessment of approximately 90 administrators at all levels of the organization to assist with determining the individual strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, barriers, and most importantly, needs to further professional learning. The following structural needs were identified from this assessment:

1. Improve the internal development of leadership at all levels by identifying talent within the organization by “growing our own.”

2. Provide orientation and improved transitions for new administrators.

3. Engage in succession planning to anticipate changes in leadership.

4. Develop consistent practices regarding the recruitment, selection, placement, and communication of new administrators.

5. Provide professional learning for all leaders tied to their annual evaluation.

The following training needs were identified from this assessment:

1. Provide more intense and focused development to assistant principals to better prepare them for career advancement.

2. Align all programs, activities, and processes related to leadership to ensure a seamless, sequential and consistent structure.
The following professional community needs were identified from this assessment:

1. Provide administrators with more opportunities to communicate regularly in collegial groups.
2. Mentor new administrator leaders according to defined expectations for both the mentor and mentee.
3. Provide more productive interaction between school-based and district administrators and between the instructional and business divisions to support each other in achieving their goals.
4. Develop self-assessment tools to identify administrator strengths and weaknesses and personalize leadership development to generate a professional leadership learning plan and portfolio for assistant principals as part of the Preparing New Principal (PNP) program.

Problem Statement

Over the past 5 years, there has been a 76% turnover of principals and 92% turnover of assistant principals in the school district where the novice principals in this study are employed. Of the 41 schools in the district, 36 changed principals between 2002 and 2007. Seven schools experienced two changes in principal leadership and two schools experienced three changes in principal leadership. Table 1 illustrates the specific data relative to these changes.

Although the circumstances causing these changes differed, all the schools underwent tremendous disruption that resulted in teacher transfers and resignations and changes in instructional programs and other school structures.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Assistant Principals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Changes</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Administrators</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of change</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
<td>92.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consequently, the district recognized the urgency of ensuring that the new principals who assumed these new roles were prepared for successful transitions through deliberate planning, preparation, and support in profound ways that had never been needed to this extent in the past. This study identified the impact of these intentional efforts as these new principals navigated through their first year.

Despite efforts to build leadership capacity and continuity within the school district through a systemic, homegrown leadership development program, the district was unable to keep pace with the constant changes in school leaders, particularly because the administrative pool of highly qualified candidates had often been depleted annually. The school district had significantly increased the amount of internal hiring and developed a tiered approach to leadership development. Until the initiation of this study, the induction and PNP programs had not been evaluated to determine if the leadership development program components incorporated in these programs were perceived by the participants to have made a difference for first-year principals as they transitioned to their new leadership roles.
Morrison (2005) posited that effective principal preparation programs must bridge the gap between what is taught in university-based programs and what skills and knowledge principals need to become true instructional leaders. Much current research asserts that there is too little emphasis placed on curriculum, teaching, learning, and student achievement. Mitgang (2003) warned, “Headline after headline, and study after study, have proclaimed that the nation faces an acute shortage of candidates for the principalship that almost certainly will worsen unless we find ways, in a hurry, to prepare many more to enter a dwindling job pool (p. 1).” Table 2 presents specific data relative to retention of district and out-of-district principal and assistant principal hires.

In addition, assistant principals were frequently delegated managerial responsibilities despite being provided with limited professional development opportunities to keep abreast of the growing list of district initiatives or gain the new skill set related to instructional leadership roles.

Table 2
New Leaders Retained
From Inside Versus Outside the School District Under Study 2002-2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>New Hires 2002-2007</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Assistant Principals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outside District</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Hired</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Retained</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>85.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inside District</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Hired</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Retained</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>95.2%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Number retained refers to those administrators retained within the school district and includes two administrators who were promoted.
Although many desired the training and demonstrated a firm commitment to learning, the district failed to integrate these leaders and prioritize their learning. Too often, the district filled principal vacancies with more experienced outside candidates, leaving a discouraged and frustrated assistant principal workforce.

The significant changes in school leaders in the school district being studied mirror the changes occurring nationally (Browne-Ferrigno, 2001; Davis et al., 2005; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Hickey, 2006; Miracle, 2006; Villani, 2007). This school district has taken a proactive approach to leadership changes by instituting professional development programs that “grow their own” leaders based on research indicating that internal hires have a greater likelihood of success (Watkins, 2003). It is much more challenging to enter the principalship from the outside than being promoted from within; indeed, a high rate of principal failure has been attributed to a lack of familiarity with the organization’s structure, informal networks of information and communication, and school/district culture; difficulty with assimilation; and the provision of less credibility than those promoted from within (Ciampa & Watkins, 1999).

Principals promoted from within typically demonstrate stronger loyalty to and relationships within the school district, as well as knowledge of specific district initiatives, leading to greater buy-in from teachers, parents, and the community. Promoting from within increases retention over time and sensitivity to cultural idiosyncrasies. This study was endorsed by four novice principals, who concluded that long-term district investment in support structures, specific professional development
programs, mentoring, and coaching was beneficial as they dealt with numerous critical incidents during their first year.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this retrospective study employing critical incident technique (CIT) methodology was to identify the profound challenges and complexities that four first-year novice principals encountered and their perceptions of how they transferred and applied the knowledge and skills that they had acquired from district-provided professional development and support programs. This study identified and examined which experiences or prior learning these new principals drew from to make decisions when they faced critical incidents or issues.

In their recent study on exemplary leadership development programs, Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) noted the tremendous expectations that have been placed on school leaders to cure the ills facing the nation’s schools over the last 2 decades, and reinforced the critical role that principals play in developing successful schools. These authors found that although much of the literature on leadership development programs focuses on program components believed to be productive, little of the literature provides information regarding what the graduates of these programs actually do as a result of their training.

Research Questions

A review of the current literature assisted in developing well-defined questions for this study. Fullan (2006) posited,
We need to unpack the way in which successful principals go about obtaining success. We need to get inside the black box and understand how principals make a difference. What do they do and how do they do it? What are the pathways to success? (p. 2)

The research questions for this study were the following:

1. What deeper insights and understandings of the complexities and challenges regarding the first-year experiences of four novice principals can be learned through an in-depth study of the principals using CIT methodology?

2. To what extent did these novice principals draw from and apply prior learning experiences that they had acquired as assistant principals and draw support from district support structures and programs for new principals?

Significance of the Study

This study provides important insight into the entry experiences of novice principals, the professional development opportunities that assistant principals need prior to assuming a principalship and throughout their early years as school leaders, and the challenges associated with the first-year principalship. The novice principals who volunteered to participate in the reflective experience required in this study increased their awareness of the connections between their prior professional learning and their daily actions as principals. This awareness could lead to improved job performance and increase the likelihood of a successful transition.

The findings of this research could impact the manner in which principal preparation and assistant principal professional development programs are designed by
identifying the strengths and weaknesses of leadership preparatory programs. Aspiring leaders may be interested in this research as they seriously consider school leadership careers. Moreover, this retrospective study analysis may provide other researchers with an opportunity to expand their knowledge base and assimilate research for professional growth. Lastly, the study may be of significant interest to educational organizations, universities, nonprofit organizations, and school districts that train and support new school leaders to prepare them for the challenges of the principalship.

**Limitations**

This research study faced several limitations:

1. The data gathered in this study were self-reported by the novice principals.
2. The study was conducted in only one large suburban school district in the southeastern United States.
3. Although the interviews were conducted by an outside researcher, the primary researcher is currently both the developer and facilitator of leadership development programs for the school district.
4. This study was limited by the extent of the researcher’s data interpretation skills.
5. The researcher’s familiarity with the content of the research study, prior experience as a former principal, and role as the coach and trainer for the novice principals increased the risk of researcher bias. Utilizing an outside researcher, the CIT methodology, and multiple perspectives for analysis helped reduce this bias.
6. This study's validity and reliability were limited to the degree of validity and reliability of the case study and CIT methodology.

7. The induction and PNP programs investigated in this study had only been in existence for 3 years prior to the initiation of this study.

8. The leadership skills were defined according to the school district's leadership standards, which were based on state school leadership standards.

**Delimitations**

The following delimitations may have impacted this study:

1. This study did not include analysis of longitudinal data.

2. The study investigated only four first-year novice principals who had completed the 3-year induction and PNP leadership development programs and had agreed to participate.

**Operational Definitions**

*Coach:* A veteran principal who is carefully matched with a novice principal who shares similar demographics, past experiences, and other characteristics.

*Cohorts:* A group of administrators engaged in learning activities or a specific program over a period of time for a designated purpose.

*Critical incident:* "Any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical, an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects" (Flanagan, 1954, p. 327).
Induction program: A mandatory intensive learning program with 12 orientation modules specifically designed to proactively support new administrators, with a focus on operational and instructional competencies necessary to be successful in their new leadership roles.

Individualized leadership learning plan (ILLP): A professional growth plan that clearly defines the focus of professional growth for a given year; directs the professional development plan each year for a 2-year period for those administrators developing a portfolio in partial fulfillment of the PNP program; and creates a meaningful set of engagements and related artifacts tied to the school district leadership standards, with specific focus on the school improvement plan, the school district’s strategic vision, and individual professional development (Donaldson, 2001).

Leadership capacity: The intentional actions of a school district to build leadership talent by developing knowledge, skills, and dispositions centered on district priorities and research-based practices (Lambert, 1998).

Mentor: Retired principals who are trained and matched with every new principal based on their level of past school experiences.

Novice principal: A first-time, first-year principal.

Portfolio: A broad-based, unified collection of artifacts that provides a framework for demonstrating the knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to the 12 district leadership standards derived from the state leadership standards, the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning’s (McREL’s, 2003) leadership meta-analysis, and their associated descriptors and indicators.
Preparing New Principal (PNP) program: A 2-year program whose successful completion allows the candidate to fulfill the criteria for principal certification in the school district. A candidate must fulfill the following criteria to be eligible for school principal certification:

1. Successful completion of a portfolio whose documentation has been reviewed by a peer and reflects proficiency in all 12 district leadership standards.

2. Attendance at monthly meetings and completion of an annual ILLP.

3. Successful evaluation of work performance by the appropriate executive director and supervising principal.

Principal transition support team: A team comprised of the new principal, the Director of Leadership Development, a retired mentor, and the principal coach that provides customized support and meetings throughout the new principal’s first year.

School district leadership standards: A set of research-based leadership standards closely aligned to state leadership and national standards that serves as the basis for all leadership development programs (see Appendix A).

Site analysis: Prior to the selection of a new principal, the district schedules a meeting with key school constituents to respond to a series of questions that are then compiled and used as the basis for the recruitment of a new principal. The analysis provides insight into the school’s successes, needs, and traditions, and the desired characteristics of the new principal.
Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 of this study provides an introduction containing specific background information related to the problem under investigation as well as the historical framework of the school district’s leadership development program. It then proceeds to describe the problem statement; the purpose of the study; the theoretical framework; and the research and guiding questions centering on the what, how, and why of the study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the significance of the study, its limitations, its delimitations, and definitions of key terms. Chapter 2 presents a review of the related literature, including that pertaining to research on the theoretical framework for experiential learning; current issues regarding principals, assistant principals, and principal preparation; topics pertaining to beginning principals, such as the socialization process; research-based professional development models and training components for principals; and the unique comprehensive features of this school district’s leadership programs and support structures for new leaders.

Chapter 3 focuses on the CIT methodology used in this retrospective qualitative case study by providing an overview of the study and the proposed research design and key components. The chapter also focuses on the role of the researcher, selection of subjects, instrumentation for validity and reliability, the data collection process, and the data analysis and research that supported this analysis. Chapter 4 provides a brief synopsis of the overall research study and a short abstract of each of the 21 critical incidents. In addition, this chapter presents the qualitative findings from the 21 critical incidents that the four novice principals selected to reflect on during the individual
interview sessions and one focus group session. It then provides an in-depth analysis from multiple perspectives using thick, rich descriptions from the transcripts of the interviews and focus group session to examine each of the critical incidents in relation to the two research questions. Chapter 5 thoroughly discusses the conclusions resulting from the research findings before concluding the study with recommendations for future policy, practice, and research.
CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Chapter 2 reviews the literature and research endemic to this study of first-year novice principals. It focuses on the issues endemic to first-time principals; the conceptual framework of the research; and the components, support programs, and structures offered to all new administrators in the school district under study. The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section establishes the foundation for this study, which is grounded in the conceptual framework of experiential learning. Experiential learning is critically important because it currently serves as the basis for all leadership development programs. The emphasis of preparatory programs is linking theory to practical application whenever possible. In addition, on-the-job learning appeared unavoidable, one of many necessary processes that the four novice principals experienced as they became acclimated to their new positions.

The second section presents a general review of the literature on current issues regarding principals, including pre-service preparation, shortages in the field, the connection between the principal and student achievement, the impact of increased accountability and high-stakes testing, and new ways of leading in the 21st century. The third section examines the literature on assistant principals and their roles and responsibilities as they relate to preparing them as future principals. The fourth section
examines the literature on principal preparation, the movement toward standards-based programs, the rise of "grow-your-own" programs, new principal transition support, effective professional development for school leaders that includes cohort and field-based learning, and the impact of professional development on the successful transition of novice principals. The fifth section narrows the focus of the literature review to specific issues regarding beginning principals, including the socialization process, self-efficacy, and enabling and hindering behaviors. The sixth section reviews the literature that endorses the unique features of the district leadership-development programs and structures designed to prepare and support new principals.

Theoretical Framework

There has been a great deal of research into experiential learning, particularly into the work of John Dewey, a progressive educator who fathered the theory of experiential learning (Carver & Enfield, 2006; Fenwick, 2001). In his classic book, *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938) challenged the status quo pedagogy and asserted that education is about learning by doing. Carver and Enfield summarized Dewey’s contributions to experiential learning by explaining what Dewey meant by an experience and what it is required for an experience to carry "educational" value. Dewey effectively conveyed how individuals create new knowledge and transform themselves through a process of learning by performing new roles.

Fenwick (2001) described Dewey’s principle of *interaction* and the principle of *continuity* as the two dimensions that an experience must include. Interaction references that the learner needs to actively interact with the environment and test lessons developed
in that environment whereas continuity refers to the learner connecting aspects of a new experience to what is already known in ways that modify knowledge. According to Fenwick, Dewey purported that the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the idea that people learn only the particular thing that is being studied at the time. Dewey valued collateral learning as a way of forming enduring attitudes, likes and dislikes, and a lifelong learning habit.

Reeves (2006) asserted that “reflection is so important for leaders because of the gulf between the theoretical abstractions of academic leadership development programs and the daily lives of leaders” (p. 50). He also cited that the Center for Creative Leadership acknowledged that people do not develop the capacity for leadership without actually being in the throes of challenging leadership work. Germaine and Quinn (2005) concurred, arguing that “training models for school leadership should place less emphasis on experience alone and focus more on examining and reflecting on the experience itself” (p. 81).

Therefore, principals must actively participate in those leadership roles and processes characterized by much novelty, difficulty, conflict, and disappointment in order to learn. This awareness is critical in working with new principals, who are learning on the job and need high levels of support and reflection, especially during the first year, when the learning curve is steepest. This research is based on Dewey’s (1938) underlying constructivist, experiential theories as well as those of others who furthered his work (Andresen, Boud, & Cohen, 1995; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1990; Schon, 1983).
Andresen et al. (1995) framed the experience-based learning (EBL) model, in which the experience of learning occupies a central place for all considerations of teaching and learning. They aligned their thinking with that of Kolb (1984) by asserting that experience is the foundation and/or stimulus for learning; that learners actively construct their own experience; and that learning is holistic, socially and culturally constructed, and influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs. In other words, learners analyze their experience by reflecting on, evaluating, and reconstructing it, either individually or collectively, in order to draw meaning from it. Observation and reflection are elements that Dewey encouraged almost a century ago. More recently, McGregor and Salisbury (2005) suggested that more holistic and reflective approaches to thinking and responding to educational challenges allow practitioners to delve more deeply into the complexities of the change process.

Barth (2003) coined the term craft knowledge to describe those experiences that one acquires on the job and upon which one reflects. He elaborated,

Reflection is nothing less than an internal dialogue with oneself. It is a process of bringing past experiences to a conscious level, analyzing them, and determining better ways to think and behave in the future. Stepping back at the end of the day, month, year or career and reflecting on success and failure and on one’s part in both is a worthwhile endeavor. (pp. xxi–xxii)

Killion and Todnem (1991) discussed reflection in practice in terms of when it might occur relative to a situation in an educational setting, such as reflection on the rapid analysis and decision-making that occurs in the midst of practice, reflection that
encompasses the evaluative thinking that occurs after an event has occurred, and reflection on ongoing analysis and decision-making designed to inform practice. All of these are especially valuable reflective habits for novice principals and can be accomplished through many vehicles, such as action research, written journal entries, self-reflection, and meditation.

The formation of abstract concepts occurs when leaders create a vision based on empirical evidence or gather data through observations and targeted conversations with key stakeholders that convey the context for action and the culture of the school. Testing in new situations occurs as leaders begin a new action plan and then attempt new strategies, practices, and solutions. The cycle begins again as the leaders collect data and formatively assess them based on concrete experiences.

After reviewing the literature on assessing the effectiveness of experiential instructional methodology for business school classrooms, Gosenpud (1990) asserted that there are inherent problems with rigorous experiential evaluation studies because they are often poorly designed and their outcomes are vague because the focus of experiential learning is usually on complex, abstract phenomena. Three different types of studies were reviewed relative to experiential learning: straight evaluation studies, contingency studies, and assessments of experiential features. Of the 18 studies focusing on behavioral acquisition or change as a criterion, 17 reported positive results in that experiential methodologies helped participants either acquire skills or change behavior. This suggests that experiential learning techniques are helpful in effecting behavioral results. Of the 19 studies that centered on attitude change as a criterion, 7 assessed experiential experience
in terms of the attitudes toward the experience and 12 assessed the experiential pedagogy in terms of changes in attitudes resulting from the experiential experience. These studies concluded that students taught by an experiential method expressed significantly more positive general attitudes toward their learning experiences than did those students who were exposed to other teaching methods. In her research on principal licensure cohort programs, Browne-Ferrigno (2001a) strongly endorsed experiential learning as "the core element of principal preparation to ensure needed skill development and socialization into the community of practice" (p. v). De Stefano (2003) suggested that experiential learning demonstrates that the researcher has an open mind about what each case might reveal rather than a preordained disposition that will lead to attempts to force-fit data into preexisting codes.

Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning model aligns well with the CIT methodology by examining how people perceive an experience and then process that experience. Kolb expanded on his model:

People must be able to involve themselves fully, openly, and without bias in the new experience (CE-Concrete Experience). They must be able to reflect on and observe their experiences from many perspectives (RO-Reflective Observation). They must be able to create concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories (AC- Abstract Conceptualization, and they must be able to use these theories to make decisions and solve problems (AE- Active Experimentation). (p. 31)
Parker et al. (1995) referred to critical incident analysis as an educational tool and described its relationship to experiential learning. These researchers advocated experiential learning because it “enables the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes grounded in practice through the use of reflection on action. . . . Critical Incident analysis has value and is appropriate for developing interpersonal skills and self-awareness (p. 111).”

Kilty’s 1982 study and Burnard’s 1983 study (as cited in Parker et al., 1995) distinguished between learning through experience and learning from experience. In learning from experience, students are encouraged to reflect upon personal experience as a means of discovering solutions to present problems from past situations, based on the knowledge that experience itself does not necessarily lead to learning. The process of reflection provides the opportunity to explore previous experiences, feelings, thoughts, and attitudes. The acquisition of new meanings, new ideas, and a deeper understanding of the situation facilitates the transformation of knowledge into new contexts.

Current Issues Affecting Principals

Inadequacy of University Leadership Preparation Programs

Universities and colleges have been working diligently to improve the quality of preparation for school administrators (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education [AACTE], 2001; Copland, 1999; Elmore, 2000; Lumsden, 1992; McCarthy, 1999; Milstein, 1992; Murphy & Vriesenga, 2004). Despite these efforts, criticism regarding the disconnect between the curriculum, the realities of the principal and assistant principal job responsibilities, and challenges remains widespread (Hess & Kelly,
Criticism regarding the shortcomings of the preparation of administrators began in the 1980s, but “the 1990’s will probably be remembered as the time when a major break was made with the preparation programs of the past” (Milstein, p. 28). One of the most vocal critics has been Arthur Levine (2005), president of the Teacher’s College at Columbia University. His 4-year study of education administrator preparation programs included 28 case studies of schools and departments of education from a variety of regions characterized by a diversity of variables. Archer (2005) summarized Levine’s charges against higher education as weak criteria for admissions, irrelevant courses, weak academic rigor, unskilled teachers, and incoherent curricula. Other critics focus on too great an emphasis on management issues compared to instructional leadership knowledge and skills.

Hess and Kelly (2007) surveyed 56 university principal preparation programs and identified significant deficiencies in the coursework relative to the current principal job demands. They collected at least four “core” course syllabi from 31 programs that met the standards, permitting systematic coding of 210 syllabi yielding 2,424 total course weeks. Hess and Kelly found that a great deal of knowledge and an alarmingly high number of complex skills are required for new principals to be effective in this high-stakes, accountability driven educational arena. Specifically, they found the following:

1. Only 2% of 2,424 course weeks addressed accountability in the context of school management or school improvement and less than 5% included instruction on managing school improvement via data, technology, or empirical research.
2. Only 11% of the course weeks made mention of or reference to statistics, data, or empirical research in some context.

3. Only 11% of the course weeks dealt with instructional management issues such as curriculum development, pedagogy, classroom management, and learning theory.

4. Of the 360 course weeks devoted to personnel management, only 12 weeks addressed teacher dismissal and only 9 addressed teacher compensation. Only 11% of course weeks devoted to personnel management addressed the recruitment, selection, or hiring of new teachers.

5. Forty-two percent of courses on technical knowledge of school law, school finance, and facilities did not include a final assessment to ensure that students had mastered the content.

6. Only 1% of the course weeks addressed school public relations and small business skills and less than 1% addressed parental or school board relations.

School leaders have also reported that their professors lack credibility because they have never been school practitioners (Bottoms & O’Neil, 2001). Moreover, because years often pass before graduates attain a school leadership position, they have forgotten much of the coursework content by the time that they assume the position. Sparks (2002) lamented,

Good principals are focused on instruction and student learning. It’s harder and harder to find good principals to replace those who are retiring. Out best teachers
don’t aspire to be principals. We think that’s because the job is getting more
difficult to do each year. (p. 7–11)

With the full realization that aspiring leaders do not exit university programs well
equipped with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions essential to lead in the 21st century,
school districts must take more responsibility to fill in the gaps through homegrown
leadership development programs that focus on the practical application of theory.
Millstein (1992) commented in his research with the Danforth Foundation that
preparation programs can no longer be viewed in a static way, but instead as living
organisms. He explained, “The need for change will be constant, if preparation programs
are expected to survive and thrive” (p. 12). Normore (2004) noted that more school
districts are providing special programs designed to support the work of novice school
leaders because they will be well-served when efforts are made to help them through their
eyear professional duties.

The data obtained through this case study substantiated the field research of other
researchers (Bottoms & O’Neil, 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Normore, 2004)
by finding strong evidence that the district’s leadership support structures and
professional development programs were perceived by the four selected novice principals
as having been beneficial during their first year on the job. The data also refuted
educational experts who tout that leadership development should primarily prepare
school leaders to serve as instructional leaders, including Reeves (2002), who asserted,
“The most important implication of my definition of leaders is the inclusive emphasis on
individual and organizational performance (p. 12),” and Elmore (2000), who argued, “Leadership is the guidance and direction of instructional improvement” (p. 13).

**Shortage of Qualified Candidates and Increase in Principal Retirement and Turnover**

Miracle (2006) noted that “while there are more than enough people certified to be principals in the United States, there clearly is a shortage of highly qualified candidates for the position, particularly in urban, low, income districts and high schools” (p. 13). National school leadership organizations, which are strong advocates for principals and assistant principals, have been keeping close tabs on the looming administrative shortages, especially in rural and urban areas. The National Association for Secondary Principals (NASSP, 2007) asserted that school districts across the country are faced with daunting and unprecedented challenges in recruiting and retaining well qualified and highly skilled school administrators. The U.S. Department of Labor estimated that 40% of the 93,200 U.S. principals are nearing retirement and that the nation’s need for additional school leaders increased 10% to 15% through 2005 to accommodate the growing student populations. In addition, over half of school districts nationwide are facing immediate administrative shortages.

Common concerns dominate the literature (Daresh, 2001; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Donaldson, 2001; Glanz, 2004; Sparks, 2002; Villani, 2006; Wilmore, 2002). The school administrator shortage has resulted from a variety of factors, including the increasing number of veteran school leaders who are retiring, fewer applicants with the desired skill set, and leaders choosing to leave due to job-related stresses. Gronn and Rawlings-Sinai (2003) and Zeitour and Newton (2002) identified additional reasons for
the problem in principal supply and principal turnover, including workplace conditions, workload intensification, salary levels, increased demands for accountability combined with less authority to act, expanded and restructured work roles, changing conceptions of professional identity, and the impact of the demands of principal work on individual lives and personal responsibilities. The typical K-8 principal works 54 hours a week, and there is little pay differential between new principals and veteran teachers (Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Ross, & Chung, 2003)

Many school districts across the country are taking responsibility for the shortage of highly qualified principals by developing their own leadership training programs, sometimes in partnership with local universities or city leadership networks (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Lashway, 2003). Miracle (2006) compiled a comprehensive list of aspiring principal training programs developed in recent years by a wide variety of institutions that have sometimes collaborated with each other, including state departments of education; the federal government; universities; school districts; education organizations such as the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the NASSP; and foundations or boards such as the Wallace Foundation, the Broad Foundation, and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB).

The school district in which this study took place has embraced responsibility for building leadership capacity from within the system. School leaders have been charged with identifying future leadership talent and encouraged to provide leadership professional development opportunities. Specific programs have targeted aspiring leaders to inspire and motivate high-performing teachers to consider careers in school leadership.
A homegrown leadership academy has been designed to bridge the gap between the theory-based approaches that dominate university programs and real-life practice through extensive field-based experiences, such as coaching, action research, shadowing, and internships (Davis et al., 2005; Hess & Kelly, 2007).

Additionally, the superintendent has made the hiring of internal candidates a priority. The implementation of principal transition support teams, retired administrator mentoring, and veteran principal coaching for new principals signifies the school district's steadfast commitment to leadership development and systematic, deliberate planning for the transitioning of new leaders (Watkins, 2003). This study attempted to capture the perceptions of four novice principals who had acquired first-hand experience of these support structures and programs when they had served as assistant principals to identify how they had applied their learning in a real-world context during their first year in the new role of principal.

Importance of Principalship and Impact on Student Achievement

Effective teachers have always been acknowledged as “making an extraordinary and lasting impact on the lives of students. . . . The teacher has proven time and again to be the most influential school-related force in student achievement” (Stronge, 2002, p. viii). Research over the past decade has demonstrated that in addition to strong teachers, a strong principal is one of the key factors ensuring that all children are successful in school (Bottoms, O’Neil, Fry, & Hill, 2003; Cotton, 2003; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). In response, researchers have studied the behaviors of
principals of highly effective schools to determine which behaviors and activities seem to make a positive difference in school culture and student achievement.

Cotton (2003) summarized the research findings regarding principal behaviors and student achievement over the past 20 years and affirmed the strong connection between strong instructional leadership and student achievement. She found that principals in high-achieving schools are effective in creating a safe and orderly environment; a vision and goals focused on high levels of student learning; and high expectations for student achievement, self-confidence, responsibility, and perseverance by maintaining visibility and accessibility; a positive and supportive school culture; communication and interaction; emotional/interpersonal support; parent/community outreach and involvement; rituals, ceremonies, and other symbolic actions; shared leadership/decision-making and staff empowerment; collaboration; instructional leadership; high levels of student learning; a norm of continuous improvement; discussion of instructional issues; classroom observation and feedback to teachers; teacher autonomy; support of risk-taking; professional development opportunities and resources; instructional time; monitoring of student progress and the sharing of findings; the use of student data for program improvement; the recognition of student and staff achievement; and role modeling.

Waters and Grubbs (2004) reported the key findings and theoretical concepts that emerged from a recent study conducted by the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL). McREL's meta- and factor analyses, the basis of the balanced leadership framework, produced convincing evidence that principal leadership is
significantly correlated with student achievement with an average effect size, expressed as a correlation of .25, which means a one standard deviation improvement in principal leadership is associated with a 10% difference in student achievement. McREL’s research also identified 21 specific leadership responsibilities and 66 associated practices that have statistically significant relationships with student achievement. It also found that leaders can also have a marginal or negative impact on achievement relative to first-order and second-order change and that certain leadership behaviors are more effective when leading change that is incremental with “the magnitude of change . . . determined by the implications for the people expected to implement it or those who will be impacted by it” (Waters, 2006). First-order change is change that reflects an extension of past practices, does not require new knowledge or skills for implementation, is well aligned with current values and norms, and is incremental in nature. Second-order change, on the contrary, is change that is complex, conflicts with norms and values, and requires the development of new knowledge and skills. Leaders must understand that change is intensely personal; a given change may be considered first-order change to one person but second-order change to another. School leaders must continually assess the responses of their stakeholders and respond appropriately.

The SREB has spent the last 15 years researching the means of strengthening school leader preparation and professional development. While doing so, it has focused on what future school leaders need to know and be able to do and on principal instructional leadership roles rather than the dominant managerial responsibilities of the
past. Bottoms and O'Neil (2001) concluded that school leaders well prepared to lead successful schools must

have a comprehensive understanding of school and classroom practices that contribute to student achievement; know how to work with teachers and others to fashion and implement continuous student improvement; and know how to provide the necessary support for staff to carry out sound school curriculum and instructional practices.

More specifically, school leaders create a focused mission to improve student achievement and a vision of the elements of school, curriculum and instructional practices that make higher achievement possible. They set high expectations for all students to learn high-level content. They recognize and encourage implementation of good instructional practices that motivate and increase student achievement. They create a school organization where faculty and staff understand that every student counts and where every student has the support of a caring adult. They utilize data and continue improvement in school and classroom practices and student achievement. They keep everyone informed and focused on student achievement, make parents partners in their student’s education and create a structure for parent and educator collaboration. Successful school leaders understand the change process and have the leadership and facilitation skills to manage it effectively. Additionally, effective leaders understand how adults learn and know how to advance meaningful change through quality sustained professional development that benefits students. They use and organize time in
innovative ways to meet goals and objectives of school improvement by incorporating a variety of scheduling models; promoting extended school days and years; implementing progressive summer school programming; and [using] other methods to increase time for improved student learning. Lastly, future quality leaders acquire and use resources wisely; obtain support from central office staff, community and parent leaders; and model continuous learning by keeping themselves abreast of new research and proven practices. (pp. 8–17)

*Increased Accountability and High-Stakes Testing*

High-stakes testing and increased demands for accountability on the district, state, and national level have significantly transformed the face of school leadership (Villani, 2006). Principals often cite these two issues as major factors attributing to increased stress, especially with the passage of the NCLB legislation. Fear of retribution or even removal can have a negative impact on the ability of school districts to recruit and/or retain talented principals for schools in high poverty, urban, and rural areas. Lovely (2004) asserted that the age of accountability does not affect only teachers and students.; principals foster the culture that ultimately determines whether or not children succeed or fail, so increasing the leader’s learning increases the probability of making systemic changes that increase student achievement.

Knapp et al. (2003) emphasized that “in this era of high-stakes testing and accountability, school and district leaders play a central role in interpreting these pressures and guiding productive responses” (p. 15). They suggested that school leaders are in a position to influence the community’s views of learning and to face fundamental
questions concerning how to represent what students know and can do. Although they lack complete control of the measurement of learning, they can still persuade how the public perceives standardized test scores and other data used to inform instruction. School leaders often deal with conflicts over competing goals, interests, and beliefs about education. Knapp et al. maintained that leaders are better able to address the pressures associated with high-stakes testing and accountability when they hold fundamental values for improved learning, such as ambitious standards for student learning; a belief in human capacity; a commitment to equity in order to address the achievement of students who differ by class, race, ethnicity, and language; a shared responsibility in holding each other accountable for improving educational quality; and a commitment to inquiry where evidence is used to evaluate and change teaching and learning practices for continuous improvement.

Because of the unprecedented level of dissatisfaction with the schools and the public’s insistence that schools do a better job preparing students for the 21st century, veteran school administrators are feeling increasingly stressed, and in some cases opting for early retirement. Aspiring leaders are becoming more aware of the challenges during their training, and considering school administration as a job option. For new school leaders, the changing expectations for expanded administrative roles necessitate that school districts provide the resources, support, training, and authority to achieve results (McAdams, 1998). However, Barnett and Muth (2001, as cited in Browne-Ferrigno, 2001) asserted that there is little current evidence that what is learned in principal preparation programs transfers to professional practice. To help address this problem, this
study enhanced the existing knowledge within the profession regarding the specific resources, district support structures, and training that seem to aid new principals during their first year.

*New Ways of Leading in the 21st Century*

Elmore (2002) dramatically redefined a new structure of school leadership and called for a “reinvention” to address the fact that schools have grown in size and complexity to serve an increasingly diversified and previously uneducated student population. He clarified,

If schools, school systems, and their leaders respond to standard-based reforms the way they have responded to other attempts at broad scale reform of public education over the past century, they will fail massively and visibly, with an attendant loss of public confidence and serious consequences for public education. (p. 2)

School leaders will need to lead differently; as many of the issues and dilemmas are relatively unknown, leaders will not be mobilizing others to solve problems they already know how to solve but confronting problems that have never yet been successfully addressed (Fullan, 2001). Teachers have been encouraged to collaborate in professional learning communities for lesson design, common assessments, curriculum mapping, data analysis, and rich dialog regarding individual students. The isolation of the past has been replaced with interactive planning and sharing of successful instructional practices. School leaders, on the other hand, have traditionally been excluded from opportunities to nurture collaborative, collegial relationships. Gray et al. (2007) asserted that highly
skilled school leaders are not born and do not emerge fully prepared to lead from traditional graduate programs in school administration. Instead, effective new principals are rigorously prepared and deliberately mentored in well-designed programs that immerse them in real-world leadership experiences where they are challenged to excel.

Cross and Rice (2000) suggested that school leaders engage in open sharing of successful leadership practice and jointly seek resolutions to the troubling issues that inhibit effective teaching and learning within their schools. School districts should provide sufficient time for principals and assistant principals to develop and maintain relationships. In an interview with Crow (2008), Richard Elmore argued,

Part of our responsibility as leaders . . . is to . . . have the structure that allows people to get together . . . Professional development that is likely to have the biggest impact has a reciprocal relationship between the time . . . colleagues spend in classrooms trying to solve problems and then reflective time outside the classrooms to think about what [they] are going to do next. (p. 42–43)

When leaders convene, they should focus on current topics relevant to their profession to lay the foundation for building a learning community of progressive instructional leaders.

Braun and Carlson (2008) stressed that leaders at all levels need support from a network of colleagues, especially at the outset of their careers. Novice principals have the opportunity to learn from listening to experts articulate their thinking on leadership dilemmas and issues within professional networks, which Elmore (2006) described as not simply voluntary associations where practitioners meet to share their experiences and contribute to each other's learning . . . [but rather associations
that] have a commitment to a common practice—a set of norms, protocols, procedures, and structured interactions that provide the basis for building individual and group knowledge and expertise in practice. (p. 3)

Summary of Current Issues

The complexity of leading schools and the diversity of roles and heightened expectations for principals in the 21st century have become urgent issues for those involved with principal preservice preparation, the recruitment and retention of new principals, and the support of new principals (Normore, 2004). As administrative applicant pools contain fewer high-quality principal candidates, school districts must take responsibility for identifying potential internal candidates and providing them with engaging, relevant curricula and field-based experiences. University preparation programs have been negligent in adapting to the rapidly changing context of educational reform and augmented demands for strong instructional leadership (Archer, 2005; Davis et al., 2005; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Levine, 2005). Although Darling-Hammond (1995) affirmed that research indicates that the training of capable leaders must begin long before they are needed, Davis et al. warned,

Principals play a vital and multi-faceted role in setting the direction for schools that are positive and productive workplaces for teachers and vibrant learning environments for children, but existing knowledge on the best ways to develop these effective leaders is insufficient. (p. 1)

The findings discussed in this chapter support the aim of this study: gaining knowledge of which learning content and support structures help beginning principals in
whom training and resources are invested. Our attempts to prepare the next generation of leaders in different ways are justified, as "the need for a dramatically more skilled and highly educated workforce in a global knowledge economy—combined with profound changes in students’ and families’ life circumstances—have created unprecedented demands on education leaders" (Wagner, 2006, p. xv).

In his interview with Crow (2008), Elmore claimed that most of what principals learn about how to do their work is not learned in school but rather in practice:

The real constraint to this kind of practice is not pre-service training, it’s the capacity of people to create school systems that support this kind of work, because that’s where people are going to learn how to do this [work]. (p. 44)

Elmore insisted that the education profession is obligated to ensure that leaders do not assume leadership positions unless they have the knowledge that they need and the leadership skills necessary to lead in the conceptual age. Specifically, they must how to organize schedules, use consultants and coaches, develop instructional expertise to distinguish between high- and low-level instruction, use time and money in a strategic way, acquire the interpersonal skills necessary to coax people out of their private sphere of practice into a collective practice, establish a basic understanding of the cause-effect relationships between teaching and learning, and diagnose problems.

This research study has augmented the body of knowledge and insights regarding the distinctive ways in which beginning principals perform their work and the manner in which the changed emphasis in preparatory training programs is perceived as beneficial to new principals.
Current Issues Affecting Assistant Principals

Different Skill Sets for Assistant Principals and Principals

More than 7 out of 10 superintendents prefer to promote employees within their own district to principal positions rather than hire candidates outside the district (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, Foleno, & Foley, 2001; Miracle, 2006). Given these data and the apparent difficulty of many school districts to identify highly qualified principal candidates, it seems logical for school districts to take more responsibility for providing leadership experiences to their own assistant principals, who have demonstrated the desired leadership skills and dispositions necessary to become a successful principal (Miracle, 2006).

Copland (2001) explained that as the expectations for schools have changed, more responsibility has been placed on principals and assistant principals; indeed, "expectations for the principalship have steadily expanded since the reforms of the early 1980's, always adding to, and never subtracting from, the job description" (p. 4). The advent of teacher coaches has also impacted the depth of experiences of most assistant principals, as principals now rely on the expertise of the coaches rather than the expertise of assistant principals. Consequently, assistant principal instructional leadership has been somewhat marginalized (Katz, Allen, Fairchild, Fultz, & Grossenbacher, 2007).

As Weller and Weller (2002) pointed out, the role of the assistant principal is the least researched and published topic in educational leadership publications. There are major differences between the role of leader and manager. Principals most often serve as the leaders of schools: They are the visionaries, conceptualizers, and catalysts who plan,
delegate, coordinate, and motivate. Assistant principals fulfill their job responsibilities in roles more often described as managerial: They are the disciplinarians, schedulers, facility overseers, and student supervisors. Limiting the roles played by assistant principals is counterproductive if we want to build leadership capacity within a school district. Weller and Weller (2002) endorsed finding ways for assistant principals to become more involved with leadership responsibilities so that they can advance professionally. The authors explained that assistant principals need to become more proactive by spending more time shaping ideas, changing attitudes, challenging others to do their best, creating high expectations, and maximizing the talents of others. They also need to become "experts" in curricula and instruction in order to be competitive in the job market.

As a result of the current circumstances that school districts face regarding assistant principals and the need to "build the bench," as Johnson-Taylor and Martin (2007) asserted, school districts must offer a network of support and foster a career-long approach to administrator development (Ponder & Crow, 2005). Principals must also take responsibility in a deliberate manner for the professional growth of the assistant principals assigned to them in the same way that they support teachers' continued learning.

Johnson-Taylor and Martin (2007) outlined specific strategies that have proved valuable in grooming assistant principals, such as avoiding hiring career assistant principals by openly discussing career aspirations with potential hires. It is also imperative that assistant principals have strong instructional skills. New Leaders for New
Schools (2007), a highly successful national principal preparation program that seeks only highly successful teachers for its aspiring leader cohorts, mandates that assistant principals must be able to analyze test data, determine the effectiveness of curricular programs, monitor instruction in the classroom, and be able to collaborate with teachers as they make decisions about their instructional programs. They also must be able to coach teachers, which means frequently getting into classrooms to model, support and plan with [them]. (Johnson-Taylor & Martin, p. 24)

Once an assistant principal is hired, principals must model specific tasks prior to asking their assistant principal to take the lead (Johnson-Taylor & Martin, 2007). In doing so, the two leaders present a united approach to teachers, which helps set the new leader up for future success. Working together as a team allows the assistant principal to become involved in all aspects of running a school, from budgeting to crisis management. At some point, principals should provide assistant principals with the opportunity to take the lead in as many activities as possible to increase their skill competencies and self-confidence. Principals should also provide meaningful feedback to their assistant principals and confront difficult issues and mistakes using a coaching approach. In addition, principals should encourage assistant principals to attend professional conferences and then share the information learned as well as incorporate it into school practices. Finally, when assistant principals are ready for promotion, principals must publicly advocate for them by marketing them to key district personnel.
Summary of Current Issues

A lack of opportunity to share instructional leadership roles with principals is an enormous barrier for assistant principals aspiring to become principals. Despite efforts to promote from within school systems, assistant principal candidates frequently lack the desired skill sets that make them competitive during the application process. Miracle (2006) explained,

Because school districts no longer have the luxury of allowing principals to learn on-the-job, the duties of the assistant principal are typically managerial, and university preparation alone is not sufficient for those who enter the principalship, there is a gap between the leadership skills of assistant principals who are likely to be promoted to the position of principal. (pp. 29–30)

School districts must accept responsibility for preparing assistant principals for leadership by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to fill 21st-century principal vacancies. These aspiring leaders must gain the district’s confidence early in the process if they hope to be selected to assume these complex, diverse roles.

Principal Preparation

Movement Toward Standards-Based Leadership Programs

A great deal of interest in improving principal preparation programs arose in the 1980s and 1990s. The publishing of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) led to much criticism of education and increased attention on instructional leadership. In 1987, the National Commission of Excellence in Educational Administration published *Leaders for*
America's Schools, a report that called for reform in the preparation of educational leaders. In the mid-1990s, the Council of Chief State School Officers formed the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) as part of a new partnership with the National Policy Board for Educational Administration. The ISLLC assumed a leadership role with other influential educational leadership organizations, policymakers, and prominent practitioners along with the lead author, Joseph Murphy of Vanderbilt University, to develop a set of standards that would define what school leaders should know, understand, be able to do, believe, value, and commit to undertaking.

Waters and Grubb (2004) noted that by 2004, policymakers in at least 40 states had incorporated the ISLLC standards into principal licensure policies. These standards played a significant role in improving the quality and consistency of administration preparation and licensure policy and practices. Morrison (2005) warned that simply applying the ISLLC standards does not ensure that a school district has created a satisfactory principal preparation program. Although there has been tremendous growth in such programs, there has been limited time and effort devoted to their evaluation and effectiveness.

Elmore (2003) asserted that "knowing the right thing to do is the central problem of school improvement" (p. 9) and that school leaders who fail to select the most effective school and classroom practices for their school improvement initiatives are not likely to guide their schools in the right direction. Gray et al. (2007) passionately noted that poorly prepared principals lead schools nowhere and, once certified, remain in the system for years, obstructing school improvement. Therefore, they argued, "Aspiring
school administrators potentially responsible for the quality of learning achieved by countless numbers of students must be tested against rigorous performance standards” (p. 10).

The research relative to principal preparation, licensing requirements, and inclusion of standards generally supports the importance of a common set of expectations regarding the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of school leaders. Davis et al. (2005) posited that standards are grounded primarily on three aspects of the principal’s job: gaining a deep understanding of how to support teachers, managing the curriculum in ways that promote student learning, and developing the ability to transform schools into more effective organizations that foster powerful teaching and learning for all students. The school district investigated in this study has made a concerted effort to link all principal preparation training to state leadership standards, which are based on ISLLC standards, as well as apply the standards to real school situations and tasks. This study focused on the ways in which principals perceive the relevancy of these standards as manifested by the application of their understanding from preparation to practice.

Rise of District “Grow-Your-Own” Programs

The Education Alliance at Brown University and the NAESP (2003) reported that due to the shortage of high-quality principals, many principals have begun to groom their staff for future leadership positions and many school districts have begun to create their own leadership academies to train and support principals. Morrison (2003) affirmed, “As the need for quality principals continues to grow as more current administrators reach retirement age, it is logical that school systems take an active role in principal preparation
by creating ‘grow your own’ programs” (p. 44). Cotton (2003) also found that many leadership development programs have emerged over the last decade to help veteran, new, and aspiring principals acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to foster improved student performance. Whether these programs will be successful will depend in part on how leadership expertise acquired from attending them is transferred to the principal’s daily realities.

Morrison (2005) asserted that when school districts create their own distinct programs, they are able to personalize their programs in ways that colleges and universities cannot because “grow-your-own” principal preparation programs allow districts to develop and implement programs over which they have total control. Davis et al. (2005) reported that the “emergence of district owned and operated programs has become an increasingly attractive way of supplying the administrative pipeline with qualified candidates who are well-versed in the needs, structures, and cultures of the sponsoring districts” (p. 16). Davis et al. concluded that these district-supported approaches to principal professional development attempt to create lasting infrastructure for sustained learning extending beyond that built by periodic workshops or week-long institutes.

Millstein (1992) posited that when students sense that they have been trained in a special way and see themselves as having the ability to meet the challenges ahead as educational leaders “it may just be the Pygmalion effect; i.e., they believe in their worth because of the different way they have been treated, from the initial selection through placement” (p. 29)—even though no evidence to date supports whether these leaders are
actually better than are other leaders. As new leaders take on the responsibilities of a principal, they exhibit the qualities that then become the foundation for strong, effective leadership.

Daresh (1977) recommended that leadership preparation programs include the following 10 practices to increase their effectiveness:

1. Pre-service programs should emphasize the development of reflective skills. School leaders must be taught to think more deeply about what they do, why they do it, and how to do the work in better ways.

2. Preparation programs should help aspiring principals acquire skills centered around moral and ethical behaviors. Strong leaders understand that getting a job done is more than accomplishing an assigned task. Fervent values must guide the decision-making process and passionate leaders must influence others to get the work done in a fair, ethical, and moral fashion.

3. The principles of adult learning should direct practice in preparation programs. Most principals have moved up from the ranks of classroom teachers and have had extensive training and experiences in working with children. As principals, their primary audience for frequent contact becomes primarily adults, including teachers, parents, staff members, and community representatives, and so these leaders must be well equipped to deal with “andragogy, the art and science of working with adults” (p. 2).

4. The curricula should be coherent, integrative, and sequenced in a logical fashion in “an incremental process of career formation, rather than simply the
ability to collect disconnected course titles and grades on a university transcript” (p. 2).

5. Greater emphasis should be placed on teaching about the teaching and learning processes in schools. School districts expect principals to serve primarily as instructional leaders well versed in teaching pedagogy and curriculum expertise, so preparation programs must include a greater percentage of coursework in this area.

6. Opportunities for more clinical learning should be made available to aspiring principals. Completing graduate coursework is well documented as ineffective alone for preparing future school principals for the realities of the job (Archer, 2005; Bottoms & O’Neil, 2001; Levine, 2005). More field-based experiences, such as internships, shadowing experiences, and action research, should be incorporated into the program design to ensure transferability.

7. Experienced administrators should serve as mentors to aspiring leaders. Often, new aspiring administrators are assigned veteran principals, regardless of their skills or dispositions. It is commonplace for a new administrator to be mentored by a principal who does not model best practices. Assigning inexperienced administrators to mentor principals should become a deliberate practice to ensure that the new leader is with the right person—one who has assumed the responsibility of shaping another generation of leaders and has demonstrated success as a leader.
8. Children and adults learn better when they join together in learning communities. Aspiring principals should learn in cohorts to increase levels of engagement and develop relationships with other colleagues sharing similar career goals.

9. Assessment techniques for principal preparation programs must move away from relying solely summative instruments, such as grades and exit comprehensive exams, that focus on the acquisition of skills and knowledge around theory. Verification of real-world skills relative to principal leadership should be demonstrated through application of theory in real-world contexts and through field-based practices, such as action research, portfolio artifacts, and reflection.

10. Pre-service preparation for school leaders must be viewed as the first step in the process of becoming an administrator. The complex demands of the job require continuous and high levels of professional development. The profession demands that school principals model life-long learning.

The sequential career pathways that prepare aspiring principals with support and professional development for professional growth are designed to embed support at each stage of advancement. This study aimed to identify which professional learning experiences are most valuable to new principals as well as the missing components or areas that need more emphasis to best prepare them for future leadership training.
New Principal Transition Support

Normore (2004) reported that universities and school districts are beginning to use a variety of bridging strategies to provide aspiring administrators with the practical administrative experience and knowledge needed to succeed in the principalship before they assume their first position. Some school district leaders offer a formal induction program for new principals so that they are well prepared for the new role. The induction program covers federal, state, and district guidelines; introduces new principals to key district staff who outline key information; and, with the assistance of administrators from various departments, covers important district initiatives and district-mandated programs. They also provide new principals with an opportunity to network among themselves, thus developing informal and formal relationships for support. According to Villani (2006), this opportunity is important because new principals do not have much time to meet with other new administrators facing the same issues or experienced principals in the district who could share information about the culture and history of the school system.

The Education Alliance at Brown University and NAESP (2003) have documented that in recent years, large numbers of principals have, as aging baby boomers, retired. As a result, in some parts of the country nearly three fourths of the system’s current principals have less than 3 years of experience. Many of the recently retired principals are now serving as mentors in various locations nationally. Daloz (2002) noted that mentors and coaches are provided for new principals in order to ensure a confidential, informal support structure when the need arises. Veteran principals are
selected to serve as mentors or coaches for new principals with whom they share similar demographics or whose schools share similar characteristics. Villani (2006) argued,

It is imperative that new principals have appropriate support through comprehensive induction and mentoring programs so that they can enter schools confident in their ability to foster a strong learning community and be sensitive to the culture they are joining. (p. 5)

Alsbury and Hackman (2006) found that principals cited mentors as their primary source of assistance in becoming successful school leaders as opposed to coursework or educational leadership professors.

This study corroborated the literature by collecting specific evidence from new principals regarding how the district preparatory curriculum enhanced their knowledge and skills to prepare them to draw from professional development learning when critical incidents occurred during their first year of tenure.

Effective Professional Development for School Leaders

School districts throughout the country are under enormous pressure to retool the knowledge and skills of school leaders amid constant changes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Levine, 2005; NASSP, 2007; Petzko, 2008). High-quality professional development cannot be limited to hit or miss in-service training. Too often, the training focuses almost exclusively on content and neglects critical factors that influence learning, such as motivation, confidence to learn, audience experience, and learning style (Lovely, 2004). Although there is fairly consistent agreement on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for future leaders, the research is less conclusive about the
components of effective preparation and development programs (Bottoms & O'Neil, 2001). Too many preparation programs go through the motions of mentoring, requiring that a practicing principal be granted a "professional seal of approval" before being certified. This approval process is little more than the practitioner's willingness to affix a signature to the completion forms with little involvement (Gray et al., 2007).

This laissez-faire approach is inadequate for ensuring that new principal positions are filled with highly qualified, capable leaders equipped with the necessary skills and experiences to handle the complex, litigious, rigorous job of a principal in the 21st century. Gray et al. (2007) emphasized that new principals "need to hit the ground running, ready to lead their staff to accelerate the improvement of teaching and learning" (p. 9). Moreover, experts indicate that too often, new leaders are left to "learn on the job" without much guidance or support. With ever-increasing accountability demands, the "sink or swim, stumble through it" approach to principal leadership development that is so counterproductive is the reason why so many reform efforts never thrive or survive.

Davis et al. (2005) compiled the most current research on principal development program features considered essential. His research confirmed that the impact of effective professional development program features is "more likely to hinge on their quality, coherence, and implementation than on their existence within the programs" (p. 7). The content of these programs must be aligned with the program's philosophy and should build upon each other by integrating important disciplinary theories and concepts. They should also be solidly linked to internships and certification or licensing standards.
Knapp et al. (2003) articulated that well-defined, coherent leadership programming links goals, learning activities, and candidate assessments around a shared set of values, beliefs, and knowledge about effective administrative practice. There should be a balance of theory and practice embedded in the program structure. The learning activities must also offer “a scaffold on which new self-directed knowledge is constructed, foster deep self-reflection, link past experiences with newly acquired knowledge, are problem rather than subject-centered, and offer multiple venues for applying new knowledge in practical settings” (Granott, 1998; Lave, 1991, as cited in Davis et al., 2005).

According to current research, the program content for principal professional development should be delivered through an array of methods centered around the needs of adult learners and should allow principals or aspiring principals to apply the curriculum content in authentic settings and toward the resolution of real-world problems. Davis et al. (2005) supported the “need to create real and simulated leadership experiences for participants in preparation programs who would otherwise lack the experiential base” (p. 9). Davis et al. were referencing that most adults learn best when exposed to situations requiring the application of skills, knowledge, and problem-solving strategies within authentic settings guided by critical self-reflection. Problem-based learning and assessment activities have become increasingly utilized in preparation programs, especially when they incorporate reflection. These activities also simulate complex real-world problems and dilemmas, encouraging a balance of theory and practice in their design. Davis et al. explained that when students participate in these
types of activities, they develop new attitudes and skills, experiment with a variety of leadership roles, and gain meaningful feedback through authentic demonstrations and assessments. Kolb and Boyatzis (1999, as cited in Davis et al., 2005) found, "Cross-disciplinary studies on experiential learning show that exposure to concrete elements of real-world practice can increase a leader’s ability to contemplate, analyze, and systematically plan strategies for action" (p. 16).

Professional internships are the best vehicle for gaining experiential learning experiences, and this preferred practice is consistently followed in other fields, such as medicine and engineering (Baugh, 2003). According to Murphy (1992), more than 90% of all administrative credential programs require an internship. Optimally robust internships provide participants with intense, extended opportunities to deal with the daily demands of school administrative life with the support of a skilled veteran administrator or mentor who is able to guide reflection and meaningful connections to relevant theories or coursework (Daresh, 2001).

Cohort Learning

Cohort grouping strategies have become popular adult learning structures for leadership preparation programs (Davis et al., 2005; Mahler, 2004; Milstein & Krueger, 1997). Cohorts are groups of students who remain together throughout a principal preparation program as they complete a series of common learning experiences. Saltiel and Russo (2001) identified four primary characteristics of cohorts:

A defined membership within a long-term group of learners; a common goal among members such as completing a graduate or certificate program that can
best be achieved when members are academically and emotionally supportive of one another; a highly structured and often intense meeting schedule; and a network of synergistic learning relationships that is developed and shared among members. (as cited in Maher, 2004, p. 19)

The cohort grouping strategy is primarily found in university programs, but recently school districts have adopted this format for their professional development programming. The school district in this study has embraced this model for most of its leadership programs, and the four novice principals who participated in the induction and PNP programs had been in one cohort 3 years prior to becoming principals. Maher (2004) noted that cohort grouping strategies provide instructors with powerful opportunities to engage students more fully in the learning environment with a greater sense of community. Proponents of cohort grouping strategies assert that adult learning occurs best as part of a socially interrelated activity format that promotes a shared responsibility for learning and as well as collaboration and teamwork in practice-oriented situations (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2001). Davis et al. (2005) reported significant positive effects from cohort grouping strategies, including enhanced feelings of group affiliation and acceptance, social and emotional support, motivation, persistence, group learning, mutual assistance, academic learning, and program completion.

The benefits of cohort learning may yield some valuable insights for this case study by identifying professional development support structures perceived to have a positive impact on the first year of a novice principal. Milstein and Krueger (1997) found that cohort learning seems to provide peer support and motivation during the inevitable
difficult leadership situations. They reported that graduates of cohort programs often indicate that the relationships developed over time with colleagues are the most highly valued aspects of the program, even years after program completion, as “cohorts promote networking in both the short term (during the program) and the long term (over the years as administrators and beyond)” (p. 106). Program participants often learn by sharing expertise and collaborating on group assignments. Later as principals, they more readily seek the advice and support of their colleagues with whom they have developed close relationships. Milstein and Krueger stressed that because cohort learning models research-based adult learning practices, they increase the probability that future principals will promote these approaches with their staff, thus creating similar learning cultures within their schools.

*Grounding in Best Practices*

Novice principal professional development must be grounded in best practices and current research to avoid costly errors and poor habits. Villani (2006) suggested that the induction of new principals address the needs of principals as they progress through the following five social stages.

*Stage 1: Survival.* During this stage, individual experiences that shock beginning leaders may occur and professional insecurity and personal concerns are high.

*Stage 2: Control.* During this stage, primary concern rests with setting priorities and performing management-related tasks.

*Stage 3: Stability.* During this stage, frustrations become routinized, difficulties are primarily with facilitating change, and the principal has achieved veteran status.
Stage 4: Educational leadership. During this stage, primary focus is on curriculum and instruction.

Stage 5: Professional actualization. During this stage, which is characterized by empowerment, growth, and authenticity, the focus is on attaining personal vision.

Teachers are encouraged to collaborate in professional learning communities for lesson design, common assessments, curriculum mapping, data analysis, and engaging in rich dialogue about individual students. The isolation of the past has been replaced with interactive planning and sharing of successful instructional practices. School leaders, on the other hand, have traditionally been excluded from opportunities to nurture collaborative, collegial relationships. Gray et al. (2007) asserted that highly skilled school leaders are not born and do not emerge from traditional graduate programs in school administration fully prepared to lead. Instead, effective new principals must be rigorously prepared and deliberately mentored in well-designed programs that immerse them in real-world leadership experiences where they are challenged to excel.

Stanford Educational Institute examined eight rigorous preparatory leadership program models to seek the essential elements and key issues in developing strong school leaders (Davis et al., 2005). Its research on principal preparation and development indicated that certain program components are critical for developing effective school leaders. Davis et al. reported that there is “evidence indicat[ing] that effective programs are research-based, have curricular coherence, provide experiences in authentic contexts, use cohort groups and mentors, and are structure to enable collaborative activity” (p. 7). However, there is little empirical evidence regarding the impact of these features.
In terms of the impact of professional development on school leaders, researchers are advised to look more closely at what we have learned about the impact of teacher professional development to guide our work in leadership development. Russo (2005/2006) described the steps that she took at her school that seemed to make a positive impact: designing personal professional development plans focused on building a solid knowledge base, improving skills, engaging in induction of new staff to provide consistency and teams of support, providing collaborative coaching in support of job-embedded continuous support in learning while applying new practices, sharing of effective practices by assuming responsibility for one’s own professional development, and, most importantly, applying new learning in real-world settings.

Guskey (2005/2006), who is considered an expert in educational research and assessment, addressed the challenges with evaluating professional development in general. He acknowledged that attempts to demonstrate “proof” that “professional development uniquely and alone leads to improvements is very difficult” (p. 4) because “it requires a level of experimental rigor that is hard and often impossible to attain in practical school settings” (p. 4) due to the complicated nature of professional development. Most policymakers, legislators and school leaders “are not asking for ironclad proof, [but instead] want to see evidence that things are getting better” (p. 4). He recommended that multiple indicators be considered when determining impact and that mechanisms be incorporated into professional development programs that rapidly collect evidence of success from students, typically within the first month of implementation. Guskey also supported ongoing job-embedded learning to ensure that that the
Professional development activities provided are effective, as “doing ineffective things longer doesn’t make them any better” (p. 4).

Cross and Rice (2000) suggested that school leaders engage in open sharing of successful leadership practice and jointly seek resolutions to the troubling issues that inhibit effective teaching and learning within their schools. School districts should provide sufficient time for principals and assistant principals to develop and maintain relationships. When they convene, they should focus on current topics relevant to their profession to lay the foundation for building a learning community of progressive instructional leaders. Dyer (2008) argued,

Professional development for principals should not be perceived as another thing to do, another task to be managed. Rather, participation in job-embedded professional learning is about being willing to be coached and mentored as well as serving as the school’s chief mentor and coach. (p. 7)

The National Staff Development Council (NSDC, 2000) contended, “The development of principals cannot continue to be the neglected stepchild of state and district professional development efforts. It must be standards-focused, sustained, intellectually rigorous and embedded in the principal’s workday” (p. 7). Millstein (1992) insisted that adult learners must recognize the need to pursue life-long learning beyond certification or licensure for educational leadership, especially as they make the transition into leadership positions. Millstein also asserted,

Preparation can no longer be viewed as something that is engaged in exclusively before obtaining a leadership position. The human drive to grow and learn and the
rapidly changing environment in which leaders perform their roles require a long-term perspective on preparation. (p. 32)

Summary of Effective Professional Development

Public demands for more effective schools and increased accountability and complex challenges related to the diverse student populations served by schools have placed significant attention on the critical role of school leaders. Unfortunately, school leaders remain “a professional group largely overlooked by the various educational reform movements of the past two decades. [However], evidence suggests that, second only to the influences of classroom instruction, school leadership strongly affects student learning” (Davis et al., 2005, p. 3). Moreover, there is little evidence demonstrating whether and how the kinds of learning opportunities provided by even the most respected leadership programs, grounded in effective professional development practices and adult learning theory, enable principals to become more effective in their practice.

This case study recorded the personal perceptions of four novice principals to provide specific examples of how a district-developed, experiential-based professional development program had impacted their first year on the job. The research-based components of the school district’s leadership development programming had been intentionally crafted to support and guide these novice principals as they made decisions, solved problems, addressed ethical dilemmas, and engaged in various practices. As such, the components aimed to ensure that the principals’ transition to their new leadership role was perceived as positive and that the principals were prepared to focus on student
achievement laden with effective leadership strategies that made a difference for those whom they served.

Beginning Principals

Beginning principals often operate in isolation and experience loneliness and changes in peer relationships (Robbins & Alvy, 2004; Villani, 2006). They often describe feeling vulnerable, at risk, clueless, and/or innocent during their first year as principal. Peer collegial support would seem to be an obvious and excellent resource. However, there seems to be a taboo in the educational profession against disclosing problems to others and giving sincere assistance, despite the fact that effective mentoring provides support to new leaders and “gives the new principal . . . an immediate opportunity to reveal him/herself to the school community as an insatiable learner” (Villani, p. xiii).

Whenever a new principal is selected for a school, members of the school community, including teachers, parents, and students, usually experience a wide range of emotions, such as curiosity, relief, apprehension, frustration, and/or excitement (Villani, 2006). Student concerns might center on possible changes with discipline and scheduling, teachers might fear a loss of autonomy or the introduction of new programs and procedures, and parents may desire to gain access to the new principal. District officials often expect a new principal to be an ambassador of the district vision and initiatives to all constituents, including the community.

New principals must quickly become respected, trusted educational leaders because the entire school community is impacted by their decisions and actions. Parkay, Currie, Gaylon, and Rhoades (1992) suggested that the extent to which principals are
socialized in their positions in the first year is often an indicator of their future socialization in the school community. Novice principals deserve to have ongoing support through comprehensive induction and mentoring programs so that they can enter schools confident in their ability to foster a strong learning community and cognizant of the new school’s existing culture (Villani, 2006). Novice principals must learn how to discern which areas are outside of and within their locus of control to concentrate their energy on only those issues that they can truly influence.

Regardless of their teaching experience or administrative preparation, it is likely that novice principals will encounter situations or incidents for which they are unprepared. They require support to assist them with challenges such as isolation from other administrators, the fear of being seen as incompetent, difficulty establishing priorities and honoring confidentiality for ethical and legal reasons, technical and logistical problems such as complex scheduling and budget preparation, and legal and moral responsibilities. Daresh’s (2001) research with beginning principals found three distinct areas of concern: problems with role clarification, limitations on technical expertise, and difficulty with socialization into the profession and system. Germaine and Quinn (2005) identified considerable differences in how tacit knowledge (informal knowledge gleaned from experience) was used by expert and novice principals during problem-solving situations:

Novice principals actually perceived situations differently than did their expert counterparts. When novice principals thought about their strategies in a metacognitive format, they did so after a disruptive incident rather than before or
during the incident. They often chose to wait to address problems rather than confront and resolve them. When novice principals did think about incidents as they transpired, they lost their perspective and reacted emotionally. Once they faced a problem, novice principals spent substantial time in anxious deliberation about possible solutions. (p. 81)

According to Baltzell and Dentler (1992), when a school system invests in the preparation of principals, this priority expenditure serves as an index of other aspects of system quality, including socialization opportunities for training and preparation for leadership roles.

Socialization of Beginning Principals

Socialization is the interactive process by which an individual selectively acquires the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and behaviors needed to participate as a member of a profession (Bennis, 1985; Hart, 1993; Kaye, 1995; Merton, 1963; Normore, 2004). Oplatka (2004) asserted that researchers need to consider the principal’s career stage within theoretical perspectives of educational leadership and align different leadership styles and priorities for training with a particular career stage. This stance seems to suggest that a more differentiated approach to coaching and support may be necessary because, as Greenhaus and Callanan (1994, as cited in Oplatka, 2004) noted, career development is an ongoing process by which individuals progress through a series of stages, each characterized by a unique set of issues, themes, or tasks. The terminology at the various stages of socialization assisted with the final selection of the themes in the
analysis. The principals' behaviors were referenced in the context of the more specific analysis of critical incidents and the principals' insights.

A major component of any leadership development or succession process involves a process of socialization by which attention is simultaneously given to both the leader and context. Normore (2004) defined socialization as the processes by which an individual selectively acquires the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to perform a social role effectively. Peterson (2001), referencing Lortie's classic 1975 study of teachers, contended that there are three stages of occupational induction and socialization: formal schooling, mediated entry, and learning while doing. All of these stages play an integral role in determining the quality of an administrator's performance. Socialization for novice principals in the United States has tended to be a piecemeal collection of strategies provided by universities or school districts without a conceptual understanding (Crow, 2006).

Crow (2006) classified socialization into the two categories of professional socialization and organizational socialization. Professional socialization, which occurs primarily in university preparation programs, concerns the initial knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to enact the role, regardless of the setting. Organizational socialization, in contrast, is context bound and concerns the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to conduct a role in a particular setting. Crow suggested that these two forms of socialization frequently conflict, as professional socialization is focused on inculcating a conception of the role for newcomers and organizational socialization is focused on making these newcomers effective organizational members. Parkay, Curie,
and Rhodes (1992) suggested that principals would benefit from gaining awareness of the socialization hierarchy, which includes common career ups, downs, and plateaus. This understanding may help reduce the common feelings of inadequacy that are typical for novice principals.

District support structures and professional development must target the organizational socialization process in a systematic and deliberate manner to bridge the gap and enable new principals or aspiring leaders to be successful in their first formal leadership experience. Greenfield (1985) confirmed that too often, beginning principals portray their initial socialization learning as individual, informal, random, and variable. Novice principals must become familiar with the school’s culture norms, history, traditions, rituals, and ceremonies. Bolman and Deal (2003) posited that a school culture is the glue that holds a school together and unites the staff around shared beliefs and values. School leaders that take the time to understand the symbols and ceremonies are much better equipped to influence their organization. Well-intentioned beginners can easily alienate others while trying to be responsive or competent; they may inadvertently do something wrong or undo something that many staff may not want changed for reasons embedded in the school’s history. Unless new administrators invest time in learning and listening, they may make early mistakes that plague them for many years (Watkins, 2003).

Bridges (2003) explained that whereas a change focus on the outcomes, a transition focuses on the endings and the letting-go process through which people must naturally pass any time that a change occurs. When organizations fail to understand the
feelings that are generated by a loss, change becomes problematic for new administrators and staff, especially during the transitions. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) reinforced the need for sensitivity when dealing with transitions and for addressing the adaptive challenges that new leaders face. Adaptive changes, which require people to change their attitudes, values, and beliefs, can be threatening to the school community when a new leader begins his or her tenure. The single most common source of leadership failure is failure in dealing with adaptive challenges, such as technical changes. Dealing with these complex issues requires providing ongoing training and support for new leaders by people whom they trust such as mentors or coaches.

Novice principals are under close scrutiny by many constituents, especially during the first year, so thoughtful programming for induction and support is needed, especially by their supervisors, to ensure their success and retention in the profession (Villani, 2006). Novice principals should develop an entry plan as a proactive strategy for ensuring success. When developing this plan, these new leaders should deeply reflect on the ways in which they can create early wins, expedite their own learning, and set short-term and long-term goals (Watkins, 2003). Month-by-month planning assists new leaders in prioritizing and then reflecting on accomplishments.

Journaling is another effective strategy that forces self-reflection and helps new leaders develop mindfulness by “going to the balcony ... to step back in the midst of action ... to listen to the song beneath the words” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2006, pp. 51, 55). Reeves (2006) noted that “a leadership journal need not require an exceptional commitment of time nor must it become a maudlin exercise in therapeutic self-
He suggested that objective statements in response to a set of questions can be routine in isolation, but may be quite enlightening over time. Reeves suggested asking questions such as, What did I learn today? Whom did I nurture today? What difficult issue did I confront today? What is my most challenge right now? and What did I do today to make progress on my most important challenge? Personal reflection, although intensely personal and private, can have a profound impact on a novice principal’s actions, decision-making, and professional growth.

Despite the significant national attention on principal preparation at the graduate level and from the perspective of school districts, limited research has been conducted from the perspective of new principals in terms of the knowledge and skill areas perceived as critical to initial success since enactment of the NCLB (Petzko, 2008). Petzko’s 2008 study of 73 new middle and high school principals and assistant principals used the knowledge base proposed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA, 2007) Connexions Project, which had identified the following 18 knowledge and skill domains: the historical, social, cultural, and philosophical foundations of education; research methods; learning theory; curriculum; student services; administration of special programs; personnel; educational management theories; educational leadership; human relations; organizational change; site-based leadership; school law; school business and finance; school public relations; school facilities; district leadership; and technology leadership.

Petzko’s research (2008) revealed far more similarities than differences in the sample group’s perceptions of which knowledge and skills were important to their
success as new principals. Specifically, he found, “Human relations and personnel scored higher with every group of principals and were closely followed by curriculum and educational leadership” (p. 237). The Connexions Project delineated the areas of human relations and personnel domains as the ability to communicate; resolve conflicts; motivate employees; manage teams; and select, evaluate, and further develop faculty and staff (NCPEA, 2007). It defined educational leadership as the knowledge and skills needed to provide vision, create effective schools, and use situational leadership theory. It labeled the knowledge and skills related to curriculum as curriculum alignment, content, the instructional process, online instruction, tracking, student evaluation, and the curriculum-change process.

Self-Efficacy

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) found that principal sense of self-efficacy is a promising yet “largely unexplored avenue to understanding principal motivation and behavior” (p. 573). These researchers also noted that although there are few empirical studies of principal self-efficacy, the results seem to suggest that understanding more about this area might yield beneficial information, especially for leadership development practices. According to Maddox (1995, as cited in Carr, Fauske, & Rushton, 2008), self-efficacy is based on the relationship among personal factors, including cognition and emotion, behavioral factors, and environmental factors. Carr et al. (2008) further refined the definition of self-efficacy as “represent[ing] one’s own view of individual capabilities enhanced or hindered by the ability to creatively garner environmental resources and choose among various actions wisely” (p. 76). Tschannen-Moran and Gareis suggested
that principals' perceived capability to perform cognitive and behavioral functions impacts their ability to regulate group processes and perform functional leadership strategies. They also indicated that a principal's self-efficacy differs in particular contexts, explaining that principals' "skills, knowledge, strategies, and personality traits [are] balanced against personal weaknesses or liabilities in each particular school setting" (p. 573).

Leithwood and Steinbach (1995) suggested that what principals do is a direct consequence of what and how they think. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) also contended that self-efficacy beliefs are excellent predictors of individual behavior. Lyons and Murphy (1994) revealed that high-efficacy principals do not interpret their inability to solve problems immediately as failure. They regulate their personal expectations to correspond to conditions, typically remaining confident and calm and keeping their sense of humor, even in difficult situations. Low-efficacy principals, on the other hand, perceive that they are unable to control the environment and tend to be less likely to identify appropriate strategies or modify unsuccessful ones. When faced with challenges, they rigidly persist in their original course of action; are apt to blame others; and are unable to see opportunities, develop support, or adapt (Osterman & Sullivan, 1996). These principals more readily feel that they are failures and demonstrate anxiety, stress, and frustration. Friedman (1997) found that principals with lower self-efficacy are also prone to earlier burnout, role ambiguity, and role conflict.
Enabling and Hindering Behaviors

Hoy and Sweetland’s (2001) research on the meaning and measurement of enabling school structures served as the seminal work for categorizing and interpreting principal behaviors in this study. These researchers contended that schools are bureaucracies with hierarchical structures that can either impede or foster organizational learning and administrative efficiency. They explained, “Enabling formalization assists employees with finding solutions to problems in their work. . . . Enabling rules and procedures are flexible guidelines that reflect best practices and help subordinates deal with surprises and crises” (p. 298). When principals incorporate enabling procedures and behaviors, they encourage engaging in interactive dialogue, viewing problems as opportunities, fostering trust, valuing differences, capitalizing on and learning from mistakes, taking delight in the unexpected, and facilitating problem solving. Principals who enact hindering or more coercive procedures tend to frustrate communication, are more autocratic, view problems as obstacles, foster mistrust, demand consensus, are wary of differences, punish mistakes, and fear the unexpected. When principal behaviors are more enabling, they encourage collaboration, increase participation, and develop trust among staff. When principals behave more coercively, they demand compliance and exercise unnecessary control, thereby creating frustration.

Although Hoy and Sweetland (2001) admitted that schools require structure, they argued that for school leaders to be more enabling than hindering, they must promote collaboration, flexibility, and innovation. After linking enabling structures to greater faculty trust in the principal, they suggested that principals promote truthful and authentic
interactions and limit concealment, deception, and delusion. Hoy and Sweetland also suggested that principal enabling behaviors, which are more humanistic, can have a cascading effect in schools. Lastly, they reported that research is beginning to “show the pivotal importance of organizational trust in facilitating student achievement” (pp. 314–315).

Unique Features of the School District’s Leadership Development Programs for New School Leaders

Induction Seminars

*Induction seminars* are part of a mandatory intensive learning preparatory program specifically designed to support new administrators. Supervisors and directors from various departments present interactive, informational modules emphasizing operational and instructional competencies necessary to be successful in new leadership roles. The 12 orientation modules that have been developed are interactive as well as informational and use the talents and expertise of the various school department directors and supervisors. The sessions provide valuable procedural and process protocols and a deeper understanding of the values, beliefs, and dispositions upon which decisions are made within the school system. Lovely (2004) emphatically endorsed these programs, recommending that every first-year principal attend them because “intensive coaching and induction programs are the best ways to support a principal’s early years. Formal coaching not only improves the retention rate for beginners, it catapults them through the transition period” (p. 60).
Mentoring by Retired Administrators

In the mentoring process, retired administrators are assigned to serve as mentors to new principals and assistant principals for up to 3 years. First-year mentoring is mandatory because much research has endorsed the use of mentoring as a recommended practice (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Brock & Grady, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Davis et al., 2005; Knapp et al., 2003; Lovely, 2004; Robbins & Alvy, 2004; Villani, 2006). The Education Alliance at Brown University and the NAESP (2003) argued, “Just as a principal should institute a mentoring program for teachers within a school, today’s principal should also view principal mentoring as a valuable tool resulting in improved leadership skills and, ultimately, a stronger learning environment” (p. 10).

All mentors receive initial training and attend additional periodic meetings that reinforce major concepts, allow for networking among mentors, and provide mini-information sessions on the school district’s hot topics. Mentoring is a supportive relationship based on mutual trust and respect between an experienced professional and a new principal. The mentor guides, nurtures, shares expertise, and encourages personal and professional growth. Increasingly, states and school districts are using mentoring to help attract and train novice principals. With the ever-increasing demands and complexity of the principalship, school districts cannot afford to leave novice principals alone, isolated from helpful colleagues, when asked to deal with complex problems (Education Alliance at Brown University & NAESP, 2003).

Davis et al. (2005) pointed out that “mentoring relationships should serve to reduce the distance between a learner’s independent problem-solving performance and
his/her potential developmental level achieved through problem solving with guidance from an expert” (p. 10). Mentors should primarily steer the principal in the search for strategies to resolve dilemmas, boost self-confidence, and construct a broad repertoire of leadership skills (Davis et al.). Highly skilled mentors model, coach, listen, question, and probe to promote self-reflection and problem-solving skills by providing feedback and counsel (Lave, 1991).

Principal Coaching

In addition to being assigned a mentor, every new principal in the school district in this study is assigned a colleague principal who serves as a “coach” for the first year. This “buddy” principal is usually someone who is at a similar level, from a similar demographic area, or has had previous experience with a similar population. The principal coach not only attends the principal transition support teams but is also encouraged to engage in informal contact with the principal. Lovely (2004) affirmed the importance of coaching and mentoring by stating, “Once hired, principals need intensive support and coaching. . . . Coaches, veteran mentors, and buddy programs should be standard fare” (p. 13).

The district’s emphasis on coaching and induction strategies is well supported by the literature. Daresh (2001) stated that it is naïve to believe that pre-service training provides new school principals with all that they need to know about effective leadership in a particular school district. School districts must continue training new hires using a variety of supportive induction programs, interventions, and activities, such as deliberate comprehensive orientation programs, buddy systems, a structured beginner workload, and
feedback, reflective activities, and planning for professional growth, to help them continue their professional growth as school leaders.

*Principal Transition Support Teams*

Principal transition support teams have been created in this school district as proactive interventions designed to support new principals during their first year by specifically focusing on accelerating learning and decreasing vulnerability to increase the likelihood of success. The team consists of the novice principal, his or her principal coach, the retired mentor, and the Director of Leadership Development. Meetings are held (usually 3 to 4 per year) at the school site. The content of the meeting is driven by the individual needs of the principal. Although there is a prepared agenda, the meetings focus on the areas that the principal wishes to address. There is honest dialogue about what is going well, what resources are needed, who is helping the new leader to be successful, and what can be improved. New principals are provided with helpful executive summaries on specific books geared to new leaders. These collaborative, collegial, and supportive relationships encourage meaningful dialogue and reflection.

Lovely (2004) described transition as a critical time for new principals. Because the success of beginning principals largely depends upon how adeptly they transition into their role and environment, school districts must be prudent and deliberate about the support provided to these neophytes, remaining aware that “once newcomers are handed the keys, they begin to deal with the issues, routines and relationships of uncharted territory” (p. 56).
Preparing New Principals Certification Program

The Preparing New Principals (PNP) program in the school district where this study took place is a 2-year certification program that was revised in 2003 to meet state statute requirements. Cox (1998) conducted a study on the effectiveness of principal preparation in a southeastern state as perceived by superintendents and first-year principals. Her study referenced the origins of the PNP programs in this state, which began in 1986 when passage of the state Management Training Act (1979) established two requirements for principal certification: attainment of a graduate-level degree in educational leadership and completion of an experiential, competency-based training program. The legislation identified 10 principal competencies and produced guidelines for the selection, development, and appraisal of school principals and assistant principals that became known as the Human Resources Management and Development (HRMD) process for each school district in Florida.

Murphy's 1990 book on the reform of American public education criticized principal preparation programs at the time for adapting to neither the hectic pace nor the varied content required for the job (Cox, 1998). Cox noted, "The weaknesses of principal preparation programs included a lack of experiential learning opportunities, an emphasis on didactic instruction, content not connected to the duties of the principal, and the lack of training for supervising principals" (pp. ix-x). At the time of Murphy's study, first-year principals were requesting more content and hands-on experience in finance, technology, human resources, and facility management. Assistant principals proposed
more contact with practicing principals in a variety of settings, more real-world experiences, and a released time internship under a highly qualified principal.

The participants in the PNP program complete an individualized leadership learning plan (ILLP) and portfolio that emphasizes instructional leadership. The portfolio also serves as a resource for a summative evaluation documenting successful completion of the PNP program and eligibility for school principal certification. The process of documentation offers participants the opportunity to reflect, engage in self-analysis, and compile evidence that demonstrates their competency in each of the 12 district leadership standards. The purposes of the documentation are therefore many: personal reflection, licensure and certification, support and growth, and school improvement. Brown and Irby (2001) advocated the use of portfolios for four different purposes: professional or academic growth, self-assessment, reflection, and analysis of behaviors relative to the principal’s performance. The portfolio may also be used for summative evaluation, career advancement, and as part of administrator preparation programs.

Principals are more subject to performance evaluation than to direct supervision. Portfolios provide a venue that helps school leaders to become more reflective. Because the evaluation system for administrators should be based on research-based practices for effective and successful schools, linking evaluation to expected leadership competencies is sound procedure. The portfolio review process should encourage collaboration between the administrator and the supervisor.

The ILLP requires that assistant principals become heavily engaged in instructional leadership activities. Assistant principals must select an area of instructional
focus, in conjunction with the supervising principal, in which they plan to take significant responsibility. The assistant principals must then determine what they need to learn and be able to do for each standard, how they will learn the knowledge and skills, what specific actions they will take as a result of their new learning, and what artifact(s) will demonstrate their proficiency. For each artifact, the assistant principals must write a summary that outlines its connection to a specific standard, reviews their specific involvement, and articulates the impact of their work. Artifacts for the ILLP then become a part of their overall portfolios. During the 2-year process of completing both the ILLP and the accompanying portfolio, the administrators remain in one cohort. The process emphasizes growth and learning by encouraging continuous reflection and providing feedback from peers and supervisory support.

The program also utilizes key speakers on relevant topics, book studies, leadership-learning team school site visits, and Consultancy Protocol (National School Reform Faculty Project, 2001). Figure 2 displays the overall PNP model and levels of support.

New Principal Friends Group

The New Principal Friends group was formed in 2007 to assist the significant number of new principals hired during the previous 2 years. Twelve new principals decided that meeting several times a year to share their new learning as new leaders and to address questions and issues in a safe, supportive environment would be invaluable.
Figure 2. The Preparing New Principals program model.
Because they wanted the meeting environment to be relaxed and informal, the sessions were held in homes rather than school buildings.

_Summary of Support for New Principals_

The literature review discussed the high quantity and quality of background knowledge that justified and framed this research study. The significant sources discussed throughout the literature review guided the design and data analysis of the study. Lastly, the literature review proved highly beneficial in providing a context for the summary, conclusion, and research implications of this study (Hickey, 2006). This retrospective study built upon the current leadership literature on principal preparation within both university pre-service programs and “grow-your-own” district preparation programs, issues related to assistant principals, research based practices for job-embedded professional development models for school leaders, and the socialization process for beginning principals.

In his recent study on leadership assimilation, Manderscheid (2006) found, leadership transitions are important passages that have implications for the leader, their team, and the organization. Such transitions are more frequent in the past and the failure rate of new leaders is high. When leaders transition into a new leadership role . . . there are few formal interventions that help them learn, adapt, and build relationships quickly with their new teams. Moreover, there is little empirical research documenting the impact of leadership development interventions early in a leader’s transition. (p. vi)
This study makes substantial contributions to understanding how novice principals, from their own point of view, engaged in the entry process and tackled what they identified as critical incidents that occurred during their first year as principal. This school district has demonstrated a strong commitment to leadership development, especially in aspiring leaders. This study appears to have captured novice principals’ perceptions regarding which support structures, programs, and program components positively impacted their first-year experiences. Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) supported the significance of studies such as this study, explaining that “much of the literature about leadership development programs describes the program features believed to be productive, but evidence about what graduates of these programs can actually do as a result of their training has been sparse” (p. 5). Continuous improvement processes, if taught properly and upfront in preparation programs, are more likely to enhance overall principal performance than is treating each new problem as a new experience.

Experiential learning provides a model that allows new principals to draw from their past learning experiences to acquire new knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes to apply in their schools. Kolb’s (1984) cycle corresponds well with the sequence of professional learning experiences in which new principals have participated from their training through their first year as principal. The first phase of concrete learning occurred during their pre-service period (their university coursework and participation in the Leadership Academy, induction program, and PNP certification program), in which they were involved in shadowing, role-playing, action research, case studies, and short-term internships. The second reflective phase that took place during the development of their
ILLPs and portfolios required incremental reflection about each artifact that was linked to specific leadership standards. The participants described the linkage, their involvement in the activity, and then reflected on the "so what" or the impact of new learning that occurred as a result of their engagement in the activity.

The third phase of abstract conceptualization began at the start of the principalship as the new leader observed, listened, and identified patterns and areas of strength and those needing attention. They asked questions such as, How do I account for what I observed? What does it mean for students, teachers, parents and my community? How is what I have learned significant? What conclusions can I draw? The last phase of experimentation began as the new leader took action based on prior learning. Past experiences, once again, helped new principals reflect on and think deeply about what might be done differently in the future and how to apply this new information to make a difference for students.

Van Velsor and McCauley (2004, as cited in Reeves, 2006) argued that "people do not develop the capacity for leadership without being in the throes of the challenge of leadership work" (p. 50). Serving in leadership roles and practices is often the source of the challenge needed for leadership development because "leadership roles and processes are full of novelty, difficulty, conflict, and often disappointment. In other words, leadership itself is a developmental challenge. Leading is, in and of itself, leading by doing" (p. 50).

Germaine and Quinn's (2005) research resulted in some unanticipated findings: "Principals concluded that experience alone was not sufficient to gain expertise. Though
previous experience was helpful in understanding school operations, novice principals with other administrative support experience did not necessarily use tacit knowledge (informal knowledge gained from experience) effectively” (p. 87). They concluded that “the lack of a causal relationship between experience and tacit knowledge distinguished experience from expertise” (p. 87).
CHAPTER III
Design and Methodology

Introduction

This retrospective, qualitative, descriptive study was designed to closely examine the first-year experiences of four novice principals at the conclusion of their first year of tenure. This empirical inquiry closely investigated the behaviors and strategies utilized by these four novice principals in the real-life context of their schools. The researcher collected data on the impact of district support structures, including transition support teams, coaching by veteran principals, mentoring by retired administrators, a formal induction program for new administrators, and prior preparatory professional development, as the novice principals reflected on their first year using their perceptions of critical incidents to guide their thinking.

A qualitative research design was selected for studying the first-year experiences of novice principals because, as Patton (2002) explained, "understanding what people value and the meaning they attach to experiences from their own personal and cultural perspectives are the major inquiry arenas of qualitative inquiry" (p 147). According to Marshall and Rossman (1995), the first year of the principalship for novice principals is a phenomenon that may be poorly understood or laden with unspecified contextual variables. As qualitative research takes place in the natural setting, the interviews in this study took place at each principal’s school. The critical incident technique (CIT) was used for collecting data on human behaviors that have critical significance and meet
defined criteria. The novice principals reflected on critical incidents by telling the specific stories about the experiences that they had had in relation to the 5 to 10 critical incidents they chose to review.

The challenges that new principals face, the need for higher quality school leader preparation, and the value of induction programs are well supported in the literature. However, little research to date has examined how principals’ preparation through sustained professional development, activities and learning during their tenure as assistant principals, and new principal district support mechanisms transfer to their effectiveness as new principals. Davis et al. (2005) noted,

There is strikingly little evidence demonstrating whether and how the kinds of learning opportunities provided by [principal preparation] program features enable principals to become more effective in their practice. Most of the empirical support for the most popular program components consists of self-reported candidate perceptions and experiences and there is virtually no evidence for how graduates of different kinds of programs perform on the job. As a result, programs are experimenting with various combinations of curriculum, methods, and program structures hoping to enhance principal practice without a solid base of empirical research to inform their design. (p. 7)

Recognizing that an important component of any successful program is the perception of the graduates (Guskey, 2005/2006), this retrospective study attempted to capture and make sense of the four principals’ perceptions in a way that might inform future training and practice. Chapter 3 describes the study’s research design, the role of
the researcher, the subjects, the instrumentation validity and reliability, the data collection
tools, the time schedule, the logistical procedures, additional research supporting the
methodology, and the data analysis procedures.

Research Design

The retrospective design of this study focused on four specific principals who had
completed 3 years of common leadership development prior to their appointment. Three
of the four principals had been promoted within one school system from teacher to
assistant principal and then to principal. All four principals had been assistant principals
in the school district prior to becoming principals. Their backgrounds and prior
leadership experiences were highlighted, compared, and contrasted. In addition, a
demographic breakdown was drafted that included key points from each school’s site
analysis report. The researcher collected extensive data immediately following the
conclusion of these principals’ first year of tenure in June 2008, spending much time
learning about the context, background, and uniqueness of each school. Creswell (2003)
contended that because qualitative research is emergent rather than tightly prefigured,
several aspects may change or be refined in the process. Qualitative research is generally
interpretative, so the researcher must first decipher the data; categorize it using themes or
categories; draw conclusions from a personal or theoretical perspective; and then suggest
possible implications for practice, policies, or future study (Wolcott, 1994).

The CIT, the retrospective research tool used for this study, has become a widely
used qualitative research method since its development in 1954. This technique grew out
of John C. Flanagan’s studies of the Aviation Psychology Program of the U.S. Army Air
Force during World War II. The technique was originally designed for the purpose of identifying and analyzing the specific reasons why pilot candidates failed to learn to fly. The U.S. Army Air Force continued to subsidize studies using the CIT during the war (Christensen, 1994).

At the end of World War II, Flanagan and his colleagues moved to the University of Pittsburgh and founded the American Institutes for Research (AIR), where they continued to develop and refine the technique (Christensen, 1994). According to Butterfield, Borden, Amundson, and Maglio (2005), the CIT is recognized as an effective exploratory and investigative tool. It has been utilized across a diverse number of disciplines, including communications, nursing, job analysis, counseling, education and teaching, medicine, marketing, organizational learning, performance appraisal, and psychology. Between 1991 and 2003, 19 masters' theses and doctoral dissertations have utilized the CIT, among which are two studies on principal effectiveness (Christensen, 1995; De Stefano, 2003). Zuilkoski (2006) used the CIT with teachers and administrative mentors to ascertain their perceptions relative to the critical incidents that either positively or negatively impacted their perceptions of their leadership abilities and/or desire to become administrators. Cunning (2005) utilized the CIT to identify educational assistants' perceptions of effective work relationships between supervising teachers and educational assistants. Johnson and Fauske (2000) incorporated the CIT in their study emphasizing the importance of school environment and leadership effectiveness.

De Stefano (2003) asserted that the CIT is a phenomenological research method used to identify the behaviors and strategies of novice principals that contribute or hinder
their effectiveness during their first year of tenure. This qualitative retrospective tool was appropriate for this study and assisted in developing a greater analytical understanding of the real-world settings in which novice principals must operate on a daily basis. Flanagan (1954) defined the CIT as

a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles. . . . By an incident is meant any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical, an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where the consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects. . . .

The critical incident technique outlines procedures for collecting observed incidents having special significance and meeting systematically defined criteria. (pp. 137, 327)

Mezirow's 1990 study on fostering critical reflection in adulthood explained that a critical incident is one that makes a significant contribution, either positively or negatively, to a specific activity or phenomenon adulthood (Lindata, 2007). Participants may be asked to tell a story or clarify a story using categories such as concerns, thoughts, feelings, accomplishments, difficulties that are either satisfying or disturbing, implications, or changes for future practice. Flanagan (1954, as cited in Kain, 2004) indicated,
The most important criteria for incidents are: the actual behavior is reported; the relationship of the reporter to the behavior is clear, the relevant facts are provided; the reporter makes a clear judgment about what makes the incident critical; and the reasons for this judgment are clear. (p. 74)

Flanagan’s 1954 research found that the CIT method has great flexibility, being applicable to studying effective and ineffective ways of doing something, examining helping and hindering factors, collecting functional and behavioral descriptions of events or problems, examining successes and failures, or determining characteristics that are critical to important aspects of an activity or event. Kain (2004) noted that as the technique has gained wider acceptance, researchers are examining not only activities but also characteristics, traits, and perspectives. The technique is grounded in careful observations by the participant or an outside observer of particular behaviors that are conducive to analysis.

Kain (2004) outlined the following five steps that Flanagan (1954) proposed for using CIT: (a) ascertaining the general aims of the activity being studied, (b) making plans and setting specifications, (c) collecting the data, (d) analyzing the data, and (e) interpreting the data and reporting the results. The first step is intended to answer two questions: (a) What is the objective of the activity and (b) What is the person expected to accomplish who engages in the activity? The second step requires that the researcher use concise and consistent procedures to provide uniformity for all the subjects participating in the study. The third step requires the researcher to collect data by conducting interviews during which the principals recall from memory incidents that occurred during
their first year as principal. Flanagan stated that there is no set rule for how many incidents are sufficient.

The fourth step is analysis, which leads to practical purposes such as the development of training or evaluation tools. Flanagan (1954, as cited in Kain, 2004) explained the three features of data analysis:

First, the researcher must select a frame of reference or general classification scheme. The subsequent coding of incidents will be inductive so that the categories arise from the data. Second, the researcher begins to create categories which is a tentative, interactive process where the researcher sorts incidents into groups derived from the frame of reference. (p. 76)

According to Butterfield et al., using the CIT usually involves "creat[ing] a categorization scheme that summarizes and describes the data in a useful manner, while at the same time sacrificing as little as possible of the comprehensiveness, specificity and validity" (p. 479). During the final or fifth step of interpretation, Flanagan (1954) recommended that researchers acknowledge their biases and the limitations of their studies while emphasizing the value of their results; specifically, they should stress what is worth knowing at the conclusion of the research rather than generalizing the results. Stake (1995) also referenced the importance of transferability in this type of study. Figure 3 illustrates the five steps of the CIT.

The researcher first reviewed each incident and then utilized a fact-finding strategy to collect the details of the incident from each principal. The key issues from each incident were identified and then possible solutions considered.
Step 1. Establish General Aims

Step 2. Establish Plans and Specifications

Step 3. Collect the Data

Step 4. Analyze the Data

Step 5. Interpret and Report

Identify behaviors, strategies, concerns, and perceptions of the impact of professional development programs.

Purposely select participants and criteria, draft questions, and set up interview/focus group schedule.

Record data and then transcribe, code, and categorize incidents.

Frame analysis to determine ways principals applied their learning to job responsibilities.

Look for emerging patterns and behaviors that align well with professional development activities.

Figure 3. Five steps in Flanagan’s critical incident technique. From “Flanagan’s 1954 Study: Five Steps of the Critical Incident Technique,” by D. Kain, Foundations for Research: Methods of Inquiry in Education and the Social Sciences,” (p. 73)
The most important aspect of the technique was the analysis, which determines possible solutions and identifies the root cause of a problem to prevent future problems and enable the principal to anticipate problems in advance (Wikipedia, 2007).

Anderson (2004) explained that “critical incidents usually center around three general themes: change, relationships and reflexivity or learning. . . . The incidents that bring to the forefront ‘change’ do so at three levels: individual, school, and district” (p. 4). Critical incidents usually bring out the social and emotional leadership dimensions; when a particular incident is deconstructed, the CIT “illuminates making what is familiar strange” (Barton, 2004, as cited in Anderson, 2004, p. 4). Through the very nature of the method (critical incident reflections), participants identified pivotal moments (“tipping and turning points”), learned never to assume, recognized gaps between beliefs and practice, and gained a deeper perception of readiness (Anderson, 2004). Sikes, Measor, and Woods (1985, as cited in Angelides, 2001) suggested that in relation to schools and principals’ careers, critical incidents may be “highly charged moments and episodes that have enormous consequences for personal change and development” (p. 432).

Merriam (1998) explained, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed; that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 6). Stake (1995) affirmed, “Qualitative study capitalizes on ordinary ways of making sense” (p. 72). Sherman and Webb’s 1988 study on qualitative research in education indicated that this type of research is direct concerned with experience as it is lived or felt (Merriam, 1998). Stake elaborated that in qualitative studies, researchers “seek patterns of unanticipated as well
as expected relationships. The dependent variables are experientially defined rather than operationally defined. Situational conditions are not known in advance or controlled. Even the independent variables emerge in unexpected ways” (pp. 41–42). Therefore, the researcher’s aims are frequently to stimulate further reflection and optimize further learning rather than placing the traditional emphasis on emic issues. The qualitative researcher of this study organized the study in such a way to maximize the opportunity for naturalistic generalization, which Stake and Trumbull (1982) termed experiential learning. Denzin and Lincoln (1994), who referenced thick descriptions as experiential learning or multiple realities, stated that thick descriptions are expected in qualitative case studies because complex meaning cannot be simply designed or caught retrospectively.

The researcher produced transcripts of the in-depth descriptions provided by the principals using their actual language. Creswell (2003) explained that the advantage of this method is that it enables the researcher to obtain the language and words of the principal. The design is purposefully emergent, flexible, and responsive to the changing conditions of the study in progress (Merriam, 1998).

Seidman (2006) recommended including a pilot or practice session of the proposed study design so that the researcher could rehearse the interviewing design with at least one participant in advance of the actual study implementation. He explained, although it may not seem ahead of time that the world of interviewing research takes one along strange paths or through dangerous places, the unanticipated twists and turns of the interviewing process and the complexities of the
interviewing relationship deserve exploration before the [researchers] plunge headlong into the thick of their [project]. (p. 39)

The practice session was scheduled prior to the actual interviews, which allowed the researcher and research assistant the opportunity to determine whether the research structure was suitable, and assisted with the practical aspects of establishing access, making contact, securing a quiet venue for the interview, assessing the time allotments for the interview, ensuring confidentiality, and running through the interview questions. The rehearsal reaffirmed the objectives that both support and detract from the study. Following the completion of the practice session, the researcher reflected on the experience, discussed it with some of the doctoral committee members, and then revised the research questions as appropriate (Seidman, 2006).

Subjects and Target Population

Merriam (2002) stressed that because “qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants” (p. 12), the researcher must select a “purposive or purposeful” sample, choosing subjects from whom the most can be learned. Patton (1990, as cited in Merriam, 2002) “argued that it is important to select information-rich cases for study in depth” (p. 12) so that the researcher can glean a great deal about the issues of central importance to the research. Creswell (2003) reinforced that qualitative research purposefully selects participants, sites, and documents that enhance the researcher’s understanding of the research question(s), a practice that differentiates qualitative from quantitative research. Random sampling or large numbers of participants is not associated with case study methodology.
The predetermined purposive sample criteria for the selection of subjects for this study were that the subjects must be (a) first-year, first-time principals who (b) had been promoted as assistant principals in one southeastern school district prior to being hired as principals and (c) had completed a 3-year preparatory leadership program characterized by monthly seminars and the development of an ILLP and accompanying portfolio that demonstrated their competency in each of the 12 district leadership standards that aimed to acclimate new administrators and meet the state principal certification requirements.

Hatch (2002) linked Patton's (1990) sampling framework directly to qualitative interviews. According to his research, this study's sample would be classified as homogeneous, as it is made up of individuals with similar characteristics or experiences. The sample of principals would also be considered as criterion because the individuals fit predetermined criteria. Consequently, only four first-year novice principals participated in this study. Three of the four novice principals selected for the study began their teaching career in the same school district. Three of the participants were female and one was male, of whom three were White and one African American.

The nonrandom, purposeful choices of principals encouraged rich detailed comprehensive data collection for a deeper and meaningful understanding of the individuals and the identification of common patterns and themes among all the principals studied. Rubin and Rubin (2005) elaborated on the meaning of richness by explaining that case study interviews may contain many ideas and different themes, often those that the researcher did not anticipate at the onset of the study: “Richness allows depth interviewers to unravel the complexity of other peoples’ worlds” (p. 134). Richness
also comes through hearing extended descriptions, detailed stories, or long narratives on what occurred and encouraging the interviewee to elaborate as the researcher listens intently and then probes for even more details and examples. Interviewing is necessary when behaviors, feelings, or how people interpret the world cannot be observed. Interviewing is also indispensable when a study is focused on past events that are impossible to replicate (Merriam, 1998).

The vivid descriptive data gleaned through the research study interviews and focus group session provided insight into how each novice principal extracted the knowledge, skills, and dispositions obtained during this phase of development. The data collected helped determine how these novice principals transferred their learning when making decisions, solving problems, creating a positive high-performing learning culture, and handling critical incidents.

Although the unique features of each of the four principals' schools could impart some valuable background information for interpreting the interview and focus group data, any information that might identify the individual schools was not included in this report per institutional review board (IRB) stipulations. As previously discussed, the participants were four novice principals who had all completed their first year as principal, participated in the school district's 3-year preparatory programs (the induction and PNP programs), served as assistant principals in the district for 3 to 4 years prior to beginning their term as principals, earned advanced degrees in educational leadership, and completed the district-developed principal certification program. Three of the principals had served as assistant principals in the same school prior to moving up to the
principalship. One principal had been an assistant principal in a neighboring community for 2 years and then had been an assistant principal for 2 years in the current school district prior to being appointed principal. Three of the principals had taught in the school district for 3 to 9 years before moving into administration. All of the principals had held significant teacher leader positions, such as behavior specialist, dean of students, data coach, technology coach, or lead teacher for a grade level, prior to advancement into administration. The resumes of all four principals reflected significant involvement in school activities and committees and membership in nationally recognized educational organizations.

The principals who participated in this study represented a wide range of geographic areas within the school district. Two schools are located in the south end of the district, one is located mid-county, and one is located in the most northern part of the district. The four principals also covered the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Two principals serve at an elementary school, one at a middle school, and one at an alternative school teaching Grades 8 to 11. Table 3 displays the demographic data for the four novice principals' schools.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Multiracial</th>
<th>Reduced Lunch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>863</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>2036</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data from school district Web site.
All four principals assumed their new roles after a significant change or multiple changes in leadership. One principal is the district’s third principal in the past 5 years, although this school has only had these three principals over its 23-year existence. The second principal is the third principal appointed in the school’s brief 4-year history. The third principal took over as the fourth new principal in the past 9 years after a district investigation of the former principal uncovered problematic information that necessitated his termination. In this school’s 24 years of existence, it has been led by 11 different principals. The fourth principal, the second school leader appointed since the school’s inception in 2003, was appointed after the sudden resignation of the former principal. Although the principals selected for this study were not chosen based on these factors, the coincidence of these atypical circumstances is worth noting. Only one of the four principals actually interviewed for the position; the other three were administratively appointed to their positions by the superintendent.

Instrumentation Validity and Reliability

The research assistant served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, thereby maximizing opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information. The researcher is currently the Director of Leadership Development and has facilitated the professional development programs investigated in this research for the past 5 years. In addition, the researcher has been a teacher, assistant principal, and principal in the same school district under investigation. The researcher, however, does not supervise any of the participants and did not participate in the accountability review of their ILLPs or portfolios. The researcher’s role is primarily in a coaching and
professional development capacity. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), “The touchstone of one’s own experience might be a more valuable indicator of a potentially successful research endeavor than another more abstract source” (p. 38). These researchers also contended that professional and personal understanding as well as the grounded motivation that a researcher possesses can significantly contribute to the design of a research study.

Given that the researcher was once a new principal in the same school district, some may argue that the researcher was too close to the topic. However, the researcher argues that her background and experiences bolstered familiarity with the content of the research study, the daily work demands, and the ability to empathize with these novice principals with regard to the challenges, complexities, and emotional aspects of a first-time principalship. Patton (2002) asserted that empathy, defined as “combining cognitive understanding with affective connection” (p. 52), allows the researcher to understand the principals’ position, feelings, experiences, and view of their constituents. This acute awareness, sensitivity, and knowledge base provided the researcher with a distinct benefit in developing the research design, generating probing questions for use during the interviews, and augmenting the ability to analyze and interpret the data (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). The researcher constantly resisted the temptation to interject her own opinions, judgments, or preconceptions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) within the analysis, synthesis, or conclusions. The researcher carefully crafted the interview and focus group questions, always cognizant of how personal biases, values, and interests had shaped this study. Creswell (2003) endorsed the researcher’s role for this study when he stated,
"Qualitative research is interpretative research, with the inquirer typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants" (p. 184).

Because the researcher had worked so closely in a coaching and training capacity with the novice principals under study, the IRB expressed concerns regarding strategic, ethical, and personal issues, which were subsequently addressed during the qualitative research process. In an attempt to dispel apprehension about human bias, an outside research assistant was hired to conduct the interviews and focus group session. This individual had recently retired from the position of Director of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment for the school system. Patton (2002) confirmed the value of having more than one interviewer or analyst to "help reduce the potential bias that comes from a single person doing all the data collection and provide a means of more directly assessing the consistency of the data obtained" (p. 560). Patton also validated this method of investigation for triangulation purposes.

The research assistant was encouraged to be upfront about the researcher’s professional role in the study and review all the safeguards for the novice principals’ anonymity. During the interviews with the participants, the research assistant clarified the researcher’s role and expectations to avoid being seen in an evaluative or supervisory capacity with the selected principals and to ensure collection of the most accurate and descriptive data regarding their actions in their new work roles. The research assistant also reassured the participants that complete confidentiality was a high priority and that they would not be identified through transcript excerpts, issues, or reflections (Johnson, 1996).
The purpose of including a focus group interview with all four novice principals was to glean the variety of their perspectives and increase confidence in whatever patterns emerged from the CIT data (Patton, 2002). The focus group questions focused primarily on the impact of principals' prior professional learning in the preparatory programs and how they were able to apply this learning in the real world setting as first-time, first-year principals. In addition, the principals were able to listen to each other's responses and then build on the responses beyond what they might have said in isolation. Krueger (1994, as cited in Patton, 2002), considered a focus group expert, commented, “Focus groups need to be carefully planned to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (p. 6). Leedy and Ormrod (2005) suggested the following guidelines for conducting a focus group interview:

1. Identify the questions in advance.

2. Make sure your interviewees are representative of the group. (In this study, the focus group included all of the purposefully selected principals.)

3. Find a suitable, quiet location that is free from interruptions and distractions. (In this study, the focus group session was held in a conference room in the district office building.)

4. Get written permission in advance and explain the nature of the study and the plans for using the results. (In this study, the IRB guidelines were utilized to ensure all the safeguards were followed.)
5. Establish and maintain rapport to ensure that the interview is respectful and courteous and that participants feel that the researcher is genuinely interested in the discussion.

6. Focus on the actual rather than on the abstract or hypothetical by asking what a person did or would do in a specific situation. (In this study, the principals were asked to recall 5 to 10 critical incidents that occurred during their first year.)

7. Do not put words in people's mouths. The interviewer must be a good listener and "let people say what they want to say the way they want to say it" (p. 149).

8. Record responses verbatim. Recording the interview ensures accuracy and completeness of responses. (In this study, the focus group session was recorded and then transcribed by outside individuals to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The primary researcher had no involvement with the participants until receiving the transcripts.)

9. Keep your reactions to yourself. The researcher must try to remain neutral without expressing emotion as responses are given.

10. Remember you are not necessarily getting the facts. The interviewer should treat responses as perceptions rather than facts.

11. When conducting a focus group, take group dynamics into account; be careful to avoid one person dominating from the discussion and encourage participation from even the most reluctant person.
was a critical incident and what the independent coder determined was a critical incident.

2. An independent researcher was asked to place the critical incidents reported into categories to increase the interrater reliability of the process. The higher the agreement between the principal researcher and the independent researcher in determining categories, the greater the likelihood that the results are credible. Angelides (2001) referenced peer debriefing to establish trustworthiness.

3. The researcher tracked the point at which exhaustiveness or redundancy was achieved, which occurs when new categories stop emerging from the data.

4. Expert opinions from trained researchers were obtained to review the categories to increase the study's credibility.

5. Participation rates were not calculated, as this recommendation seems more appropriate when larger numbers of participants are involved in the study.

6. The researcher “check[ed] the theoretical agreement by stating the study’s underlying assumptions and by comparing the emerging categories” (p. 491) to ensure alignment with the current scholarly literature associated with principal preparation.

7. Interviews were audiotaped to ensure that participant stories were accurately portrayed.

8. The researcher listened to a sample interview to check the fidelity.
Data Collection Methods

The research assistant, as the key instrument of data collection with CIT, captured the novice principals' perceptions of the enabling behaviors and proactive strategies most beneficial in dealing with critical incidents throughout the first year (Flanagan, 1954). The CIT process facilitated the collection of two additional data points including principal concerns and emotional responses. The flexible quality of the CIT research method has evolved so that it "used to generate descriptive data on a variety of human activities and behaviors producing a thematic or categorical representation of these given behaviors and its components (Johnson & Fauske, 2000).

Researchers have utilized the CIT for collecting other dimensions of data. In their study of principals, Johnson and Fauske (2000) examined the nature and description of incidents, specific participants, concerns expressed by the principal in selecting and attending to the incidents, and the cognitive processes of principals acting on the incidents. Sharoff (2007) provided another example of a researcher who used the CIT to gain a deeper and more personal understanding of clients by capturing their perspectives and concerns as well as a more personal awareness of oneself.

Data were collected from each school in order to ensure the interpretive research took place in the real setting. Lastly, the research employed an inductive strategy that built abstractions, concepts, or theories rather than testing existing theory (Merriam, 1998). The CIT requires that the data be collected retrospectively as words through interviewing, participant observation, and/or asking qualitative semi-structured questions focusing on the principals' perspectives. The data were first interpreted to discover each
individual principal portrait in a manner that protected anonymity. The data were interpreted by looking at the common patterns and trends in the general background and historical information about the four principals as a group. Butterfield et al. (2005) expounded, “CIT was initially posed as a scientific tool to help uncover existing realities or truths so they could be measured, predicted, and ultimately controlled within the realm of job and task analysis—ideas rooted in the predominant quantitative research tradition” (p. 482). The data from each of the four cases were then triangulated to synthesize for emergent themes and patterns. Then conclusions were drawn in order to discover the implications beyond these four cases for further research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

Patton (2002) recommended that a variety of methodological combinations be employed because “studies that use only one method are more vulnerable to errors linked to that particular method . . . than studies that use multiple methods in which different types of data provide cross-data validity checks” (p. 248). Patton (2002) further clarified the importance of including multiple data types in a qualitative study:

Different kinds of data may yield someone different results because different types of inquiry are sensitive to different real-world nuances. Thus, understanding inconsistencies in findings across different kinds of data can be illuminative. Finding such inconsistencies ought not to be viewed as weakening the credibility of results, but rather as offering opportunities for deeper insight into the relationship between inquiry approach and the phenomenon under study. (p. 248)

This study employed four interviews and one focus group session.
After gaining approval from the superintendent to conduct the study, the purposefully selected principals were then contacted by sending them an IRB solicitation letter to determine if they would be willing to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. Subsequently and prior to the start of the study, the researcher provided them with the IRB consent form, which explained the purpose of the research study, presented a brief description of the methodology process, and reiterated that participation would be strictly voluntary. Additional assurances were described in the document, such as that principal or school names would not be used, that data would be stored in a secure locked location, and that study results would not be shared with anyone from the school system or any outside agency or organization without prior consent. The letter also clarified that the interview would be recorded anonymously, the data would remain confidential and used for the sole purpose of the dissertation process, the recorded data would be transcribed for analysis, and that the data would be destroyed 3 years after the conclusion of the study. The volunteer principals were also asked to participate in one interview and one focus group with the other novice principals.

During the interviews, each novice principal was asked to select 5 to 10 critical episodes that stand out as successful or unsuccessful learning incidents or particular problems that had made an emotional impact on them. The principal was asked the following regarding each incident:

1. When and where did it happen (time of day, location, and social context)?
2. What actually happened (who said or did what)?
3. What were you thinking and feeling at the time and just after the incident?
4. What were the significant factors?

5. What was the outcome?

6. Why does this incident stand out?

7. Did you bring personal bias or a particular mindset to the event?

8. Could you have interpreted this event differently from another point of view?

9. What could you learn from the episode about the context, colleagues, and yourself?

10. What professional development activities or learning content did you apply when handling the incident?

The critical incident template (see Appendix B) was used for data recording purposes. Table 4 clarifies the data sources and data collection techniques utilized for the principal interviews and the ancillary questions used with the principal focus group to address the two primary research questions.

Data Analysis Methods

Merriam (1998) explained that in qualitative research, data analysis is performed simultaneously with data collection. The reason for this is that at the outset, the researcher does not know what will be discovered, what or whom to concentrate on, or what the final analysis will entail. The analysis must be ongoing to avoid the data becoming unfocused, repetitive, or overwhelming because of the volume of information that must be reviewed. De Stefano (2003) suggested that the coding of behaviors becomes a central part of the analysis.
Table 4

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<tr>
<th>Evaluation-Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Data Collection Techniques</th>
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<tr>
<td>What deeper insights and understandings of the complexities and challenges about the first year experiences of novice principals can be learned through in-depth multiple case studies using Critical Incident Technique methodology?</td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>Interviews, Focus Group, CIT technique</td>
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<tr>
<td>To what extent do novice principals draw from and apply prior learning experiences as assistant principals and from district support structures and programs for new principals?</td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>Interviews, Focus Group, CIT technique</td>
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<tr>
<td>How do the District Leadership Standards guide the novice principal's actions?</td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>Focus Group, CIT technique</td>
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<tr>
<td>To what extent do novice principals utilize journal writing to capture their learning during the first year?</td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>Focus Group, CIT technique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What evidence of experiential learning is discernible from principal reflections about their first year?</td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>Interviews, Focus Group, CIT technique</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that “to review a set of field notes... and to dissect them meaningfully, while keeping the relations between the parts intact, is the stuff of analysis” (p. 56). A system for coding the data for analysis is also recommended, and logically computer systems can ease the organization and collection process (Merriam, 1998).

Angelides (2001) suggested that the researcher consider various explanations and interpretations of the principals’ actions in order to gain a better understanding of the assumptions that they take for granted. In doing so, the researcher “can look behind people’s actions in search of factors related to the life of the school that might have shared their behavior, and might have driven their actions” (p. 436). Codes are further defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) as “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 56). Codes may change and develop as the study’s fieldwork evolves over time. These coding changes are to be expected, as there is usually more happening in the field than is incorporated in the researcher’s initial frame of reference. Some codes emerge progressively during the data collection process.

Miles and Huberman (1994) explained that three sources of knowledge are considered during the revisions that take place in the coding process. First, researchers refine or remodel parts of the original conceptual framework with which they started at the beginning of the study. Second, the field site has its own particular dynamic that clarifies and becomes more meaningful as the researcher gains more insight. Third, the interview produces “a continuous stream of leads, mysteries, themes, contradictions that
need to be pursued and that will never fit perfectly into the ... coding system. The coding system forces the researcher to understand what is still unclear by putting names on the incidents and events, trying to cluster them, communicating with others around some commonly held ideas, and attempting to envelope concepts with conversations.”

Flanagan (1954) purported that one of the hallmarks of the CIT is the configuration of categories as a result of analyzing the data. Angelides (2001) contended that the CIT can be used by outside researchers interested in getting away from traditional case study methodology. This approach provides a systematic, efficient “way of analyzing data, a task which is usually considered complex, messy and not straightforward in qualitative research” (p. 440).

Yin (2003) supported the use of multiple case studies as a preferred methodology rather than that of single case study to provide opportunities for cross-case analyses. The case study analysis promotes comparisons for likenesses and differences by noting of emergent trends and patterns. The outcome of the research may be shared with the participating new principals to increase their self-awareness. The implications of the study may affect the redesign of the curriculum for preparation programs as well as district support structures. Lastly, this study may inform policy changes at the district and/or state levels.

According to Patton (2002), triangulation has the greatest benefit as a strategy during data analysis “not only in providing diverse ways of looking at the same phenomenon but in adding credibility by strengthening confidence in whatever
conclusions are drawn” (p. 556). Patton described four types of triangulation that add to the verification and validation of qualitative analysis:

1. Methods of triangulation: Verifying the consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods. In this study, the methods included CIT interviews and one focus group.

2. Triangulation of sources: Verifying the consistency of different data sources with the same method. Each of the four novice principals represented a different data source for each of the data collection methods utilized.

3. Analyst triangulation: Using multiple analysts to review the findings. One independent researcher provided an additional coding of data and analyzed the data obtained through the interviews and focus group transcripts to identify patterns and trends.

4. Theory/perspective triangulation: Using multiple perspectives or theories to interpret the data. Although experiential learning was the primary theory for interpretation, research from experts in the fields of professional development, school leadership, and transitioning new leaders was incorporated during the analysis.

In making the final determination regarding themes and before beginning the analysis of the data, the researcher decided to refer back to the literature to ensure that the themes were grounded in the current research on concepts that emerged from the data and were not addressed prior to the initiation of the study. The areas that needed further examination were socialization, self-efficacy, experiential learning, enabling and
hindering behaviors, and the topics that have been used to generate data for analysis in other studies using the CIT.

**Study Timeline**

The research for this study took place from August 2007 through March 2008. The informed consent forms were signed by the volunteer participants and all other required documentation was completed prior to submission to the IRB, from which the researcher gained approval in May 2008. The practice session took place in June 2008 following approval from the IRB. The interviews and focus group session were scheduled during June 2008. The researcher gathered the data in a timely manner to coincide with the conclusion of the first year for each of the four novice principals so that their recollection of the critical incident details would optimal; that is, before their attention turned to preparing for the next school year. Data collection occurred subsequent to the completion of each interview and the focus group. The independent research assistant also participated in the coding process to ensure interrater reliability at the conclusion of the interviews and focus group session and to triangulate the data using multiple sources.

After the extensive coding and categorizing process took place, the researcher and research assistant collaborated to identify consistent patterns and themes and to reorganize the data into meaningful groupings. The researchers went through several iterations before reaching consensus on theme selection. Once the groupings had been determined, the researcher connected the themes back to the literature and theories for the analysis. The data were organized into tables, which are displayed and referenced in
chapter 4, to facilitate the content thematic analysis and interpretation, thereby advancing the agenda to inform future practice.
CHAPTER IV

Findings and Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of this retrospective study was to examine the perceptions of four novice principals at the conclusion of their first year as principal, focusing on the complexities and challenges that they faced as well as the extent to which they were able to draw from the professional development and support provided during the 3-year principal preparatory programs in which they had participated. The insights and reflections from these first-year principals provided rich data from which to identify consistent themes to inform future programming and leadership practices during an educational era laden with pervasive economic and societal barriers coupled with increased accountability for all students. As Adams and Copland (2005) explained, “A growing consensus among scholars asserts that performance-oriented educational reforms have changed the very nature of school leadership, altering the knowledge and skills required of principals” (p. 11). States and school districts nationwide struggle to discover best practices that will effectively prime new principals to successfully lead their schools, despite their acknowledgement that university programs have failed to provide relevant or sufficient pre-service training (Archer, 2005; Bottoms & O’Neil, 2001; Daresh, 1997, 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Gray et al., 2007; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Johnson-Taylor & Martin, 2007; Levine, 2005; Murphy, 2001).
Using CIT protocol, the principals were asked to identify and debrief 5 to 10 critical incidents that took place during the first year of their principalship. Providing background information and answering semi-structured questions led to the disclosure of enabling and hindering behaviors, proactive strategies, perceptions, concerns, emotional responses, roles and responsibilities, and serious contextual issues that typify the complexities principals encounter daily. During the interviews, the principals cited specific leadership development programs, experiences, and district support structures that assisted them in making decisions when dealing with critical incidents. The principals also articulated their learning experiences as assistant principals that had been beneficial in easing the transition to their new role. Lastly, the principals provided evidence that they were able to apply some of the learning experiences associated with their ILLPs to the daily responsibilities and critical incidents that they encountered during their first year as principal.

The CIT was the retrospective exploratory and investigative tool used in this study to identify the enabling and hindering behaviors, proactive strategies, and the concerns of novice principals that impacted their perceptions of effectiveness and feelings of self-efficacy and self-confidence during their first year in the principalship. The CIT also isolated the novice principals' perceptions of the impact of their preparation for the job. Qualitative research was chosen as the preferred methodology to collect critical incidents that have special significance for each of the principals in the study.

Chapter 4 presents the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews, focus group, and transcript analysis. The researcher designed an interview guide to provide a
flexible conversational protocol without compromising consistent inquiry (Penney, 2007). According to Patton (2002), qualitative interviews with the four principals using semi-structured questions and probes offered in-depth responses about their experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. Patton (2002) expounded that "understanding comes from trying to put oneself in the other person’s shoes, from trying to discern how others think, act, and feel" (p. 49). The researcher extracted comments or anecdotes from the principal interviews that seemed to connote experiential learning rather than formal professional learning. The voluminous data from the interview and focus group transcriptions were then organized into CIT protocols for a multilevel analysis. From the principal narratives, the researcher extracted recurrent themes, patterns, understandings, and insights regarding the critical incidents using content thematic analysis.

The data collected in this study allow principals to view incidents differently, examine incidents through distinct lenses, and draw different conclusions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The principals interpreted the incidents from their own perspectives, explaining the context and outcome of the incidents; their thoughts and feelings at the time of the incidents; the significant factors; why the incidents stood out as important; their personal biases; how the incidents might have been interpreted from another point of view; opportunities to learn from the incidents, colleagues, and themselves; what professional learning from past experiences and other individuals has been useful; and changes they might recommend for future practices. The researcher was able to glean shared meanings and nuances held by this distinct group of novice principals, recognizing
that although each principal interpreted and encountered incidents in a somewhat unique manner, the data may be aggregated to generalize understandings held by other novice principals (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Rubin and Rubin (2005) asserted, “Qualitative interviewing requires more intense listening than normal conversations, a respect for and curiosity about what these [principals] say, a willingness to acknowledge what is not understood, and the ability to ask about what is not yet known” (p. 14).

The richness and depth of the information assembled from the interviews and focus group in this study unraveled the complexities and challenges that each principal faced during his or her transition. Providing vivid descriptions and extended narratives allowed each principal to portray the nuances that enveloped each critical incident. Rubin and Rubin (2005) described nuances as “showing that things are not always true or not true, that they may be in part true, or true in some circumstances or at some times” (p. 132). The anecdotes and examples offered during the interviews and focus group session allowed the researcher to picture what was being discussed intellectually and emotionally. Each principal candidly personalized the experiences depicted as critical incidents, conveying the human intricacies rather than detached abstractions.

The researcher analyzed the 21 critical incidents using Flanagan’s (1954) definition of critical incidents and Hoy and Sweetland’s (2001) enabling school structures by identifying enabling and hindering behaviors, proactive strategies, and principal concerns that emerged in the data. The critical incidents were sorted by involvement groups, including teachers, non-instructional staff, parents, students, and district staff. The researcher used coding procedures to examine the data for meaningful elements
regarding novice principals’ perceptions of first-year experiences, their responses to the
critical incidents, the impact of these incidents on them, and their experiential learning.
Additionally, this study explored principal perceptions regarding the extent to which the
district preparatory programs adequately trained them to deal with these incidents. From
the analyses, patterns and themes surfaced for each principal and across principals,
generating a greater awareness and understanding as to the complexities and challenges
confronting these new school leaders and informing the knowledge base on leadership
preparation and necessary support.

This chapter is organized to facilitate a deeper understanding of this study’s
findings according to the two research questions. For the first research question, a brief
synopsis for each critical incident is provided, followed by an itemized breakdown of the
principals’ reported actions and responses for all relevant critical incidents that
involved
specific constituency groups, including teachers, non-instructional staff, parents, students,
and district staff. Next, the researcher analyzes the principal enabling and hindering
behaviors, proactive strategies, and reflective concerns expressed by the novice principals
for each critical incident relative to the specific constituency group. The researcher then
provides an analysis of all the critical incidents clustered by constituency type,
highlighting the significant trends and patterns. Following this analysis, the researcher
connects the critical incidents with the district leadership standards. The subsequent
section, which is devoted to the first research question, examines the emotional responses
vocalized during the principal interviews. The last section of the chapter is devoted to an
analysis of the 11 themes that emerged from the data, looking across the principals.
For the second research question, the data presented are primarily from the focus
group session and supplemented with findings from the interviews. The district
professional development and district leadership-support structures that were highlighted
as most valuable by the novice principals are presented. The responses of the principals
to ancillary questions regarding applied learning experiences from the principal
certification program, the use of journal writing and reflection, and the evidence of
experiential learning conclude this chapter.

Nature of Study

The school district in this study initiated a formal leadership development
program in 2003 with the creation of the Director of Leadership position. Since that time,
the district has worked diligently to develop a sequential career pathway and
complementary leadership training program for aspiring school leaders in the district. A
leadership academy was created to bridge the gap between university theory-based
programming and the realities of the actual school leadership positions. Morrison (2005)
posited that effective principal preparation programs must bridge the gap between what is
taught in university-based programs and what skills and knowledge principals need to
become true instructional leaders. Research-based practices and exemplary national
leadership models served as the basis for the programs. District support structures were
initiated, including a formal mentoring program for all new administrators and an
induction program to orient new principals, assistant principals, and district
administrators to the school system while strengthening their knowledge, skills, and
dispositions relative to serving as educational leaders.
The PNP program was revised to meet the state statutory requirements for state principal certification such that the participants were required to develop an ILLP and a portfolio of artifacts that demonstrates their competency in 12 state and district leadership standards. Transition support teams were established for all new principals that consisted of a retired mentor, principal coach, and the Director of Leadership Development. The team’s primary purpose was to ease the formal transition process or hand-off for new principals. This leadership development work served as the background for this study. In addition to exploring the daily intricacies that characterize life as a novice principal, this study explores the impact of the professional learning and district support structures offered to these individuals prior to their appointment. Patton (2002) described the understanding of qualitative data as “capturing and communicating someone else’s experience of the world in his or her own words” (p. 47).

Selection of Study Participants

The researcher was interested in selecting information-rich cases for this in-depth study (Merriam, 2002). Therefore, participants were selected who met specific criteria: they had to be first-year, first-time principals in a suburban school district located in the southeastern part of United States during the 2007-2008 school year who had successfully completed the school district’s preparatory induction and PNP programs. Only four principals in the school district met the purposeful selection requirements of this study.

The researcher followed the specific IRB guidelines for contacting the purposefully selected principals for the study and providing them with a solicitation letter.
and a consent form that informed them of all the safeguards regarding anonymity and confidentiality. The documents also outlined the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, the study design, data storage method, and logistical information. All four principals eagerly volunteered and were quite open and forthright in their responses to the 11 questions during the interview, as well to the 8 focus group questions. One principal commented about the focus group session, "This is the best hour I have spent during the entire year." The interview transcripts indicate that the principals took advantage of this unique opportunity to reflect on their first year by immersing themselves in concentrated, thoughtful analysis to produce responses both erudite and prolific.

Logistical Procedures

Based on the recommendations of the IRB, the primary researcher hired a research assistant to conduct the four principal interviews and one focus group session. After completing the necessary IRB requirements, the primary researcher met with the research assistant and reviewed the interview protocol and all of the designated procedures. The data analysis began with the transposition of each of the written transcriptions into the CIT protocols. This lengthy process provided the primary researcher with the opportunity to thoroughly read the contents of each interview, making notes and comments about concepts, issues, emotions, pertinent professional learning, and examples of experiential learning. Common themes emerged during this process, according to which the interview data were organized using a variety of structures and formats to assist with the analysis. For the purposes of reporting and analyzing the data,
the four principals were identified as Principal A, Principal B, Principal C, and Principal D. All references to the specific school district or any specific programs or terminology developed by the school district were deleted to comply with assurances made in the IRB correspondence with the principals prior to the start of the study.

General categories were coded and listed for each incident. Next, professional development and training was identified as noted by each principal during the retelling of each incident. The researcher was also able to extract and record examples of experiential learning from comments made during the interviews. The incidents were categorized as positive or negative and then coded by involvement groups, including those of teachers, non-instructional staff, parents, community, district office staff, students, and other miscellaneous groups such as law enforcement and media (see Appendix E). The frequency of each category was then calculated for all critical incidents that involved teachers, non-instructional staff, parents, students, and the community. The incidents were also coded and aligned to the 12 district and state leadership standards (see Table 5) for later analysis to determine their implications for future professional development practices.

Lastly, the researcher developed a taxonomy of the themes that emerged throughout the entire content analysis process (see Appendix D). The primary researcher met with the research assistant, who had separately coded the incidents, and generated a set of suggested themes.
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<td>Loss of key teacher leader</td>
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<td>Loss of 2nd, 3rd staff members in two week period</td>
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<td>Staff member with intoxication</td>
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<td>Security monitor- inappropriate touching with student</td>
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<td>Transition from AP to principal</td>
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<td>Monitorial aide job performance</td>
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<td>Dysfunctional teacher team</td>
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<td>Student with sexually explicit behavior/self mutilation</td>
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<td>Bus driver and failure to report suspect sexual child abuse</td>
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<td>Rebuild morale due to prior principal sudden resignation</td>
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<td>Teacher stealing credit card from another teacher</td>
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<td>Student threatening to bring a gun to school to shoot AP</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>End of the year surplussing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>

|                               | 7 | 12 | 0 | 12 | 5 | 0 | 13 | 16 | 11 | 1 | 5 | 3 |
Together, both researchers negotiated the categories until they agreed upon a taxonomy. After the convergence portion of the analysis had been completed, the two researchers examined the divergence in the data by building on the existing knowledge base, making connections to determining themes. The process proved difficult because of the overlapping nature of the categories and the redundancy among principal responses.

The following 11 themes emerged from the disaggregation of the data collected from the four principal interviews and the one focus group:

1. Change
2. Communication
3. Interpersonal orientation/relationships
4. School culture/climate
5. Safety/law enforcement
6. Federal/state law and regulations/contractual issues
7. Organizational/operational stability
8. District support
9. Social and emotional student needs
10. Conflict
11. Personal and professional socialization/role clarification

These themes comprehensively reflect the magnitude and complexity of the roles and responsibilities that typify the lives and world of principals in the 21st century. The forthcoming analysis illuminates and illustrates the intensity, diversity, and scope of the issues that frequently accompany the daily experiences of today's principals.
Interviews

The interview protocol (see Appendix B) was comprised of 11 questions specifically related to the two research questions:

1. What deeper insights and understandings of the complexities and challenges regarding the first-year experiences of four novice principals can be learned through an in-depth study of the principals using CIT methodology?

2. To what extent did these novice principals draw from and apply prior learning experiences that they had acquired as assistant principals and draw support from district support structures and programs for new principals?

**Interview Findings: Research Question 1**

The principals responded openly to research question 1, which asked them to convey the deeper insights and understandings that they had acquired of their role relative to the complexities and challenges that they had encountered during their first year of tenure. In particular, they articulated the unpredictable nature of the principal’s job and acknowledged that advance planning rarely succeeds because of the daily crises and interruptions that pervade each day. Two principals expressed that the job never ends, even when the official day concludes: “It was about things beyond your control.” “There were days that you had an agenda and then got nothing done on your list.” “Employees are always at your door leaving a lot of work for you at night.” “You have to accept the fact that the job is never done.”

The principals were requested at the onset of the interview to select 5 to 10 critical incidents that occurred during their first year. They were told they could select any type
of incident, as no preset criteria had been established to determine what constitutes an incident.

**Negative Critical Incidents**

Eighteen or 86% of the 21 incidents were coded as negative incidents because they were characterized as unsafe or having an upsetting, detrimental, and/or hurtful impact on one or more individuals within the school or organization. These incidents were also problem or conflict-based and thus considered unfavorable by the constituents in the organization. The negative incidents described were the following:

1. **Veterans Day ceremony at an elementary school:** One teacher attempted to use the event to showcase political views about conscientious objectors. One veteran politically conservative parent objected and called a nationally syndicated radio show. The school was bombarded by telephone calls and e-mails, thereby gaining international attention. Political activist groups tried to get involved in the event. The incident generated parental concern about the stability of the school and the competence of Principal A. The teacher took a leave of absence and continued to receive much negative publicity.

2. **Feuding parent-teacher organization (PTO):** Two diverse sets of parents, one a fundraising-focused, wealthy nonworking group and one a community, socially aware group, were debating the need for the school to be more service oriented and community focused. The latter group wanted the vice president, who was in the former group, to step down from the leadership post. Both groups wanted Principal A to get involved and settle the dispute by asking for
the vice president’s resignation. Despite recommendations from Principal A’s retired mentor and principal coach to stay as neutral as possible, she sided with the president and attempted to resolve the conflict. The situation escalated and parents threatened to leave the school, generalizing the problem so that school stability was in jeopardy. Principal A was eventually successful in allaying parental fears and concerns. A new board took over the following year and a parent leadership committee was formed.

3. Open-door policy: Using a strategy learned at a summer conference, Principal A determined that all school communication should be filtered through her assistant. The staff became concerned because they interpreted Principal A’s decision as counter to their request for her to maintain an open-door policy and be more accessible to staff. Other members of the office staff unsupportive of Principal A’s new structure undermined her change efforts. In addition, the receptionist and bookkeeper were attempting to find other jobs. In the end, Principal A hired new office staff more aligned to the school’s vision and mission. Principal A spent time building strong relationships with the staff and took their suggestions to heart by maintaining an open-door policy, and was able to utilize her assistant for scheduling appointments, relying on her past experience for guidance.

4. Clinic coverage: Principal A was unhappy with the way that students were hanging out in the office eating food, throwing up, and waiting for parents with fevers and injuries. The problem was exacerbated when the clinic was
closed during lunch. Principal A asked the front office staff to cover the clinic because she viewed the situation as a safety issue. The office staff refused, stating that they were uncomfortable assuming the role. Although Principal A was shocked at the lack of professionalism and concern for the welfare of students, she was able to secure one of the lunchroom aides to cover the clinic.

5. Redecoration of front office: Principal A was displeased with the unprofessional manner in which the front office was decorated. During the principal transition, the office staff had been making decisions and running the school. When the staff left for summer vacation, the office was repainted, and Principal A tried to involve the office staff in understanding the desire for change, but her plan was met with resistance. In addition, students were sent to the office for behavior and disciplinary issues, and Principal A was concerned about the image portrayed for visitors and parents. After meeting together as a group, a compromise was reached that allowed both Principal A and the office staff to give input into the redecorating of the office so that it conveyed a more professional image.

6. Loss of key teacher leader: One of the most respected teacher leaders expressed the desire to relocate out of state. Principal B reacted emotionally, taking the desired act personally. Despite the fear of a negative impact on the students and staff, Principal B worked through the process of assisting the teacher in obtaining a new position and in selecting a replacement. The new
teacher ended up being a welcome and contributing member of the staff.
Principal B learned about student resiliency in dealing with change.

7. Loss of another key teacher and principal assistant: Within a 2-week period, Principal B discovered that another respected, highly skilled English teacher was planning to move to a neighboring school district. The teacher was interested in moving into administration and felt that the other school district would offer more opportunities for advancement. In addition, Principal B’s secretary gave notice that she was planning to leave the school. With two staff losses within a short period, Principal B responded to each of these situations personally and struggled with the notion of additional staff changes. A new teacher was hired, but did not have the required certification. The teacher attempted to pass the required certification state test but was unsuccessful. Consequently, the teacher could not be rehired for the next school year. Principal B learned a valuable lesson regarding the need to become familiar with existing certification rules and regulations as well as their contractual ramifications.

8. Intoxicated teacher: Principal B observed that one staff member was coming to work smelling of alcohol. The staff member was highly regarded in terms of academic prowess, work ethic, and relationships with students. Principal B decided to deal with the situation directly, using a coaching approach rather than involving district staff. The staff member was receptive to the counseling
and changed his behavior. Principal B followed district protocol by writing a memorandum of instruction that was not disciplinary in nature.

9. Security monitor’s inappropriate behavior with female students: A recently hired security monitor began to display questionable behavior with several female students. Principal B also noticed that this individual was having individual conversations with students in remote areas on campus. In addition, several female students reported that the security monitor was making inappropriate remarks as well as contact. Principal B reported the situation to school district officials, but was dissatisfied with the timeliness of their response. The situation was left unresolved, to Principal B’s displeasure. Although the situation was still being investigated, no resolution had been proposed.

10. Monitorial aide’s job performance: Principal C had inherited a full-time monitorial aide as a result of budget reductions and surplussing. This aide came with a host of performance issues, including poor attendance, unwillingness to accept administrative directives, and problems with task completion. When Principal C searched for documentation, none was available. Principal C experienced tremendous frustration with a process that allowed problematic employees to be transferred to another work site, especially when the person who was displaced was a high-quality employee. Principal C also worried about the impact of the employee’s negative attitude on the positive collaborative working culture of the school. Additionally,
Principal C had to learn the employee discipline and union grievance procedures. The aide went on leave due to a grievance regarding a 5-day suspension for insubordination.

11. Dysfunctional teacher team: During the last 6 weeks of the school year, an issue with one of the teacher teams erupted due to the teachers' inability to work together. Complaints began to surface, but when Principal C asked them to formally document their concerns in writing, they refused to cooperate, inaccurately depicting the problem as harassment. Principal C was disappointed with the teachers' lack of professionalism and concerned that interpersonal issues were negatively impacting their priority responsibilities for children as well as disrupting the school's cultural climate. Principal C deliberately did not get involved, and referred the incident to mediation using district resources.

12. Student with sexually explicit and self-harming behaviors: An extremely intelligent female student began to exhibit some concerning behaviors, including self-mutilation. The student also wrote in her journal about sexually explicit behaviors. Despite the efforts of Principal C and other key staff members to communicate these concerns to her non-English speaking parents, they were unsuccessful in communicating the severity of the behaviors. The student's behaviors did not compromise her academic achievement, which was significantly above average, and the parent's apathetic response continued. Law enforcement and district guidance support staff intervened,
especially when the student brought a razor to school and cut herself on the wrist and legs. The student ended up being Baker Acted twice, and communication with the middle school was initiated to ease her transition the following school year. The parents continued to be unresponsive and very lax with their parenting.

13. Bus driver's inappropriate touching of student: Principal C was off campus when a student informed the teacher that while she was getting ready to board the school bus, the bus driver had touched her. The teacher should have reported the incident immediately to the Department of Children and Families (DCF), but instead reported it to an administrator, who then asked a guidance counselor to report the incident the following day after gathering more information. The situation escalated because the DCF, the school resource officer, and school board officials determined that the incident had not been handled properly. The threat of filing charges against the administrator was ultimately dismissed. Principal C realized the incident emphasized the need for staff training regarding the statutes that protect students and the mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse. The bus driver was found not guilty but was no longer permitted to drive buses.

14. Class size adjustment at 10 days: The number of students in core academic classes was over the state class-size cap of 22, which required Principal D to add an additional 11 teachers after the first 10 days of school. Principal D had inherited the problem, which had been created by a faulty master schedule. In
addition to finding additional funds to cover the costs of hiring additional teachers, Principal D had to deal with teacher adjustments and notification of parents and students. Finding the best teachers to make the changes, asking teachers to pick up extra class assignments, and making instructionally sound student changes were just some of the many hurdles Principal D faced. The changes were made so that the school met the class size mandate, and the power of past relationships allowed the situation to be successfully resolved in a timely, ethical fashion.

15. Rebuilding staff morale after former principal resigned unexpectedly:

Principal D had to immediately address low staff morale following the unexpected resignation of the previous principal after a high-profile expose of the situation in the media. The school-climate survey data supported the need to focus on building morale, so Principal D began with teambuilding efforts to change the image of the school and make the workplace more enjoyable. Hiring the right teachers, making the most of past relationships developed as an assistant principal, and maintaining professionalism were all ingredients that contributed to positive school climate changes.

16. Teacher stealing credit card from another teacher: A detective from the police department arrived with a video of a teacher stealing a credit card from another teacher and then leaving campus without permission to purchase cigarettes and alcohol. Principal D made arrangements so that the teacher’s arrest occurred after the school day without media involvement. Principal D
was concerned about the school's reputation in light of the recent incident with the previous principal. The teacher in question is no longer employed by the school district.

17. Special education student threatening to bring a gun to school to kill an assistant principal: Only 2 hours into the second day of school, a special education student threatened to shoot one of the assistant principals while walking off campus. Principal D recommended suspending and possibly expelling the student. At the manifestation hearing to determine if the act was part of this student’s handicapping condition, the group reviewing the incident noticed that the paperwork had not been completed correctly. The mother of the student pointed out that two teachers who had signed the IEP (individualized education plan) were not in attendance at the meeting. Because the IEP was in violation of the law, the student was allowed to remain at the school. Principal D recognized the importance of following the federal guidelines for special education students while expressing concern that the volume of work required by special education teachers created situations promoting the use of shortcuts. The incident also underscored that when training is offered, follow-up is essential to ensure that the training has been consistently applied, especially when the principal is ultimately held accountable.

18. End-of-year surplussing/downsizing: Anticipating the downsizing of staff due to the opening of a new nearby middle school as well as financial issues at the
district and state level, Principal D sensitively planned a 3-month process to gradually address the issues, with concern for the impact on people’s lives.

Principal D also wanted to maintain school stability in anticipation of the upcoming Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) testing. Principal D met with 28 staff members individually, addressing the situation and allowing them to ask questions and deal with the situation privately. The staff was extremely appreciative of Principal D’s efforts.

Positive Critical Incidents

The three incidents classified as positive were beneficial, constructive, and upbeat and contributed to the overall enhancement of the school.

19. Student recognition program: Principal A identified that the school had no form of student recognition and that past practices involving student recognition programs had been terminated. Based on feedback from parents and input from staff, Principal A altered her original plan, making modifications based on specific grade-level recommendations.

20. Hiring of eight new teachers: Principal C experienced the strong competition among elementary schools to hire the best candidates. Having a high free and reduced lunch student population, an older facility, and a high ESOL population made it more difficult for Principal C’s school to attract the most qualified candidates, especially because two of the other elementary schools in the area have newer facilities. Principal C took an assertive approach. When candidates dropped off their resumes, she personally met these potential
teachers, taking the time to walk them around campus in order to learn more about them and make a lasting positive impression. Principal C discussed the importance of recruiting and hiring the best possible individuals to benefit students and balance veteran with novice teachers. Principal C had a positive mindset about the school and worked hard to convey that vision to new hires.

21. Transition from assistant principal to principal: Principal C considered her unexpected appointment to the principalship a compliment and an honor. Her experience as an assistant principal at the same school allowed Principal C to capitalize on established relationships and provided her with an advantage in understanding the needs and priorities of the school. The staff received the appointment positively and worked collaboratively to focus on improving teaching and learning. Principal C expressed the desire to make the right decisions and do the best possible job for the students and staff, and stressed the importance of relationships.

Each of the critical incidents was categorized through content thematic analysis and organized according to four classifications: (a) enabling behaviors, specific actions that the four novice principals utilized to handle the critical incident and that contributed to their perceptions of effectiveness, self-efficacy, and self-confidence; (b) hindering behaviors, specific actions that the principals used to address the critical incident that decreased their perceptions of effectiveness, self-efficacy, and self-confidence; (c) proactive strategies that the principals suggested that they would consider using in the future based on what they had learned from the incident about the context, colleagues,
themselves, and/or the ideas that they had generated when examining the incident from another perspective; and (d) expressed concerns of the principals that illuminated their personal thoughts and feelings during and after the critical incident or reflected how they might have handled the situation differently.

Critical Incidents Involving Teachers

Of the 21 critical incidents, 14 or 67% involved teachers who had exercised poor judgment, made unreasonable demands on the principal’s time, resisted change, made personal decisions with little regard to the impact on students or colleagues, displayed unprofessional or unethical behavior, or allowed themselves to become immersed in interpersonal disputes that impacted the entire school culture. In several incidents, teachers ignored school board policies or federal and state mandates and/or jeopardized their careers by committing unlawful acts. These novice principals had to endure the consequences of these negligent, inconsiderate acts by quickly learning how to negotiate, communicate to a variety of audiences, and run interference for a multitude of constituencies.

In reviewing the critical incidents involving teachers, specific principal behaviors seemed to either enable or hinder the novice principals’ perceptions of their effectiveness, self-efficacy, and self-confidence. The principals identified proactive strategies that they would employ if faced with a similar situation and candidly discussed the concerns that had arisen from what they had been feeling and thinking at the time of the incident.

Tables 6 to 26 summarize the findings from the principals’ description of each critical incident.
Veterans' Day ceremony. Table 6 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal A’s description of a critical incident that occurred during a Veterans Day ceremony at her school.

Table 6
Principal Behaviors, Strategies, Concerns Enabling or Hindering Perceptions of Effectiveness and Self-Efficacy

**Principal A**

*Critical Incident: Veterans' Day Ceremony*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Behaviors</td>
<td>• confronted teachers&lt;br&gt;• listened to teachers&lt;br&gt;• contacted district office&lt;br&gt;• allayed fears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering Behaviors</td>
<td>• insufficient communication&lt;br&gt;• lack of clear expectations&lt;br&gt;• change w/o input from staff&lt;br&gt;• assumed what worked in one school would transfer to another&lt;br&gt;• failure to learn culture or establish trust prior to acting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Strategies</td>
<td>• ensure political views remain out of classroom&lt;br&gt;• articulate consequences of non-compliance&lt;br&gt;• tougher stance with offenders&lt;br&gt;• input prior to implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>• school’s reputation&lt;br&gt;• principal put school in harm’s way&lt;br&gt;• concern that incident wasn’t handled properly&lt;br&gt;• incident reflected poorly on principal competence</td>
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Although Principal A expressed her best intentions in hosting a Veterans Day ceremony for the school, she recognized that she had moved too quickly without spending enough time gaining understanding of the prevailing culture and the diversity of the teachers' viewpoints, and had not provided clear expectations for teachers in terms of student deliverables for the public ceremony. She had assumed that a replication of a successful Veterans Day ceremony from her previous school would be equally valued in the new school environment. In her attempt to be liked and accepted by the various school constituents, she had also failed to take a sufficiently firm stance with the teacher who had insisted on using the ceremony as an opportunity to convey his personal political views.

Principal A commented,

I was feeling like a failure, in a way. I felt that I didn’t understand it, totally. I felt that I hadn’t done anything wrong, but I did feel like I set the school up, put the school in a vulnerable situation. I just felt like I never would want to ever put the staff, parents, or students in danger or unwanted publicity. I am still dealing with the publicity from the newspaper article in November and so I was just devastated that I knew what I had to do to protect the school. And on top of that, he was having classroom management issues, really horrible, actually. Discontented parents wonder why this happened. Within minutes, the school office received phone calls and e-mails from all over the world. The whole office staff fell apart; all of the secretaries fell apart. We had phone calls from naval ships and they would say something like, We’re landing some helicopters here on the ship so can
you hold on a moment? Some soldiers from Afghanistan called the superintendent: “We have to keep social issues out of schools and it is okay to expose kids about global issues, but to get them politically involved is just wrong.”

Open-door policy. Table 7 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal A’s description of a critical incident concerning her school’s open-door policy.

Principal A had attempted to implement a new organizational structure pertaining to how she planned to utilize her office staff and administrative assistant. She had taken an idea presented at a Harvard summer leadership conference and had tried to implement a change in procedure without input from the key stakeholders. The staff had misinterpreted her decision to schedule appointments through her secretary as offensive and against their specific request for the principal to maintain an open-door policy.

Table 7
Principal Behaviors, Strategies, Concerns Enabling or Hindering Perceptions of Effectiveness and Self-Efficacy

Principal A
Critical Incident: Open Door Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Behaviors</td>
<td>• listen to staff concerns</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• altered original plan to consider grade level uniqueness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering Behaviors</td>
<td>• change w/o input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• failure to build relationships &amp; trust prior to acting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• assume what worked in one school would work in another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Strategies</td>
<td>• provide accessibility to staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• build relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>• creating conflict</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Once again, Principal A admitted that she had initially failed to build relationships and understand more fully the staff's need for her to be visible and accessible. She had been able to recover from the incident by listening and being flexible in altering her original plan to incorporate the suggestions of others. She described the incident as follows:

When I first arrived, the office staff had taken it upon themselves to move all my furniture. . . . They moved it all against the window so that I could be seen. So the factor was . . . that the previous principal had been utilizing the front receptionist and bookkeeper. . . . I structured it differently and threw them completely off kilter. They were offended that I wasn't going directly to them. The bulk of the resentment was from the office staff. . . . I guess it's all about relationships, and I've learned that a lot in my trainings. . . . When I came in and did things a little differently, [it] really upset the staff . . . but just those little changes made huge reactions. . . . It came out in my climate survey . . . on the list of improvements, that they want an open-door policy. . . . [It] was the most negative factor in my staff survey. . . . I am in the people business and I do need to be accessible to them.

Student recognition. Table 8 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal A's description of instituting a new student recognition program in her school.
Principal A viewed the initiation of a new student recognition program as a positive critical incident. In this situation, she had demonstrated her ability to gain input prior to making final decisions relative to the specifics of the program. She had also been willing to negotiate and compromise, which had gained her greater trust and respect from the staff. Although Principal A had conducted a successful student recognition program at her former school, she was open to adapting the program to meet the unique needs of her new school, especially in working collaboratively with the kindergarten team to reach a positive resolution, even though the outcome was not exactly what she had envisioned from the outset. She explained,
So, I just gave it my own title, I called it a high five. Come up to the principal for high five on Friday afternoons, and I'd announce it and I gave out a pencil or a ruler, something academic to two students from each class. And what happened was, as I met with different teams, and they talked about this high five, all teams were thrilled about it except kindergarten. Kindergarten didn't like it. So, I sat down with them, and of course by that point, most everyone is on board, I'm determined, I've ordered things and now kindergarten says they don't want to do it. And my first instinct was to say, "Well too bad, you're going to do it." But I held my composure took a deep breath and I said, well, they said we have this other recognition we do in kindergarten; we're different. If we send two kindergarten students down to the office for a high five, the rest of the class will cry. So I looked at them and nodded. They said, "What we would really prefer... [is to have] you come down and visit a couple of students, read to them a couple of books or to give a high five in the classroom. You can give high five to students who fill up their superstar chart, there may be 5 or maybe 10 students each week, but we would prefer if you would come down here. We just don't want to send to kindergarten students down to the office, we really don't want to get involved in that." And I just looked at them, and said "Okay, let's do it that way." And I knew it would be more work for me, because I had allotted 5 or 10 minutes of my day, and this would create another 10 minutes or more to go around to those classrooms and give all those kindergartners a high five. But I decided that I needed to do that. So I think that was a success, because the kindergarten teachers
all kind of looked at me like oh, she accepted our request, and they began smiling at me more and more as I learned to work with them and their unique grade level. And even though it was against my—because to me on I'm sort of like we do this and we all—I guess even though I've kind of contradicted myself because earlier I talked about being very global and understanding of others’ feelings and opinions. But I also feel that I have to do things aligned and you have to do things as a whole and as a team and just get a grip and get on board. So there's a part of me like that too. But I did, I did work it out with them.

*Loss of key teacher leader.* Table 9 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal B’s description of the loss of a key teacher leader.

When Principal B learned that one of her most respected teacher leaders had decided to relocate, she responded emotionally:

I was devastated beyond words. I was not only entertaining the idea of losing a fantastic friend and colleague, but also the backbone of the school. I went from being extremely sad and crying to trying to figure out where we go next. And I had to let go and develop a plan to share the information with team members. Absolutely, I was mad. I was angry. I felt like it was a selfish act on his behalf. I felt like he knew coming into the year that this was my first year as a principal and I needed to establish myself in that he’s bailing out.
Table 9

Principal Behaviors, Strategies, Concerns Enabling or Hindering Perceptions of Effectiveness and Self-Efficacy

**Principal B**

**Critical Incident: Loss of Key Teacher Leader**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Behaviors</td>
<td>• Began with end in mind&lt;br&gt;• Communicated with teachers&lt;br&gt;• Involved district support&lt;br&gt;• Allowed time for grieving loss&lt;br&gt;• Built school climate and culture&lt;br&gt;• Developed others&lt;br&gt;• Planned for changes in staff&lt;br&gt;• Resourcefulness&lt;br&gt;• Assisted teacher in obtaining new job&lt;br&gt;• Active involvement in recruitment and selection of replacement teacher&lt;br&gt;• Created a positive vision for future&lt;br&gt;• Getting input of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering Behaviors</td>
<td>• crying&lt;br&gt;• selfishness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Strategies</td>
<td>• realize the resiliency of staff&lt;br&gt;• utilize the support and encouragement of staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>• loss of colleague and friend</td>
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</table>

Despite her highly emotional state, Principal B provided strong leadership skills and behaviors that contributed to the hiring of another high-quality teacher and the successful utilization of the power of staff support to make a smooth transition for students:

Time heals all wounds and we are a strong group of colleagues that handled adversity and challenges well. We came through that together. I realized that they’re resilient, phenomenal how we support each other here. I listened to them;
I received their input, especially the counselors as to how we’ll be sharing this information with students.

Loss of two staff in 2-week period: Table 10 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal B’s description of the loss of two staff within a 2-week period.

When Principal B learned that another strong teacher and her administrative assistant were planning to leave, she began to question her own leadership. She immediately focused on the students and quickly hired another teacher that embodied the school’s vision and mission and would work effectively with students with challenging academic needs. Principal B hired one of her own staff due to her concerns with consistency for the students. However, after selecting a teacher who was out of field, she then faced the complications of having hired a teacher without the proper certification. The teacher attempted to pass a state test but was unsuccessful. Principal B then had to confront this teacher with the fact that he could not be employed for the following year. She experienced a plethora of emotions, ranging from anger to frustration. Principal B once again realized the importance of continuous communication with staff and the importance of being knowledgeable of contractual language and certification rules.
**Principal B**

*Critical Incident: Loss of Two Staff Members Within 2-week Time Period*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Behaviors</td>
<td>• Celebrating those who leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Maintaining contact with teacher who left</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Involved with interviewing and selection of replacement</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Coaching and advising new teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Holding difficult conversation with new teacher about loss of position</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Communicating informally with teachers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Rounding with staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Making kids a priority for decisions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Visiting classrooms frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering Behaviors</td>
<td>• Unfamiliarity with certification rules, out of field status, and contract language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Inexperience as new principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Providing inaccurate information about certification to new teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Strategies</td>
<td>• Learn certification rules and applicable contract language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communicating frequently with staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Responses</td>
<td>• Taking loss personally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reflection of principal competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Questioning own style, personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Trying to figure out what's going on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sensing kids were feeling abandoned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Feeling that district office could have done more to rectify situation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
She reflected on the incident during her interview:

Now, I must admit that point I began to take it personal. I felt like it was not just staff members wanting to move on to look at advancement in their careers but I felt it was like a reflection on me. I was really feeling horrible at the time. . . . So you begin to question your own style, personality and try to figure out what's going on. . . . We had the position posted. We did not get the [right individual] to walk through the door and I refused to settle. I absolutely refused to settle. I did something that was nontraditional, but I felt like I had to do it for consistency and because I needed to let the students know that their education was equally important, regardless as to what we were going through. . . . I feel like it was my inexperience as an administrator/new principal that I'm in the situation that I'm in now with him. I knew, as I stated, that he was certified in elementary education, I knew I could hire him as a teacher. What I did not know was all the ramifications with an out-of-field certificate.

Principal B also discussed her feelings about the district office involvement: “I didn’t want to blame them, but I felt like more could’ve been done. I thought that I could have been notified. I was bitter for a while, but I don’t think they realized I was angry.”

*Intoxicated teacher.* Table 11 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal B’s description of a critical incident involving an intoxicated teacher.
Table 11
Principal Behaviors, Strategies, Concerns Enabling or Hindering Perceptions of Effectiveness and Self-Efficacy

**Principal B**

**Critical Incident: Intoxicated Teacher**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Behaviors</td>
<td>• Confronting teacher and taking immediate action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Having a difficult conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Being blatantly honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Focusing on relationships with people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Coaching vs. discipline approach to addressing problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Staff provides feedback in writing to principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering Behaviors</td>
<td>• Conflict regarding role and responsibilities as an administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Difficulty in saying &quot;no&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Strategies</td>
<td>Role-playing with mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>• Not wanting to upset anyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Wanting everyone to be happy and things to go well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Worrying about how things might be perceived by the district and Union (reputation)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Principal B shared a critical incident that involved a new staff member who was highly regarded, but came to school smelling of alcohol. This situation presented a conflict for her because this teacher gave 110% and was an excellent instructor who had great rapport with the students. She confronted the teacher using a coaching strategy rather than pursuing a more formal disciplinary approach. Principal B worried about the ramifications of her decision but took a risk, using the power of the relationships and the trust that she had established with the staff. The teacher appreciated the principal’s honest feedback, fully acknowledged responsibility for his impropriety, and corrected the problem. Principal B was surprised that her strategy worked so favorably and that she had been able to deflect a far more complicated situation by giving the teacher a second chance. She reported that in response to her direct interaction the teacher had stated, “I had no idea; you are the first person to tell me that you could smell it from my mouth and my pores. I will correct the problem. I don’t ever want to do anything to jeopardize this school or my students.”

Principal B reflected on the incident:

I think it stood out for me because . . . it's the relationship, it's that people piece. My staff and I we've talked. I have a group of them to give me feedback in writing. They think sometimes, that I'm concerned with saying no, and I just want everybody to be happy and everything to go well. I'm extremely optimistic and always looking at the positive and the bright side. I don't want to upset anyone, and maybe that's why it stood out for me. It was a part of that people, that relationship piece, where I was in conflict with my responsibilities as an
administrator and how would he perceive this, would [it] have a positive or negative impact on our relationship. And maybe they're right.

_Hiring of eight new teachers._ Table 12 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal C’s description of the hiring of eight new teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Enabling Behaviors** | - Actively participated in recruitment and hiring of new teachers  
- Invested personal time with prospective hires  
- Marketed school  
- Built rapport with staff  
- Created a welcoming school environment  
- Conveyed a sense of pride, loyalty, and ownership with employees  
- Willing to take on challenge of competition |
| **Hindering Behaviors** | |
| **Proactive Strategies** | - Maintaining a good relationship with peers  
- Being decisive and confident with hiring |
| **Concerns** | - Wanting to hire the best teachers who were a good fit for the uniqueness of school population |
Principal C realized rather quickly that schools compete vigorously to hire the best candidates for their schools. She took a proactive approach to the issue by marketing the school, creating a welcoming school environment, and conveying a genuine pride in the school. She relied on her strong relationships with neighboring principals, but was decisive and confident about her hiring decisions. Principal C understood the importance of devoting personal time to recruitment, hiring, and retention of quality staff.

Principal C shared her sentiments about this critical incident during her interview:

For me, I think because it's one of the most important pieces is putting effective teachers in a classroom, and if you, I feel it’s a pretty important process the hiring process. We were fortunately last year to have vacancies. It’s always a risk, and you only have one small time to spend with the candidate, and it’s not that you have time to see how they would be as a teacher because your interviewing them with adults and they’re responding to questions that everybody knows the buzz words to, so you try to make sure your picking the right person, that is right person for the kids... I feel we work way too hard to settle for mediocre or satisfactory. So, candidates who may be a competent teacher and we are sure would be fine but, we really wanted the ones that were going to be superior or we hoped would have a big impact on our students... I think I learned... that I enjoyed that piece of the position I enjoy the... I did enjoy the competition. Knowing there was competition between the other schools and that they had equal programs and similar population and similar facilities that really, I wanted to win the candidate that would be best, so that my kids would have maximum
opportunity for success, and I don't know what other words to use there. But I also learned that... it just doesn't seem as though it's connected to curriculum or to the data, but I really enjoyed meeting, interviewing, and you learn from the candidates some of the experiences that they shared. We took ideas from some of the things that the candidates shared in their interviews.

Dysfunctional teacher team. Table 13 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal C’s description of a dysfunctional teacher team.

Principal C demonstrated great restraint when a team of teachers tried to get her to resolve their interpersonal problems. She was astute enough to realize that these teachers did not understand the meaning of harassment and were using the term incorrectly. She required that the teachers document their concerns in writing and avoided responding hastily. Principal C effectively maintained her professionalism and focus despite the temptation to get involved. Principal C noted,

And the issues they were targeting were frivolous just petty issues. What else? I did seek support from Human Resources to make sure that, because I was not comfortable, I did not want to be the mediator. . . . Trying to be the problem solver, or now even that I begin to think about that, trying to solve the problem themselves created a poor relationship between the administrator and the team of teachers, because after they made friends again, it was the administrator who was the problem, or even observed taking the hearsay and then making judgments about other professionals and not always having the truth is what’s being presented.
Table 13

*Principal Behaviors, Strategies, Concerns Enabling or Hindering Perceptions of Effectiveness and Self-Efficacy*

**Principal C**  
*Critical Incident: Dysfunctional Teacher-Team*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Behaviors</td>
<td><em>listening</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>requiring facts and written documentation</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>maintaining priorities</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>contacted district for support (mediator)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>maintained distance from problem</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>avoided being judgmental</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>focused on problem-solving</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>modeled mutual respect</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering Behaviors</td>
<td><em>impatience</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>lack of firmness in handling the situation</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Strategies</td>
<td><em>create a climate of collaboration and collegiality within school</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>change team and team leader for next school year</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>one on one conversations with teachers</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>firmly outlining professional expectations</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>avoid responding to hearsay without facts</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>teambuilding</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td><em>personal staff issues interfering with focus on students</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>adults modeling childish behavior</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Class size adjustment. Table 14 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal D’s description of having to make class size adjustments after the start of the school year.

Table 14
Principal Behaviors, Strategies, Concerns Enabling or Hindering Perceptions of Effectiveness and Self-Efficacy

**Principal D**
Critical Incident: Class Size Adjustment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Behaviors</td>
<td>• communicated personally w/ teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• finding money for classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• solving problem in timely manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• delegating responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• formulating good plan of attack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• capitalize on past relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• putting right people in charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• delegating responsibility to AP to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering Behaviors</td>
<td>• not wanting own responsibility for inherited problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Strategies</td>
<td>• ensure master schedule is accurate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• learn from mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• proactively deal with issue before becoming a problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>• stress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Principal D was surprised to learn after his appointment that the master schedule had been inaccurately planned, which created a situation whereby the school was out of compliance with state class-size mandates. Despite Principal D's desire to blame his predecessor for the error, he quickly assumed full responsibility and went about making the necessary adjustments. He demonstrated his awareness of the community impact of his decisions and strategies. He effectively persuaded the teachers to assume an additional class, surprised by the manner in which the teachers came forward to do what was right for students. Principal D also understood the importance of developing the skills of his assistant principal by delegating some responsibilities. Principal D acknowledged the need to learn from mistakes to avoid future errors and realized the power of strong relationships with his staff.

Principal D commented,

I literally inherited the master schedule becoming a principal and 3 weeks later, I have a pretty sizeable problem that I have to fix. . . . I learned about myself that no matter how tough a problem is, if you are ethical about it and formulate a good plan of attack and put the right people in charge, you can pretty much conquer any problem you come across.

_Rebuilding morale after former principal's resignation_. Table 15 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal D's description of rebuilding morale after the previous principal had abruptly resigned due to an incident concerning his public ethical and professional conduct.
Table 15
Principal Behaviors, Strategies, Concerns Enabling or Hindering Perceptions of Effectiveness and Self-Efficacy

**Principal D**
Critical Incident: Rebuild Morale After Sudden Resignation of Former Principal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Behaviors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• maintaining professionalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• create an enjoyable place to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• rebuild positive image for school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• capitalize on strong relationships with staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• teambuilding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• surround yourself with the right people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• taking some ownership for problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering Behaviors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Strategies</td>
<td>• proactive hiring practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• marketing school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>• morale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• faculty turnover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• media involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• stress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Principal D quickly realized the need to build staff morale following the sudden resignation of the former principal after accusations of impropriety. The staff climate survey data also supported the need to focus on changing the image of the school. Principal D took some ownership for the problem, having been an assistant principal during the prior year. Despite his admittedly high level of stress, Principal D created opportunities for teambuilding, took advantage of his strong relationships with staff, and worked diligently to rebuild the school’s reputation in the community through marketing, proactive hiring of talented new teachers, and maintaining his professionalism and optimism.
Principal D shared his observations of the changes that took place his first year:
The outcome was a lot of teambuilding throughout the year, a lot of positive faculty-administrative interaction and the outcome was, well, I’m not a pure numbers guy. But just looking at this year's climate survey, 86% of the staff has a positive self-image of the administration compared to 52% from the previous year. So the outcome has been that we've built a really productive, very enjoyable place to work; it's a tough place to work, but it's an enjoyable faculty to work with. And I believe that they believed that of themselves and each other... I had to be a leader and to get a mindset of changing from an AP [assistant principal] mold to a principal mold. And making sure I didn't lose that, and it’s been difficult this year but, to make sure I didn't lose that relationship piece with the faculty. And also making sure I can stay professional about what happened with my predecessor.

*Teacher stealing credit card from another teacher.* Table 16 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal D’s description of addressing a critical incident in which one teacher stole a credit card from another teacher during the school day.

Principal D handled the teacher-stealing incident using standard protocols. Because law enforcement was involved, he had few decisions to make in this situation. The teacher had violated the law as well as school board policy by leaving campus to purchase cigarettes and alcohol with a stolen credit card.
Table 16
Principal Behaviors, Strategies, Concerns Enabling or Hindering Perceptions of Effectiveness and Self-Efficacy

**Principal D**

*Critical Incident: Teacher Stealing Credit Card From Another Teacher*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enabling Behaviors</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Arranged for arrest after school hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communicated with district office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hindering Behaviors</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proactive Strategies</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• document no matter how much time it takes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• be aggressive with Union when serious situations with staff occur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concerns</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• more negative press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• community perception that school was running like a circus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• incident is a reflection of principal’s leadership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Principal D’s most prominent concerns centered on deterring negative press because this incident followed the melodrama of the class-size reduction situation. The incident underscored the importance of timely follow-through, communicating confidently with the union, and improving community perceptions of the school and the principal’s leadership.

Principal D expressed,

I don’t think I’ll ever get over the fact how dumb people can be and how unethical people can be. . . . I was very frustrated. I just expect more out of myself and individuals around me. . . . It stands out to me because I do feel like it’s a reflection of my leadership.
Student threatening to bring a gun to school to shoot assistant principal. Table 17 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal D’s description of a critical incident in which a special education student threatened to bring a gun to school to shoot an assistant principal. Although at first glance this incident appears to be student focused, the incident ultimately centered around faulty paperwork that prevented the student’s expulsion.

Principal D handled this serious student conduct violation by following due process and the school district’s zero-tolerance guidelines. During the manifestation hearing, the parent of the student who had committed the infraction alerted school officials to an error in the paperwork: The special education teachers had “cut corners” by signing the IEP paperwork even though they did not attend the meeting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Behaviors</td>
<td>• recommending expulsion&lt;br&gt;• holding manifestation hearing&lt;br&gt;• addressing lack of compliance with teachers&lt;br&gt;• willingness to change attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering Behaviors</td>
<td>• complacency about Special Ed. paperwork&lt;br&gt;• angry at district office&lt;br&gt;• making excuses for errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Strategies</td>
<td>• monitor compliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>• heavy workload for Special Ed. teachers creating unreasonable expectations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Principal D initially blamed the district office for a lack of support and made excuses for the teachers’ mistakes. He eventually recognized the gravity of the situation and its possible ramifications, as well as that final accountability for federal and state special education compliance rests with the principal.

Principal D candidly shared his thoughts:
Initially, pretty ticked off at the district office for not what I felt was initially backing me up right away. That was my initial feeling, because at [school] we have a great student population, but it's a tough group too, and getting people who may work at different schools, who have easier populations, to understand that.

You don't want to cut corners, but I can understand why it was done. So, initially I was pretty angry, but as I thought through the process, I understood where the district was coming from. Regardless of how busy we are down here we've got to get the job done right. So I actually did a 180 on my attitude towards this. . . .

I learned the importance of making sure that you follow state and federal law, with regards to the ESE program. I knew that to begin with, but until it was my head that was on the front line, I have in the past cut corners too, to be quite honest with you. Not to be lazy but to get kids where they need to be quickly. But I learned that you've just got a take the time and to get it done, regardless of the gripe or the reasons why I feel like they can't get done, just get the job done.

End-of-year teacher surplussing. Table 18 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal D's description of the surplussing that had occurred at the end of the school year due to declining enrollment and budget cuts.
Table 18

Principal Behaviors, Strategies, Concerns Enabling or Hindering Perceptions of Effectiveness and Self-Efficacy

Principal D

Critical Incident: End of the Year Teacher Surplussing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Behaviors</td>
<td>• met face to face with each impacted teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• held a voluntary staff meeting to communicate process early on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• treated staff respectfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• protected morale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• established trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• aware of impact on people's lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering Behaviors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Strategies</td>
<td>• familiarity with seniority and surplussing contract rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>• impact on state testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• laying off people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Principal D displayed his compassion and concern for his staff during the end-of-year surplussing. Budget reductions and the downsizing of the school due to the opening of a new middle school caused much consternation for the staff. Principal D made sure he was familiar with the seniority and surplussing process and then took the time to communicate with teachers to reduce their anxiety. He also took steps to help maintain the focus on state testing despite the budget distractions. The staff appreciated Principal D's respectful efforts.

Principal D commented,

We had the downsizing on top of that surplussing. I had 28 face-to-face meetings with individuals, letting them know they would be surplussed, which can be very stressful. You're impacting peoples' lives and their paychecks that they bring
home to their families. . . I met with the staff in the morning faculty meeting, and then with them again in a voluntary afterschool faculty meeting to walk them through the surplus process a little bit by little bit and at the same time trying not to let this whole surplus animal ruin our momentum towards FCAT.

Summary of Critical Incidents Involving Teachers

Principals B, C, and D demonstrated their ability to utilize their staffs' strengths and relationships to resolve problems or address issues. Principal A appeared to make the same mistakes in two of the three teacher incidents before learning the value of involving staff prior to making unilateral decisions. Principal A had also tried to implement changes too quickly without establishing trust and building relationships. She had also taken ideas that had worked in other school settings and assumed that they would work in the new school environment without considering the school's uniqueness, past practices, traditions, and the feelings of the various constituents.

Principal C effectively distanced herself from getting directly involved in a teacher dispute. Principals B, C, and D recognized their lack of familiarity with contractual rules, federal and state guidelines, and employee disciplinary procedures. All four principals seemed able to keep children at the forefront of their decisions, reveal their genuine care and concern for their staff, solicit district office assistance when appropriate, and demonstrate a willingness to learn from their mistakes.

Principals B, C, and D selected critical incidents that centered on the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers. These principals understood that investment in hiring the best possible teachers would have the most significant impact on changing the
quality of instruction so that all students could achieve at high levels. Principal C eloquently stated,

We were wanting to make sure we had the best candidate of all those who expressed an interest because we service quite a unique population between the free and reduced and ESOL population. If we found someone, we couldn't hmm and haw whether that was the right person for that position. We needed to make sure that we were confident in our decision and offer them that position. We really wanted the ones that were going to be superior or we hoped would have a big impact on our students. I have learned the importance of recruitment, even when it's busy here.

Principal B passionately expressed a similar view of the significance of selecting teachers that were a good match for the unique population served in her school:

He came in and stole the show at the interview so we immediately hired him . . . he would have an opportunity to affect kids in a positive way. It was more his attitude, his demeanor, more than anything. And in my opinion, you can teach someone how to teach, but there is something you just can't teach. It was that with-it-ness; it was that connection he had.

Critical Incidents Involving Non-instructional School Staff

Nine or 43% of the 21 recorded incidents involved non-instructional school staff. These individuals included bus drivers, secretaries, aides, and security monitors, who all have daily direct contact with students. Their inappropriate and in some situations negative attitudes created some extremely difficult situations and much aggravation for
the new principals, whose inability to correct the situations or intervene on behalf of their students, families, and staff was a source of great concern and many unanswered questions. In four of the incidents, the non-instructional staff played only a minor role, so only the five critical incidents in which non-instructional staff members were key participants will be analyzed in depth.

One of the critical incidents that was previously addressed as involving teachers also involved non-instructional staff. During the Veterans Day ceremony, the entire office staff went home during the flurry of telephone calls and e-mails responding to Rush Limbaugh’s comments. Their inability to handle an emergency stressful situation created an additional burden for Principal A. She quickly realized that she did not have the right people in key positions in the school. This episode, along with several others, created a sense of urgency for Principal A to make staff changes as soon as feasible.

Clinic coverage. Table 19 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal A’s description of the changes that she had tried to implement regarding coverage of the clinic during the clinic aide’s lunchtime.

Principal A had good intentions based on sound data when she attempted to ensure that the clinic was covered when the clinic aide went to lunch. However, the office staff responded negatively to this new idea, claiming that they were afraid to be alone with children. Principal A expressed her personal bias regarding these adult rationales. She felt that if they truly cared about children, they would take on the responsibility when asked. Principal A acknowledged that even small changes produced strong reactions from the staff.
Table 19

Principal Behaviors, Strategies, Concerns Enabling or Hindering Perceptions of Effectiveness and Self-Efficacy

**Principal A**

**Critical Incident: Clinic Coverage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enabling Behaviors</strong></td>
<td>• safety of children is a priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• inability to compromise on strong beliefs when safety is an issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Conceded and respected staff's voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hindering Behaviors</strong></td>
<td>• change without input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• change too quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• aloofness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• insensitivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proactive Strategies</strong></td>
<td>• allowing input prior to making final decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ease in slowly when making changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concerns</strong></td>
<td>• school was running itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• professional appearance of office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Principal A did honor the office staff's wishes by seeking someone else to fill the clinic position to ensure that the clinic was covered during lunch. The one cafeteria aide who offered to cover the clinic during lunch served as the only positive example of a non-instructional staff member's role in the school.

Principal A remarked,

I told the office staff when we met to plan, that I would like one of them to cover the clinic rather than having the clinic kids come and hang out in the office when the clinic is closed, while the clinic aid went out for lunch. It's about to me professionalism. I also heard that behavior kids were sitting in the office eating cupcakes, and kids coming to the clinic when he went for break were sent to the
office. Kids that were throwing up, with fevers, broken arms, whatever, and I said okay that can't be. I don't want that to happen. So I made a plan for reorganizing, and that all three of my office staff refused to cover the clinic. And they told me that they were afraid to be alone with children. And my personal bias is that I can understand that in this day and age, but I also have a problem with that with my personal bias in that. That's the business we are in. We are in the business of children, and if you have their best interest in heart you're safe, you're safe from controversy. But I did honor their wishes, and I told them that I would respect their wishes because they had not been required to do this in the past. And that I would look for someone else to come to the clinic. So I did concede to their fears. I just thought that that would escalate into something even worse. So I found a lovely, lovely lady, a cafeteria monitor, who just rose to the occasion and took it as a compliment.

Redecoration of the front office. Table 20 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal A's description of her efforts to redecorate the office during the summer prior to the start of the school year.

Principal A, wanting the front office to appear more professional, used her interior design background to make changes, even though the office staff had taken it upon themselves to redecorate the front office on their own.
Table 20

*Principal Behaviors, Strategies, Concerns Enabling or Hindering Perceptions of Effectiveness and Self-Efficacy*

**Critical Incident: Redecoration of Front Office**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Behaviors</td>
<td>• waiting until they returned to hang things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering Behaviors</td>
<td>• change without input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• change too quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• violated office staff's work place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• hurtful feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Strategies</td>
<td>• gaining some input prior to making changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>• insensitivity and aloofness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Principal A retold this story:

When I first arrived another thing they had done was they had redecorated the front office. It was in my opinion very unprofessional, and unprofessionally done. There were cardboard fish hanging all over the walls, huge cardboard fish, which for elementary classroom cute, but for front office administrative office not cute. They put Apple tape everywhere, all over the office.

Principal A's actions offended the office staff, as evidenced by the changes in their demeanor upon returning: “When I had first arrived they were very engaging, when they returned they were very quiet.” Although Principal A elicited some input, the data reveal that she clearly had a picture of what she wanted the front office to portray to outsiders, regardless of what input she received from the office staff. The comments in the transcript seem to indicate that Principal A was going through the motions of asking for input without any intention of validating the input by using some of it for the
redesign. The staff’s hurtful feelings appeared to be irreparable. Principal A had forgotten the importance of valuing traditions and past practices, building rapport and trust with staff prior to making changes, and understanding the unique characteristics of the new school environment and its cast of characters.

Principal A further explained,

I was feeling at the time—I guess, I should say I didn’t care how they felt, but I just felt that they needed to get over it. Maybe that was a mistake. But I did wait for them to return because the office had just been painted, so I did wait to hang things, I didn’t actually hang anything until they got back. I did more removal than anything, so when they came back I guess, I felt, or just knew that they would have their feelings hurt, because if someone took down my work my feelings would be hurt too. But it wasn’t anything I was going to change; I was still going to do it. And as a result, I asked their opinion of how they thought these things should be hung. And I did allow them, after I approved what their ideas were, I did allow them to re-hang everything. So, I got them involved and I think that helped. Not saying it solved the problem, but it helped, it helped.

*Security monitor.* Table 21 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal B’s description of her dealings with a security monitor who had made inappropriate contact with students.
Table 21

**Principal Behaviors, Strategies, Concerns Enabling or Hindering Perceptions of Effectiveness and Self-Efficacy**

**Principal B**

**Critical Incident: Security Monitor**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Behaviors</td>
<td>• closely monitored actions of SRO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• involved the Executive Director, supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• contacted sheriff's department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• called weekly for an update or to remind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>district officials that the situation remains valuable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unresolved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering Behaviors</td>
<td>• impatience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Strategies</td>
<td>• aggressive to get information and do what</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>is necessary to ensure safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• step up and do whatever is necessary even</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>without adequate support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>• factors beyond control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• no official action from district or law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>enforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• no sense of urgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• unable to communicate with staff about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>situation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Principal B demonstrated an acute awareness of adult and student interactions.

When she observed some suspected impropriety, she immediately took proper action by involving law enforcement, keeping the school district personnel informed, and completing all the necessary paperwork and documentation required in this type of circumstance. She was assertive in asking key questions and following up with all parties involved in the incident. Principal B's frustration centered on the unresolved nature of the situation from a legal, ethical, and moral perspective.

She shared her sentiments:
It was the first time I had a situation that dealt with inappropriate touching and things like that, with an employee and a student. It stands out in my mind because what I noticed is that where things are at the school level a sense of urgency it's not always perceived in other areas. From what must've been mid January or February to the end of this year, this person was placed on administrative leave. I am not the assigned administrator, so I had no control over the time limits, or I should say lack thereof, of completing necessary memorandums of instruction. It was on my particular file, so I was calling every week for an update, but it was not a high priority. And there were a lot of other things going on, but this particular person continued to be on the district payroll and his checks came here every 2 weeks. It was an unofficial arrest, no one heard about it because unfortunately, it occurred during testing time. And I was adamant that there would not be an arrest during testing, that they would have to wait until I was done with testing, and maybe that's why it was the way it was. And by that time, other things came up. So we lost that person . . . [and] there was no sense of urgency, was no sense of closure, and was no sense of wanting to complete this in a timely fashion. Whereas, I just didn't understand that!

_Incompetent performance of monitorial aide._ Table 22 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal C’s description of her concern about an incompetent aide who had been involuntarily transferred to the school with a history of poor attendance.
Table 22
*Principal Behaviors, Strategies, Concerns Enabling or Hindering Perceptions of Effectiveness and Self-Efficacy*

**Principal C**

**Critical Incident: Monitorial Aide Incompetent Job Performance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Behaviors</td>
<td>• noticed patterns and trends with employee behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• reviewed site file for new employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• holding difficult conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• fulfilling ethical and professional responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• performs job with pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering Behaviors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Strategies</td>
<td>• following proper procedures, contract, and completing required documentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• coaching and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>• time away from the important focus of teaching and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• inequities with involuntary transfer process and contract language protecting the wrong people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Principal C fulfilled her ethical and professional responsibilities in dealing directly with an aide who had poor attendance and an undesirable work ethic. She had the courage to confront this aide and follow district procedures that eventually led to the aide's resignation. This principal expressed frustration with the district policies and contract language that had allowed an aide with more seniority and a history of performance issues to displace another aide who had consistently demonstrated exemplary performance but had less seniority. Principal C made note of the amount of her time that had been averted from her primary instructional responsibilities to deal with monitoring the expected duties of one employee. She also expressed her concern about
the possible impact of one noncompliant negative employee on the other staff’s collegial relationships.

Her unwillingness to compromise on ethical behavior when it affected children was the impetus for Principal C’s prompt actions. The incident proved to be a valuable learning experience for this novice principal, as she had to learn quickly about manifestation hearings and complete copious written documentation. Principal C candidly explained,

Initially, I was frustrated that because of the process somebody who was passionate about our kids and her job and had a solid work ethic was displaced, and actually ended up resigning because her placement was way on the north end of town, and with gas mileage her pay would not have been worth the drive. I was concerned also because we have a very collaborative office staff, and I worried that somebody with a negative attitude . . . that sometimes those kinds of work habits and emotions can spread, and then people will become more lackadaisical on how they approach things. She is currently grieving a recommendation for a 5-day suspension for insubordination, and is grieving that due to the financial constraints while she is in excess of leave. So we have another Weingarten hearing about that. So grievance of the decision I made for the previous incident is delaying further action. We still have the Weingarten to gather all of the information there but it did not have an impact. I mean it did have an impact but it did not compromise the work ethic of the front office. They still knew that . . . they did not lose touch of why they were here and the role that they played. No
matter what your classification is that’s important that everybody does the best job they can do. And that we should all be able to rely on one another when we need help. I also learned, as an outcome, that if you do things the right way, I mean following the contract and documenting appropriately, while it is a time-consuming task, that you receive the support from Human Resources and the union and the superintendent. I think the discouraging part though is the amount of time it takes away from focusing on . . . what I really want to be focusing on and that’s not on someone’s arrival or monitoring them doing their assigned duties, minimally know what’s expected of them.

_Failure to report suspected child abuse by bus driver._ Table 23 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal C’s description of the failure of an assistant principal to report suspected child abuse by a bus driver.

Principal C was out of town when the incident occurred with the bus driver. The situation escalated because the child reported it to the teacher, who should have called Department of Children and Families (DCF). Instead, the teacher reported the incident to the administrator, who told the teacher that he would take care of it, but instead contacted the guidance counselor and asked her to discuss the situation further with the child in the morning. The incident was mishandled on various levels, which led to law enforcement involvement. Principal C reflected on the incident to learn from the mistakes and avoid future errors, and then coached her assistant principal, who had become the focal point of the investigation and misdemeanor charges because of his negligence for not reporting the incident.
Table 23
Principal Behaviors, Strategies, Concerns Enabling or Hindering Perceptions of Effectiveness and Self-Efficacy

**Critical Incident: Failure to Report Suspect Child Abuse By Bus Driver**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Behaviors</td>
<td>- assuming ultimate responsibility as principal even though off campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- remaining non-judgemental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- supporting/coaching assistant principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- putting oneself in someone else's shoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- communicating with district office and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering Behaviors</td>
<td>- not following state guidelines for reporting suspect sexual abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Strategies</td>
<td>- annual training for staff about mandatory reporting procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- awareness of community's sensitivity to sexual abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- avoid taking lackadaisical approach to potentially serious issues because of ramifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>- for child's safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Assistant Principal and misdemeanor charges</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Principal C was surprised that law enforcement had aggressively pursued filing misdemeanor charges to use the assistant principal as an example for the community.

Principal C shared these comments:

I believe that some of the [incidents] were not able to be solved or were not addressed appropriately. They were adamant that everything be handled appropriately. The SRO was very active in bringing this situation to light. He was really behind the misdemeanor charges on the administrator. I think it was
difficult because of their relationship... it was not handled softly; it was handled to the extreme. I guess they felt it was to the letter of the law.

Further comments by this principal revealed a deeper reflection on the incident:

I think in the future I will make sure we have training at the start of the school year and just ongoing refreshers of reporting and the obligation we have. I think it did provide us an opportunity to know that we are in this together, that we need to use each other as a check to make sure we are doing everything that we need to do, and not taking a lackadaisical approach to anything.

*Summary of Critical Incidents Involving Non-instructional Staff*

The primary concern of all four principals regarding the critical incidents involving non-instructional staff was the safety and well-being of students. Principals B, C, and D learned the importance of being knowledgeable regarding contract language and employee disciplinary procedures. Principals A, B and D realized from dealing with the incidents that they did not have competent, ethical people in crucial positions in their schools. These three principals also acknowledged the need for more proactive planning and professional development to avoid similar issues in the future. Principals B and C expressed their frustration with experiencing incidents that were beyond their locus of control. Once again, these principals learned valuable lessons about which areas of responsibility that they can impact and which areas require them to depend on others for assistance or action. Excessive rules, regulations, policies, and procedures often soak up the time and energy of school leaders, and then they must deal with the aftermath of others' solutions or remedies regardless of their impact on students.
Principal A had responded to the non-instructional staff in a manner similar to that in which she had responded to the teachers in two of the incidents that she also described. In both incidents, she had selectively involved her office staff subsequent to taking action, but all staff except for one person had chosen to leave the school when both Principal A and her staff recognized that the trust between them had been violated and that they shared conflicting views on how the front office should operate. Principal A again disclosed that she had created hurtful feelings by disrespecting their ideas and making too many changes too quickly without establishing a trusting, respectful rapport.

Critical Incidents Involving Parents

Eight or 38% of the 21 incidents reported by the four novice principals concerned parents. Principal A selected two cases in which parents were the direct cause of the incidents. The incident concerning the Veterans Day ceremony had been initiated by a parent’s telephone call to a nationally syndicated radio show, which had resulted in a flurry of e-mails and telephone calls from around the globe. The second incident concerned the two groups of parents who had sought the principal’s help with resolving their conflict. These incidents required patience, diplomacy, flexibility, and the problem-solving talents of the principals. Both incidents had been unexpected, so the principals had had no lead time to prepare for them. The aftermath of these incidents had lasting ramifications for the principals, as parents judged the principals’ actions and tried to manipulate the principals to align with their self-interests. Both incidents took place at the same school, where parental involvement is traditionally high and where parents are characterized as middle- and upper-class socioeconomically.
Principals of schools with parents who are heavily invested in their children’s academic programs require a different level of savoir-fair. Regarding one parent, Principal A shared,

I’m not sure what her purpose was other than I think she loves to get involved politically. . . . I think I did the right thing by instead of banning her from campus or from talking—I tried to embrace her and sort of hold out the grape leaf . . . not shoo her away. . . . I tried to become more friendly with her.

In one situation, Principal A relied on previous experiences that had occurred at another school, assuming that what had been successful in one situation would automatically be successful in the new location. Principal A commented, “I brought my previous experiences from [another school] where I was for 11 years where we had a Veterans Day program which had always been received very well and so I brought those experiences in, thinking they would work here too.” Principal A further reflected,

The incident affects the whole school community. The rumor mills and that people developed fears about the stability of our school and its future. I know that power of team work and I also know what happens if it’s not there. . . . I expected more than that from adults and I just think that people are above that, but apparently they are not. If I aligned myself more with either group, it would have been more disastrous, and I would have lost parents on both sides. I think I would have said less. I think I should’ve gotten less involved, to tell you the truth. I think I was feeling pressured to, that the board wanted me to step in, even as much as I
was being advised not to. You are tempted to try to get involved and solve the problem.

Feuding PTO. Table 24 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal C’s description of a critical incident involving a feud within the PTO at her school.

Table 24
Principal Behaviors, Strategies, Concerns Enabling or Hindering Perceptions of Effectiveness and Self-Efficacy

Principal A
Critical Incident: Feuding P.T.O.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Behaviors</td>
<td>* remaining positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* talked to both parent groups separately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* insisted on appropriate behavior at meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* attempted to convey importance of teamwork &amp; trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering Behaviors</td>
<td>* sided with president rather than remaining neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* tried to make everyone happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* attempted to solve problems of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Strategies</td>
<td>* utilizing facilitative skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* listening more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* initiate parent leadership group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>* rumors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* misunderstandings by other parents and staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* fears about perceived stability of school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Principal A had inherited two groups of parents who had divergent views about their role in serving the school as well as how monies should be allocated. She diligently tried to help the parents understand the importance of teamwork and trust, but the situation had already escalated beyond reason, so despite Principal A's efforts to make peace and get both sides to cooperate, her plan failed. As parents decided to leave their leadership positions, rumors began to circulate about the stability of the school. This situation was especially difficult for Principal A, who admitted that she wanted to make people happy and remain positive. Most likely, the new parent boards would have had a greater allegiance to Principal A. This principal struggled with how much or how little to involve herself in matters that she perceived would ultimately affect the entire school.

Principal A stated,

I try to again, to keep everything positive. I'm trying to have hope that we can make all people happy. And I think that overall, I think that it's good that the board is leaving. I think it's is good for me they're leaving, it's probably important for them to leave the school. I think it would be difficult for them to participate in a positive way next year if they stayed. . . . I'm afraid that if I aligned myself more with either group it would've been more disastrous, and I would've lost parents on both sides. And you know, by the way some parents on the other side are leaving too. So it's really affected both camps to some degree. . . . I think I would've said, I think I would have said even less. I think I should've gotten less involved to tell you the truth. I think I was feeling pressured to, that the board wanted me to step
in, even as much as I was being advised not to. You're tempted to try to get involved and solve the problem.

*Student engaged in sexually explicit/self-harming behaviors.* Table 25 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal C’s description of her attempts to get assistance for a student engaged in sexually explicit and self-harming behaviors and to communicate effectively with Russian parents who do not speak English.

Table 25
*Principal Behaviors, Strategies, Concerns Enabling or Hindering Perceptions of Effectiveness and Self-Efficacy*

**Principal C**

**Critical Incident: Student with Sexually Explicit and Self-mutilation Behaviors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Behaviors</td>
<td>• solicited support from guidance, district office, &amp; law enforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• utilized a translator for parent communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• continued to maintain pressure on parents to take action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• maintained support for child's needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• developed progress plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering Behaviors</td>
<td>• bias about children and families in poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Strategies</td>
<td>• worked collaboratively with middle school staff to ease transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• continue to keep tabs on student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• place child in more rigorous academic environment to meet advanced learning needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• try to understand parents cultural differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>• student's future safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• parent complacency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• impact of poverty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Principal C strongly advocated for the child's physical, academic, social, and emotional needs. She seemed to be extremely knowledgeable about available resources and options for supporting this child. Her concern for safety as well as her strong academic skills propelled Principal C to take definitive action. She was relentless about pursuing multiple avenues of support and interventions for this child despite the unusual nature of the situation. Principal C thought beyond the present moment and made attempts to proactively work with the neighboring middle school to alert staff to the child's history and plan for her arrival the following year.

Principal C conveyed her sincere compassion for children and her awareness of the impact of poverty and cultural differences regarding parents' ability to support their children. She noted,

> We hit roadblocks with the parents. They did not share our same level of concern in regards to the behaviors we were seeing. I was feeling really sad for this student... frustrated with the parents... They don't show any kind of heightened alarm or concern or that they are thinking this is peculiar. They think she's different, but they are accepting her differences, I think. How frustrating it was that a child's parents didn't seem to care as much as we did about the potential risk that lies ahead for their daughter.

The other four incidents were coded for parental involvement primarily because parents had to be contacted or notified regarding incidents serious enough to warrant their awareness or action. The principals had to communicate difficult messages to these parents about their children's inappropriate behaviors, which concerned self-mutilation,
suspected abuse, and threats to use a weapon to kill an administrator. These principals had to carefully craft a message that communicated the urgency for parental support and engagement. Principal D shared, “I called the parent after I was pretty calm and cool. It was a pretty cut-and-dry case as you just can’t do something like that.” Regarding the class-size incident, Principal D decided to sensitively communicate the need to make a class change once the school year was underway. When the teachers resigned mid-year, Principal D informed parents of the change and provided them with an opportunity to address their concerns.

The principals had to use their diplomacy skills while being discrete and confidential in their approach with staff notification. They needed to communicate with key district staff and follow federal, state, and legal guidelines for due process and the handling of media inquiries. They had to carefully manage the situations to prevent the incidents from having a negative impact on the overall school environment. All of the situations were extremely complex and required a multiplicity of highly skilled behaviors, finesse, and ethical and legal competence.

Critical Incidents Involving the School Community

Three or 14% of the 21 incidents had an impact on the broader school community. The incident regarding the Veterans Day ceremony previously described could have had a resounding impact on the local school community and the principal’s competency. Although the response from the world community was instantaneous, fortunately district staff intervened quickly and coached Principal A to avoid escalation. This principal expressed her sentiments about the incident: “I hadn’t done anything wrong, but I did feel
like . . . I set the school up or the students in danger, or unwanted publicity. I’m still dealing with the publicity from the newspaper article in November.”

The incident regarding the failure to report suspected abuse by a bus driver also previously described highlighted the importance of Principal C learning as much information as possible as quickly as possible about the community in which the school resides. Prior incidents of a similar nature had recently occurred in this community, so the local police and citizenry were especially sensitive to this incident. The importance of building relationships and trust with the community is reflected in this incident. In addition, this principal had to support her assistant principal, who had not followed state statute and was therefore suffering the consequences. The situation helped Principal C realize the importance of being proactive and providing ongoing training to the staff.

The last incident that directly impacted the community was that of needing to rebuild morale after the sudden resignation of the former principal. The reputation of the school and the staff’s poor morale was of paramount concern to Principal D. The constant negative summer media coverage about the former principal, the staff’s feelings of betrayal, and the community’s lack of confidence obviously made the need to reestablish pride and respect for the school this novice principal’s top priority, confirmed by the climate survey and site analysis that took place prior to the appointment of the new principal. Principal D agreed, “Morale was significantly ahead of any other factor that the community, staff, or students could single out.” Principal D explained the increased pressure to ensure that operations ran smoothly for fear of more negative press: “Even though the staff members didn’t have a role in what happened with the resignation, it
really put a poor face on the school. I have learned that the principal is the face of the school."

Principal D also realized the importance of hiring the right people to set a positive tone for the students as well as that teambuilding for generating strong relationships is not something that can be left to chance. The relationships and connections with the community contribute greatly to the overall school environment. The principal stated,

This was my first principalship and to take it over under very trying circumstances, it's not what you want. It's been a very difficult year, but I didn't want to lose the relationship piece and make sure I remained professional about my predecessor.

Critical Incidents Involving the District Office

The district office was involved in 14 or 67% of the 21 critical incidents reported in this study. This finding stands out because it signals that well over half of the selected incidents by these novice principals were significant enough to warrant either notification or intervention by the district office. The principals' supervisors require notice whenever litigation, law enforcement, or media might be involved. They prefer no surprises in handling the more complicated situations in which parents or the community may intensify circumstances. This small sample of novice principals had to mitigate incidents that involved suspected child abuse, a threat of violence against an administrator, suspected adult impropriety with students, falsification of IEP documents for a special education student, staff stealing from other staff members, political activist groups and
the national media, the intoxication of a staff member, job performance issues, and union complications.

Five of the incidents that involved district staff were related to contractual or procedural issues, including hiring and surplussing of staff, out-of-field ramifications, and class size reduction. Reflection on the serious nature of these incidents provides profound insights into the complexities and challenges that the novice principals braved during their first year. All of these issues dealt with people and the whole host of provocations that accompany human relations.

One positive critical incident remains to be more closely scrutinized. Principal C chose the transition from assistant principal to principal for one of her critical incidents. In her discussion of the incident, she highlighted both the excitement in being appointed to this important position as well as the enormous responsibilities associated with the job.

*Transition from assistant principal to principal.* Table 26 summarizes the critical incident findings based on Principal C’s description of her unexpected appointment to the principalship.

During her interview, Principal C exuded confidence, enthusiasm, passion, and commitment to the school. She also demonstrated her astute awareness regarding the needs of her school’s unique student population. Her optimism and pride were contagious, even when reading the transcript. She seemed focused on the learning needs of the students and the teaching skills of her teachers. She also expressed a high level of preparedness for the job demands and strong support for a collegiate network for support and sharing.
Table 26
Principal Behaviors, Strategies, Concerns Enabling or Hindering Perceptions of Effectiveness and Self-Efficacy

**Principal C**
*Critical Incident: Transition From AP to Principal*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported Actions &amp; Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enabling Behaviors</td>
<td>* focus on teaching and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* desire to do the best job possible-exceed expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* utilize staff support and past relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* prioritize school needs and issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* feeling privileged to have opportunity to serve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* create a network of support and sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* use the power of positive thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* incorporate a goal-target-plan-steps process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* remind people of purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* enjoy being busy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* focus on the right things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* recognize people's talents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* having broad based experiences in all aspects of school life as an AP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* committed to the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindering Behaviors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Strategies</td>
<td>* find an avenue to express concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* continue learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* avoid becoming complacent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>* numerous changes in leadership over years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Critical Incidents Involving Media and Law Enforcement

A further breakdown of key players confirmed that media and law enforcement were inextricably embroiled in the principal incidents. Seven or 33% of the 21 incidents involved law enforcement and 2 or 10% involved the media. Once the incidents had risen to the level at which these constituencies became engaged, the principals’ vital role and responsibilities intensified, as well as the need to ensure accuracy, confidentiality, timeliness, and thoroughness in achieving a respectable outcome. The multifaceted issues required a significant investment of time, problem-solving abilities, and rapid examination of all aspects of the issues with wisdom, sensitivity, and great insight. These incidents placed these new leaders at high risk at a time in their careers at which they were most vulnerable. For these novice principals, every judgment or decision sent a clear message regarding what is and is not important to each member of the school community.

Critical Incidents Aligned to Leadership Standards

Table 5 summarizes the leadership standards that had the highest numbers of related incidents: ethical leadership (16), human resource development (13), communication (12), managing the learning environment (12), and change (11). These data strongly support Petzko’s (2008) finding that human resource and personnel management trumped instructional leadership as expressed knowledge and skill areas deemed important for principal initial success.
Emotional Responses of Novice Principals

The researchers were able to extract 36 emotionally laden responses from reviewing the principal interviews. The emotional responses were organized into three subcategories for added clarity and comprehension: professional insecurities, enabling emotions, and hindering emotions, which are itemized in Table 27. The enabling emotions were those that had seemed to increase novice principals’ self-efficacy and self-confidence, which in turn helped the staff view these principals as competent. The hindering emotions were those that had deterred self-efficacy and self-confidence and seemed to impede the transition for these novice principals.

Table 27
Emotional Responses for Novice Principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of Emotional Responses</th>
<th>Emotional Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Professional Insecurities (18)</td>
<td>Taking things personally (2) fears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reflection of principal (2) uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wanting to be liked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>not wanting to upset people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>questioning own personality/leadership style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>feelings kept private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lack of understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>want people to be happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>conflicted feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unsettled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Enabling Emotions (9)</td>
<td>open-mindedness (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tolerance (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>feel privileged for opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stress management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>optimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Hindering Emotions (9)</td>
<td>impatience (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>anger (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>insensitivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>making judgments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>aloofness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>passionate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sensitivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>assertiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>frustration (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>aggressive (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>selfish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>resentment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The four novice principals had the greatest number of emotional responses in the category of professional insecurities. Eighteen responses expressed the agony of dealing with difficult teachers, students, and parents; the frustration of situations beyond their sphere of influence; and even the fear of consequences, such as getting a poor reputation due to the union-based decisions that they had made. Principal A, who had experienced the Veterans Day ceremony incident, expressed, “I was feeling like a failure, in a way. I felt like I didn’t understand it, totally. I felt that I hadn’t done anything wrong, but what’s to learn from this?” Principal B, who had key staff members leave during the year, commented, “So you begin to question your own style, personality, and try to figure out what’s going on.” Principal D, who had received a telephone call from the district office expecting that class sizes be adjusted immediately, shared, “Unbelievably stressed at the beginning of this because the district said, and rightly so, just to get the job done and figure out how to do it.” When discussing the incident regarding the teacher stealing a credit card from another teacher, Principal D divulged, “It stood out for me because it’s something that’s . . . hard for me to take to heart; just because someone does something really dumb should not be a reflection on [me] and I do feel like it’s a reflection of my leadership.”

The principals had the second greatest number of emotional responses in the category of enabling emotions, defined as responses that promote and enhance positive interactions and outcomes and reflect greater self-assurance and self-efficacy. Nine key words and phrases captured the constructive emotions within the critical incidents: open-mindedness, tolerance, feel privileged for the opportunity, stress management, optimistic,
passionate, positive, sensitivity, and assertiveness. Principal C, who singled out the transition from assistant principal to principal as one of her critical incidents, summarized her sentiments: “I am committed to this school, really feeling privileged to have this opportunity, and I am very passionate about it.” Principal B celebrated the year’s successes despite the numerous challenges: “There were a lot of positives; great, great staff, great students, just really proud. Can’t wait for those FCAT scores to come out, and proud of a lot of things we’ve done; it’s been a remarkable year.”

The principals had the third greatest number of emotional responses in the category of hindering emotions. As previously discussed, the principals shared nine examples of emotions that represented reactive responses to highly charged situations that almost always resulted in sleepless nights, intense anxiety, and fear of retribution or litigation. The key words and phrases that illustrated their hindering emotions were impatience, anger, insensitivity, making judgments, aloofness, frustration, aggressive, selfish, and resentment. For new principals, these emotions can be particularly difficult when emotions clash with personal values and beliefs. Principal A, who selected the redecoration of the office as a critical incident, admitted, “I guess I should say I didn’t care how they felt, but I just felt they needed to get over it. Maybe I was a little insensitive, aloof, more than I thought.” Regarding her intervention with the feuding parents, she confessed, “I think the outcome is going to be good for me, but it’s been painful throughout, very painful.” Principal B, who dealt with the frustrating situation with the security monitor who was accused of inappropriate touching, disclosed, “I can
be impatient at times, and I had to become a little aggressive. I was extremely frustrated, my hands were tied."

These rich descriptions of the critical incidents, direct quotations from the interviewees, and organizational tables enhance the understanding of the complexities and challenges that these four novice principals experienced during their first year of tenure. The focus group feedback best summarizes their overall insights into and understandings of the challenges and complexities of their first year. The principals expressed, “It was all about relationships,” “Employees are always at your door leaving a lot of work for you to do at night. Employees are very needy personally,” “Make sure you hire the right people in the right spots,” Dealing with the union is an ongoing challenge for principals in this school district.” They also explained that when “you take the leap from AP to principal, you have to find a balance again.”

Several of the novice principals commented on the difficulty of serving in the role of an instructional leader with everything else that is expected by the district. Principal A provided a specific example of juggling roles: “It is tough to make yourself accessible to classrooms with an open-door policy.” Lastly, the principals expressed the need to navigate through the district financial system so that they were apprised of the best ways to use monies to support the strategic plan before the district completes its end-of-year rollover.

*Critical Incident Analysis by Theme*

Eleven themes emanated from the 21 critical incidents that the four novice principals reviewed during their interviews. Table 28 illustrates the percentage of
incidence of each theme for the 21 critical incidents in this study. School climate/culture had the highest percentage of incidence (19 or 90%), followed by conflict (17 or 81%); personal and professional socialization or role clarification (16 or 76%); change, communication, and interpersonal orientation/relationships (14 or 67% each); district support (13 or 62%); organizational stability and social and emotional needs of students (11 or 52% each); federal/state laws/regulations and contractual issues (9 or 43%); and safety and law enforcement (7 or 33%). The percentage of incidence does not necessarily reflect the significance of a particular theme.

Table 28

*Incidence of Themes in Critical Incidents*
Change. Looking more closely at the 11 themes that emerged in this research study contributed greatly to the understanding of the complexities and challenges that typified the real-world experiences of the four novice principals. The first theme is that of change. Robbins and Alvy (2004) indicated that “the new principal represents change within the organization” (p. 192). Change signifies loss of familiar people, familiar ways of doing things, and traditions. Robbins and Alvy also insinuated that new principals must quickly understand the change process, the basic principles regarding facilitating organizational and individual change, why change fails, and strategies for working constructively with change. Change surfaced as a theme in 14 or 67% of the 21 incidents, as illustrated in Table 29.

Heifetz and Linsky (2002) referenced two types of change that impact organizations. Technical change requires people to apply their current knowledge to new situations whereas adaptive change necessitates learning new ways of working and impacts people’s values, beliefs, and behavior. All the principals in this study encountered incidents that required people to change habits, caused them to experience the loss of colleagues whom they admired, or challenged how they define themselves. Eight or 57% of the 14 change incidents were categorized as adaptive change occurrences and 6 or 43% were categorized as technical change occurrences.

Four of the incidents centered on a change or loss of colleagues, which often led teachers to grieve and forced them forced to develop new loyalties with new teachers.
Table 29

*Critical Incidents and Change*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incidents</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Adaptive</th>
<th>Technical</th>
<th>Resistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veterans' Day Ceremony</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feuding PTO</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Door Policy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinic Coverage</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front Office Redecoration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Recognition</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of key teacher leader</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of 2nd, 3rd staff members in two week period</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff member with intoxication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security monitor- inappropriate touching with student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition for hiring eight new teachers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition from AP to principal</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitorial aide job performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysfunctional teacher team</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student with sexually explicit behavior/self mutilation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus driver and failure to report suspect sexual child abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size adjustment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebuild morale due to prior principal sudden resignation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher stealing credit card from another teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student threatening to bring a gun to school to shoot AP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of the year surplussing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regarding changes in staff, Principal B explained, “These students began to feel abandoned and so I had to assure them that things happen, you know, transition; that people want advancement; they were just ready to move on. That was difficult, that was extremely difficult.” In two incidents, the principals handled disputing factions within the school, but in very different ways. Principal A dealt with parents who were quarreling and jockeying for power whereas Principal C coped with teachers who were complaining about the behavior of teammates making unprofessional and unfounded accusations of harassment.

As the principals handled these situations using very different approaches, their descriptions of them were very divergent. Principal A explained her ambivalence: “I guess that’s the part I don’t really understand fully. Like how far to step back and how far to step in.” Principal C, however, was able to maintain distance from the personal issues of the team members, and required them to define the problem in writing and ultimately solve the problem themselves. She reflected on the incident:

Sometimes you respond to hearsay, and then end up going on a false trail where there is nothing at the end. It’s important to make sure your respond to facts and only facts. Because when people are emotionally involved in something, details are fabricated and it’s not really a true perception. I learned to use a filter and to maintain priorities instead of getting sucked in.

In both situations, the incidents involved adaptive changes underlying value choices that were either individual or organizational.
Nine or 64% of the 14 incidents that were associated with change pertained to resistance to change. The principals discussed incidents that gave people good reason to resist change—they had asked their staff to do things that they did not understand, did not know how to do, or perhaps did not initially believe in—so many of the responses that the principals received from staff reflected their puzzlement, anxiety, and insecurity. Principals must welcome and work productively with resisters, but this is extremely difficult to accomplish for new principals who have not had sufficient time to develop the levels of trust necessary.

Principals C and D acknowledged a change in frame of mind as they moved from the role of assistant principal to that of principal. Both had moved up to the principal position in their respective schools and been in unusual situations because their former principals had unexpectedly resigned. Principal C commented,

I was shocked. It was like a Friday and all of a sudden it was Monday and I . . . was appointed or asked to serve as acting principal. I felt if someone else were to come in [to this position], that would be very awkward. I was really honored they had asked me to do that and from that, I took away a responsibility to make sure I did the best job that I was able to do. I have the principal leaving and his problem, change in student population because of redistricting, support of staff. There are times, looking back that I think leading up to the big transition that I may have . . . there were things that happened that I was not comfortable with, and at that point in my role as assistant principal I really wasn’t quite sure where to go with that.

Principal C remarked about change:
I had to be a leader and to get a mindset of changing from AP mold to principal mold. I learned that I can handle a heck of a lot of stress in a short time. I found out [that] my 2 years previous as assistant principal and in-roads I made to build positive relationships really pay dividends in this type of situation when my back is against the wall. It’s nice to see people step up for you.

As noted previously, all four principals served in schools that had undergone frequent changes in principals. Faculty turnover was another change noted in all four schools due to staff reductions caused by redistricting, surplussing and downsizing, budget cuts, class-size state mandates, and the desire for advancement. These changes had remarkable implications for these new leaders, who all dealt with the grieving process, changes beyond their locus of control, and planning for unexpected losses. In some circumstances, these changes illuminated the principals’ lack of knowledge about contract language, state certification issues such as out-of-field status, and class-size legislation. Principal B assumed responsibility for this lack of knowledge:

Now I fully understand and that became my mission: to learn as much as I could about how that out-of-field status works and how teachers are impacted with that 1-year contract. I learned a lot about that. I think I’ve become a lot more familiar with that whole certification process as a result of this. I have learned the test that you can take online and get immediate results.

Principal A rapidly learned valuable lessons about making changes too quickly without input and without gaining the trust of the school constituencies through establishing relationships, even for minor changes. Implementing a Veterans Day ceremony for the
first time gave rise to a significant incident that occurred and had lasting ramifications for staff, parents, and the community. Redecorating the front office without buy-in from the office staff damaged relationships beyond repair almost immediately. Instituting a new student recognition program also precipitated resistance from some staff, causing the principal to compromise and modify the original plan. Principal A again ruminated,

And I think that reflecting back, that’s why they tell you not to make a lot of changes when you haven’t built that trust with your staff yet. I didn’t know my colleagues. I guess it’s all about relationships and it’s important to build them. When I came in and did things a little differently, [it] really upset the staff... but just those little changes made huge reactions. I immediately took everything down and made different plans. I am sure that I offended them and hurt their feelings when they returned. Well, it really did get the office staff and I off to a bad start. In reflecting back, perhaps I should have just eased in a little more slowly. Again, just like they tell you to do, don’t make a lot of changes. It’s a fine line, but be very careful with the changes you make, be very careful. And even though my changes were minimal, each and every tiny little change affected somebody. It’s just amazing.

All of the changes noted by the four principals ignited strong responses and reactions from people within the school organization. The data related to the theme of change underscore the humanistic side of leadership.

*Communication.* The second pervasive theme that surfaced in this study was communication. Communication is one of the 12 leadership standards adopted by the
school district, which accentuates its importance in terms of effective leadership. Although every critical incident described in this study related to some aspect of communication, the principals specifically mentioned communication issues in 14 or 67% of the selected critical incidents. Their comments highlighted examples of miscommunication, face-to-face communication, difficult conversations, listening, dealing with the press and media, “with-it-ness,” rumors, language barriers, confidentiality, misinterpretation of expectations and consequences, validation of others’ opinions and suggestions, getting to know staff, lack of clear communication, inability to communicate effectively, and feedback. These comments demonstrated the benefits of having fine-tuned their communication skills in a wide variety of settings and for different audiences prior to assuming the lead role in a school. High-performing leaders regularly express ideas clearly and correctly orally, in writing, and in multimedia presentations for students, teachers, colleagues, parents, and the general public within the community. The critical incidents illuminated both positive and negative effects of communication for the entire school community.

All four novice principals expressed in some manner an increased awareness and understanding of the value of authentic communication in developing healthy relationships, especially at the onset of a new principalship. Principals spend most of their time interacting with their constituents, so strong communication and active listening abilities are fundamental to building trustful relationships and helping new leaders ease through the transition. Principal A stirred an emotional response by instituting new ways of communicating through her assistant. The staff misinterpreted the
new way of working as a refusal to honor their request for an open-door policy. Principal A acknowledged, "I am in the people business, and I do need to be accessible to them."

Principal A again ran into difficulties as a result of miscommunication regarding the Veterans Day ceremony. Principal A noted, "Apparently that was the understanding of the office staff, that I had not addressed it, even though I had but I did not [communicate] with the office staff. I still need to improve communication [because] you cannot communicate too much."

When people feel communication is insufficient, anxiety, suspicions, and rumors begin to permeate the school environment. Principal A worried that "the rumor mills generated fears about the stability of our school and its future." The lack of closure of the security monitor incident was based on the lack of communication from the district office, which created an awkward situation for the principal and the staff. Principal B explained,

They wanted more information than I was able to provide. They were asking along the way what’s happened, what’s going on and I’m communicating with others, but I’m not having any information given to me so I can share with my colleagues. . . . They wanted to be kept in the loop; they wanted to know what’s going on. They wanted to know things that will affect our school, our students, and I think it’s because they genuinely care.

Principal D was extremely concerned about negative media communications, an issue that constantly came up during the interviews. The incident in which one teacher had stolen a credit card from another teacher had occurred right after the sudden
resignation of the former principal and the reception of negative press in the community.

This principal commented,

> After dealing with some negative press in the summertime, being back in the headlines for another negative occurrence. I don't know why the phrase that just popped in my mind was are the inmates running the asylum type of thing, which was frustrating because the school was running very efficiently, but the appearance of running like a circus was somewhat frustrating.

Principal C shared her frustration when describing the incident with the student who had written about sexually explicit activities in her journal. Her disappointment and dissatisfaction with communicating with the non-receptive parent was further intensified because the parent was unable to speak English. This principal expressed, "We involved the mother and we had a translator always available and we would read verbatim what the child was writing because the parents were not proficient in English, [but] we were not sure they understood it all."

Three incidents—those regarding the failure to report suspected child abuse, one teacher stealing from another, and the security aide who inappropriately touched students—reflected how poor communication or lack of communication is often the root of problems. When key staff members failed to file a report as required by federal law, the ramifications were severe. Principal D learned a valuable lesson about ensuring that staff members are well informed and trained in communication procedures for these types of situations. This principal commented, "I learned the importance of communication with the district office, making sure they are abreast of all situations like this."
Other incidents highlighted that these novice principals recognized the importance of strong communication and used this tool for positive purposes. When Principal B experienced the loss of key staff members at the start of the school year, she communicated with students and staff, conveying empathy, support, and encouragement. This principal explained how she gained valuable input by listening carefully:

- The importance of everyone's opinion being valuable and getting input as I went through the process, so I listened to them; I received their input, especially the counselors as to how we'll be sharing this information with students. It always goes back to people, that communication that I have with the staff, and I think I utilize in just about everything that I do.

When Principal D was first advised to make massive class size changes, he communicated personally and respectfully with each teacher, student, and parent who would be affected by the changes. This principal pointed out, "I brought down those kids down to a face-to-face meeting before you plop them into one of those classes. Calling their parents helped to minimize any potential backlash." This same principal dealt with the surplussing of teachers at the end of the school year based on seniority due to downsizing and the opening of a new middle school. Once again, his ability to communicate in a deferential, private manner demonstrated his astute sensitivity to the impact of these changes on the staff. Principal D again reflected, "I had 28 face-to-face meetings with individuals, letting them know they would be surplussed, which can be very stressful. You're impacting people's lives and their paychecks that they bring home to families." Principal B also effectively utilized face-to-face communication to address
the incident involving the intoxicated teacher by “doing a memo of instruction and
calling him and talking with him. I was blatantly honest with him about this issue.”

Principal C used communication to market the school during the recruitment of
new teachers:

I asked the front office to find me when someone dropped off a resume, as I
wanted to take a few moments to show them around campus and just spend a little
bit of time with them . . . A lot of candidates commented on that at the close of
the interview. They expressed an appreciation of the warm welcome.

Using key words, this principal emphasized the school’s vision and essential focus on
teaching and learning. In addition, this principal conveyed passion and pride for the
school to potential new teachers by reiterating what matters most at this particular school:

“Even if they weren’t hired here, I still wanted them to leave with the opinion that we
were a great school and a great place to work with very talented staff members.” Lastly,
this principal consistently recognized the staff’s talents.

Principal D centered his efforts on rebuilding morale by maintaining
professionalism and communicating a positive vision for a school that was a “really
productive, a very enjoyable place to work.”

*Interpersonal orientation/relationships.* The third theme that became apparent
from the interview and focus group data coding was interpersonal
orientation/relationships. School leadership is a people business, and every day principals
are consumed by interactions with students, teachers, non-instructional staff, parents, and
community and business constituents. This theme reflects the four principal’s references
to their behaviors or actions that focused specifically on individuals within and outside
the organization during the first year. Once again, all incidents concerned interpersonal
relationships, but some incidents evoked explicit comments accentuating this theme,
specifically 14 or 67% of the incidents. The terms relationships, modeling, respect,
encouragement, support, care, rapport, appreciation, developing others, service, and
celebration were often used to express this theme throughout the interviews.

The principals’ actions and interview comments confirmed their deep
understanding of the importance of establishing strong relationships and that relationship
building is a central ingredient in the socialization process for novice principals. Principal
A initially struggled with managing key relationships or leveraging established
relationships for support during these critical incidents, whereas the other three principals
seemed to have a better grasp on interpersonal relationships with key constituents in the
school. Once again, all of these principals had been assistant principals in their schools
prior to advancement, a fact that may provide new insights into succession planning.

The four novice principals seemed to be acutely aware of their own emotional
makeup, were extremely sensitive, and were often inspiring to others. Principal A
reflected,

I’ve learned you have to build relationships with everyone, you can’t build a
relationship with one or two, people are so sensitive. They really all want to be
one of your best friends; they always want you to spend time with them.

This principal also commented on the need for giving people ownership in defining
solutions: “I asked their opinion of how they thought things should be. So, I got them
involved and I think that helped.” In addition, Principal A recognized the importance of getting people involved with decisions: “I made sure I got buy-in and everybody felt good about it.”

Three of the principals acknowledged the crucial value of developing others and recruiting the best teachers. Principal D commented, “I just learned that times get better if you surround yourself with the right people. It makes all the difference in the world.” Principal C remarked, “I wanted to win the candidate that would be best so my kids would have the maximum opportunity for success.” Principal B was the third principal who acknowledged strong sentiments about selecting the best person who aligned with the school’s vision and student population: “We had the position posted and we did not get the [blank] factor to walk through the door, and I refused to settle; I absolutely refused to settle!”

Some of the critical incidents that these principals referenced involved what Greenfield (1985) called crises of integrity, challenges that went beyond the immediate moment. Greenfield explained that “a crisis of integrity occurs inside the leader and often involves a conflict between two powerful values.” Principal B had to deal with a highly competent and respected teacher who smelled of alcohol. Principal C had to lose a “more senior, beyond spectacular aide” for one that had a “negative, lackadaisical attitude” due to contract language and the surplussing process. Principal C sincerely desired to coach the assistant principal who had erred by not reporting suspected child abuse in a timely fashion, but struggled with how to provide support without undermining the district and legal process: “I think I tried to put myself in the situation as if all of this was happening
to me. I tried to focus not as much on what happened in the past, but how we are more proactive... so this won’t happen in the future.”

Principal D selected several incidents that could be considered crises of integrity. This principal anguished over maintaining professionalism while accepting full responsibility for the errors in the master schedule, knowing that the problem had been created by the former principal. He conceded that the staff had not followed federal guidelines for completing a student’s IEP by falsifying signatures, a practice that had been justified in the past on the basis of the challenging student population, teachers’ huge workloads, and lack of help: “Regardless of how busy we are down here, we’ve got to get the job done right.” Principal D provided the final example of a crisis of integrity, the incident involving the downsizing of his school and the contract language for surplussing. Again, this principal struggled with finding an ethical, respectful way to inform people that they were likely to lose their jobs, knowing that other colleagues put messages in teachers’ boxes rather than holding tough conversations.

School culture/climate. School culture/climate was the fourth theme that materialized among the critical incidents reported by the four principals. In 19 or 90% of the 21 incidents, the principals described events that had a positive or negative impact on the school climate or culture of their respective schools. Relationships with people inside and outside the school were once again noteworthy factors influencing the incident itself or the outcome. In selecting this school/climate theme, the researchers sought out the complex patterns of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that appeared to be deeply rooted within the critical incidents (Barth, 2006).
The principals often used the key words low morale, loyalty, ownership, teamwork, consistency, welcoming school environment, collaboration, collegiality, trust, attitudes, service, mutual respect, pride, climate surveys, values, beliefs, dispositions, stability of the school, violated workplace, competition, individual differences, community, network of support and sharing, and motivations to express their concerns, acknowledgements, or satisfaction relative to their school culture/climate. All four principals clearly understood the importance of developing or maintaining a positive learning environment for their staff and students. They also realized how their actions and words portrayed their own priorities, preferences, and displeasures not only to those housed within the school but to the greater community and school district.

Deal and Peterson (1999) provided a list of characteristics that exist in positive school cultures, many of which were also reflected throughout the principals’ commentary in the critical incident interviews. First, three principals addressed professionalism, collegiality, collaboration, sharing, teamwork, and continuous improvement that was focused on staff and student learning with a mission to make a difference in the students’ lives. Principal A, who had intervened with the feuding PTO members, recognized that “teamwork [is] necessary for anything to get accomplished and that you have to build trust and work together.” Principal B, who had lost key staff members, also acknowledged the power of team building: “The importance of everyone’s opinion being valuable and getting input . . . we spoke of them as a team.” Principal C worried about the potential impact of the monitorial aide’s poor work ethic on the culture of the school: “I was concerned because we have a very collaborative office staff, and I
worried that somebody with a negative attitude . . . that sometimes those kinds of work habits and emotions can spread, and then people will become more lackadaisical on how they approach things.”

In five of the critical incidents, the principals conveyed situations or examples of a shared sense of responsibility, which is the second attribute of a positive school culture/climate. Regarding losing one of her most respected teachers, Principal B expressed, “I had to let go and develop a plan to share the information with team members. I wanted him to pass the torch to someone that he felt he could trust.” Principal C selected the transition from AP to principal as a critical incident to share her concerns about the school culture: “I could feel and I think people could feel that the climate of the school was not focused on what it needed to be focused on and that was students and what was right for them.”

Principal C reiterated the importance of teams working collaboratively when describing the incident in which her assistant principal failed to report suspected child abuse in a timely manner. She immediately reacted by stating, “Everyone is accountable to do that.” This same principal worked diligently to help the dysfunctional team of teachers realize that their personal issues were distracting them from their primary teaching roles:

They developed an essential agreement that basically was the norms of how they would function as a group and they all gave input. When I reflected on the incident, I thought I can’t have someone in a leadership role in charge of a team
promoting that kind of behavior because it takes away from the collaborative
discussions they should be having.

Principal D also conveyed the significance of teachers sharing a sense of
responsibility in relation to the class-size adjustment incident:

We were able to convince the right teachers to take an extra class to teach for the
remainder of the year. Because even though you’re giving people more money to
teach a class, surprisingly, money was not the first rationale why each teacher
took a class. It was more of an obligation to help out the school. Quite honestly,
you could see it in their eyes when they are talking back to you, and that was a
nice thing to see how people going out of their way to help out their fellow staff
members and their school.

Regarding the third characteristic of a positive school culture, the four novice
principals mentioned trust, respect, caring and integrity as cultural norms in discussing
critical incidents at their school. These words depicted something special yet difficult to
describe about the unwritten rules, traditions, expectations that seem to permeate
everything about the way they act, how they dress, what they talk or avoid talking about,
whether or not they seek help from colleagues, and how they feel about their work and
their students (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Regarding the Veterans Day ceremony incident, Principal A noted, “Perceptions
are such a big factor in our school environment of what we do. I do feel as a leader that
you do have to understand both sides.” During the PTO feud, this same principal realized
that “if you can’t trust someone on your team, you are never going to be successful.
Because they are so limited in their perception, they weren’t really open to listening to others.” Principal B, who confronted the teacher who came to work smelling of alcohol, shared these thoughts:

It was a part of that people, the relationship piece, where I was in conflict with my responsibilities as an administrator and how would he perceive this would have a positive or negative impact on our relationship. I felt like I had to go over and beyond with that people piece to make up for the perception that was perceived by the union and others.

Lastly, Principal D, at whose school one teacher had stolen a credit card from another teacher, struggled with the incident from an ethical standpoint: “I went into it with no tolerance. I don’t think I will ever get over the fact how unethical people can be.”

Culture also refers to the ways a given group of people learn how to cope with problems and make decisions and how new people are inculcated to think, perceive, and feel in relation to these problems (Deal & Peterson, 1999). In looking at this fourth characteristic of a positive school culture, two incidents surfaced in the interview data. Principal A, who had tried to institute a new way of working with the office staff and reorganize the way that the front office staff operated the clinic, experienced backlash from the staff, who misinterpreted her actions. This principal had to learn the art of compromise and listening in working through the issue with the staff. She explained, “I could’ve come in and allowed them to leave things as they were for awhile, ease them into it a little more slowly.”
When Principal A attempted to institute a student recognition program, the initial plan had to be modified after gaining input from the staff, understanding divergent beliefs and attitudes about the issue of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. Her comments provided a glimpse of her on-the-job experiential learning:

I really didn't want to give in to the teachers. I wanted them to do it my way, but I realized that to work together and be successful as a team, I was going to have to make some exceptions, and honor their request. I learned that all my colleagues come from different vantage points. They all want something different and it's always about coming to an agreement of what we all can live with and that what it's all about.

The fifth feature of a positive school climate was typified with rituals, ceremonies, stories, and celebrations.

Two incidents discussed by the principals seemed to accentuate the importance of mores within the schoolhouse. When Principal A wanted to create a new recognition program, she had a definitive implementation plan, but quickly learned that others had different approaches based on past practices and wanted their voices to be valued in the decision-making process. This principal explained the teachers' responses to her idea: "We have this other recognition that we do in kindergarten because we're different. I think it went downhill here because teachers interpret recognition differently and subjectively." Principal C focused on hiring eight new teachers with a new marketing strategy of promoting an invitational culture of pride about the school, which challenged past practice. She expressed her sentiments in this way:
I feel we work way too hard to settle for mediocre or satisfactory, so candidates who may be competent teachers and we are sure would be fine, but we really wanted the ones that were going to be superior or we hoped would have a big impact on our students.

The last characteristic of a positive school culture centers on a physical environment that focuses on learning for all members. Only two critical incidents seemed applicable to this characteristic: Principal A’s redecoration of her office and the clinic situation. Principal A was passionate about ensuring that the front office conveyed a professional environment that was safe and student centered. Once again, Principal A disagreed with the school’s past practices, “the way we do things around here,” where students were sitting in the front office with colds, fevers, and discipline issues for the general public to witness upon entering the school. For this principal, “it was about safety as the school had been running itself. I was accustomed to a very professional front office.”

Safety and law enforcement. The fifth theme was safety and law enforcement. Seven or 33% of the 21 critical incidents involved student or adult behaviors that required law enforcement intervention. Five of these incidents were adult related: those involving the failure to report suspected child abuse, a theft whereby one teacher stole a credit card from another teacher, the inappropriate touching of a student, the action of political activist groups, and accusations of harassment. Two incidents were student generated: those involving a student who threatened to bring a weapon to school to shoot an
assistant principal and a student writing about sexually explicit behaviors in her journal and engaging in self-mutilation.

The severity and complexity of these seven incidents provided invaluable insights into the challenges that these four novice principals encountered in one year. For each critical incident, the principals described their anxiety and self-doubt about their actions, their decisions based on unfamiliarity with procedures, implications for litigation, and the impact on the school and students. They all made reference to what they had learned from handling the incident personally and professionally. They also commented on the changes that they would make in the future.

Principal A, who handled political activist groups as a result of the Veterans Day ceremony, felt the situation had been managed “a little too loosely”; she had been too lenient with the teacher, and suggested that in the future “anyone trying to bring in a political or social issue would be reprimanded.” The security monitor who had been accused of inappropriate touching female students created an unresolved dilemma for Principal B due to the lack of any definitive action from law enforcement or the district. She spoke disconcertedly about the situation:

The situation continues to haunt me. I know it’s the law, but the thing is they never completed the process. It’s still being investigated. No one ever asked me for my files on this case. . . . The process of going through getting the statements, notifying the public defender, dealing with the investigator, was really interesting. I don’t know how to fix it and I am just having difficulties with that whole process. Just recently my student found out that he is going to be at another school
for the upcoming year and she wants to make sure that he is not at her school. If I had an opportunity to do this again, I would probably communicate directly with my Executive Director and have him deal with that department.

Principal C communicated her great concern regarding the student who had written sexually explicit behavior and engaged in self-mutilation. She became extremely distressed about the child’s safety and the lack of parental supervision. The student was Baker Acted two times and yet the behaviors continued, as well as the parents’ apathy. Other parents started complaining about their children being exposed to such inappropriate behavior. Principal C sought out district resource personnel and the school resource officer (SRO) for advice, but since none of the prescribed interventions was successful, her anguish and guilt persisted. She lamented, “I wish that somewhere along the lines we would have picked up on some of those warning signs. I think she is crying out for help and I wish we would have been able to hear her before it got to this point.”

The assistant principal who failed to report suspected child abuse in a timely manner precipitated a lengthy investigation by the local police. Principal C was off campus during the incident, which caused her great doubt and frustration. An overwhelming sense of responsibility continued to plague the principal:

I don’t know how I would have responded in having been in that moment at that time. But I felt like, wow, they needed me and I wasn’t here... now all of this has happened and it didn’t go away for a really long time and I felt I had let them down... You think your handling something using the code of conduct or using the systems you have in place in school and you fail to report and something ends
up happening to that child. You have to just make the call. It is a very solid reminder for me.

_Federal/state laws, regulations, and contractual issues._ The sixth theme that emerged from this study concerned federal/state laws, regulations, and contractual issues. The novice principals referenced these topics in 9 or 43% of the 21 critical incidents. During each interview, the principals used language supporting this theme, including the terms hiring practices, displacement of teachers (surplussing), documentation of the NEAT process (termination), out-of-field status, employee discipline, professionalism, memorandum of instruction, Weingarten hearings, violation of IEP compliance, and contractual agreements.

The novice principals all outlined the need for accuracy; attention to details; copious paperwork; and reliance on district support for guidance for complying with district, state, and federal mandates. The principals’ comments, aggravation, and discomfort with the processes and/or procedures related to these incidents and coded for this theme seemed to echo the pattern identified in the safety/law enforcement theme. Principal C mentioned that these incidents were distracting, time consuming, jeopardized the ethical treatment of children, and ultimately prevented her from “what I really want to be focusing on.” In addition, this principal remarked, “I have learned through experience, which is a good way of learning, the process of progressive discipline, and the NEAT process.”

Principal D, who managed the student and weapon incident, was initially angry with the district office, feeling a lack of support. However, as the situation progressed,
this principal recognized the critical magnitude of following state and federal laws for special education students. Principal D shared,

One of the best pieces of advice I got about 6 years ago was make sure if you have someone who is not doing their job, document, document, document. I’ve tried to follow that, but we’re so busy here, documenting is easier said than done because it takes a heck of a lot of time. I have in the past cut corners too, to be quite honest. Until it was my head that was on the front line, I learned not to be lazy, to get kids where they need to be quickly. I had all the nuts and bolts, but taking the time to actually apply it is what I need to do differently next time.

Principal B commented, “I felt like had I known a lot more about certification, for out of field being one year only and the ramifications, I would have advised him differently.” Principal C reiterated similar sentiments:

It reminded me of the need for them to document if there is a problem. Sometimes you respond to hearsay, and then you end up going on a false trail where there is nothing at the end. It is important to respond to facts and only facts.

**Operational/organizational stability.** The seventh theme centered on operational and organizational stability. This theme incorporates the more typical types of processes and actions that principals routinely perform that when done well, instill a sense of stability and trust for the school constituents and demonstrate the novice principal’s evolving self-confidence and self-efficacy. This theme also highlighted the continuing debate regarding management and leadership functions for principals. Eleven or 52% of the 21 critical incidents documented in this study were coded for this theme. The
principals' responses were organized into four categories to provide clarity and focus for the analysis and synthesis of the interview data, as shown in Table 30.

The leadership behaviors and concepts clustered under the theme of organizational stability included developing others, recruitment and retention, organizational leadership structures, and leadership presence. Developing others reflected the novice principals' attention to the importance of providing support and delegating authority to others within the school. They demonstrated the ability to call on the right people at the right time by having the insight to determine whom they could count on for specific situations.

When principals rely on staff members, they empower a greater sense of efficacy, responsibility, and control. The challenge for novice principals is to be responsive while simultaneously developing a sense of responsibility in others. They had to encourage their subordinates to take risks and back them up when they failed. In addition, these novice principals continuously helped others become successful, then allowed them to take the credit (Murphy, 2006). They also were able to balance the need for pressure and support to facilitate key actions. Theirs comment in the interviews often integrated more than one category of these organizational/operational behaviors. Therefore, some of their behaviors have been included under other themes.

Principal D summarized, “I learned about myself that no matter how tough a problem is, if you are ethical about it and formulate a good plan of attack and put the right people in charge, you can pretty much conquer any problem you come across.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Category of Principal Actions</th>
<th>Specific Leadership Behaviors Cited from Critical Incident Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Developing Others</td>
<td>Coaching, Pressure and Support, Support, Putting right people in charge, Facilitating, Delegating to AP and others to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Recruitment and Retention</td>
<td>Recruitment of teachers/staff, Follow-up and feedback, Interviewing, Notice patterns and trends with employees, Marketing, Investing time with new hires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Organizational Leadership Structures</td>
<td>Goal-target-plan-purpose-steps, Chain of command, Top down-bottom up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Leadership presence</td>
<td>Accessibility, Visibility, Focus on teaching and learning, Documentation, Monitoring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Principal C reinforced the same ideas:

When you have a goal and a target, and you lay out the road or the steps you are going to take to go there and you are very clear about that and the ethics around it, [people respond because] everyone is here for the right reason. It is important to remind people . . . that you need them to bring their brain to work and to do what is they need to do to help kids.

Principal B captured the optimism and buoyancy of the staff after the loss of key staff members:

Time heals all wounds and we are a strong group of colleagues that handled adversity and challenges well. We cried, literally cried together, but gave everyone time to go through the process. I realized that and learned that they’re resilient, phenomenal, and they support and encourage each other.

All four novice principals referenced the recruitment of teachers or non-instructional staff in retelling their selected critical incidents, underscoring their acknowledgement of the importance of hiring the best people possible for their schools. For Principal B, losing, hiring, or disciplining staff members were key pervasive issues in all cited critical incidents. For Principal C, recruitment of teachers, discipline for both instructional and non-instructional staff, and a priority focus on teaching and learning were the major issues revealed during the interviews. In three of the five critical incidents, Principal D mentioned the issues of faculty turnover; delegating responsibility to the assistant principal in order to learn from the experience; and the importance of
creating an enjoyable, trusting work environment to retain talent. Principal C best captured the focus on teaching and learning:

We pulled together and everyone prioritized what was important from that point on. It wasn’t anything other than children and learning, whether it was focusing on their learning or the development of staff, it wasn’t about things that were not related to teaching and learning.

*Student social and emotional needs.* The eighth theme that emerged from the critical incident interview data was the social and emotional needs of students. The novice principals single out critical incidents that underscored the need to ensure that students’ emotional and social needs are addressed if they hope to maximize student learning. In 11 or 52% of the 21 critical incidents, the novice principals cited significant issues related to the social and emotional needs of their students. The specific issues, situations, or individuals associated with the social and emotional needs of students that were itemized during the principal interviews included attempted suicide, self-mutilation, depression, crisis interaction, feelings of abandonment, the ethical treatment of students, safety, guidance counselors, home-school liaison, building relationships with students, the impact on FCAT testing, and motivational theory. The most significant issues were categorized by the most frequent types, including safety, uniqueness of student population, inappropriate student behavior, and inappropriate adult behavior, as shown in Table 31.

Six incidents involved the safety of students, and all four novice principals selected at least one at least critical incident dealing with safety.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incidents</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Standards</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veterans' Day Ceremony</td>
<td></td>
<td>Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feuding PTO</td>
<td></td>
<td>Uniqueness of Student Population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Door Policy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Students Feeling Abandoned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinic Coverage</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Inappropriate Student Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front Office Redecoration</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inappropriate Adult Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Recognition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of key teacher leader</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of 2nd, 3rd staff members in two week period</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff member with intoxication</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security monitor- inappropriate touching with student</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition for hiring eight new teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition from AP to principal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitorial aide job performance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysfunctional teacher team</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student with sexually explicit behavior/self mutilation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus driver and failure to report suspect sexual child abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size adjustment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rebuild morale due to prior principal sudden resignation</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher stealing credit card from another teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student threatening to bring a gun to school to shoot AP</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of the year surplussing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>6 3 1 2 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comments from the principals portrayed their passion and commitment for ensuring the safety of their students on campus, in the classroom, or personally. Principal A adamantly exclaimed relative to the clinic incident, “It was all about safety!” Principal C emotionally explained her disappointment in dealing with the student’s parents who ignored their daughter’s sexually explicit writing and self-mutilation:

I think the mindset is just the safety of the kids and how sacred that is, their innocence and protecting them, and how frustrating it was that a child’s parents didn’t seem that they cared as much as we did about the potential risk that lies ahead for their daughter.

Three of the principals commented about the uniqueness of their individual school communities during the interviews, as well as the need for their staff to be sensitive to their diverse student populations. Principal D stated, “We have a great student population, but it’s a tough group too, and getting people who may work at different schools, who have easier populations to understand that.” Principal C expressed the noticeable differences between the present student population and that of her former school:

When I arrived here, just the difference of parental support, and I saw the impact that it had on the kids. What a different life they lead than those kids that I had the opportunity to work with [at the other] school.

Principal B, who had to deal with multiple teacher changes in the middle of the year, mentioned,
These students began to feel abandoned. The teacher remained in constant contact with the students. She came to visit them on a regular basis. I needed to let the students know that their education was equally important, regardless as to what we were going through.

Principal C further shared her concern about the ethical treatment of students: “I felt the ethical treatment of children is something that is not negotiable when you work in a school, and that was being compromised.”

*District support.* The ninth critical incident theme that became apparent during the coding process was district support. In 13 or 62% of the 21 critical incidents, the novice principals described issues related to district support. As will be discussed in more depth in relation to research question two, all four principals utilized district support structures in addressing the critical incidents selected for this study. Table 32 provides a closer look at the numbers and percentages of critical incidents by principal.

All four principals had extremely positive remarks about support provided by the executive directors, their colleagues, and mentors.

Table 32

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal</th>
<th># of Critical Incidents w/District Support</th>
<th>% of Incidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal A</td>
<td>3 of 6</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal B</td>
<td>2 of 4</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal C</td>
<td>5 of 6</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal D</td>
<td>4 of 5</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Principal C referenced her relationship with the executive director: “I learned more from his actions and the advice that he gives than I would if I were to be belittled or reprimanded if I hadn’t handled something appropriately.” In addition, having a network of support and coaching was mentioned by three of the four principals. More specifics will be shared in the discussion of research question two.

Some of the negative connotations associated with the district included the following issues: inequities in the system, finding enough money to adjust classes, downsizing, the lack of timeliness with actions, no closure, an unexplained lack of consequences for offenders, and finding an avenue to express concerns. Principal B expressed great dissatisfaction with the manner in which the security aide incident had been handled at the district level: “There was no sense of urgency, was no sense of closure, was no sense of wanting to complete this in a timely fashion.” Principal D corroborated this opinion with this reflection: “I found out it was amazing how a lot of people don’t know the answers to what you’re asking.”

Conflict. The tenth theme that evolved from the critical incident data was conflict. In 17 or 81% of the 21 critical incidents, the principals mentioned some type of conflict within their description of the incidents. Table 33 breaks down the number of incidents associated with conflict by principal. For two of the novice principals, all the critical incidents involved some type of conflict.
Table 33

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal</th>
<th># of Critical Incidents w/Conflict</th>
<th>% of Incidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal A</td>
<td>6 of 6</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal B</td>
<td>4 of 4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal C</td>
<td>4 of 6</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal D</td>
<td>3 of 5</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In studying the critical incident data and rereading the transcripts, the researcher found that all the novice principals had endured both internal conflict and external conflict. External conflict represents the factors outside the control or jurisdiction of the principal whereas internal conflict signifies the inner struggles, dilemmas, or role conflicts that each novice principal grappled with in making decisions or evaluating the issues. Principal A, who dealt with the feuding PTO members, not only endured the obvious external conflict that took place between the various parent factions but also wrestled with the internal conflict of deciding whether or not to intervene, and if so, to what degree. Principal C, who cited the dysfunctional team of teachers as one of her critical incidents, had no control over the disagreements that transpired among this particular team of teachers. Table 34 illustrates the breakdown of the incidents and their categorization as internal and/or external conflict.
Table 34

*Internal and External Conflicts by Critical Incident*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incidents</th>
<th>Internal Conflict</th>
<th>External Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veterans' Day Ceremony</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feuding PTO</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Door Policy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinic Coverage</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front Office Redecoration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Recognition</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of key teacher leader</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of 2nd, 3rd staff members in two week period</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff member with intoxication</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security monitor- inappropriate touching with student</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition for hiring eight new teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition from AP to principal</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitorial aide job performance</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysfunctional teacher team</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student with sexually explicit behavior/self mutilation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus driver and failure to report suspect sexual child abuse</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size adjustment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebuild morale due to prior principal sudden resignation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher stealing credit card from another teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student threatening to bring a gun to school to shoot AP</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of the year surplussing</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External/Internal</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Some of the specific key words and phrases extracted from the critical incident data regarding conflict were inability to compromise, difficulty in saying no, teachers not getting along with each other, proactively dealing with issues before they become a problem, conflicting administrative responsibilities, ethical dilemmas, problem-solving, consensus building, parent discontent, roadblocks with parents, parental influence, inherited problems, feuding PTO, and team leader who acted unprofessionally. The conflicts within the 21 critical incidents entailed differences in political views, disputes with district management, professionalism, past practices, intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation, ethical responsibilities, and discord with personal values and beliefs.

Principal D commented about inheriting a flawed master schedule: “I don’t like giving answers and not taking full ownership of something.” Principal C passionately expressed her sentiments regarding the student who was involved in sexually explicit behavior without parental support for any intervention:

The safety of students, that’s a big piece. I don’t know this student’s situation. . . .

It’s at your core; it bothers you because when you’re waving at all the students as the buses are leaving the last day of school, you don’t want them to go home because it’s not the best place for them.

As discussed earlier, Principal B anguished over losing a key staff member during the first year:

I went through the natural feelings of going from grieving then realizing that it’s about him; he needs to have an opportunity to explore. I had to let go and I
believe his rationale for leaving had nothing to do with the school itself. I believed he loved the school, but he had to move on.

Finally, Principal A explained her disappointment with the PTO members after trying to help resolve their differences:

Even after I felt I supported them and had the person step down, they still had a negative year and the reason is this wasn’t the only person that was having a conflict with them. They were so limited in their perception; they weren’t really open to listening to others.

**Personal and professional socialization/role clarification.** The eleventh and final theme revealed in the data coding was personal and professional socialization or role clarification. Socialization was specifically referenced earlier with regard to interpersonal orientation/relationships. This theme interfaces with all of the other themes, as it relates to how principals make sense of their job duties and responsibilities and directly connects to the complexities that emerged from the principal interviews. Socialization has to do with how principals acclimate to their new working environment, develop and maintain the school culture, promote a vision of academic success for every student, conduct business every day, and are perceived by others inside and outside the school.

Personal and professional socialization or role clarification was cited in 16 or 76% of the 21 incidents. All the novice principals acknowledged their challenges, desire to exhibit ethical behavior, concern for their school’s reputation or public image, and need to be active problem solvers. They also expressed apprehension about how things might
be perceived by the district, considering their inexperience. In addition, all the principals seemed willing and able to learn from their inevitable first-year mistakes.

Principals A and C openly discussed their concerns about balancing their involvement in parental and teacher disputes. Principal A remarked,

I'm learning about myself when to step in and when to pull back. And that, I really like everybody and I just want everybody to get along . . . and I'm a very open-minded person, very global thinking person, and I would like to have everyone's input accepted and understood and considered.

Principal A often wrestled with the alignment of her staff's actions and her own beliefs. She handled several adverse situations with discretion, professionalism, and decisiveness despite her own insecurities. She once again expressed these ideas: "I expected more than that from adults. . . . I'm not tolerant enough or maybe too tolerant."

Principal B took risks by performing what she termed "nontraditional acts" to do what she felt was in the best interest of her staff and students. She shared these thoughts: "I did something that was nontraditional but I felt like I had to do it for consistency and because I needed to let the student know that their education was equally important, regardless as to what we were going through." Principal C "performed her job with pride" and assumed a mature, positive, and optimistic outlook amidst some very serious and complex situations. She believed that "focusing on the right things" allowed her staff to "make a difference" for children, and she was committed to doing "the best possible job" as principal. She saw herself as a continuous learner, keeping abreast of current research and deliberately reminding people about the purpose of their work. She admitted
her resentment about personal issues that were distracting from school business and her “time spent away from the important focus.” She explained, “I just brought the expectation that everybody is here to do whatever it takes to help students and to perform their job with pride, ethically and professionally.”

Principal D also commented about doing “whatever it takes” to get the job done efficiently and effectively. He candidly conceded the unreasonable expectations associated with the principal position and talked about “the shortage of time to do work optimally.” Time management was a recurrent theme in his interview. He also mentioned being proactive and, most importantly, genuinely concerned about how his decisions “impacted peoples’ lives.” He commented about his school’s overall accomplishments:

Just looking at this year’s climate survey, 86% of the staff has a positive self-image of administration compared to 52% from the previous year. So the outcome has been that we’ve built a really productive, enjoyable place to work; it’s a tough place to work, but it’s an enjoyable faculty to work with, and I believe they believed that of themselves and each other.

*Interview Findings: Research Question 2*

Research question two attempted to determine the extent to which the novice principals had drawn from and applied prior learning experiences as assistant principals and from district support structures and programs for new principals. During the focus group session, the four novice principals responded to this question by stating that they had applied the knowledge that they had gained from being an assistance principal to 99% of the decisions that they had made during the first year. Two of the principals who
currently had assistant principals expressed that they planned to provide their assistant principals with a wide range of experiences so that they would be ready to assume a principalship and to delegate some of the responsibility.

During their interviews, two of the principals made specific references to how valuable their experiences as an assistant principal had been in preparing them for the role of principal. Both of these principals had moved up from assistant principal to principal in the same school.

Principal C clarified,

I felt ready because I was so involved with what was going on here, and just wanting to be a part of every opportunity, whether it was curriculum, discipline, or facilities as an assistant principal. I think that it helped to serve to my advantage having been involved in all the different components here, was able to assume all of the responsibility, and the support of the staff was huge.

Principal D also commented on the impact of his prior administrative experiences:

Before I became principal, I had 3 years as a dean and 5 years as an AP, so that’s 8 years of administrative experience. I was lucky enough to have prior principals give me tasks to do or I was able to watch them handle some of the similar situations.

During the interviews, all four principals paid homage to a former principal who had influenced their actions; instituted a particular program that they wanted to replicate; or instilled in them a certain set of beliefs, values, or dispositions. Principal A, who reported the redecoration of the front office critical incident, wanted to replicate a former
principal’s model of professionalism as a benchmark. This principal revealed, “When I came in, I was coming from [Mrs. Principal] at [Lovely] Elementary, a very professional environment, and I was accustomed to a very professional front office. So, I brought those background experiences with me.”

The data in response to district support structures and programs for new principals emanated from both the principal interviews and the focus group session. The focus group responses summarized the sentiments of the four novice principals more globally whereas the interview data provided individual testimonials related to each specific incident. Tables 35 and 36 indicate the number of times a particular professional development activity or a specific district structure was noted during a critical incident interview.

Table 35

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Professional Development for School Leaders</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency Reported in Study</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory Induction/Compliance Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resource University modules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quint Studer Rounding/Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment of Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCF Training (Child Abuse)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby Payne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Handle Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer Leadership Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside District Training (Harvard)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HR University was referenced five times during the interviews as being extremely helpful to the new principals. The content for this course was developed internally by the school district’s Human Resources department. Eight modules comprise the series of workshops entitled HR University, with the goals of identifying key HR practices and articulating the impact of these practices on administrators’ daily management of employees. In addition, the workshops assist administrators in managing employees more effectively in compliance with federal/state employment laws, school board HR policies and the Union collective bargaining agreements.

The novice principals’ collective opinions about the district support programs and supportive individuals were extremely positive. During the focus group session, the four principals mentioned 11 specific support structures or programs that they jointly determined as beneficial for new leaders. Monthly principal meetings, data/literacy coaches, and a self-selected network of principals were additional organizational structures deemed helpful. The focus group mentioned the quarterly new principal
dinners as an excellent way to meet new colleagues and share ideas. Three other forms of support were itemized in the focus group but not shared during the interviews—the assistant superintendent’s quarterly meetings, informal meetings, and school drop-bys as well as the superintendent’s support. Lastly, the focus group felt that the district strategic plan that provided the common vision and goals was beneficial, especially for first-time principals.

The Director of Leadership Development was also mentioned in several instances as knowledgeable and supportive. Principal A stated in relation to the feuding PTO, “I went for the advice of my boss, my mentor, the Director of Leadership Development, and my principal coach.” This principal also mentioned in relation to the student recognition program, “The Director of Leadership Development gave me some pointers.” During the focus group session, the Director of Leadership Development was singled out for “wonderful support for guidance, resources, knowledge, information, and the ultimate support.”

In general, the novice principals reported that having mentors for assistant principals and principals was beneficial: “The retired administrator mentors were great to run by ideas before making big decisions.” One of the retired mentors role-played sample tough conversations to offer practice to Principal B. Often, these mentors and the principal coaches “threw out a lot of ideas.” The novice principals seemed to utilize the retired mentors in a variety of ways. Principal B met quarterly with the mentor. Principal D met once individually, but preferred to find his own support. Each novice principal found a support group of trusted colleagues.
At the elementary level, the Executive Director was cited as being always available and supportive. Principal A referenced the Harvard Principal Center as source of great learning. Three of the novice principals described their previous principals as providing strong modeling, non-examples, or involving them in a wide variety of experiences from which they were able to draw from when confronted with similar situations. Principal D provided this example:

Once again prior knowledge, prior experience, having seen teachers and other professional administrators go through, due to their own fault, unethical circumstances, I’ve learned from watching—watching how my previous leaders have dealt with problems like that . . . just prior experience and stealing from other people’s bag of tricks.

Principal A provided another excellent case in point: “Probably more through my experience with my previous leader, I learned to stay on top of it, to address it head-on, and I also relied on my superior [for] guidance.”

A careful examination of both the focus group and interview data indicated that all of the leadership development programs in the school district had provided meaningful and relevant learning experiences that subsequently supported the novice principals during their first year. These new principals were able to draw from their prior learning, mentors, and other colleagues when responding to the myriad of situations that occurred. The PNP program had provided an invaluable system of support with colleagues and content that proved extremely useful in dealing with several critical incidents. Principal C related the following:
I still wanted them to leave with the opinion that we were a great school and a
great place to work with very talented staff members and that came from a
training session with the PNP. I could get advice from my mentor, other
colleagues that I had developed relationships through either the induction program
or the PNP, or other experiences that I’ve had being in the district. I definitely
surrounded myself where I created a network so when I need help I would seek it.

Throughout the interviews, the novice principals referenced explicit professional
development experiences that were especially valuable in handling particular critical incidents (see Table 34). The HR University seminars were singled out several times as
being extremely helpful to these novice principals. One principal described, “I applied from the Human Resources 101 training, the training from the Summer Leadership Institute, and sought support from HR prior to taking action.” Another principal also referred to the training offered during one of the HR University modules:

I went through the information I learned from my training, where they coach you on what happens when you believe someone is on the job intoxicated. I had just reviewed the information, so I knew I relied on that. I had a couple of choices, so I did utilize that information in counseling him.

About 5 years ago, the district began to partner with the local hospital to bring Quint Studer, a highly successful author and consultant, to work with the district to promote organizational excellence. In his training seminars, Studer emphasizes the importance of taking care of the people within the organization as well as those outside the organization. The school district has adopted many of his strategies, and much of his
work is currently being rewritten for application in educational settings. The school district under study is one of the first school districts nationally to transfer what worked so successfully in health care to the educational-arena. Studer's tactics are included in the induction program, have been aligned to the leadership standards, and are recommended to new principals within the transition support team meetings. Principals A, B, and C singled out his teachings as making a significant impact in their leadership role. Principal B noted, "I met Quint Studer for the first time many years ago and I am really comfortable rounding or as I call it communicating regularly and informally with staff."

Principal C also referenced this work:

Experiences with Studer and the cultural climate and the importance of trying to maintain professionalism when you have people who truly could not get along with one another. . . . We had addressed recruitment and hiring and it probably comes from the Studer piece and the importance of . . . I know there was one session where we talked about people would travel or step over hot coals if they had a rapport of felt like, you know, wow this is the place for me.

Focus Group

During the focus group session with the four novice principals, the researcher asked the following ancillary questions related to the application of district professional learning experiences:

1. What evidence can you provide that demonstrates you have applied the learning experiences from the ILLPs and portfolio artifacts (from the PNP
certification program) to daily responsibilities and critical incidents during your first year as principal?

The novice principals’ interviews provided more insights regarding the impact of PNP program components (including the ILLPs and portfolio artifacts) than did the focus group. As previously discussed within the district support section of the findings, three of the four novice principals specifically referenced the PNP program during their interview sessions when asked to reflect on 5 to 10 critical incidents using a predetermined question protocol. These in-context testimonials seemed more beneficial and relevant to the research question than the five responses that the principals offered during the focus group session: (a)“[we] collaborated and stole ideas from each other, artifacts;” (b) “[we] took a lot of information, culture, and climate section and implemented strategies based on what they had learned in the program;” (c) “the PNP program forced [us] to look at each competency [in relation to our work];” (d) “the Studer strategies;” and (d) “helpful resources provided by the Director of Leadership Development.” Two additional citations by the principals regarding the PNP program were included in the district support section.

2. How do the state leadership standards guide your actions?

In order for each administrator to be eligible for this state’s principal certification, they must successfully complete the 2-year PNP program and demonstrate competency in each of the district leadership standards. The state recently changed legislation to require that all leadership development programming be aligned to these standards. The novice principals’ comments relative to the impact of the standards on their daily work were limited to five inconsequential statements: (a) “the importance of a good head custodian;”
(b) "the right people in the right place;" (c) "standards remind you of your focus, outline competencies;" (d) "don't refer to the standards regularly;" and (d) "rely on district expectations to plan for actions—the district is guiding us based on what they expect."

3. To what extent did you utilize journal writing to capture your learning during the first year? In what ways have you reflected?

The topic of reflection was addressed purposely in the focus group questions. Although each of the novice principals was given a journal at the initiation of their principalship and encouraged to use reflection as a best practice during the first year, none of the principals seemed to adopt this ritual as routine. When the researcher inquired during the focus group conversations about utilizing journal writing to capture learning during the first year, the principals responded, "I don't... I should;" "use journals to document meetings, phone calls and conversations;" "don't journal to reflect, but to document;" and "calendared journaling, but can't find the time to make it happen."

When asked in what ways they have reflected during the focus group, the principals mentioned internal or self-reflection and brief reflection with trusted staff, colleagues, mentors, or family members. One principal noted that the only reflection occurred in relation to time management. Another principal formed a support team with staff that met monthly to provide feedback. A third principal used the climate survey data for some reflection. A fourth principal used the monthly principal meetings for some reflection when collaboration time was included as a chance to reflect on how to apply learning in a different school setting. Finally, one principal shared that a group of staff members at the end of the year had provided some reflective feedback about where the
school was going. Reflection was not definitively mentioned during any of the principal’s recounting of critical incidents, nor did any of the focus group examples appear to fully support reflection as an embedded learning custom.

The last area indirectly addressed in this study centered on the conceptual framework of experiential learning. Because no specific research questions regarding experiential learning were included in the interview protocol, the researcher had to extract evidence of learning by experience from the principal interviews using the CIT methodology. Each of the principals openly delineated the lessons learned from their first-year administrative experience. Perhaps much of their learning concerned topics covered within a past course or advice offered by a mentor or colleague, but it appears that as do children, they had to learn their lessons on their own.

Two principals discovered the significance of constant and frequent communication. Principal A stated, “I still need to improve communication and I’ve learned that over and over again this year. I also know and learned the importance of communication with the district office, making sure that they are abreast of all situations.” Principal A also learned the value of listening, building relationships, and establishing trust before making changes: “Coming in as the new leader I tried to make all people happy . . . but they were uncertain of my support of them. As much as I tried to do it, I’m not sure they were ever convinced.” This principal vowed to keep social and political issues away from the schoolhouse and maintain distance from special interest groups:
It was just so unfortunate that we had to go there, and I perceive the outcome as we have to keep social issues out of our schools, and it's okay to expose kids about global issues, but to get them politically involved is just wrong, just wrong.

Lastly, this principal realized the importance of being accessible and knowing effective negotiation strategies for dealing with the parent leadership: "And I learned that my facilitative skills are really going to have to kick into place, when I am with these groups. I'm learning about myself when to step in and when to pull back."

Two principals also discovered the power of being firm in their values and beliefs and to avoid assuming others' problems. Principal C mentioned, "I try to show mutual respect with all of the staff members and I don't want to get caught in the middle of personal issues." Principal A noted, "I think I should've gotten less involved to tell you the truth, but I was feeling pressured."

Two principals discovered the need to stay focused on the primary mission of educating children. Principal A shared this reflection:

I also came from my previous experience where there was monthly academic recognition in place. There was controversy because the staff complained about it every month, and they always wanted to eliminate it because it was a lot more work for them. And I know that my principal would never give in, and said too bad, that it really is best for kids.

Principal C revealed, "I think I learned that I do like a challenge in every aspect, even in the daily business. I like to be challenged and busy and focused on the right things."
Two principals learned that “time heals all wounds” and that people are resilient. Principal B expressed, “It was losing that staff member, but realizing that there were things that were even better down the road that I had no idea.” Principal D remarked, “There have been a lot of problems I’ve dealt with this year as a first-year principal, and I just learned that the times get better if you surround yourself with the right people. It makes all the difference in the world.”

Two principals also ascertained that taking time to learn from other key staff members and even students was quite indispensable. Principal B commented, “How to respond, how to react, so things I learned along the way were very valuable especially in dealing with people.” Principal B explained, “[The student] taught me, because she is very honest and open, new things about the Internet and some of the things that children are faced with.”

In addition, three principals learned about critical technical information that was essential in guiding others properly. Principal B acknowledged, “I have learned a great deal regarding the hiring process, certification, out-of-field status because of it.” Principal C shared, “I have learned through experience, which is a good way of learning the process of progressive discipline; familiarizing myself with the NEAT process and contract language.” Principal D openly disclosed, “I learned the importance of making sure that you follow state and federal law with regards to special education programs.”

Principal B articulated, “Challenges make you stronger,” and understood the significance of managing time and being there for staff and students. Two principals gained a deeper understanding of the weight of “being in charge.” Principal D revealed,
"What I’ve learned in the past year is that the principal is the face of the school."

Principal B candidly observed,

It’s the relationship, it’s the people piece. My staff and I have talked. I have a group of them to give me feedback in writing. They think sometimes that I’m concerned with saying no, and I just want everybody to be happy and everything to go well. I’m extremely optimistic and always looking at the positive and the bright side. I don’t want to upset anyone, and maybe that’s why it stood out for me. It was a part of that people, that relationship piece, where I was in conflict with my responsibilities as an administrator.

The candor of the novice principals’ remarks about their own experiential learning enhanced the transparency of qualitative data in this study. Principal C reinforced the belief that hiring and retaining the best teaching staff positively impacts student achievement and the collaborative work culture of the school: “I wanted to win the candidate that would be best so that my kids would have maximum opportunity for success.” This principal also recognized the impact of being a continuous learner and modeling this behavior for staff: “It reminds me to continue my learning and not to get in a complacent type of zone. I think there is always something you can learn and do expect the unexpected sometimes. Be prepared to deal with it.”

This principal realized that being more proactive in providing training up front would likely prevent serious errors that might impact children: “We’re just focusing on how are we more proactive to this so that it doesn’t happen in the future.” Lastly, this principal acknowledged that seeking help from district personnel or feeling comfortable
in addressing concerns should become regular practice without fear of reprimand or earning a poor reputation at the district office:

[The Executive Director] always lends support even if there is a lesson to be learned from a situation. . . . Something I would do differently is finding an avenue of how to share or express concern. I guess as you get higher in the organization you realize your relationship with people—they are approachable.

Two principals discovered the power of holding difficult conversations. Principal D reflected, “I found out it was amazing how much you have to learn as you go, and I learned that you treat people with respect with a face-to-face meeting.” Principal C reiterated the value of confronting tough issues:

This stood out for me because it was a learning experience. I think for me to learn the process of having a difficult conversation and addressing something that should not be happening in the workplace, but doing so appropriately rather than just turning a blind’s eye to that.

In providing the final examples of experiential learning, Principal D mentioned more than once that knowing what to do and applying this learning in a real-world context are very different skills. “Figuring out how to do and actually doing it are two different things. . . . I’ve had all the nuts and bolts, but taking the time to actually apply it is what I need to do differently next time.” This principal understood the value of building capacity within the school by delegating and developing the administrative skills of others. This comment reinforced this mindset:
Fix it in a timely format and also, to be honest with you, train one of my APs to help out and learn from this experience rather than it be just on my shoulders . . . so for me it was a learning experience, and I’d made sure I brought a couple of people along to learn with me.

This principal continually referenced prior administrative experiences as being most beneficial in this new role:

I would say my prior experience as a dean of students, an assistant principal, and just learning how to think through problems. I was lucky enough to have prior principals give me tasks to do or I was able to watch them handle some of the similar situations I’ve gone over and just watching people in action. Watching how different leaders handle different problems and the same problems differently, which isn’t necessarily a bad thing. Just watching people do what they do and do it effectively, I have been able to take that and put that in the back of my head, and as I am doing things, it allows me to have that frame of reference.

The challenges and complexities have been well documented within the findings and are valuable for informing future leadership development practices. The novice principals detailed their insights, dilemmas, and insecurities within the context of each diverse critical incident. These provoking experiences underscored the importance of providing new leaders with ongoing district support, mentoring, and established collegial networks of strong relationships. These principals confronted manifold situations that all involved the complexities of dealing with people, including students, parents, other colleagues, and the community. The findings revealed the need for greater emphasis on
topics including socialization stages, hindering and enabling behaviors, the emotional aspects of leading, and self-efficacy within professional development preparation experiences.
CHAPTER V

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary of Study

This retrospective qualitative study closely examined the vast complexities and challenges faced by four first-year novice principals serving in a southeastern suburban school district at the conclusion of their first year. As the principals reflected on self-selected critical incidents that had occurred during that period, the researcher captured their perceptions regarding their professional development preparatory experiences, which included their participation in the induction and PNP programs; the learning that occurred during their time as assistant principals; and the district support structures that had impacted their decisions or had provided support as they addressed these critical incidents. The researcher also extracted concrete examples of experiential learning as they related to the novice principals’ prior field-based learning experiences as well as those that conveyed their actual learning on the job.

Chapter 1 presented specific background information related to the problem under investigation as well as the historical framework of the overall school district’s leadership development program. Chapter 1 also presented the problem statement, purpose of the study, theoretical framework, research questions, significance of the study, limitations and delimitations, and definitions of terms. Chapter 2 provided a review of the related literature, including the theoretical research on experiential learning, current issues related to principals and assistant principals, principal preparation, topics pertaining to
beginning principals, research-based professional development models and training components for principals, the unique comprehensive features of the school district's leadership development programs for aspiring leaders and assistant principals, and support structures for new leaders.

Chapter 3 focused on the CIT methodology used in this retrospective qualitative study by providing the historical background of the CIT and the proposed research design and key components. This chapter focused on the role of the researcher, selection of subjects, instrumentation validity and reliability, the data collection and analysis processes, and additional research that emanated from the findings. Chapter 4 offered a brief synopsis of the overall research design and a short abstract of each of the 21 critical incidents that the four novice principals selected to reflect on during the individual interview sessions and one focus group session before documenting the qualitative findings from the 21 critical incidents. The chapter also thoroughly analyzed the emerging 12 themes that emanated across the critical incidents in relation to the two research questions, applying the principal s’ perceptions from multiple perspectives. This chapter provides a brief summary of the study; a review of the logistical procedures; a thorough account of the conclusions that resulted from the research findings; and the implications and recommendations from the study for future policy, practice, and research.

Since the initiation of this study, the topics of high-quality leadership development and preparation for aspiring and new school leaders has remained at the forefront of current leadership conversation and debate on the national school reform
agenda (Gray & Bishop, 2009). Researchers continue to grapple with identifying the key topics, effective pedagogy, and role-embedded learning for inclusion in both university pre-service leadership programs and school district support initiatives that will increase the likelihood for success for school leaders in diverse and highly complex school contexts. Likewise, experts in the educational arena strive to identify the specific leadership behaviors that contribute to the success of novice principals, increase the likelihood of retention, and positively impact school cultures and student achievement.

Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) purported,

Successful leadership can play a highly significant and frequently underestimated role in improving student learning. Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school and leadership effects are usually largest where and when they are needed most. (p. 7)

As previously noted, this study was designed to add knowledge and perspicuity to the educational leadership field by examining the intricacies of novice principals through the reflective perceptions of four principals regarding a sampling of self-selected critical incidents. The study was guided by the following two research questions:

1. What deeper insights and understandings of the complexities and challenges regarding the first-year experiences of four novice principals can be learned through an in-depth study of the principals using CIT methodology?
2. To what extent did these novice principals draw from and apply prior learning experiences that they had acquired as assistant principals and draw support from district support structures and programs for new principals?

Conclusions

The majority of the findings pertained to the first research question, which focused on gaining greater understanding of and insight into the first-year experiences of novice principals. As the novice principals in this study described the selected critical incidents, their actions in handling the incidents, the proactive strategies that they suggested for the future, their concerns, and their emotional responses, they provided meaningful insight into their perceptions of competence and self-efficacy.

The data collected from these four principals strongly support the current research that portrays principals as the key actors in influencing instructional change and responding to a multitude of public demands while continuously protecting and advocating for children’s academic, social, and emotional needs (Crow, 2006; Normore, 20004; Peterson, 2001; Portin et al., 2003; Waters & Grubb, 2004; Villani, 2006). The present consensus in the educational arena also signals that the roles and responsibilities of the principal have changed substantially since the 1990s (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Fry et al., 2005; Levine, 2005). Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) asserted,

With the role of the school principal being increasingly defined in terms of academic achievement and success as measured by high-stakes assessment
results, a principal's sense of efficacy plays a critical role in meeting the expectations and demands of the position. (p. 582)

Embedded within the findings are significant barriers that these four novice principals discovered throughout their first year. They became more aware of the heavy workload and exorbitant expectations, as well as the lack of time to engage in work or focus on what matters most in schools. They recognized the inequities in the school system and the contractual agreements that tightly dictated policy, practices, and procedures. In addition, they encountered the hazards of inheriting problems or issues from former administrators. Finally, they had to balance their ability to distance themselves from becoming too involved in issues yet ultimately being held responsible for everything remotely associated with their schools.

The diversity and severity of the 21 critical incidents recorded in this study underscore the mammoth nature of the principalship, the enormity of the skills required, the importance of maturity, and the value of having extensive educational experiences prior to assuming a principalship. Each incident as described by the principals seemed significant unto itself, but after considering the scope and gravity of the collective reported incidents, many questions surfaced relative to the reasonableness of the principal position.

The findings endorse the notion that leadership is both art and skill (Hess, 2003). Principals must juggle the prosaic skills of managing routine processes as well as the vigorous task of leading staff through cultural, organizational, and technological change. The incidents reported reinforce the troubling myth of the “superprincipal”—“that a
single man or woman is able to accomplish with ease what many would regard as an untenable set of demands” (Adams & Copeland, 2005, p. 13)—especially in the present challenging, high-stakes environment during a national economic crisis.

States and school districts increasingly count on principals to ensure that all children learn and that all teachers receive quality professional development. Stakeholders expect principals to share decision-making, connect with business partners, and engender a school vision that includes broad community involvement. Principals construct budgets; engineer staff and student schedules; and hire, supervise, and evaluate hundreds of employees each year who belong to collective bargaining units, each with its own set of copious rules. Principals handle facility issues from broken light bulbs to building renovations as they maneuver through a steady flow of district and state policy mandates, often implemented without their input. They supervise bus lines, cafeterias, and afterschool athletics and handle complaints and crises that range from minor to life threatening (Copeland, 2001).

The findings of this study confirmed the current research regarding the need for strong preparatory experiences and the importance of robust support for new principals, such as mentoring and collegial networking. However, it also yielded some surprising evidence regarding priorities for training that seem to refute the current thinking of reformers in the field regarding the needs of beginning principals. Farkas et al. (2001) commented, “There appears to be a mismatch between the visions of the new profession being offered by reformers and the chief problems these leaders face daily” (p. 33). Petzko (2008) confirmed these results in her study of the perceptions of new principals in
terms of the knowledge and skills that they determined were essential for their initial success.

In recent publications, researchers have claimed that instructional leadership should be the core of all training for school leaders. Fry et al. (2007) stated, "Every action in these [university preparation] programs should be driven by one essential question: what do principals need to know and be able to do to improve teaching and learning in their schools?" (p. v). The collective voice of the novice principals in this study counter this claim, as none of the critical incidents in this study dealt with instructional leadership roles or responsibilities. All 21 critical incidents involved people and the situations that occurred because of employee-related challenges. Human resource management functions assumed a predominant role in the critical incidents presented in this study. The novice principals faced complex circumstances that all revolved around recruitment, retention, and training of staff; performance issues; and personnel and management practices related to school board polices, contractual obligations, federal and state regulations, and ethical behavior. All four of the novice principals dealt with incidents that involved the various constituencies that typify the world of schools, including teachers, non-instructional staff, parents, district personnel, and students. Usher and Pajares (2008) referenced Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which emphasizes that principals' self-efficacy beliefs help determine the choices that they make, the effort that they put forth, the persistence and perseverance that they display in the face of difficulties, and the degree of anxiety and serenity that they experience as they engage in the myriad of tasks and responsibilities associated with their role as principals.
Eighty-six percent of the incidents reported in this study were coded as negative. This finding strongly suggests that new school principals must be prepared to deal with a plethora of issues that must be adeptly handled to prevent detrimental effects on their school populations. The principal’s self-selection of critical incidents in this study seemed to underscore a wide array of problematic issues that involved moral and ethical dilemmas, implicated law enforcement, had legal or political repercussions, included safety and security issues, and evoked insecurities about new principal inexperience or competence. According to Villani (2006), “For new principals, heightened visibility can be disconcerting as everyone seems to be watching their every move” (p. 12). Watkins (2003) advised new leaders to match their strategies carefully to each situation and suggested that a clear diagnosis of the problems or issues “is an essential prerequisite for developing a strong plan for action” (p. 13). Each new leader’s ability to secure an early win established personal credibility and created momentum. Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, and Gundlach (2003) argued that school leaders need to be master diagnosticians: “How they diagnose, interpret, dissect what are necessarily complex systems is, in some ways, a key measure of their success as a principal” (p. 13).

Teachers and Staff

All 21 critical incidents highlighted in this retrospective study involved people who represented constituencies both inside and outside the school organization. Of the 21 critical incidents discussed in this study, 14 concerned teachers and 10 concerned non-instructional staff. As previously noted, these incidents reflected examples of teachers and staff who exercised poor judgment, made unreasonable demands on the principal’s
time, resisted change, made personal decisions with little regard to the impact on the students or other colleagues, displayed unprofessional and unethical behavior, or allowed themselves to be immersed in interpersonal disputes that impacted the entire school culture. Other incidents provided real-world cases in which teachers and staff ignored school board policies and/or federal and state mandates and jeopardized their careers by committing unlawful acts. Often, these incidents arose unexpectedly, so the principals had little or no advanced notice to anticipate these occurrences. The aftermath of some of these situations has had lasting ramifications for the novice principals.

These incidents led the four novice principals to draw from past leadership lessons to effectively handle complex situations. They understood more fully the importance of building trusting, respectful relationships or relied on strong past associations, especially when having to implement changes. The principals who were able to convey a sense of pride, loyalty, and ownership with their teachers and staff could more easily engender support and confidence. They acknowledged the need to listen to and communicate frequently with clear expectations. These incidents underscored the need for patience, diplomacy, accessibility, flexibility, problem-solving talents, and a willingness to compromise. The principals also quickly recognized that using a personalized approach in confronting teachers or staff individually to convey a difficult message or coach them for improvement was a far more successful approach than a more generalized approach. As the novice principals interacted with teachers and staff, they encountered some situations that were beyond their locus of control. Their inability to directly or indirectly rectify the situations or intervene on behalf of their constituents
became a source of great concern and anxiety, and often left them with unresolved dilemmas and unanswered questions.

As previously noted, three of the four principals selected critical incidents that focused on the importance of recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers. Schmoker (2006) reinforced the magnitude of choosing high-quality teachers: “The single greatest determinant of learning is not socioeconomic factors or funding levels. It is instruction” (p. 7). Mortimore and Sammons (1987, as cited in Schmoker, 2006) “found that teaching had six to 10 times as much impact on achievement as all other factors combined” (p. 7), which further supported the need to attract the best teachers.

Parents/Community

In dealing with parental issues, these principals learned valuable lessons in handling extremely complicated situations that required much expertise, finesse, and ethical and legal competence. They quickly appreciated that schools do not operate in isolation. The same interpersonal and communication skills that were helpful in dealing with staff issues were equally as effective with parents and the community. They utilized facilitation skills, often to intervene in nasty disputes or politically charged events. These principals had to craft and communicate difficult messages to parents about inappropriate or potentially dangerous student behaviors. They also had to convey the urgency for support and engagement, and at times sensitively advocate for student’s safety. The principals had to discretely address concerns and changes with confidentiality, carefully managing these situations to avoid escalation and media attention.
All the principals in this study were acutely aware of the impact of their behaviors on the image and stability of the schools in the community. They also understood with maturity and great insight the implications for every word or action, which translated their own values, belief, and vision for the school. Their inherent need to please and desire for positive outcomes resonated throughout their reflections. Their inexperience coupled with this awareness often led to insecurity and an initial lack of self-efficacy.

Portin et al. (2003) elaborated by explaining that while diagnosis and analysis of complex problems may occur in the middle of a serious crisis, the critical choices effective school leaders make at these moments are not impromptu:

Even amidst crisis, great principals consider the long-term interests of the school, continuously touching on intangibles like vision, mission, and motivation as they proceed to a decision. Ultimately, they are grounded in the broader context of their school’s goals and commitments. (p. 13)

For two of the four novice principals, parents created dilemmas with no easy answers. Villani (2006) commented that “principals often find there isn’t a way to honor the wishes, or perhaps demands of some without alienating others” (p. 8). Watkins (2003) asserted that new leaders, regardless of level, are the most vulnerable during the first several months because they lack detailed knowledge of the challenges that await them as well as what is needed to meet them. They also lack the ability to diagnose and align the strategies, structure, systems, and skills of the new organization.
District Staff/Support

The district office was involved in 14 or 67% of the critical incidences reported in this study. This percentage reveals the acute nature of the incidents that are occurring in schools today. Although varying degrees of district support were available to mitigate circumstances that had far-reaching political, social, and legal implications, these principals began to realize more fully the limitations of their control and influence. They were often forced to rely on the judgments and decisions of others, and at times disagreed with the outcomes or lack of resolution. The principals also gained new awareness of the administrative bureaucracy that still dominates the educational arena. Moreover, they were able to understand the value of knowing key people in the school district who had influence or expertise in specific areas, such as special education, communications, the custody and safety of children, mediation, and personnel matters. In all their communications with district office or community resource people, the principal’s vital role and responsibilities were magnified to ensure accuracy, confidentiality, timeliness, and thorough documentation.

Emotional Responses

The enveloping tenor of the novice principals’ emotional responses permeated the critical incident discussions. The 36 emotional responses extracted from the principal interviews signaled professional insecurities as well as enabling and hindering emotions that impacted self-confidence and self-efficacy. The findings endorse the current research that indicates that few school leaders are adequately prepared for the emotional aspect of serving in a leadership role and "scholarship on organizations and leadership has for
generations largely ignored this issue” (Ginsberg, 2008, p. 293). The emotional responses also portrayed another dimension related to the challenging aspects of being a new principal. All of the principals, at least once during their interviews, expressed self-doubt, discomfort, an overwhelming sense of responsibility, self-blame, uncertainty, disappointment, and fear. They also coped with their constant desire to please and respond to situations personally, impatiently, angrily, or insensitively. The prevalence of these emotions supports the need for principal preparatory experiences to include a greater emphasis on socialization stages and the development of self-efficacy.

A mixture of enabling and hindering emotions resonated in the principals’ reflections. Passion, optimism, tolerance, and sensitivity to the welfare of students and staff were offset with resentment, frustration, judgment, and aloofness with inefficient educational systems or cumbersome bureaucracies. The unmistakable message from this finding signals the necessity of the inclusion of coping mechanisms within preparatory leadership programs. Ginsberg (2008) reported that researchers “agree that having some degree of emotional intelligence, emotional competence, or some sort of emotional expertise can positively affect one’s performance” (p. 293). Aspiring leaders and assistant principals would greatly benefit from simulations that allow them to practice making difficult decisions and then reflecting on the residual emotional impact as leaders.

Themes

The 11 themes that emerged in this retrospective study are consistent with the research on beginning principals (Alvy & Robbins, 2004; Daresh, 2001; Parkay & Hall, 1992; Petzko, 2008; Villani, 2006). Many of the themes accentuate the recurrent topics
well documented in the literature and align well with the leadership standards that guide professional development priorities in preparatory programs (Murphy, Elliott, Foldring, & Porter, 2006; Waters & Grubb, 2004). Looking through the lens of each theme, the principals exhibited enabling and hindering behaviors, proactive strategies, and concerns. In addition, each principal's perceived sense of self-efficacy and level of socialization appeared to impact his or her emotional responses, adaptability, persistence, and ability to make sound decisions in the context of the critical incidents. Several themes underscore deficiencies and serve to inform future practice.

**Change**

Change, which emerged as one of the major themes, is well documented in the literature as a priority for learning in preparation for school leader positions. The novice principal interviews and focus group discussion echoed an implicit need for new principals to possess a deep comprehension of the implications of change within their schools. All principals in this study encountered incidents that asked people to give up habits of behavior, caused people to experience the loss of colleagues whom they admired, or challenged how they define themselves. Although change is a topic covered extensively throughout the district preparatory programs, the use of the CIT provided the novice principals an opportunity to reflect on their chosen incidents and explore previous experiences, feelings, thoughts, and attitudes about change. They were then able to gauge these new meanings or understandings of the situations by transforming knowledge into new real-world contexts (Parker et al., 1995). Villani (2006) asserted,
When new principals are appointed, members of the school community may experience a variety of emotions, including curiosity, relief, apprehension, frustration and/or excitement. Students may worry about changes in discipline practices; teachers may fear a loss of autonomy; parents may be concerned about accessibility to the principal. (p. 4)

The temptation for new principals to implement changes surfaced repeatedly as the principals retold the stories about their critical incidents. One principal thought that the changes she made were incidental, and was surprised by the staff reactions. The three other principals disclosed examples of changes that occurred because of outside influences, to which they responded with foresight, planning, and sensitivity. Four of the incidents pertained to changes or the loss of colleagues. The novice principals assimilated the need to allow staff time to grieve as well as develop new loyalties.

Heifetz and Linsky (2002) suggested that “refashioning loyalties is some of the toughest work in life” (p. 28). The novice principals learned patience, as change takes time. People need time to understand the urgency for change and “reconcile old ways with new . . . because they prefer to do things habitually and the deepest habits of people are embodied in the structure and culture of the organization where they live out their lives” (Schlechty, 2001, p. 163). The novice principals also learned to facilitate change in a way that is sensitive to the individuals who affected by the changes (Robbins & Alvy, 2004). Bolman and Deal (2003) summarized the issues relative to change and its impact on new school leaders:
Organizational change . . . affects the individual's ability to feel effective, valued, and in control. Without support, training, and a chance to participate in the process, people become a powerful anchor, making forward motion almost impossible. Change disrupts existing patterns of roles and relationships, producing confusion and uncertainty. Change creates conflict between winners and losers—those who benefit from the new direction and those who do not. Finally, change creates loss of meaning for recipients rather than owners of the change. (p. 393)

The literature is rich with documentation of principals who move up within the same school experiencing changes in relationships with colleagues and friendships as well as a sense of loneliness (Brock & Grady, 2004; Robbins & Alvy, 2004; Villani, 2006), yet none of the principals in this study made reference to these personal changes. Instead, the principals referenced networks of collegial support, strong professional relationships, and district assistance when they needed guidance or direction.

External and internal phenomena created an urgency for the novice principals to grapple with technical changes and adaptive changes simultaneously. Eight or 57% of the incidents in this category were categorized as adaptive change occurrences and 6 or 43% were considered as technical change occurrences. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) argued, "The deeper the change and the greater amount of learning required, the more resistance there will be and, thus, the greater the danger to those that lead" (p. 14).

Bolman and Deal (2004) affirmed these responses when they explained that "changes in routine practice and procedures undermine existing knowledge and skills,
and they undercut people's ability to perform with confidence and success” (p. 373).

Robbins and Alvy (2004) asserted that trust and respect are critical considerations for successful change. One of the principals acknowledged several times that she had failed to take the time to build relationships and establish trust prior to making changes. She was able to learn from previous mistakes, detailing the value of gaining input and compromise with the last critical incident that she described.

Fullan (2001) Robbins and Alvy (2004) found that sustaining successful change requires anywhere from 3 to 5 years before realizing the full impact, so novice principals must be reminded that patience, flexibility, and insight are key leadership characteristics in leading the predictable pattern associated with change in organizations.

Communication

The significance of communication is pervasive in the administrative literature (Alvy & Robbins, 1998; Brock & Grady, 2004; Evans, 2007; Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2007; Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Evans (2007) emphasized that “change begins not just with a goal, but with a leader who communicates it, enlisting the organization’s members in the pursuit of a compelling agenda” (p. 151). Although communication was isolated as one of the themes, the impact of communication was intertwined within all of the critical incident reflections. All of the novice principals in this study acknowledged the essential need for consistent, clear, and frequent communication with all the constituents in their schools. They provided numerous examples in which a lack of communication led to misunderstandings, insufficient buy-in, distrust, and rumors, and threatened interpersonal relationships as well as their
credibility as leaders. For the one principal who was new to her school, spending time with staff on a personal level was even more critical. These principals cited other instances where they were able to craft well-designed personal messages that enhanced their relationships; validated others’ opinions; and created a positive, inviting image for the school.

All of the principals emphasized the necessity for professionalism, listening, confidentiality, and honesty in their dealings with people. Every one of the novice principals had to conduct difficult conversations with staff, students, and parents. They were well aware of the implications of their communication for the media and the community at large. Although only one principal noted language barriers, the others referenced the uniqueness of their school populations and conveyed great sensitivity to these differences.

**Interpersonal Orientation/Relationships**

Kelley and Peterson (2006) reported that “more than eighty percent of the [principal’s] day is spent in verbal interaction, much of it face to face” (p. 357). The four interviews with the novice principals underscored the humanistic side of being a school leader, as education is primarily a people-focused business. All the principals repeatedly stated the importance of building rapport and developing meaningful relationships with their populace. They also recognized the necessary investment of spending time getting to know staff, students, parents, and the community. They mentioned treating people with respect, valuing talents and skills for support, gaining input prior to making decisions, and solving problems in a timely manner to elicit trust. Three of the principals exhibited a
deep awareness of past practices and appreciated the efforts of others in authentic ways. These three principals seemed to comprehend the value of developing other leaders within the school as well as their assistant principals. At least one of the principals mentioned the significance of modeling expectations, used encouragement and caring approaches in working with people, drew from the strength of past relationships, and celebrated those individuals that left the school for professional growth opportunities.

Only one of the interviewees had initially discounted the power of interpersonal relationships in a new role and had consequently experienced resistance from both staff and parents. She readily and accurately labeled the problem and worked to change her behavior as subsequent incidents occurred throughout the first year. Watkins (2003) contended that “too often, the new leader behaves more like a virus. Early actions alienate potential supporters, undermine credibility, and stimulate defensive reactions” (p. 5). Principals must be schooled in learning how to balance the “delicate interpersonal aspects of difficult situations” (Villani, 2006, p. 12), such as addressing the intricate details required for special education students.

The significance of emotional intelligence and affective qualities in assisting the transition of these novice principals is broadly accepted in the leadership research (Alvy & Robbins, 1998; Bolman & Deal, 2003; Brock & Grady, 2004; Fullan, 2001; McEwan, 2004; Robbins & Alvy, 2004; Sergiovanni, 2006; Villani, 2006). Goleman (1995) defined emotional intelligence as “the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships” (p. 241). Goleman suggested that the highest performing leaders are those
able to combine intellectual brilliance with emotional intelligence. Similarly, Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) claimed that emotionally intelligent leaders and emotionally intelligent organizations are essential in complex times.

The principals’ reflections revealed a common emotional strand that incorporated all four domains of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Stone, James, Parker, and Wood (2005) suggested that professional development programs should concentrate on promoting emotional intelligence abilities. These aptitudes seem especially relevant for new leaders, considering the critical incident findings. These abilities include emotional self-awareness (the ability to recognize and understand one’s feelings and emotions); self-actualization (the ability to tap potential capacities and skills in order to improve oneself); empathy (the ability to be attentive to, understand, and appreciate the feelings of others); interpersonal relationships (the ability to establish and maintain mutually satisfying relationships); flexibility (the ability to adjust one’s emotions, thoughts, and behavior to changing situations and conditions); problem solving (the ability to identify and define problems as well as generate potentially effective solutions); and impulse control (the ability to resist or delay emotional behaviors).

School Culture and Climate

Much has been written over the past 2 decades on school culture. However, with the advent of the NCLB and increased accountability and testing pressures, school culture and climate has taken a back seat. Habegger (2008) reported that in order to get past the daily survival mode, principals must create a positive school culture that promotes
learning and engagement for students and adults because “school culture is the heart of improvement and growth” (Habegger, 2008, p. 42). The findings from the novice principal interviews support the current literature on the importance of establishing an enriched school culture from the onset (Barth, 2006; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Robbins & Alvy, 2004).

Barth (2006) asserted that “a school’s culture or the way we do things around here has far more influence on life and learning in the schoolhouse than the state department of education, the superintendent, the school board, or even the principal can ever have” (p. 159). Schools, like other institutions, have cultures that influence their operations, so it is imperative that new principals quickly learn the school history, traditions, and implied practices that typify the work culture. Typically, when new principals begin their tenure, some people are dissatisfied with a school policy or practice, and have therefore attempted to change it. Unknowingly, newcomers may lunge into a landmine by responding in a way that alienates others while trying to be responsive or demonstrate competence. They may inadvertently do something wrong or undo something that many people did not want changed (Villani, 2006). Unfortunately, the stakes are high because of the new leader’s vulnerability and lack of established relationships and detailed understanding of the new role. When new principals fail to build momentum during the transition, they face an uphill battle from that point forward (Watkins, 2003). As a part of the socialization process, Normore (2004) suggested that rituals include the early bombardment of responsibilities, rites incorporating the testing that teachers inherently do to new principals, and ceremonies involving the introduction to teachers and staff.
Robbins and Alvy (2004) described *positive cultures* as those having "an underlying set of norms and values, history and stories, hopes and dreams that are productive, encouraging and optimistic" (p. 25). Deal and Patterson (1999) also eloquently articulated the obscure concept of *culture*:

This invisible, taken-for-granted flow of beliefs and assumptions gives meaning to what people say and do, [by] shap[ing] how they interpret hundreds of daily transactions. The deeper structure of life in organizations is reflected and transmitted through symbolic language and expressive action. Culture consists of stable, underlying social meanings that shape beliefs and behavior over time. (p. 3)

Many of the critical incidents incorporated multiple aspects of a positive school culture or climate. Early in their tenure, all the novice principals grasped the magnitude of influence that culture plays in fostering a rich, inviting school atmosphere; a value set that promotes recognition of accomplishments; an embedded belief that all students are capable of learning; a positive connection to parents and the community; and constant attention on what matters most and is valued by the constituents (Deal & Peterson, 1999). The critical role of relationships with stakeholders inside and outside the school as mentioned within this theme are inextricably tied to the culture or climate of the school but endemic to the entire school or team framework.

All four principals identified key positive elements, such as teamwork, pride, loyalty, ownership, mutual respect, collaboration, collegiality, trust, and networks of support and sharing. They also singled out factors that contributed to negative cultures or
climates, such as low staff morale, unethical behavior, and a violated workplace. The principals' comments detailed their insights about the formidable effect of attitudes, motivation, service, and differences in values, beliefs, and dispositions on the learning environment and achieving their goals. The individual culture or climate of each novice principal's school was unique but the sense of community resonated in all the discussions. Teachers in all the schools were willing to "pitch in to help," and each principal noted concerns for the stability of the school.

Safety/Law Enforcement and Federal/State Regulations/Contractual Issues

In thoroughly reviewing the current literature on principal preparation and professional development over the past decade, the researcher found few references to safety, legal, or contractual issues. Principals in the 21st century are expected to be familiar with due process laws and the implications of student disciplinary decisions, suspensions, and expulsions. Villani (2006) noted that "regardless of their personal beliefs, principals have the legal and moral responsibility to uphold the laws of our country and to protect the rights and feelings of students and their families" (p. 12). They must also be cognizant of the multitude of federal and state laws regarding special education, teacher dismissal laws and timelines, safety procedures and liability, search and seizure laws, free speech parameters, and gender equity and discrimination laws (Alvy & Robbins, 1998). All of the principals in this study were confronted with at least one critical incident that accentuated their lack of knowledge, skills, and experience with issues and increased their vulnerability to making costly mistakes. The implications for
the principals personally and professionally as well as for the school districts that they serve are worthy of serious attention.

The findings clearly indicate that mandatory training in safety, law enforcement, federal and state regulations, school board policies, and contractual issues should be a priority in designing the curriculum of preparatory programs if school districts are serious about setting up their school leaders for success. The areas in which all the principals expressed a need for more training were employee discipline, professional practices, hiring procedures, and employee contracts. Other areas addressed by one or two principals included teacher assistance and firing practices, surplussing, certification issues such as teachers out of field, and special education and IEP compliance.

**Operational/Organizational Stability**

Alvy and Robbins (1998) asserted that management and leadership responsibilities go hand in hand and that is misleading to try to separate them in terms of importance. The current intense focus on instructional leadership, management skills, and time is no longer sufficient to meet the escalating challenges and demands (Elmore, 2002; Kelley & Peterson, 2006; McGowan & Miller, 2001). Principals are accountable for a wide variety of basic tasks, and developing routines that promote organizational stability are an essential part of the socialization process for new school leaders (Greenfield, 1985). They must establish goals and develop plans for implementation; build budgets and hire personnel; lead and monitor the curriculum and instruction at every grade level; select resources and coordinate time use; evaluate staff and formatively assess student
learning; organize school improvement efforts; and develop processes for working with
students, school staff, families, and the community.

The organizational stability theme reaffirmed the finding that all of the critical
incidents that the principals selected to share during their interviews were focused on
management-related issues rather than instructional competence. For these new
principals, organizational stability centered on ensuring that structural procedures and
processes were functioning well within their schools, an initial priority that had to be well
grounded before they could focus on the instructional program. They had to be confident
that the operational aspects of the school were functioning efficiently and effectively, that
students and staff were safe, and that they had recruited and now support the best possible
staff. In a similar way, new teachers must first focus on establishing well-defined
expectations, processes, and procedures to set up classrooms that are properly managed
with strong classroom management in place before any learning can take place. The new
principals in this study invested time in recruitment and retention and tried to be highly
visible and accessible to staff, which allowed them to notice patterns and trends among
their employees. In two of the critical incidents, the principals were able to detect staff
problems before they escalated by observing and carefully attending to the management
functions of running a school.

However, the findings also suggest that the new principals were not spending the
majority of their time overseeing the instructional program, even though they clearly
understood the district expects them to serve primarily as instructional leaders, and that
they would be held accountable for high-quality teaching and learning and end-of-year
test results. The findings also imply that new principals need a different skill set or professional development opportunities during the initial period of the principalship. Oplatka (2004) suggested that “most theories of educational leadership ignore the principal’s career stage and development, which have a great impact upon the principal’s ability to lead and manage the school” (p. 44). Novice principals typically have lower self-efficacy and managerial skills at the beginning stages of their career, so would benefit from training that offers coping strategies for the stress and associated difficulties that accompany the various developmental stages.

*Student Social and Emotional Needs*

Crow (2006) asserted that “students are major participants in the school who create problems, challenges, and opportunities that influence the beginning principal’s learning of knowledge, skills and dispositions” (p. 320). The theme of student social and emotional needs references Abraham Maslow’s (1954) most influential theories about human needs. Bolman and Deal (2003) described Maslow’s theory, which stemmed from the notion that people are motivated by a variety of desires. Maslow grouped these needs into a hierarchy categorized from physiological needs at the bottom; then safety, belongingness, and love; esteem; and self-actualization at the very top of the hierarchy. Maslow’s 1985 research (as cited in Bolman and Deal) explained that physiological well-being and safety must be satisfied first: “Once lower needs are satisfied, individuals are motivated by higher needs of belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization” (p. 117).

All four novice principals disclosed actions that underscored the importance of student social and emotional needs as they discussed their individual critical incidents.
Robbins and Alvy (2004) supported these principals’ actions by referencing Eric Shaps, president of the Developmental Studies Center in Oakland, California: “When a school meets students’ basic psychological needs, students become increasingly committed to the school’s norms, values and goals” (p. 187). The novice principals were quite demonstrative as they retold the distressing stories that illuminated student social and emotional needs. Attempted suicide, depression, self-mutilation, sexual activity, abandonment, unethical treatment, and a lack of safety were some of the horrific issues that have become more commonplace in schools.

With increased pressure for all students to succeed, principals must be attuned to the needs of the whole child if they have hopes of making progress academically (Noddings, 2005). Once again, the national focus on academic achievement often leaves the affective side of learning and issues a secondary priority. The findings from this small sample of principals in a suburban school district serve as a vivid reminder that educators cannot deal with only one aspect of a child’s development. Principals must learn to balance social and emotional needs with student achievement and ensure that their staff has ongoing training so that they can become astute observers of behavioral patterns and home factors that strongly influence student performance and can access the appropriate resources and interventions.

*District Support*

The data from this study revealed that school district support staff was a much-utilized resource for these novice principals. In 13 or 67% of critical incidents the principals conferred with district personnel or elected to access district resources as they
worked through very difficult and stressful situations. All of the novice principals utilized
district support in dealing with the capricious types of situations that frequented their
daily work. Although there were several examples of anger and frustration with the lack
of timeliness or unresolved incidents, in most cases district support staff provided
invaluable guidance to these principals, especially in some of the more high-profile
circumstances in which the media or law enforcement had become involved. When
district-level staff was implicated, the principals recognized the need for accurate and
detailed communication and documentation. The findings show the necessity for school
districts to offer proactive support and training to new principals and dedicate time and
resources to ensure judicious interventions to protect their leaders, as well as the children
and families whom they serve, from potentially long-term ramifications.

Conflict

Conflict was another prominent theme within this retrospective study, surfacing in
17 or 81% of the 21 incidents. As previously mentioned, new leadership inevitably equals
change for those involved in the school and “change invariably creates conflict” (Bolman
& Deal, 2003, p. 376). Change often spawns a highly contested tug-of-war to determine
winners and losers. Some support the changes and others resist. Frequently, conflicts
submerge and smolder beneath the surface, and sometimes the conflicts erupt openly as
outbreaks of unregulated warfare: “As change emerges in schools, camps form;
supporters, opponents, and fence-sitters” (Bolman & Deal, p. 376). Brock and Grady
(2004) insinuated that schools have many individuals with different needs and
expectations that, predictably, are inclined to create conflict.
The novice principals experienced internal and external conflicts. The internal conflicts signified the inner struggles, dilemmas, or role conflicts that each principal addressed in making decisions or evaluating issues. The external conflicts required these principals to learn the balancing act of knowing when and how much to intervene. Some of the conflicts that the principals highlighted were the results of their own actions, such as the inability to compromise, acting without consideration for others' input, or lack of awareness to the cultural elements that dominated the school environment. Other conflicts arose because of disagreements between staff or parents, an area beyond their realm of control.

The lessons learned reiterated the need for new principals to act proactively before issues became problems and to act decisively, realizing that not everyone will be content with the outcomes. They now more fully understood the frequent ethical dilemmas that confront school leaders, the value of utilizing problem-solving or consensus-building strategies in their human interactions, and the discord with district office that often places principals in compromising situations. Lastly, the principals discovered the realities of a formidable leadership role that bestows the ultimate professional responsibility for all that occurs within the schoolhouse despite the tension that occurs due to past practices, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, or their own personal values and beliefs.

Often, new leaders avoid conflict, which is a typical strategic error because if conflict is ignored or allowed to continue, differences multiply and intensify, personalities become confused with the issues, people take sides, and relationships are
damaged. Keane (2007) affirmed that new leaders are often reluctant to confront behavior that does not align with the standards of the organization because they are afraid to jeopardize a relationship or are unsure how to deliver the message. In either situation, the cost of silence for new principals is the endorsement of the behavior because “what [they] permit [they] promote” (Studer, 2008, p. 82).

Bulach, Pickett, and Boothe (1998) claimed that when handled properly, conflict can be very constructive. Although dealing with disagreements can be stressful and time consuming, they can cause people to view things with new perspectives, challenge complacency, and serve as the impetus for change (Brock & Grady, 2004).

**Personal and Professional Socialization/Role Clarification**

The distinction between *professional socialization* and *organizational socialization* provided great clarity in trying to understand more deeply the concepts, ideas, issues, and word selection that principals used during the interview sessions. Bennis (1985) suggested that *socialization* involves an intricate set of human relationships within an organization that includes all the people in it and their relationships to each other and to the outside world. The novice principals acquired professional socialization by gaining knowledge, skills, and behaviors through which the values and norms of the profession were internalized and their professional identity established (Daresh, 2000; Pounder & Young, 1996).

The contextual situations that characterized each of these novice principals’ entry into their new role presented beneficial insights. Their socialization was based on several factors. Their prior experiences as assistant principals or teachers afforded them varying
opportunities to observe veteran principals modeling best practices. Greenfield (1985) concluded that as new principals move through a variety of social situations, they learn the requirements of continuing in those situations and being successful within them. Crow (2006) reinforced that the values and dispositions that beginning principals carry into the job and develop on the job are critical for the way that their role is interpreted by others.

When a novice principal's predecessor leads with distinctive style or personality, the change may be problematic. Gordon and Rosen (1981, as cited in Parkay & Hall, 1992) noted, “It is important whether the former leader is a hero to be lived up to, or a bad act which is easy to follow” (p. 47). Two of the four principals followed admired leaders whereas two immediately followed crisis situations whereby former administrators had been either terminated or promoted. Frequent changes in leadership were also cited by all four administrators, so these repetitive leadership changes were likely quite disruptive and therefore delayed staff acceptance.

Several researchers, as captured in the literature review, have also labeled different developmental stages of socialization that describe in detail the behaviors and skills most frequently observed or utilized by principals as they progress through professional and organizational learning (Crow, 2006; Normore, 2004; Parkay, Currie, & Rhoades, 1992; Peterson, 2001; Smith, 2007). Parkay, Currie, & Rhoades, 1992 also conveyed that novice principals who were at stage one of the socialization process often experience situations that shock them initially because they are still trying to “sort it out.” Personal concerns and professional insecurity are high, so they tend to overreact to
unfamiliar circumstances. The findings suggest a link between the enabling or hindering behaviors and proactive strategies employed in the context of the critical incidents and each principal’s sense of self-efficacy and stage of socialization.

Three of the four principals appeared to be at a higher stage of socialization, which may have been due to their familiarity with the school and relationships with the staff in their prior roles as assistant principal. This finding underscores that insiders (someone appointed from inside the school) bring past experiences, knowledge of the instructional program, insights about the school culture, and past relationships, as opposed to someone who is brought in from the outside. Normore (2004) contended, “Socialization to the administrative position is fundamentally unique” (p. 108). This finding may provide strong justification for school districts deliberately selecting assistant principals as likely successors to principals long before a leadership change occur.

Heifetz and Linsky (2002) reinforced the need for new principals to clarify their role by explaining that the frequency of mistakes underscores how difficult it is for new leaders to externalize the issues and resist the temptation to take on problems by themselves. People expect leaders to take a stand and resolve problems immediately because that is what people in authority are paid to do. One principal failed to maintain a position of neutrality when trying to negotiate a mutual resolution to a PTO dispute whereas another principal refused to take on the personal issues of teachers who were having difficulty working respectfully as a team.
The implications of the findings surrounding this theme should inform future professional development practices. They indicate that a greater awareness of the socialization stages should be applied to the training for new principals and that this training should be differentiated to accommodate for individual differences based on socialization levels. Self-assessments and background experiences as assistant principals should dictate the development of specific skill sets, with sensitivity to the principal’s emotionality associated with the various stages.

Summary of Expanded Roles and Responsibilities of Principals

Many theorists have developed extensive organizational frameworks to outline and categorize the numerous and intricate roles and responsibilities of principals (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005; McEwan, 2004; Murphy et al., 2006; Reeves, 2006; Sergiovani, 2006). Although the configurations and labeling are all distinct, the predominant and prevailing expert opinions of all of these educators places instructional leadership at the top of the list or as the primary focus for professional learning. Researchers are just beginning to realize that a sole emphasis on instructional leadership, such as teaching pedagogy and instructional strategies, is not enough to sustain high student achievement.

An enumerated previously, principals must have expertise in ensuring that all children receive quality teaching and engaging learning experiences that yield positive results. Each year they endure the stress of demonstrating improvement for all subgroups, with the goal that all students perform at high levels on annual standardized tests. They must know how to interpret a variety of data to make well-informed decisions; ensure the
physical and emotional safety and well-being of students and staff; maintain accurate and thorough documentation, considering the increase in litigious actions against schools and districts; and display energy, sensitivity, and responsiveness to the individual needs of staff, students, parents, and business and community partners.

The data from the interviews and focus group session affirm the multiplicity and complexity of the roles and responsibilities of novice principals and provide deeper insight into improving preparation and induction. The results of this study place stronger emphasis on the human side of leadership, specifically the need to establish strong relationships with high levels of trust, integrity, and sensitivity to the people inside and outside the organization as well as respect for past traditions and past practices. New principals must be wise to the value and strengths of individuals and instill collaboration and sharing as a norm for how people work together in a school.

The operational aspects of leadership must be implemented before a new leader can focus on the main business of teaching and learning. New principals must ensure that technical processes, procedures, and operations run efficiently and effectively for the safety of all constituents. Teachers must have well-defined expectations for professional behavior. Principals must consistently study laws, contract language, and policies so that they understand how these regulations frame practices within the school. Likewise, principals must guarantee that staff is properly trained so that they also adhere to laws and policies to protect themselves from unnecessary litigation.
Professional Development for School Leaders

The responses provided valuable insights into the professional development provided to the novice principals during their pre-service as aspiring leaders and assistant principals, including the specifically designed instruction included in the induction and PNP certification programs, the transition support teams, mentoring, the ongoing district leadership development opportunities offered through regular meetings, the summer leadership institute, and out-of-state training sessions. Davis et al. (2005) asserted that leadership development programs seek to inculcate habits of reflection and critical analysis for school principals to promote continuous learning from practice. They noted that the growing consensus on the attributes of effective school principals is increasingly reflected in preparation and licensing requirements that subscribe to a set of common expectations for the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of school leaders.

The results strongly supported the existing program offerings and generated helpful information to strengthen the content for future practice. The current district training has centered primarily on instructional leadership skills and content; however, the findings from this study suggest the need for changes in training priorities for new school leaders. The data suggested that leadership training be differentiated based on socialization levels, prior experiences, and entry-level skills.

The novice principals in this study cited the training that focused on human resource management as the most beneficial. In particular, the training offered at HR University surfaced as the predominant training that these novice principals utilized for decision-making and problem solving for the self-selected critical incidents. They
accessed personnel from Human Resources and their supervisors for guidance and
direction more frequently than other sources. The novice principals acknowledged their
lack of familiarity in areas related to their understanding and knowledge of contracts as
they pertained to staffing processes, surplussing, certification issues, and employee
discipline. The legal areas highlighted during the principal interviews included due
process, the Weingarten hearings, and legal policies and regulations that accompany
special education and child abuse laws and policies. These critical areas increased the
principals’ insecurities and stress and led to sleepless nights worrying about the
ramifications for staff, students, parents, and community, as well as their professional
careers.

The novice principals noted that all currently adopted district support structures
and personnel had bolstered their learning during their first year. The retired mentors
were considered most noteworthy, followed by the principal transition support team
meetings, the Director of Leadership, and support by fellow colleagues. Mentoring helps
novice leaders shape beliefs about change, students’ capacities to learn, relationships with
staff and community members, and ethical leadership practices (Gray & Bishop, 2009).
This finding confirms that of Davis et al. (2005):

Mentoring relationships should serve to reduce the distance between a learner’s
independent problem-solving performance and his/her potential developmental
level achieved through problem solving with guidance from an expert. The
primary role of the mentor is to guide the learner in his or her search for strategies
to resolve dilemmas, to boost self-confidence, and to construct a broad repertoire of leadership skills. (p. 10)

The goal of the district-leadership development programs is to provide relevant learning opportunities for collaborative inquiry, collegial support, and reflective problem solving. Although the programs are valued by new leaders, more can be done to refine the curriculum so that it is better aligned with the challenges and complexities that frequent the work lives of new principals. Novice principals need safe havens in which to engage in conversations, deepen their understanding of their roles and responsibilities, ask questions, brainstorm, debate, share possible solutions to complicated dilemmas, and jointly develop strategies to address the intricate issues they face continually. Developing professional camaraderie helps new leaders recognize their internal struggles are not unique as they learn to rely on each other to collectively pool past experiences from other situations to inform their decisions. Furthermore, by embedding reflection and feedback within the design of these interactions, collaborative learning becomes more transparent and an established norm in the professional leadership culture. The field research remains complex, but signals that novice principals need more than experience, solid preparatory experiences, mentoring, and coaching (Germaine & Quinn, 2005). Knapp et al. (2003) maintained, “Leaders often encounter formidable obstacles and must reach within themselves, while reaching out to professional and wider communities, to attain perspective and emotional strength to persist” (p. 30).
Experiential Learning

The four novice principals in this study encountered first-time incidents for which no amount of prior training, no matter how comprehensive, could have adequately prepared them or allowed them to predict all the unexpected circumstances that occurred in the real-world setting. No handbook, textbook, university course, or preparatory seminar could be inclusive of all the possible scenarios that frequent the principal’s scope of roles and responsibilities. Some things had to be learned in the moment, relying on similar past experiences, intuition, and good judgment.

These experiences and their gargantuan expectations, as illuminated by the novice principals, were in most cases extremely complex, forcing them to expedite their own learning in order to make wise decisions. Mistakes were inevitable, but each principal hoped that the errors were not costly for their careers or their school constituents. Watkins (2003) summarized,

You need to climb the learning curve as fast as you can in your new organization. This means understanding its markets, products, technologies, systems, and structures as well as its culture and politics. Getting acquainted with a new organization can feel like drinking from a fire hose. You have to be systematic and focused about deciding what you need to learn and how you will learn it most efficiently. (p. 12)

Lyons, Schumacher, and Cameron (2008) further clarified, “When principals challenge their current ways of thinking, acting and leading, they are better able to align their leadership behaviors with research-based practice” (p. 7). Gandz (2002) added to the
understanding of "learning by doing": "Learning does not simply happen. Doing without reflecting does not lead to learning. When learning is combined with doing—the concept of action—learning, the loop is effectively closed" (p. 9).

**Overarching Conclusions**

In summarizing the salient findings, four global conclusions that resonated throughout the study influenced the researcher's recommendations for future practices, policy, and research.

**Use of the CIT**

The CIT proved to be a valuable, efficient investigative methodology for focusing on those novice principal behaviors, strategies, concerns, and emotions that either contributed to or detracted from the principals' effectiveness as school leaders during their first-year of tenure. The CIT enhanced the robustness of the findings by generating rich qualitative data and getting at deeper levels of understanding about the social processes within the context of the schools. This research tool engaged the researcher in an intense short-term collaboration with each principal, who reflected on a past episode of practice by describing and then producing thoughtful explanations around it (Angelides, 2001). In addition, the tool allowed the researcher to explore the feelings, thoughts, and reasons behind the principals' behaviors and decisions as well as the most satisfying aspects and dilemmas that persisted.

The CIT process facilitates the development of essential knowledge, skills, and self-awareness grounded in real-world practices through the use of reflection in action (Parker et al., 1995). Based on the feedback from these four principals, the use of the CIT
provided them with a rare opportunity to learn from experience and make sense of past experiences as it simultaneously allowed the researcher to collect substantive data (Flanagan, 1954). The future use of the CIT within the field of leadership offers promising possibilities, in particular greater insight into the complexities and challenges associated with the demanding and exhaustive roles and responsibilities of school leaders, as well as into improving leadership preparation.

**Role of Human Resource Management**

Human resource management assumed a predominant role in all the critical incidents, indicating the need for redesigning the curriculum content within the conceptual framework for preparing new principals. When beginning school leaders transition to a new school environment, organizational change inevitably occurs. The research of Bolman and Deal (2003), Fullan (2002), Heifetz and Linsky (2002), and Marzano et al. (2005) indicated the need for management through the development of strong relationships grounded in mutual respect and trust so that individuals within the school organization feel valued, effective, and empowered. Although Marzano et al.'s research primarily focused on the relationship between leadership and student achievement, many of the 21 leadership responsibilities that emerged in their meta-analysis were management related, and five were identical to themes that emanated from this study (change agent, communication, culture, relationships, and order).

Bolman and Deal (2003) acknowledged that schools are complex, surprising, deceptive, and ambiguous, and therefore formidably difficult to manage and understand. Novice principals must prove their competency with managerial skills during the initial
phase of their careers (Oplatka, 2004). After the initial year, principals tend to shift their attention to instructional issues and innovation (Kremer-Hayon & Fessler, 1992). Based on the findings of this study, managerial skills seem critical to the survival of the school, as well as the survival of the novice principals in their role as school leaders. All of the principals expressed frustration about their inability to spend sufficient time on teaching and learning, which they understood to be their primary responsibilities.

The most successful and progressive organizations adopt a variety of high-involvement strategies for improving human resource management, so school districts must make human resource management skills a high priority in preparatory programs if they are serious about aligning training with the expressed needs of beginning school leaders. Investment in the humanistic aspects of leadership builds commitment and assists in the attainment of each school’s short- and long-term goals.

**Role of Emotions**

The preponderance of emotionality within the novice principals’ reflections underscored the compelling need to address this area with preparatory principal programming. Ginsburg (2008) stated, “Leaders are human and they continually face emotion-laden situations, often agoniz[ing] over decisions and worry[ing] incessantly about the repercussions” (p. 293). Often, new leaders feel the need to hide their emotions for fear that they will be viewed as weak or ineffective. School leaders should not be isolated or ill equipped to deal with the emotional fallout that occurs when making decisions that impact people’s lives or challenge their own personal values. When emotions are left unaddressed, school leaders may encounter devastating health
consequences or may choose to leave the profession prematurely. School districts must take responsibility for providing training and support for their new leaders to ensure a more comprehensive awareness of Goleman’s (1995) emotional intelligence research and research-based coping strategies. Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relation management are foundational skills that favorably position new leaders for success. Emotionally intelligent leaders are essential in complex times (Goleman et al., 2002).

Multiplicity of Factors

This study illuminates the multiplicity of complex factors that impacted the successful transition of these four novice principals. The socialization process and individual school contextual issues surrounding each new principal’s entry provided additional insights into the unique challenges that these novice principals faced during their first year. As the new principals were socialized into the school leadership role, many difficulties arose endemic to the school and its constituents. Each principal’s prior leadership experiences and initial behaviors, such as achieving acceptance, learning the organizational culture, overcoming their own inexperience and insecurities, and developing self-confidence, all influenced their professional and organizational socialization. Crow (2006) explained,

The degree to which the beginning principal’s experiences take place in the same district, same school, and same demographic context versus taking place in different settings provides learning experiences that can constrain or expand,
impoverish, or enrich the experience and ability of the new principal to work in a complex, ambiguous, and diverse environment. (p. 316)

Succession often disrupts lines of authority and communication, disturbs power and decision-making systems, and upsets school organizations (Carlson, 1961). Although each transition is situational, three of the novice principals in this study had been assistant principals in the same schools prior to their appointment as principals. This school district’s decision allowed these principals to initiate their tenure at a higher stage of socialization. Consequently, these three principals demonstrated a more astute awareness of preexisting situational factors. They had already established positive supportive relationships with staff, parents, and the community, which assisted in their handling of the critical incidents. These principals more easily relinquished control by empowering others to solve problems and appeared better able to avoid costly errors. Through these three principal reflections, the researcher developed a more sensitive understanding of the cultural and symbolic elements valued by the school stakeholders.

Parkay and Currie (1992) suggested a “tripod of support” for first-year principals consisting of training, networking, and coaching. Principal-led workshops in which new principals can support each other by discussing the resolution of problems and issues common to particular socialization stages might be helpful. Beginning principals would also benefit from training that increases their awareness of the socialization hierarchy so that they more fully understand the normal progression of ups and downs expected with first-year leaders. Knowing that they share common experiences would likely reduce
feelings of inadequacy and allow them to see challenges as characteristic of certain stages rather than personal flaws.

**Implications for Practice**

1. School districts should provide comprehensive principal preparatory programs that “grow their own” leadership. These homegrown programs are established and operated by local school districts to supplement and enhance the preparation provided by colleges and universities (Morrison, 2005). These programs are often cohort-based academies that incorporate research-based practices such as action research, mentoring, coaching, induction, shadowing, reflective practices, journal writing, portfolios, problem-based learning simulations, case studies, and cohort experiences (Brown-Ferrigno, 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Davis et al., 2005; Farkas et al., 2001; Lyons et al., 2008).

2. Leadership development programs should be configured to foster a cohort experience with a greater involvement of practitioner-led sessions to ensure content is centered on current job realities.

3. Principal preparatory learning experiences should emphasize human resource and personnel management content by refining the curriculum so that aspiring leaders gain greater awareness of and experience with situational and ethical dilemmas. Additionally, these programs should place a higher priority on communication skills to ensure competency with conflict resolution and coaching strategies as well as clarity and conciseness of language (Brown-Ferrigno, 2001; Goldring et al., 2007).
4. Prior to advancement to the principalship, principal preparatory programs should require competency in specific skill sets that encompass legal processes and procedures, such as Weingarten hearings (an investigatory hearing that may lead to disciplinary action), due process, manifestation hearings, and special education compliance (Villani, 2006). School districts should teach the union contract and include training that concentrates on the historical, political, and social influences that are unique to the community and school district.

5. Preparatory leadership programs should include content that addresses the emotional side of leadership to build greater awareness of the developmental and socialization process that new principals undergo (Crow, 2006; Ginsburg, 2008; Normore, 2004; Parkay, Currie, and Rhoades, 1992). In addition, the leadership curriculum should focus on promoting and developing the abilities associated with emotional intelligence (Stone et al., 2005).

6. Leadership development should be differentiated based on the socialization stages of new principals. Training should be based on an assessment of the prior knowledge, skills, and experiences that administrators have acquired prior to assuming the principalship (Crow, 2006; Ginsburg, 2008; Normore, 2004; Parkay, Currie, & Rhoades, 1992).

7. Induction training should incorporate a greater understanding of self-efficacy and how principal beliefs align with career stages, skill development, behaviors, and proactive priorities for their initial attention (Oplatka, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004).
8. Mentors who are assigned to new principals and assistant principals should have continuous training so that they are equipped with the same skill sets and foundational knowledge required of new principals (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Davis et al., 2005; Gray & Bishop, 2009; Gray et al., 2007). Particular attention should be given to mentors who come from out of state and are not familiar with local and state policy and regulations. Consideration should also be given to requiring mentors to participate in the same district induction program that is required for new administrators. In this way, the school districts can be more deliberate in ensuring that mentors are qualified and current on issues, practices, policies, and legal regulations.

9. School districts should seek financial resources through grants and local foundations to establish more year-long internships. Administrative internships, according to the research, still provide one of the best avenues for aspiring leaders to gain on-the-job experiential learning prior to advancement (Baugh, 2003; Fry et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Davis et al., 2005; Gray & Bishop, 2009).

10. School districts should seek creative ways to provide continuous networking and collaborative learning opportunities for new principals to build collective wisdom; to foster strong supportive relationships so that they feel comfortable and safe to celebrate successes and to commiserate about challenges and mistakes with each other; to share their own experiential learning; to pool resources; and to address their social, emotional, and intellectual needs (Davis et al., 2005; Knapp et al., 2003). Online exchanges using technology might provide additional avenues for collaborative problem solving and
reduce the isolation and insecurity that are common issues for new principals. These technological resources might also offer new sources of support to expedite learning.

11. University and school district partnerships should be encouraged to promote curricular alignment and continuity to eliminate gaps or overlaps in content delivery as well as to seek unique ways to utilize both scholarly and practitioner talent and expertise (Davis et al., 2005; Hess, 2003).

12. School districts should integrate leadership development with succession planning, hiring, induction, and evaluation (Gray & Bishop, 2009).

*Implications for Policy*

1. School boards and state lawmakers should consider redefining and restructuring the role and the responsibilities of principals if their true intention is to set these individuals up for success and retain them for more than 5 years. Over the past 2 decades, the principal’s role has expanded to encompass unrealistic and unreasonable expectations. These decision-making bodies need to explore the research and other states and countries that have successfully implemented alternative administrative arrangements. DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) proposed several models, such as having each school employ a services coordinator to relieve the principal of certain managerial responsibilities. School districts might consider hiring coprincipals or a principal team to share responsibilities. Another model utilizes an associate principal to absorb many of the time-consuming managerial responsibilities. These options should be further explored. DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran articulated that the principal’s role should be defined more narrowly: “Rather than insisting that principals become
'superleaders' with expanded responsibilities, perhaps it is more realistic and strategic to do just the opposite” (p. 59). Elmore (2002) contended that “knowing the right thing to do is the central problem of school improvement” (p. 9). In many cases, principals are well trained and know the right things to do but need “assistance to meet the expanded expectations of their role” (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2005).

2. State education boards should require that school district leadership programs be grounded in a set of research-based leadership standards to guide the performance of new leaders before becoming school or district leaders (Gray & Bishop, 2009); promote university and school district collaboration (Bottoms & O’Neil, 2005); and be routinely evaluated to determine their impact on principal transition (Goldring et al., 2007).

3. Local school boards should require that assistant principals have multiple school experiences prior to advancement to a principalship to increase the diversity of prior leadership experiences and mentoring opportunities available at their schools.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. The small number of subjects in this study limited the ability to generalize the results. Therefore, similar research should be conducted using a larger number of subjects.

2. More widespread research with new principals should be conducted to substantiate or refute these findings.

3. The collection of additional data from other district-developed principal preparatory programs would assist in developing a recommended core curriculum,
determine the content and quality of these programs, and provide a deeper understanding of new principals’ perceptions of how well prepared they are for the job demands.

4. This study could be replicated or redesigned to address differences with respect to gender and prior experience.

5. Additional research should be conducted to examine the differences between homegrown principals versus those recruited outside the school district.

6. This research focused solely on the first year of principals. Additional studies could look more broadly at their second and third years to examine differences in the critical incidents selected and determine if areas of focus change with principal experience.

7. This research study took place in a suburban school district. Additional research should be conducted in rural and urban areas to determine if principals in different settings face different types of issues.

8. Although the sample in the study was inclusive of elementary, middle, and high school principals, supplemental studies should be conducted with larger samples at each school level to ascertain distinctions between the types of incidents that occur at the various levels and to inform professional development content and practices for aspiring and new school leaders.

9. Because the literature on principals’ sense of self-efficacy is limited, further studies with novice principals should be conducted to examine the influence of self-efficacy beliefs on novice principals’ ability to handle the challenges that they face in their daily work.
10. Additional research might include studies of emotional intelligence and the personality types of beginning principals and how these factors influence leadership behaviors and effectiveness during their first year of tenure.

11. As a reliable and valid qualitative research tool, the CIT should be used in future studies that assess the impact of professional development practices on school leadership.

Concluding Remarks

Although the four novice principals related positive perceptions of the impact of their preparatory experiences, the intense complexities and challenges that emerged from the descriptive data validated that first-year principals must lead their schools at the same time that they are learning to lead. Successful school leaders must lead bifocally, addressing both learning and management issues (Alvy & Robbins, 2005). All the principals in this retrospective study were able to reconstruct meaning from dissecting critical incidents and thereby gain many invaluable lessons by examining their first year of tenure. They understood that keeping children at the forefront of decisions and actions is paramount to earning the trust and respect of their constituencies. They understood more fully the need for a moral and ethical commitment to promoting student success; supporting teacher growth; fostering quality relationships with teachers, parents, and the local community; and making a positive difference in the life of every child attending their school. As educational leaders, they recognized the importance of being continuous lifelong learners and appreciated the need for ongoing feedback and informed guidance,
aware that their decisions would impact thousands of children over the course of their careers.

The purpose of this study was to identify the deep challenges and complexities that four first-time, first-year principals encountered daily and identify the impact of the professional development preparatory or induction experiences that they reported to be most valuable as they addressed numerous daunting critical incidents. Although the results affirmed the current literature in the education field regarding beginning principals, they also highlighted the need for more prescriptive, differentiated professional learning in the areas of human resource management, legal and contractual issues, federal and state regulations, socialization, self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence. Furthermore, the findings imply that preparatory training for novice school leaders should be better balanced, combining both instructional leadership and human resource management. Most importantly, this study modeled the power of reflection on critical incidents as a demonstrative learning strategy for helping new principals make sense of who they are as leaders and to gain deeper understanding of the perceptions of others in the unique context of their own school environment. The opportunity to reflect on critical incidents allowed them to expand their limited awareness, connect past learning to new experiences, challenge their own practices and assumptions, and gain additional insights for informing their future practice.

The themes that emerged in this study profoundly depict the challenges and complexities that typify the world of these four novice principals. Although the purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize, it should inform future practice for this school
district. It provided authentic examples of the issues that these new principals confronted and served to enlighten the content of future leadership development preparation. The incidents, which offer possible fictitious scenarios for meaningful discussion and problem solving, reinforce the need for leadership standards as the strong foundations for the development of the leadership competencies required for effective principal performance. They also endorse the perpetuation of an experiential theoretical framework. The emotional responses were so pervasive in this study that they demand urgent attention. Preparing prospective school leaders for the developmental emotional aspects of leadership can be reassuring and prompt proactive coping strategies, which in turn promote higher levels of self-efficacy for novice principals during their transitions.

Responsive leadership development activities and conversations must reflect the genuine needs of future leaders. This study offers an inside look at the perceptions of four successful principals who voluntarily and candidly shared their thoughts, feelings, and actions during one of the most vulnerable times in their careers. The lessons learned from their experience enable future work in the field of leadership development and bridge the gap between theory and practice.
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APPENDIX A

School District Leadership Standards
The school district leadership standards reflect a synthesis of the following standards and principles:


5. The school district’s learning initiative.


The standards are presented according to their classification within the three domains of instructional leadership, operational leadership, and global leadership.

Domain #1: Instructional leadership

Standard 1. Instructional leadership.* High-performing leaders promote a positive learning culture, provide an effective instructional program, and apply best practices to student learning, especially in the area of reading and other foundational skills.

Standard 2. Managing the learning environment. High-performing leaders manage the organization, operations, facilities, and resources in ways that maximize the use of
resources in an instructional organization and promote a safe, efficient, legal, and
effective learning environment.

Standard 3. Learning, accountability, and assessment.* High-performing leaders monitor
the success of all students in the learning environment; align the curriculum, instruction,
and assessment processes to promote effective student performance; and use a variety of
benchmarks, learning expectations, and feedback measures to ensure accountability for
all participants engaged in the educational process.

Domain #2: Operational leadership

Standard 4. Communication. High-performing leaders express ideas clearly and correctly
orally, in writing, and in multimedia presentations for different audiences: students,
teachers, colleagues, parents, community members, and others.

Standard 5. Decision-making strategies.* High-performing leaders plan effectively, use
critical- thinking and problem-solving techniques, and collect and analyze data for
continuous school improvement.

Standard 6. Technology.* High-performing leaders plan and implement the integration of
technological and electronic tools in teaching, learning, management, research, and
communication responsibilities.

Standard 7. Human resource development.* High-performing leaders recruit, select,
nurture, and, where appropriate, retain effective personnel, develop mentor and
partnership programs, and design and implement comprehensive professional growth
plans for all staff, paid and volunteer.
Standard 8. Ethical Leadership.* High-performing leaders act with integrity, fairness, and honesty in an ethical manner.

Standard 9. Change. High-performing leaders are reflective and fulfill responsibilities for change agent and situational awareness and the pacing of various change initiatives; they know when to push, when to support, and when to back off and encourage others to push.

Domain #3: Global Leadership

Standard 10. Vision.* High-performing leaders have a personal vision for their school/district and the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to develop, articulate, and implement a shared vision that is supported by the larger organization and the school community.

Standard 11. Community and stakeholder partnerships. High-performing leaders collaborate with families, business, and community members; respond to diverse community interests and needs; work effectively with the larger organization; and mobilize community resources.

Standard 12. Diversity.* High-performing leaders understand, respond to, and influence the personal, political, social, economic, legal, and cultural relationships in the classroom, the school, and the local community.

*Also a Florida Principal Leadership Standard.
APPENDIX B

Critical Incident Analysis Template
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal #</th>
<th>School level:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When and where did it happen (what was the time of day, location, and social context)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What actually happened (who said and did what?).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were you thinking and feeling at the time and just after the incident?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the significant factors?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was the outcome?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Critical Incident Analysis Template (page 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal #</th>
<th>School level:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Why did this incident stand out?

Did you bring your own personal bias or a particular mindset to the event?

Could you have interpreted this event differently from another point of view?

What can you learn from the episode about the context, colleagues, and yourself?

Would you make any changes for future practice?

What professional/leadership development activities or learning content did you apply when you handled this incident?
APPENDIX C

Sample Critical Incident Analysis Template: Principal A
Principal A  Critical Incident # 5  Identifier  Student recognition
Critical Analysis Template theme, professional learning, experiential learning
Interviewer’s comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal # A</th>
<th>School level: Elementary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

When and where did it happen (what was the time of day, location, and social context)?

There was no recognition at the school when I arrived, that is student recognition, and so as I talked to the staff . . . it had been dumped because, all of a sudden the parents and teachers decided that it was intrinsic motivation that’s important, not extrinsic, and because the initial magnet was a very strong structure of spirit days and recognition. It had all gone to the wayside.

What actually happened (who said and did what)?

So, to ease them in this year I suggested a high five on Friday, and I got that from Constance, she did hers on Friday and she called it a “pat on the back. So that’s where I got the idea from. She did it sort of generic pat on the back, and allowed teachers to send two students every Friday afternoon. So, I just gave it my own title, I called it a high five. Come up to the principle for high five on Friday afternoons, and I’d announce it and I gave out a pencil or a ruler, something academic to two students from each class. And what happened was, as I met with different teams, and they talked about this high five, all teams were thrilled about it except kindergarten. Kindergarten didn’t like it. So, I sat down with them, and of course by that point, most everyone is on board, I’m determined, I’ve ordered things and now kindergarten says they don’t want to do it. And my first instinct was to say, “Well too bad, you’re going to do it.” But I held my composure, took a deep breath and I said, well, they said we have this other recognition we do in kindergarten we’re different. If we send two kindergarten students down to the office for a high five, the rest of the class will cry. So I looked at them and nodded. They said, what we would really prefer Betsy, is light, what [Dr. Smith] used to do. Have you come down and visit a couple of students, read to them a couple of books or to give a high five in the classroom. You can give high five to students who fill up their superstar chart, there may be 5 or maybe 10 students each week, but we would prefer if you would come down here. We just don’t want to send to kindergarten students down to the office, we really don’t want to get involved in that. And I just looked at them, and said okay, let’s do it that way. And I knew it would be more work for me, because I had allotted 5 or 10 minutes of my day and this would create another 10 minutes or more to go around to those classrooms and give all those kindergartners a high five. But I decided that I needed to do that. So I think that was a success, because the kindergarten teachers all kind of looked at me like oh, she accepted our request, and they began smiling at me more and more as I learned to work with them and their unique grade level. And even though it was against my—because to me on I’m sort of like—we do this and we all—I guess—even though I’ve
kind of contradicted myself because earlier I talked about being very global and understanding of others’ feelings and opinions. But I also feel that I have to do things aligned and you have to do things as a whole and as a team and just get a grip and get on board. So there’s a part of me like that too. But I did, I did work it out with them.

What were you thinking and feeling at the time and just after the incident?
And even though it was against my—because to me I’m sort of like—we do this and we all—I guess—even though I've kind of contradicted myself because earlier I talked about being very global and understanding of others’ feelings and opinions. But I also feel that I have to do things aligned and you have to do things as a whole and as a team and just get a grip and get on board. So there’s a part of me like that too. But I did, I did work it out with them.

What were the significant factors?
The significant factors were that parents had already been coming to see me complaining that there was no recognition, academic or other recognition, in place for students, and that all other schools provided it and why didn't this one? And another factor was as I read the old articles, as I was trying to find as much history as I could about the magnet program, and I read that that was a very strong component of the program. I also came from my previous experience, where there was monthly academic recognition in place. I knew there was controversy, because I knew that the staff at complained about it every month and they always wanted to eliminate it, because it was a lot more work for them. And I know that the principle would never give in and said too bad, that it really is best for kids. So, what I learned through my mentor again is that she does it in such a way that it’s a little more user friendly for teachers, and they don't have to do quite as much work and preparation. A lot of the work and preparation for recognition, academic recognition and planning for this year, because I’m planning a lot more, will be done administratively. And I’m pretty sure that I learned that from [my mentor principal]. That's how it’s successful at her school. A lot of the work is done administratively and not so much pressure is put on the teachers. I also feel that when academic recognition is given—they think how it went downhill here; it is that teachers interpret recognition differently and subjectively, some students were not getting recognized at all. And when you start hurting students, hurting their feelings, that to me defeats the purpose of academic recognition. It should be done in a way that no students are left feeling hurt or left out. So, I brought those kind of experiences with me to come to this new plan I have.

What was the outcome?
So I think that was a success, because the kindergarten teachers all kind of looked at me like oh, she accepted our request, and they began smiling at me more and more as I learned to work with them and their unique grade level
**Why did this incident stand out?**

Well, once again it was significant because I think you have to recognize kids—you have to make the kids feel good. I knew from previous experience with that the high five would be a hit with the kids and would be a good way for me to bond and get to know kids, and learn who the principal was. I guess emphasizing or accentuating the positive, and not the negative.

**Did you bring your own personal bias or a particular mindset to the event?**

No.

**Could you have interpreted this event differently from another point of view?**

No.

**What can you learn from the episode about the context, colleagues, and yourself?**

So learned about myself in that case, I really did not want to give in to the teachers. I wanted them to do it my way. But, I realized that to work together and be successful as a team, I was going to have to make some exceptions, and honor their request.

Well, I learned that all my colleagues come from different vantage points. They all want something different, and it's always about coming to an agreement and that's what it's all about, coming to an agreement of what we all can live with, and guys we have to work through this and come to an agreement, and where everyone can live with it.

**Would you make any changes for future practice?**

No actually. Because I did meet with team leaders and threw it out there and I went to the process of discussion and went to the whole team process for input approval. And again, the kindergarten team example adjustment, adjustment of the plan. I even formed a recognition committee for next year's academic recognition. And we are going to give these adorable stuffed manatees for our straight As. We got this idea from [my mentor principal]. One of our teachers, students go there, and she gets invited to the principal’s ceremony every 9 weeks. So quarter one you get the manatee, because he's our mascot, quarter two get the life ring, quarter three you get the backpack, and quarter four you get a handkerchief, and they'll come to a ceremony with me. But we will also give merit awards for improvement with coupons in the report card, and also a B honor roll with coupons, and again I felt this was a process we worked through. And I made sure I got buy-in, and everybody felt good about it.

So that was a good one, which there are. There are lots of those, but it is the negative ones that seem to stand out for you, the most dramatic.

**What professional/leadership development activities or learning content did you apply when you handled this incident?**
APPENDIX D

Taxonomy of Themes
1. Change: 19
   - Change in mindset from AP to principal: 3
   - Faculty turnover
   - Change without input
   - Change too quickly
   - Dealing with change
   - Planning for change in staff
   - Grieving process
   - Time for change
   - Resiliency
   - Transitions-time to move on
   - Change beyond locus of control
   - Frequent changes in principals
   - Unexpected appointment
   - Untimely leave with prior principal
   - Student population redistricting
   - Moving teachers and kids
   - Good plan of attack for change
   - First principalship
   - Downsizing

2. Personal and professional socialization: 31
   - Balancing too much-too little involvement
   - Alignment of actions and beliefs
   - Rarely leaving campus
   - Adversity
   - Challenges
   - Nontraditional acts
   - To do the best possible job
   - Prioritizing-maintain priorities
   - Emotional development
   - Power of positive thinking
   - Ethical behavior
   - Making a difference
   - Remind people of purpose
   - Focus on the right things
   - Do whatever it takes
   - Perform job with pride
   - Heavy workloads
   - Unreasonable expectations
   - Problem solver
   - Proactive
   - Keeping up with the research
   - Impact on people’s lives
   - Time management
   - Motives
   - Behavior
   - Concern about reputation/public image
   - Inability to distance oneself from becoming too involved
   - Shortage of time to do work optimally
   - Time spent away from important focus
   - Personal issues distracting from school business
   - Learning from mistakes

3. Communication: 20
   - Communication with teachers: 2
   - Communication with students: 2
   - Miscommunication
   - Lack of clear communication
   - Misinterpretation of expectations, consequences
   - Difficult conversations: 2
   - Listening: 2
   - Honesty
   - Professional
   - Validation of others’ opinions, suggestions
- Getting to know staff
- Face-to-face communication
- Dealing with media/press
- Rumors
- "With-it-ness"
- Connections

4. Interpersonal orientation/relationships: 21
- Relationships: 3
- Celebrating those who leave
- Maintaining contact with those who leave
- Build rapport
- Appreciation of efforts
- Caring
- Spend time with people
- Open-door policy
- Recognize people's talents, skills
- Staff support
- Modeling
- Solving problems in timely manner

5. School culture/climate: 30
- Low staff morale: 2
- Loyalty, ownership: 2
- Teamwork: 2
- People wanting advancement
- Consistency
- Welcoming school environment
- Pride
- Motivations
- Attitudes
- Service
- Network of support and sharing
- Collaboration
- Collegiality
- Build trust
- Mutual respect among team members: 2
- Mutual respect among students
- Inability to communicate effectively with staff
- Confidentiality
- Lack of information to report
- Language barriers
- Assistant principals with a wide range of experiences
- Treating people with respect
- Setting expectations
- Gaining input from others
- Past relationships yield big dividends
- Awareness of past practices
- Begin with end in mind
- Developing others- teacher leaders
- Encouragement
- Relationships: 3
- Teachers pitching in to help
- Poor climate surveys
- Enjoyable place to work
- Unethical behavior
- Different values, beliefs, dispositions
- Mutual respect with SRO
- "We are in this together"
- Violated workplace
- Stability of school
- Competition
- Individual differences
- Putting oneself in someone else's shoes
- Community
6. Safety/law enforcement: 9
   - Threat to bring weapon on campus to kill assistant principal
   - Failure to report suspected abuse
   - Self-mutilation
   - Student sexual activity
   - Teacher stealing credit card from other teacher
   - Inappropriate touching of a student by an adult
   - Intoxication of adult
   - Political activist groups
   - Harassment

7. Federal/state law and regulations/contractual issues: 9
   - Hiring practices
   - Displacement of teachers (surplussing)
   - Documentation/NEAT process
   - Out-of-field status
   - Employee discipline
   - Professionalism
   - Memorandum of instruction
   - Violation of IEP compliance
   - Contractual agreement

8. Operational/instructional roles and responsibilities/organizational stability: 21
   - Coaching-advising new teachers: 2
     - Support: 2
     - Confronting issues
     - Top down-bottom up
     - Interviewing
     - Recruitment of teachers/staff
     - Monitoring
     - Marketing school
     - Investing time with new hires
     - Follow-up and feedback
     - Chain of command
     - Documentation
   - Focus on teaching and learning
   - Notice patterns and trends with employees
   - Delegating to assistant principal and others to learn
   - Putting the right people in charge
   - Goal-target-plan-purpose-steps
   - Accessibility
   - Visibility
   - Facilitating skills
   - Pressure vs. support
9. Social and emotional needs of students: 10
- Attempted suicide
- Depression
- Crisis interaction
- Feeling of abandonment
- Ethical treatment
- Safety
- Guidance/home-school liaison
- Building relationships with students
- Impact on FCAT testing
- Motivational theory

10. District support: 13
- HR Director
- Executive directors
- Colleagues
- Mentors
- Assistance
- Coaching
- Inequities in system
- Finding money to adjust classes
- Lack of timeliness with actions
- No closure
- Unexplained lack of consequences for offenders
- Find avenue to express concerns
- Downsizing

11. Conflict: 14
- Inability to compromise
- Difficulty in saying no
- Teachers not getting along with each other
- Proactively dealing with issues before becoming a problem
- Conflicting administrative responsibilities
- Ethical dilemmas
- Problem solving
- Consensus building
- Parent discontent
- Roadblocks with parents
- Parental influence
- Inherited problems
- Feuding PTO
- Team leader acting unprofessionally

12. Emotional responses: 36
- Impatience: 3
- Frustration: 3
- Anger: 2
- Tolerance: 2
- Open mindedness: 2
- Sense of loss: 2
- Taking things personally: 2
- Reflection of principal: 2
- Aggressive: 2
- Sensitivity
- Insensitivity
- Waning to be liked
- Hurtful feelings
- Want people to be happy
- Not wanting to upset people
- Feelings kept private
- Conflicted feelings
- Optimistic
- Positive
- Questioning own personality/leadership style
- Unsettled
- Fears
- Selfish
- Uncertainty
- Lack of understanding
- Resentment
- Aloofness

- Blaming oneself
- Passionate
- Feel privileged for opportunity
- Disappointment
- Making judgments
- Discomfort
- Feeling responsible
- Stress management
- Assertiveness
APPENDIX E

Critical Incident Taxonomy by Constituency
### Critical Incident Taxonomy By Constituency

#### Principal Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident</th>
<th>Positive Negative</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Non-instr. Staff</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>District office</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Other</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veteran’s Day Ceremony</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>Open Door Policy</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Clinic coverage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Front office redecoration</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student recognition</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Loss of key staff member</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Loss of 2nd/3rd key staff</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff member with alcohol intoxication</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Security monitor</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hiring of eight new teachers</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Transition from AP to principal</td>
<td>+</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>personal</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitorial aide’s job performance</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dysfunctional teacher team</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Student with sexually explicit behavior</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bus driver – failure to report suspect sexual abuse</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>SRO</td>
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<td>Class size adjustment – 10 days</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rebuild morale after former principal resigned unexpectedly</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>media</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher stealing credit card from other teacher</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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<td>ESE Student threatening to bring a gun to kill an AP – errors with ESE paperwork</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Law enforcement</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>End of the year surplussing/downsizing</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/21 positive</td>
<td>N=85%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>LE = 19% Media = 10%</td>
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APPENDIX F

Letter to Superintendent
April 7, 2008

As you know, I am currently a doctoral student at Seton Hall University College of Education in the Department of Educational Leadership, Management, and Policy Executive Ed.D. program. As a part of my doctoral requirements, I am planning to conduct a case study on first-time, first-year principals using individual interviews as well as a focus group to gather data for my dissertation. The title of my dissertation is *A Retrospective Study of Four Novice Principals and Their Perceptions of the Impact of a School District’s Standards-Based Professional Development Induction Program*.

The purpose of the study is to determine the extent to which first-year, first-time (novice) principals perceive that they transfer and apply learning from the district-offered professional development and support offered throughout the 3-year principal preparatory programs, including the induction and Preparing New Principals programs. The study will provide evidence as to the ways that beginning principals draw from their learning experiences as assistant principals in making decisions when critical incidents arise during their first year.

Once I receive approval from the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I would like to begin the interviews and data collection process in June 2008. I will be conducting two individual interviews with principals who volunteer to participate in the study and meet the criteria for selection. The first interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes, during which the principal will be asked to identify 5 to 10 critical incidents that took place during the first year and then respond to 12 questions. The second follow-up interview, which is designed to allow participants the opportunity to review the recorded transcript of the first interview, will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes.

I will be utilizing two research methods for this study. The critical incident technique was first developed in 1954 by John Flanagan and since then has been used in many disciplines, including education. The technique involves asking participants to identify events or experiences that were “critical” for some purpose. These incidents are then pooled together and analyzed looking for common patterns or themes. In addition, an independent researcher, [ ], will be assisting with the case study by leading one focus group with all of the participating novice principals. Each focus group will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and the principals will be asked six open-ended questions to generate discussion regarding the relevancy and applicability of their experiences in the district preparatory leadership development programs to their first year as principals. The interviews and focus group session will be scheduled in convenient locations in advance to avoid interfering with school or district events.

I will provide a consent form for volunteer first-time, first-year principals in 2007-2008 who initially agree to participate in this study. The consent form itemizes all the specific information necessary to fully inform participants about the nature of the
study and assurances that responses and data will be anonymous and confidential prior to the start of the study. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and any participant may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they are entitled.

All of the data and records regarding this study will kept strictly confidential. Even though the participant responses during the interviews and focus group will be digitally recorded, no identifying data about the participants or their schools will be documented by the researchers. The focus group data will not be anonymous to others in the group, but after being collated, individual responses will not be identified in the analysis. Participant names and schools will not be referenced in the dissertation and there will be no monetary benefits for participating in this study.

Once the Seton Hall IRB has approved my application, I will request permission to conduct this research study with the novice principals who meet the specific criteria and who volunteer to participate. If you are in agreement, please send me a letter granting permission to utilize selected school district novice principals for my study, as this is a requirement for approval by the IRB. I have completed the necessary forms that are required by the Research, Evaluation, and Assessment department.

Thank you in advance for considering my request to conduct this research in the school district. I appreciate the opportunity to carry out this research in my home school district and I pledge to maintain the confidentiality and the anonymity of the participating principals. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Wendy J. Katz
APPENDIX G

Letter of Solicitation
Dear Administrator:

In addition to my role as Director of Leadership Development for the [ ] County School District, I am currently a doctoral student at Seton Hall University College of Education in the Department of Educational Leadership, Management, and Policy Executive Ed.D. program. As a part of my doctoral requirements, I am planning to conduct a study on first-time, first-year principals using individual interviews as well as a focus group to gather data for my dissertation. The title of my dissertation is *A Retrospective Study of Four Novice Principals and Their Perceptions of the Impact of a School District's Standards-Based Professional Development Induction Program*.

The purpose of the study is to determine the extent to which first-year, first-time (novice) principals perceive that they transfer and apply learning from the district-offered professional development and support offered throughout the 3-year principal preparatory programs, including the induction and Preparing New Principals programs. The study will provide evidence as to the ways beginning principals draw from their learning experiences as assistant principals in making decisions when critical incidents arise during their first year.

The interview and data collection process will take place during the month of June 2008. I will be conducting two individual interviews with principals who volunteer to participate in the study and meet the criteria for selection. During the first interview, which will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes, the principal will be asked to identify 5 to 10 critical incidents that took place during the first year and then respond to 12 questions. The second follow-up interview, which is designed to provide the participants with the opportunity to review the recorded transcript of the first interview, will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes.

I will be utilizing two research methods for this study. The critical incident technique, first developed by John Flanagan in 1954, has been used in many disciplines, including education. The technique involves asking participants to identify events or experiences that were “critical” for some purpose. These incidents are then pooled together and analyzed to identify common patterns or themes. In addition, an independent researcher who will be assisting with the case study will lead one focus group with the all of the participating novice principals. During the focus group, which will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes, the principals will be asked six open-ended questions to generate discussion regarding the relevancy and applicability of their experiences in the district preparatory leadership development programs to their first year as principals. The interviews and focus group session will be scheduled in convenient locations and scheduled in advance to avoid interfering with school or district events.
I will provide a consent form to the volunteer first-time, first-year principals in 2007-2008 who initially agree to participate in this study. The consent form itemizes all the specific information necessary to fully inform participants about the nature of the study prior to the start of the study and assurances that their responses and data will be anonymous and confidential.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and any participant may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they are entitled.

All of the data and records regarding this study will kept strictly confidential. Even though the participant responses during the interviews and focus group will be digitally recorded, no identifying data pertaining to the participants or their schools will be documented by the researchers. The focus group data will not be anonymous to others in the group, but after being collated, the individual responses will not be identified in the analysis. Participant names and schools will not be referenced in the dissertation, and there are no monetary benefits for participating in this study.

The digitally recorded audio and written transcripts from the individual interviews and focus group interview session will remain in the possession of the researcher and will be stored on a USB flash memory drive and housed in a secure locked location in the home of the researcher. None of the data will be used or disclosed without the participants' expressed consent. The data will be destroyed 3 years after the conclusion of the study.

The results of this study will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of current district support structures for beginning principals and leadership development preparatory programs that currently exist in the school district. The insights of the principals will also identify the strengths and weaknesses of the leadership development programs to help the district improve the curriculum and field-based experiences for aspiring school leaders. In addition, the conclusions drawn from the study will also allow for more strategic support/coaching for principals who are transitioning to this role for the first time.

If selected to participate in this study, I hope that you will consider this important opportunity to be a part of this research. I will begin contacting those qualifying principals in the next week. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me. I appreciate your support and look forward to sharing the results of my research with you.

Sincerely,

Wendy J. Katz
Director of Leadership Development
[ ] County Public Schools
APPENDIX H

Informed Consent Form
Affiliation

Wendy J. Katz is a Seton Hall University College of Education doctoral student enrolled in the Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy Executive Ed.D. Program. She is currently employed as the Director of Leadership Development for the [ ] County Public Schools in City, State.

Purpose of the Study and Expected Duration of Subjects' Participation

The title of the study is A Retrospective Study of Four Novice Principals and the Perceived Impact of a School District’s Standards-Based Professional Development Induction Program. The purpose of the study is to determine the extent to which first-year, first-time (novice) principals perceive that they transfer and apply learning from district-offered professional development and support offered throughout the 3-year principal preparatory programs, including the Induction and Preparing New Principals programs, using a descriptive, multiple case study and critical incident technique methodologies. The study strives to discover in what ways novice principals draw from these learning experiences when making decisions as critical incidents or issues arise during their first year.

Currently, only four principals in the school district meet the specific criteria to participate in this case study because they completed the induction and Preparing New Principal programs as an assistant principals in the school district prior to becoming a principal. Each of these principals will be offered the opportunity to participate in the study. Participation in the study requires that the principal to agree to participate in both the interview and focus group. Each individual interview will take place at the school site during a mutually agreed upon date and time during the month of June 2008. The interview will require approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The focus group with all four principals or all those who agree to participate that will take place on a separate occasion during the month of June 2008 at a convenient location is expected to require between 60 to 90 minutes.

Procedures

In order to provide anonymity to the interviewees, the research assistant, [ ], a retired executive director of Research, Evaluation and Assessment for a local school district, will be responsible for all communication with the principals and will conduct the interviews and focus group. Principals who meet the specific criteria for this case study will be given the opportunity to participate in the study via a solicitation letter set in late May 2008. Those agreeing to volunteer for the study will then be contacted by the research assistant to schedule a date and time for the individual interview as well as the focus group session. During each of the individual interview sessions, the research assistant will once again review the aim of the research study and the sequence of interview procedures. During this interview, each principal will be asked to identify 5 to 10 critical incidents that occurred during the first year. In addition, each principal will be asked to respond to 12 questions related to each of these incidents for further clarification. The recorded data will then be transcribed and sent electronically to each principal to
verify the accuracy and intentionality of their responses and allow them to suggest any changes or clarify any information provided during the first interview.

On a separate occasion, the same research assistant will conduct one focus group with all four participating principals. The focus group will address six open-ended questions to generate discussion among participants related to their perceptions of the impact of the school district's professional development preparatory program. The focus group responses will be recorded by an assistant who is not part of the research team and is not an employee of the school district. The responses will be recorded on flip charts. With the permission of the participating principals, the focus group session will be recorded using a Sony IC Recorder LPE device as a back up to ensure that all of the responses are captured accurately. Principal names and school names will not be used as identifiers in recording the data. The recordings will be transcribed onto the researcher's USB flash drive for storage.

**Interview Protocol**

Using the critical incident technique (CIT) protocol, you will be asked to identify the incident and then answer questions such as the following:

- When and where did it happen (time of day, location, and social context)?
- What actually happened (who said or did what)?
- What you were thinking and feeling at the time and just after the incident?
- What were the significant factors?
- What was the outcome?

Next, you will be asked to further describe the following:

- What was the outcome?
- Why did this incident stand out?
- Did you bring your own personal bias or a particular mindset to the event?
- Could you have interpreted this event differently from another point of view?
- What can you learn from the episode about the context, colleagues, and yourself?
- Would you make any changes for future practice?
- What professional development activities or learning content did you apply when you handled the incident?

**Focus Group Protocol**

During the focus group session, the following questions will be used to guide the reflective discussion:

- What are some of your deeper insights and understandings of the complexities and challenges? About your first-year experiences as principal?
- In what ways do you perceive you applied your prior learning experiences as an assistant principal?
To what extent do you perceive that the district support structures and programs for new principals (induction seminars, principal transition support teams, mentoring by retired administrators, coaching by fellow principal, and new principal cohorts) encouraged reflection and assisted you during your first year as principal?

What evidence can you provide that demonstrates that you applied the learning experiences from their individualized leadership learning plans and portfolio artifacts (from the Preparing New Principal certification program) to daily responsibilities and critical incidents during your first year as principal?

How do the [State] Leadership Standards guide your actions?

To what extent did you utilize journal writing to capture your learning during the first year?

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinuing participation will in no way result in any penalty or loss of benefits to the participants. No one in authority associated with the school district will have access to the data. A signature on this informed consent form indicates agreement to full participation in this case study, which includes two components: the interview and focus group. Agreement also signifies a willingness to allow the interview and focus group session be recorded and then later transcribed to a written format. The findings of the study will be shared with the participants at the conclusion of the study. Lastly, the researcher will take every precaution necessary to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of responses.

Anonymity

The data from the interviews and focus group will be collected by a research assistant rather than the primary researcher so that the primary researcher will not be able to link the data to a specific principal or school. The researcher will assign numbers to each principal and the aggregate data will be reported in the dissertation. Principal names or school names will not be identified in the data collection process. The focus group data will not be anonymous to others in the group, but after being collated, individual responses will not be identified in the analysis.

Security of Stored Data

The digitally recorded audio and written transcriptions from the individual interviews and focus group interview session will remain in the possession of the researcher and will be stored on a USB flash memory drive and housed in a secure locked location in the home of the researcher. Sincere efforts will be made to protect the participants' identities. The data will be confidential and available only to the researcher, the research assistant, [ ], and the researcher's Seton Hall University mentor, Dr. Elaine Walker. None of the data will be used or disclosed without the participants' expressed consent. The data will be destroyed 3 years after the conclusion of the study.
Confidentiality

All of the data and records regarding this study will kept strictly confidential. No individuals will have access to the names of the participating principals or the data except for the researcher, the research assistant, [ ], and the researcher’s Seton Hall University mentor, Dr. Elaine Walker. The data analysis will not reference any of the participants or their schools. The data analysis will focus on the themes and categories derived from the data and the researcher will ensure the anonymity of the participating principals in the final dissertation document.

Possible Risks

It is possible but highly unlikely that if an employee from the school district were to read the dissertation, the employee may be able to connect a specific incident, if public in nature, to a specific school. However, the researcher will take every precaution to avoid using any language that might be recognizable to persons reading the dissertation.

Direct Benefits

The results of this study will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of current district support structures for beginning principals and leadership development preparatory programs that currently exist in the school district. The insights of the principals will also identify the strengths and weaknesses of the leadership development programs to help the district improve the curriculum and field-based experiences for aspiring school leaders. In addition, the study will document the perceived relevancy and applicability of the induction program for new administrators and the individualized leadership learning plans and portfolio requirements that currently play a significant role in the Preparing New Principals program. The conclusions drawn from the study will also allow for more strategic support/coaching for principals who are transitioning to this role for the first time.

In addition, the findings may increase the awareness of the participating principals as to the connections between their professional learning and daily actions in the real world as principals. This awareness could lead to improved job performance and increase the likelihood of a successful transition. Lastly, the participating principals may find comfort in knowing that some of the challenges and incidents they faced in their first year are not unique but quite common for most first-year, first-time principals.

Monetary compensation or other remuneration will not be offered as a direct benefit to the participating principals in this study.

Alternative Procedures

If for any reason you are unable to participate in this study, no other alternative procedures are available for your involvement.

Contact Information

Two researchers will be involved with this study: Wendy Katz, the primary researcher, and [ ], the research assistant. Wendy Katz’s faculty mentor at Seton Hall University is Elaine Walker, Ph.D. The principal researcher may be contacted
with pertinent questions regarding the study or for information about participants’ rights by writing to her at Seton Hall University, College of Education and Human Services, Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy, Jubilee Hall Fourth Floor, 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079, or by telephoning her at Seton Hall University at (973) 761-9397. Dr. Walker may be contacted with questions regarding the study or for information about participants’ rights by writing to her at Seton Hall University, College of Education and Human Services, Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy, Jubilee Hall Office #416, 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079, or by telephoning her at Seton Hall University at (973) 275-2307.

In addition, Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D., the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Director, may be contacted with questions regarding the study or for information about participants’ rights by writing to her at Seton Hall University, Office of the Institutional Review Board, Presidents Hall Third Floor, 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079, or by telephoning her at Seton Hall University at (973) 313-6314.

**Digital Audio Recording**

The researcher is requesting permission to digitally record both the individual interview as well as the focus group interview as a part of the agreement to participate in this study. Principals will be identified by a code number on tape, not by name. The taping will ensure the accuracy of the information provided during the interviews. Interviewees have the right to review all portions of the audiotapes and can request that the tapes be destroyed at any time. The primary researcher, research assistant, the transcriber, and the researcher’s Seton Hall University mentor, Dr. Elaine Walker, are the only persons who will have access to the recorded data. The audio recordings will be transcribed onto the researcher’s USB flash memory drive by a secretary employed by the school district, who will be working on a private contract outside her position with the researcher for the sole purpose of completing the transcripts. The researcher will review with the secretary the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of the research data in advance of the study.

The USB flash memory drive will be kept at the principal researcher’s home in a secure locked location. The researcher will destroy the digital audiotapes 3 years after the conclusion of this study.

**Acknowledgement of the Informed Consent Form**

I have read the information in this document and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I will be provided with a copy of this informed consent form for my records prior to the start of this research study.

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Signature of Person Participating in Study

Date