A Qualitative Examination of Factors Influencing Assistant Principal Motivation to Pursue a Principalship in an Era of Accountability

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ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL MOTIVATION TO PURSUE A PRINCIPALSHIP

A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF FACTORS INFLUENCING ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL MOTIVATION TO PURSUE A PRINCIPALSHIP IN AN ERA OF ACCOUNTABILITY

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

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2013
APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine assistant principals with five or more years of experience and investigate the factors that influence their decision to pursue a school principal position. The study examined Self-Determined Motivation Theory and identified components that influence assistant principal motivation. The study found that assistant principals have a high level of self-efficacy and believe in their ability to positively impact educational organizations. The study also found that accountability pressures of Achieve NJ and No Child Left Behind influence the perception of the school principal role and limit the attractiveness of the position among career assistant principals. The study also found that assistant principals enjoy the role of implementation regarding school programs and vision. Assistant principals appreciate the ability to remain in close contact with students and all components of school leadership and see the school principal position as limiting what they find to be most enjoyable as school administrators. This study included ten assistant principals with five or more years experience from all grade spans, socioeconomic status, and demographic groups but was limited to Middlesex County, New Jersey.
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I am especially thankful to Dr. Barbara Strobert, my dissertation advisor, for providing ongoing feedback and responding immediately to my many questions. Her insight and direct method of communicating allowed me to remain steadfast and focused so that this study could be completed. Dr. Strobert maintained a positive attitude and dealt with every question, be it simple or complex, with a calming and reassuring approach. Her support allowed me to complete a project that I deemed to be nearly impossible when I started.

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Dr. Virginia Stillson is a valued colleague and friend. She has a tremendous grasp of APA style and has offered many critical elements of feedback that have allowed me to produce a study that reflected the quality of work to which she has become accustomed. Her work at Rutgers has been consistently strong and groundbreaking, especially when researching those with disabilities; I hope my work reflects the same professionalism.

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I thank the ten assistant principals who participated in this study. You all donated hours of time to this study. There is a richness of the data reflects your participation in this study.

My grandparents--Nora and John, Rita and Steve have supported my educational goals in many different ways and taught me the value of school and the power of the mind.

Mom and Dad, I am grateful to you. Be it at North Coventry, The Hill School, the College of Charleston or Seton Hall University, you encouraged me to learn much and laugh often while enjoying each stop along the way. I have been blessed with the most supportive parents any son could ask for. This study should serve as a constant reminder of the importance you placed on education. I am proud to be your son; you have always made me certain how important I am to you.

My siblings and closest friends: Carolyn, Eric Stephen, Amy, Greg, Sarah, Severin, and Dorian and the extended Dillon and Colligan families have created a powerful layer of support. I am fortunate for you all.

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The Hill School and Mark Nelson; the most challenged I have ever been as a learner and a person was as a student at The Hill School. I was a sluggish starter as a
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learner but I submit to all of my former mentors in Pottstown that there certainly is a blossom on Brotschul’s flower.
I am eternally grateful to you, Jill Erin, for supporting my goals and for always helping me to believe that I can achieve them. You consistently look at the positive elements of my character and pride yourself on loving and supporting me. You reinforce the importance of patience and positive thought and underscore how they remain a constant in our lives. Thank you for your love and constant belief in me. I dedicate my study to you, Jill. You are my best friend and hero. Now it’s your turn.

B.B.B.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In 2003 the Wallace Foundation released findings from several studies highlighting issues regarding the supply and retention of principals nationally. Lovely (2004) discussed the void that would exist by the year 2010 in the building administrator position. The 2010 National Center for Education Statistics report from the 2008-2009 school year reflects these predictions with a retirement and attrition rate nationwide of 45.4%, totaling over 10,600 vacancies (Battle, 2010). A major characteristic of eligible principals in this labor market has been explained by researchers as lack of interest to seek an administrative position (DeAngelis & O’Connor, 2012).

In 2000, the Institute for Educational Leadership reported that enrollment forecasts alone will increase the need for principals by 10% to 20%. Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, and Orr (2007) found that increased responsibilities, accountability, salary and benefit packages, and loss of tenure dissuade potential candidates from seeking building-level administrative positions. The position of school principal, in particular, is at a crossroads if those serving as assistant principals, who have the professional certificate of school principal, do not wish to move forward and serve as leaders of schools.

Research from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2002) indicates that 62.1% of principals had experience as an assistant principal/program director prior to assuming the principalship. The U.S. Department of Labor (2006) reported that as pressure to produce student achievement results increases for the principal, greater
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responsibility could potentially be shifted to the assistant principal, thus impacting the incentive to apply for a principal or assistant principal position.

Fields (2002) discovered that the assistant principal position continues to be one of the least researched areas in both journals and books; this finding was supported ten years prior by Marshall (1992). Hartzell, Williams, and Nelson (1995) said, “The nature of the assistant principalship and the skills required to be successful are oriented much more toward management than toward leadership, a condition that does not promote the development of visionary leadership in its occupants” (p. 158). Ryan (2011) indicated that the assistant principal’s range of formal educational experiences, or lack thereof, impacts the construction of knowledge, beliefs, and values continuing to mold personal and professional identity (p. 15).

Modern education organizations are structured in a myriad of ways. One of the most common structure patterns is the administrative position of principal and assistant principal. Looking at the roles through a historical lens, the two roles have proven to differ vastly in the scope of educational organizations. The role of a principal and its function in an education organization has evolved in the era of No Child Left Behind legislation.

The current day principal is asked to serve as an instructional leader and is directly accountable for student achievement based on the nature of No Child Left Behind legislation; Race to the Top legislation (2009) has only reinforced the role of principal as instructional leader. Although there is research suggesting that supervision and leadership of instruction is a more frequent expectation, given the era of accountability under which school leaders serve (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003),
the historical lens of the assistant principal position suggests that he/she has been charged with satisfying many of the managerial structures of the organization. The overall parameters of that role, however, are changing in support of leadership of instruction (Ryan, 2011, p. 11).

Assistant principals play a valuable role in education organizations. However, the role might not reflect the career goals and aspirations of those in the position. This study seeks to explore the motivational factors that lead assistant principals to pursue a principalship.

It can be postulated that pursuing a position as principal indicates that a candidate has the confidence in his or her ability to perform the role, the motivation to assume ownership for a group of students, families, and staff members, and the belief in his or her ability to meet state accountability measures as mandated in federal and state legislation. Despite these characteristics, school leaders are experiencing increasing dissatisfaction and occupational difficulties (Chapman, 2005).

It can also be postulated that the work performance of assistant principals, becomes stagnant for those who have grown comfortable in their role; long-standing assistant principals can lack motivation through positional stagnancy. In a validation study done by Fernet (2010), attention is paid to the relationship between principals’ motivation and different variables concerning attitude (work satisfaction and commitment), psychological health (burnout), and job functioning (transformational leadership and self efficacy) (p. 309). Aside from leadership practices, the research on school administration has largely neglected the work-related behavior of those charged with leading the learning (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).
Evaluation of Performance and Impact on Work-Role Perception

The influx of a teacher and administrator evaluation system that is reflective of student performance outcomes through standardized test scores prompted the recommendations by nearly every study participant to include activities that are reflective of instructional leadership, including expanding roles of assistant principals to include the leadership of actual initiatives. To date, there has been a sense among assistant principal study candidates that their role was to perform all of the roles and responsibilities that the principal delegated. Instead the role is to become more inclusive of instructional leadership, as was legislatively mandated through Achieve NJ.

Effective Educator Task Force Recommendations

New Jersey Governor Christopher Christie established the Educator Effectiveness Task Force through an executive order. Nine members, with experience in and knowledge of education policy, administration, and teaching, were selected and were charged with recommending an educator evaluation system based on measures of effectiveness. According to the executive order, its recommendations were to include measures of student achievement (representing at least 50% of the evaluation); demonstrated practices of effective teachers and leaders; and weights for the various components.

The Educator Effectiveness Task Force reviewed the latest research on educator evaluations, examined systems in use both in-state and across the nation, and studied a range of issues related to the development of high-quality evaluation systems, such as observation protocols, growth measures, and special education considerations. On March 1, 2011, the task force ultimately recommended that 50% of all evaluations of principals
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and their assistants be weighted by student outcomes—performance on state-mandated assessments. The Educator Effectiveness Task Force led to the Teach NJ Act, issued by the New Jersey Legislature on August 6, 2012. Teach NJ formalized the recommendations of the Educator Effectiveness Task Force and legislatively mandated that 50% of student outcomes drive the evaluation of principals and assistant principals.

The legislation requires the following: four defined annual rating categories for teachers, principals, assistant principals, and vice-principals (ineffective, partially effective, effective, and highly effective); a provision requiring that the rubric be partially based on multiple objective measures of student learning that use student growth from one year’s measure to the next year’s measure; a provision that allows the district, in grades in which a standardized test is not required, to determine the methods for measuring student growth; a provision that multiple measures of practice and student learning be used in rating effectiveness; a provision that the rubric be based on the professional standards for that employee; a provision ensuring that performance measures used in the rubric are linked to student achievement; a requirement that the employee receive multiple observations during the school year which shall be used in evaluating the employee, at least one annual summative evaluation for the school year, and a conference with his superior or superiors following this evaluation; guidelines for school districts regarding training and the demonstration of competence on the evaluation system to support its implementation; a process for ongoing monitoring and calibration of the observations to ensure that the observation protocols are being implemented correctly and consistently; a performance framework, associated evaluation tools, and observation
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protocols, including training and observer calibration resources; and a process for ensuring that the results of the evaluation help to inform instructional development.

The regulations for Teach NJ were issued on March 6, 2013, and were re-titled Achieve NJ. Achieve NJ relies on multiple measures to evaluate assistant principals. These measures include components of both student achievement and assistant principal practice. All assistant principals are rated on multiple measures of effectiveness as follows:

**Student achievement.**

Ten percent of an assistant principal’s summative rating is based on an average teacher SGO (Student Growth Objective) score. SGOs are measurable academic goals that teachers set for their students in collaboration with principals/supervisors. Each district locally determines which teachers’ SGOs are linked to an AP/VP (Assistant Principal/Vice Principal). For example, if a VP is involved in collaborating with specific grade levels or departments on SGOs, those SGOs will comprise this component of the summative rating.

**Administrator goals.**

The portion of an assistant principal’s summative rating based on Administrator Goals is 10%, 20%, or 40%, depending on whether the administrator is a multi-grade SGP assistant principal, a single-grade SGP assistant principal, or a non-SGP assistant principal. The assistant principal can have the same goals as the principal or create his/her own in consultation with the superintendent or the superintendent’s designee.

**School student growth percentile (SGP).**
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SGPs are state-calculated scores that measure a schools’ median student growth on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK), and some assistant principals have school wide SGP data. For assistant principals in schools with multiple SGP grades, this measure accounts for 30% of the summative rating. For single-grade SGP assistant principals, this measure counts for 20%.

Assistant principal practice.

Forty percent of an assistant principal’s overall evaluation is based on observations of his or her practice by the superintendent, principal, supervisor, or designee. These might involve a school walkthrough or an observation at a staff meeting, student conference, or other significant school event. Districts may adapt the locally-adopted principal practice instrument to fit the responsibilities of the assistant principal.

Evaluation leadership.

Ten percent of the overall evaluation is based on a Leadership Evaluation Practice Instrument. In 2013–2014, this instrument measures how well the assistant principal implements his or her evaluation responsibilities and includes the following components: fulfilling requirements of the evaluation system; providing feedback and planning for growth; assuring reliable, valid observation results; and assuring high-quality student growth objectives.

Statement of the Problem

A report from the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement at the University of Minnesota and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Learning from Leadership: the Links to Improved Student Learning (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010, p. 9), found that leadership is second only to teaching
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among school-related factors as an influence on learning, according to a six-year study which analyzed data from 180 schools in nine states. Researchers have noted that “To date, we have not found a single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership” (Mintag, 2012).

The assistant principal position is a stepping stone to the principalship in many school systems. The position is underutilized, as many assistant principals are relegated to managing routine administrative functions and student discipline (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011, p. 24). Research has reported that experience as an assistant principal in the principal’s current school is associated with higher performance (Roebling, 2009), and previous experience as an assistant principal in any school is associated with longer tenure as principal (Young & Fuller, 2011). These findings beg the question “If these findings are true, why do assistant principals preclude themselves from candidacy for a promotion?”

In a report for the Wallace Foundation, Portin (2009) discussed leadership realities in an era of accountability, indicating that leaders need to be more than managers and that the federal No Child Left Behind law has refocused the primary work of principals on leading teaching and learning activities (p. 1). According to the findings in Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom (2004), leadership is only second among school-based factors in influencing learning (p. 7).

In separate examinations of assistant principal mobility, Dunleavy (2012) and Weller and Weller (2004) found a shallow research base, resulting in little knowledge relative to job and career satisfaction. Weller and Weller (2004) found that elementary assistant principals aspire to the principalship more often than secondary assistant
principals. This finding may suggest that the experience for elementary administrators to function outside of a departmentalized organization is more conducive to the holistic professional experiences that result in leader confidence to pursue the principalship.

With the latest reform movements to increase accountability standards and apply pressure onto schools and their administrators, demonstrating the knowledge needed to be an effective school leader can be overwhelming. School leadership requires that individuals be more knowledgeable than ever before and be able to cover many different components of education. With a preponderance of literature supporting the building-level principal as crucial to the effectiveness of a school (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003), the challenge of filling that position must be addressed (Pounder & Merrill, 2001).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors influencing the pursuit of a principal position by “sitting” assistant principals as viewed through the lens of Self-Determined Motivation Theory. This study shall answer the question “If one is qualified to be a school principal, has the professional certificate to serve in the role and experience as an assistant principal, what influences one’s decision to either pursue or not pursue a principal position?”

The study seeks to examine the strength of various factors that influence the decision process of whether to pursue a principal position or to remain in the assistant principal role. I chose to incorporate a qualitative interview approach in order to address this purpose through analysis of the experiences of assistant principals within the K-12 public school setting. In this chapter I explain the background of the study and why I initially became interested in this topic. Similarly, I provide a description of the methods
used to answer the research questions. The design of the study is followed by a description of the selection of the participants and provides a profile of each assistant principal and his or her employment site. I then explain how I collected data, analyzed the data, and validated the research procedures and outcomes. This chapter also addresses the delimitations set in addition to the items that limit the approach of the study.

A review of literature that follows in Chapter II illustrates that research relative to assistant principal motivation to pursue a principal position is lacking depth.

**Research Questions**

1. How does Self-Determined Motivation Theory (intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation) influence the decision for an assistant principal to pursue a principalship?

   Hypothesis: Those assistant principals that choose to pursue a principalship do so because they operate from a base that is founded on intrinsic motivation, have high self-efficacy, and feel prepared for the position; they value challenge and the application of professional development under advantageous environmental and institutional conditions.

2. How does high-stakes accountability (i.e. No Child Left Behind; Race to the Top; Achieve NJ) influence an assistant principal’s decision to pursue a principalship?

   Hypothesis: Accountability is a factor in the decision process to pursue a principalship; however, there are personal and contextual factors that contribute to the decision of whether or not to pursue a principal position.
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3. What other factors influence an assistant principal’s decision to pursue a principalship?

Hypothesis: Family construct, financial compensation structure, assistant principal perceived preparation for role assumption, types of responsibilities that a principal delegated to an assistant principal, and unexpected outcomes are contributing factors influencing an assistant principal’s decision to pursue a principalship.

The incorporation of Self-Determined Motivation Theory into this study assisted in framing the concept of motivation and guided the development of research questions. It has been hypothesized in the research questions that motivation does influence career choice; the Self-Determined Motivation Theory framework assisted the researcher in examining influence on career decisions. Additional hypotheses indicate that contextual factors also impact the pursuit of a principal position by career assistant principals. Those factors include compensation difference between assistant principal and principal, efficacy, level of role clarity, and role satisfaction (Dunleavy, 2010).

**Conceptual Framework**

Self–Determined Motivation Theory is an approach that not only considers the intensity of motivation but also its quality (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Self-Determined Motivation Theory propositions also focus on how social and cultural factors facilitate or undermine people’s sense of volition and initiative in addition to their well-being and the quality of their performance. Three subsets of Self-Determined Motivation Theory are extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation and amotivation.
Extrinsic motivation has several subsets that are important in Self-Determined Motivation Theory:

- External Regulation
- Introjected Regulation
- Integrated Regulation
- Identified Regulation

External regulation occurs when behaviors are regulated to obtain a reward or avoid a constraint (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Introjected regulation corresponds to the process whereby an external demand becomes an internal representation; it occurs when people self apply pressure to make sure that a particular behavior is performed (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Integrated motivation refers to behavior that is performed not only because individuals value their significance but also because it is consistent with their identities (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Identified regulation is defined as behavior that individuals choose to perform because it is congruent with their own values and goals (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Intrinsic motivation refers to performing a task for pleasure and/or satisfaction (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Amotivation is the relative absence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. It occurs when people do not perceive a relationship between their actions and the outcomes and feel unable to achieve their goals (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Self-determined motivation (intrinsic motivation and identified regulation) fosters positive outcomes, whereas non-self-determined motivation (introjected regulation, external regulation, and amotivation) leads to negative outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 1985).
Hierarchical models of self-determined motivation propose that the different motivations operate at three levels of generality: global, contextual, and situational (Vallerand, 1997).

The phenomenon of Self-Determined Motivation Theory has to have consequences as it relates to student achievement in a school--consequences on student views of their self-efficacy to the organization as well as an effect on the perception of the assistant principal in the eyes of the instructional staff, principal, district office leadership, and the public.

**Study Design and Methodology**

The study uses a qualitative methodology, utilizing semi-structured interviews. The interviews were one-on-one in composition. For the purposes of this study, all study participants were currently serving as K-12 assistant principals for five years or more, were certificated to serve as a principal, and had not chosen to pursue a principal position. Efforts were made to include a varying representation of genders, experience, and grade spans (K-5, 6-8, 9-12).

With the goal of self-disclosure among participants (Rennekamp & Nall, 2010, p. 1), the focus group assisted in answering the question “Why do experienced assistant principals choose not to become principals?” The interview participants were guided through semi-structured interviews in order to promote the sharing and developing of experiences with one another in order to generate ideas for consideration for this and future studies and to explore issues of shared importance (Merriam, 2009, p. 178).

All participant input was coded and reported in a narrative explanation by the researcher. The researcher engaged in open coding by reading the interview transcripts
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and making notations of important items. Throughout this process, codes were assigned to pieces of data in order to construct categories and meaning; marginal notes and comment codes made by the researcher were grouped with like categories (Merriam, 2009, p. 179).

The population was selected so as to be representative of gender, various grade spans, and varied duration, thus far, of career.

**Significance of the Study**

The review of literature shows that the phenomenon of career assistant principal is a research topic lacking depth. Performing this study will offer more to the research base and may help drive further study. There are implications from a policy perspective: future policy drafts could include caps to the amount of time an assistant principal can serve, or even changes relative to the manner in which assistant principal performance is measured and evaluated. Such a policy might increase the urgency for the work of assistant principals to stimulate the process of improving outcomes as it relates to teaching and learning.

There are factors influencing the decisions that assistant principals make. This study endeavors to report what those factors are and how they impact the field. Additionally, this study has the potential to inform the work pursued by principals, school district human resource officials, superintendents, and boards of education in the manner in which they recruit, interview, hire, and mentor assistant principal candidates.

This study has the potential to assist practitioners in understanding the career aspirations of assistant principals and allow policymakers to better understand the demographic prior to making any policy recommendations.
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Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

This is a qualitative study that collected interview data from current assistant principals in select New Jersey school districts who have decided not to pursue principal positions despite holding the professional credentials by the New Jersey Department of Education to serve as a principal. This study, limited by the sample size, took place during the 2012-2013 school year. The study did not afford the opportunity to generalize findings to all assistant principals in New Jersey and did not explore the research problem in more geographical depth. Additionally, the study was limited by the opinions shared by the study participants and has to assume that those thoughts are honest and truthful. Similarly, the study relied on the experiences of study participants and, by extension, the way in which they were led and managed by their principals. Perceptions about workplace politics also limited this study and influenced the opinions of study participants.

Delimitations

The study included only assistant principals with five years or more of service in the same role and examined Self-Determined Motivation Theory as it relates to the factors that influence the decision to pursue a principalship. The study surveyed those who have the skills from a certificated and application/experiential standpoint to pursue a principalship. Assistant principals with five or more years of experience fall into that category. The researcher interviewed both male and female subjects who serve as assistant principals and hold required credentials to serve as school principals. The study endeavored to survey a cross-section of assistant principals from an experience
perspective: sitting assistant principals with 5 to 20 years of experience were considered for inclusion in this study. Possible study participants were screened prior to a formal interview in order to ensure that the pool of interview subjects reflected a perfect criteria match for inclusion in the study.

**Definition of Terms**

*Accountability* is an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility for one’s actions.

*Administrative Certification* is a certificate that endorses that an individual completed the certificate-level training in education administration for a principal.

*Deterrent* is anything that inhibits, restrains, or impedes the advancement of something or someone.

*Education Accountability* is the act of being responsible and holding schools, teachers, and administrators accountable for students’ academic progress.

*Education Administrators* are individuals who hold a variety of different positions and work in different capacities in an education office, an education department, a school district or school. Education administrators are the people that lead and manage staff members and students.

*Financial Compensation* is a fixed compensation for services, paid to a person on a regular basis.

*Instructional Leader* is someone who is involved in setting clear goals, allocating resources to instruction, managing the curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, and evaluating teachers.
Manager is a person responsible for controlling or administering all or part of a
company or similar organization.

No Child Left Behind is a United States Act of Congress concerning the education
of children in public schools. It supports standards-based education reform, which is
based on the belief that setting high standards and establishing measureable goals can
improve an individual’s outcome in education. The Act requires states to develop
assessments in basic skills to be given to all students in specified grades.

Race to the Top is an amendment to No Child Left Behind.

Tapping is an informal recruitment mechanism of teachers to become principals.

Principal is an individual holding the building-level administrative position in
which he or she supervises and facilitates the daily operations of a school and is viewed
as the leader of the school.

Qualified Candidate is an individual who has the professional certificate and
ability to perform a particular job or task.

Tenure is the status granted to an employee after a probationary period, indicating
that the position or employment is permanent.

Summary

This chapter presented background information pertaining to reasons that may
influence experienced assistant principals to pursue a principal position. The chapter
included the purpose of the study, introduced a problem of practice, stated research
questions with hypotheses, explained the significance of the study, noted the limitations
and delimitations of the study, and offered a definition of terms for the reader. Chapter II
will review the current literature relative to the research topic.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review examines the themes of career stability and individual perception, transition and mentoring, role ambiguity, motivation and job satisfaction, gender, and the candidate pool. The review of literature reveals a shallow research base specifically as it relates to examining the motivating factors that influence assistant principals to pursue a principal position.

The review of literature is organized topically based on articles that were found in the following databases: ProQuest, EBSCOhost Electronic Journal Service, ERIC, and SAGE Journals Online accessed through the Walsh Library at Seton Hall University. This chapter represents a review of the major research relative to the topic of influencing factors to consider when deciding to pursue a principal position in a public school. A topical overview was developed in order to establish a global inspection of the areas that impact the pursuit of a principal position. The review of literature includes major topical themes relative to the problem statement as identified below:

1. Perceptions of career stability factors relative to the assistant principal position as stepping stone and training ground
2. Transition to the principal position: recruitment, mentoring received as an assistant principal, succession planning, positional preparation, and candidate tapping
3. Hybrid roles of instructional leadership and operational management
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4. Motivation theory, job satisfaction, role definition/work load, and accountability

5. Gender challenges, realities, and trends

6. Candidate pool and depth

Fields (2002) found that the role of the assistant principal is one of the least researched and discussed topics in professional journals and books on educational leadership. Additionally, the PsycINFO database contains only two scientific articles published since 1970 on school leaders’ motivation (Fernet, 2010, p. 308).

**Perceptions of Assistant Principal Position as Stepping Stone and Training Ground**

Despite the findings in Fields (2002), research does exist that examines the role of the assistant principal in an education institution. Leaders are measured by their sense of purpose, ability to get others engaged with them as they translate purposes, manage the enterprise, and intervene when required to keep the system on target (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003).

The assistant principal position is regarded as an important step in attaining the principalship. The assistant principal is seen as a necessary and critical position in the educational organization; the assistant principal provides the primary training ground for the principalship (Madden, 2008, p. 2).

MacCorkle (2004) found that participants in her study indicated that overall they more than slightly agreed that their jobs were clearly defined. This finding was contradictory to indications in the literature that the assistant principal role is vague and undefined (Hartzel et al., 1995; Reed & Himmler, 1985; Scoggins & Bishop 1993). The study also found that regardless of clarity (or lack thereof) as it relates to role definition
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of the assistant principal, the relative lack of ambiguity did not have any effect on assistant principals’ career plans. There was no significant correlation between their plans for the next few years and their perception of the clarity of the expectations of the job (p. 58).

**Transition to the Principal Position**

Educational literature about the assistant principalship suggests that the position does not provide a smooth transition into the role of principal (Denmark & Davis, 2000; Hartzell, 1993). It is apparent that a cadre of knowledge and skills is essential to effectively perform the array of responsibilities associated with the assistant principalship, but the majority of assistant principals indicated that they lacked the necessary training to perform many of these responsibilities (Weller & Weller, 2000).

Miller (2008, p. 78) examines the career intent of elementary assistant principals in an urban setting. This study resulted in no significant association with age, race, gender, health status, or readiness to lead. However, there was a significant relationship between the completion of a district-sponsored leadership academy and assistant principal desire to serve in the role (Miller, 2008, p. 79). While female and male respondents showed equal interest in pursuing the role, female respondents were more apt to be career assistant principals.

MacCorkle (2004) studied factors that influence career stability of assistant principals. Findings showed that participation in a leadership preparation program (p. 1), had a significant correlation with career stability. Similarly, an inclusive administrative teaming process in lieu of hierarchical leadership (p. 56) resulted in assistant principals who are comfortable with their jobs.
Results from the *Assistant Principal Career Stability Survey* (MacCorkle 2004, p. 61) confirm the importance of the relationship between mentor and protégé as well as the leadership structure in which they work; the former is a determinant of principal success after they have served as assistant principals under such a leadership structure.

Jeffords (2008) also found that boards of education and institutions of higher learning provide cooperative programs of administrative professional development so that practicing administrators can interact with peers and professors regarding issues of mutual importance (p. 105). Additional findings in Jeffords (2008) suggested that specific factors inhibit the pursuit of promotion: accountability and performance expectations, burdens on schools of low socio-economic status, and systemic/institutional factors.

Findings in *Good Principals Aren’t Born - They’re Mentored* (Gray, Fry, Bottoms, & O’Neill, 2007) indicate that mentoring, in its current state, fails to ensure that aspiring principals are prepared on the first day of the job and for all the days that follow. For aspiring administrators who oftentimes become assistant principals, it is often the luck of the draw when it comes to the effectiveness of mentoring in field-based experiences.

A Wallace Foundation study, *The Making of the Principal: 5 Lessons in Leadership Training* (Mitgang, 2012) found that training academies coupled with a selective, probing process for choosing successful candidates for district level training academies (p. 2) improves the quality of candidates that are recommended to principal positions.

Principals need sound preparation and mentoring, both in the classroom and in the field. In *Education Leadership: A Bridge to School Reform* (2007) Linda Darling-
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Hammond said, “It’s the work they [principals] do that enables teachers to be effective, as it is not just the traits that teachers bring but their ability to use what they know in a high-functioning organization that produces student success.” Mitgang (2012) found that it is the leader who recruits and retains high quality staff and…it is the leader who must develop this organization. The onus of several critical operational components is placed on the principal in order to ensure the smooth operation of the district.

Leadership works best when it is shared in the school community (Mitgang, 2012, p. 4); this finding supports the findings relative to mentoring and management style and its impact on assistant principals aspiring to the role of principal. Spiro, Mattis, and Mitgang (2007) reported that, especially in their first years on the job, assistant principals need high quality mentoring and professional development; a buddy system is too often the nature of mentoring and does a disservice (pp. 5-7). Overall, research (Mitgang 2012; Center for Applied Research, 2010; Linda-Darling Hammond, 2007) highlights issues relative to the transition and support of the building-level principalship that support why assistant principals might not find that role attractive.

Schmidt-Davis and Bottoms (2011) examined the issue of principal succession for the Southern Regional Educational Board in *Who’s Next: Let’s Stop Gambling on School Performance and Plan for Principal Succession*. The study reported that 18,000 principal openings exist per year and, additionally, that most states have done very little to prepare themselves for such a number of vacancies. Further, the study did not report evidence that state-level departments of education did not encourage districts to prepare either. The vacancies impact school culture (Louis, Leithwood, et al., 2010) and support the notion of creating test tube principals through a hire-and-hope approach (Bower,
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2007). However, Mitgang (2003) suggests that the problem of filling principal vacancies is not about quantity, but quality. When considering leadership preparation, candidate motivation, and succession planning, Schmidt-Davis and Bottoms suggest that districts have to take an aggressive approach that lead to filling the principal position with qualified candidates (p. 6).

Schmidt-Davis and Bottoms report that accountability (true evaluations), professionalism (pride in continuous improvement in knowledge base), teamwork (method of leadership and empowerment of others), trust (exercise of distributing tasks), ownership (empowering professionals to assume responsibility of problems and causes), and transparency (clarity of professional expectations) are hallmarks of organizations prepared to plan for the filling of principal vacancies.

In the context of concerns about the lack of educators willing to take on the role of principal from an international perspective, Lacey (2002) undertook a comparative study of leadership aspirations of school-based educators in Victoria, Australia, in order to examine the factors that impact their willingness to lead a school and made recommendations for a strategic approach to succession planning. Thompson (2010) found that only a handful of assistant principals are crafting their own professional development plan to the strategic plan of the school; assistant principals in this study do not believe they are viable candidates to assume the principal position in their current school (p. 111).

Assistant principals have an opportunity to craft their work in order to be better prepared for the position from which they are a heartbeat away. The principal almost exclusively determines the duties and responsibilities of the assistant principal. This
means that the role of the assistant principal and the duties he or she is assigned are greatly affected by the competence and experience of the principal. Therefore, the principal plays a major role in the development of the assistant principal. Hausman, Nebeker, McCreary, and Donaldson (2002) reported that the literature shows a trend in the importance of the role of the assistant principal. Ultimately, the assistant principal will be needed to pursue tasks related to student achievement and instruction, thus increasing his or her profile in organizations. Gone are days when assistant principals spend their days as attendance monitors and in student management oversight; their role continues to evolve under No Child Left Behind legislation and Race to the Top waivers into one of critical importance when student achievement is measured.

Assistant principals' duties usually included management of student conduct, attendance, and other managerial matters. When examining the progress of the assistant principal position, Glanz (1994) reports that the intent of crafting the assistant principal position in this fashion was to provide support for teaching and learning by assuming the responsibility for all non-instructional items that take place in a school. Namely, administration of discipline connected with student conduct and monitoring individual and overall student attendance fell under this broad professional responsibility that served to buffer the classroom learning environment from external disruptors. Denmark and Davis (2000) concluded that if the principal places more emphasis on management of operations, the likelihood of the assistant principal's learning to be a leader is diminished. Other research reports that student discipline, student activities, and student attendance are still viewed as the three major duties of assistant principals (Simpson, 2000). Further research (Celikten, 2001) listed five major responsibilities typically reported as important
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to the role of the assistant principal: disciplining students, distributing textbooks, supervising the cafeteria, assigning lockers, and attending student activities. Historically, the assistant principal position has focused on the operational and management levels, not instructional leadership or student achievement.

In a study by Harris, Muijs, and Crawford (2003), it was found that assistant principals were self-deterring in applying for principal positions because of the difficulties they experience in coping with an expanded set of responsibilities. This speaks to the inclusion and collaboration philosophies of leadership responsibilities that are incorporated by the principal.

Myung, Loeb, and Horng (2011) examined the topic of tapping candidates in the absence of a formalized succession management program. The researchers define tapping as an informal recruitment mechanism of teachers to become principals (p. 696). The study surveyed nearly 8,200 educators and found the following regarding those that were tapped (see Tables 1-3).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>Implication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9% of teachers were tapped by the principal</td>
<td>Respondents were tapped more by colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72% of current principals and 52% of current assistant principals were tapped by their principal</td>
<td>Once tapped, many used it as motivation to move on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers viewed the principalship positively</td>
<td>Ability to influence school change, salary, building staff, and student relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers viewed the principalship negatively</td>
<td>Impact of work hours, tasks that compromise responsibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Table 2 illustrates the pattern that candidate tapping took in gender roles: 10% of females were tapped by males, 22% of males were tapped by females, 45% of females were tapped by another female, and 8% of males were tapped by a male. Table 3 illustrates the pattern that candidate took in race/ethnicity roles.

Table 2

*Gender Pattern of Candidate Tapping*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Pattern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Male-Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22%</td>
<td>Female-Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45%</td>
<td>Female-Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8%</td>
<td>Male-Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

*Race/Ethnicity of Candidate Tapping*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Pattern</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23%</td>
<td>Hispanic-Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7%</td>
<td>Hispanic-Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>Hispanic-White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6%</td>
<td>Black-Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11%</td>
<td>Black-Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>White-Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7%</td>
<td>White-White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6%</td>
<td>Black-White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4%</td>
<td>White-Black</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, Myung, Loeb, and Horng (2011) found that there is little difference in probability of having been tapped as a future administrator by a school principal; gender is not significantly associated with the likelihood of being tapped; and race, years of experience and current school level were not predictors in being tapped.

Several initiatives are underway in an effort to address the issue of recruiting and retaining effective building-level principals. The Allegheny County Schools in West
Virginia are phasing in a plan to base principals’ pay on a formula indexed to the top of the teachers’ salary schedule. Fairfax County Public Schools created LEAD Fairfax, a training and internship program for aspiring principals.

The Maryland State Department of Education established a Principals’ Academy for new administrators to provide encouragement, tools, and a peer group with which to network for day-to-day solutions. The Principals’ Academy is a component of the Maryland Educational Leadership Initiative, designed to attract, train, and retain principals (NAESP, 2007).

What is being done to ensure that America’s schools will have strong leaders? At the state and district levels, the focus is on aggressive recruitment of likely candidates, support of new principals, redefinition of priority tasks, and implementing competitive pay rates (NASSP, 2007). Orr and Orphanos (2010) studied the impact of leadership preparation programs on public schools. They found that the integration of instructional and transformational leadership—as evidenced by the manner in which exemplary leadership programs are designed—was an outgrowth of focusing upon student learning, development of teachers’ capacity, and the use of achievement data to guide their work. The study found that exemplary leadership preparation programs serve to actively recruit—and create—quality candidates.

Principal recruitment is also a concern for education researchers because despite the existence of empirical studies about teacher recruitment, the education literature is virtually devoid of empirical research about administrator recruitment (Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). One of the key drivers in assuring a pool of candidates will be determined by the motives and intentions of potential building-level administrators,
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depending in large part on what candidates actually think about school leadership, and the principalship in particular (Cranston, 2003).

**Hybrid Roles of Instructional Leadership and Operational Management**

Recent studies note the importance of the assistant principal in the school system, particularly with regard to curriculum, staff development, and instructional leadership (Dunleavy, 2010). Furthermore, several legislative mandates have helped to change the role of the assistant principal. One of the biggest reasons that the assistant principal's role is changing is that the demands on and accountability of the principal have changed. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) altered the national landscape of public education by making standardized test scores in reading and mathematics critical factors in judging student, teacher, principal, and school performance. The new accountability movement has transformed what the role of the principal has become. Similarly, it has changed what the role of the assistant principal has become as well (Dunleavy, 2010).

One possible solution for meeting these new demands is for principals to place more responsibility on the shoulders of the assistant principal in the area of instructional leadership and in the role of teaching and learning. NCLB is just one of recent reform movements to have impacted the assistant principal. Certainly, the *A Nation at Risk* report (National Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983) and the standards movement played key roles in reshaping education and, subsequently, the roles assigned to assistant principals.

In an examination of mentoring assistant principals, Ryan (2011) indicated that the assistant principal position is undergoing a transformation from manager to instructional leader. As it stands currently, the assistant principal position evolved
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predominantly from that of general supervisor; several other names used for the position are vice principal, administrative assistant, associate principal, and assistant to the principal (p. 11).

Changing forces in education are giving rise to the idea that assistant principals may need to have a broader range of administrative responsibilities, including those traditionally reserved for the building principal. Assistant principals are being asked to function more like principals in an age of accountability but are not pursuing principal positions as they become available (Waskiewics, 2012, p. 4). Additionally, because of the focus on principals and teachers, the movement to reform American education has placed an increased burden on building principals to improve the overall quality of the level at which students achieve and the growth they demonstrate from year to year. More is expected from the people who supervise teachers. These increased expectations have set the stage for an expansion of the role of assistant principals to aid principals in performing duties that are becoming increasingly difficult (Waskiewics, 2012, p. 5).

The evolution of the assistant principal position has not happened overnight. Smith (1987) surveyed assistant principals, principals, directors of secondary education, and district superintendents in the state of Washington; their findings suggest support among these leaders for an enhanced role for assistant principals, especially in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and professional development.

Bartholomew, Melendez-Delaney, Orta, and White (2005) analyzed the role and efficacy of assistant principals and found them to be skillful curriculum specialists with the potential to be instructional leaders. While there has not been much change in the role of assistant principal over the last 30 years, Evans (2002, p.1) cites increased
academic attention over the last 30 years to the examination of the role, its definition, and its significance in the administrative hierarchy of schools. Matthews and Crow (2003) found that the assistant principal’s role is undergoing change in contemporary schools, which creates role confusion and ambiguity, suggesting that there is great need for instructional leadership but that traditional managerial roles continue to present themselves (p. 273).

Mertz (2000) reported the various daily applied responsibilities of assistant principals as follows: discipline, parking, athletics, lockers, dances, drama productions, other school events, open houses, new teacher support, intern supervision, graduation, liaison to other organizations or agencies, cafeteria duty, hallway monitoring, state reporting records, special projects, and going to meetings outside of the school.

In this study, Mertz (2000) explains that of all the duties assigned to assistant principals, discipline consumed a major portion of their responsibility and was addressed almost daily with students. Their discipline duties included dealing with students' being sent to the assistant principals by teachers (or other school staff), meetings with parents, holding disciplinary hearings, and monitoring disciplinary decisions, especially detention or in-school suspensions. These findings might explain why the role concept that has evolved for elementary assistant principals versus their middle and secondary counterparts makes them more apt to become principals as compared to secondary assistant principals (Dunelavy, 2010).

In 1965-1966, Austin and Brown (1970) conducted a normative study of secondary assistant principals consisting of information gathered from 1,127 assistant
principals and 1,207 principals from all fifty states. The researchers divided the roles and responsibilities of an assistant principal into six general categories: (a) school management, (b) staffing/personnel, (c) community relations, (d) student activities, (e) curriculum and instruction, and (f) student issues. The survey asked assistant principals to report the most important administrative tasks that they perform. The most common answers that assistant principals reported in the survey are discipline (83%), student attendance issues (76%), master schedule (72%), concerns related to school policies (69%), curriculum development (67%), teacher evaluations (64%), being involved in new teacher orientation and guidance (62%), and dealing with school opening and closing (55%).

Koru (1993) reported that the assistant principal has a three-fold job: crisis manager, custodian, and visionary. In his study, Koru concluded that assistant principals have limited access to opportunities in the area of instructional leadership, and that this position is not an adequate training ground for the principalship.

In a survey of 100 practicing assistant principals from rural, suburban, and urban schools, Weller and Weller (2002) reported on a prioritized order of the skills and knowledge needed to be an effective assistant principal: interpersonal skills; knowledge of leadership theory; techniques for improving curriculum and instruction; ability to work with professional teams (and community, civic, and business leaders); knowing the politics and networks within the schools; ability to conduct effective meetings; ability to manage time; and knowing how to be flexible, diplomatic, and pursue their roles with patience and empathy. The skills that assistant principals have to master are vast and far-reaching.
Assistant principal responsibilities have been identified in separate clusters of studies. Bates and Shank (1983), Black (1980), and Smith (1987) identified assistant principals as being associated with attendance and discipline and being perceived to have little influence over the leadership of schools.

Porter (1996), Kaplan and Owings (1999), and Merz (2000) discussed the evolution of the assistant principal position by identifying that it had become responsible for administering discipline and monitoring attendance in addition to providing instructional materials, overseeing substitutes, developing curriculum, supervising teacher evaluation/coaching, and promoting school goals.

Hausman, Nebeker, and McCreary (2002) identified seven dimensions of being an assistant principal: instructional leadership, personnel management, interaction with education hierarchy, professional development, resource management, public relations, and student management.

Still more dimensions were identified in an Australian study by Cranston, Tromans, and Reugebrink (2004): strategic leadership, education and curriculum leadership, management and administration, student issues, parent and community issues, and operational issues.

When examining motivation, Shen, Cooley, and Wegenke (2004) found that factors considered in deciding whether or not to apply for a principal position include workload/compensation, macro-constraints, impact of the position on the individual and family, intrinsic rewards, opportunity for advancement, work environment, school district characteristics, school safety, and community characteristics.
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Student discipline, drug and alcohol abuse, teacher-administrator conflict, and increased public skepticism continue to complicate the administrator’s role, responsibilities, and the nature of administrative work. The demands of a modern society have complicated and intensified the administrator’s work responsibilities (Cooley & Shen, 1999).

Motivation Theory, Job Satisfaction, Role Definition, and Accountability

In a dissertation study about elementary level assistant principals in an urban setting, Miller (2009, p. 80) reported that interest by the study subjects negates a theory that there is a shortage of interested candidates for principal positions. According to the study, those under the age of 51 demonstrated self-determined motivation and were interested in the principal position; the younger the respondent, the more interest existed in moving onto a principalship.

Miller (2009, p. 80) found a statistical significance with candidate age, race, health issues, feeling prepared to run a school, and career goals. Previous studies in which respondents reflected upon upward mobility support this claim (Bates, 2003; Huscusson, 2001).

Edwards (2009) studied factors that determine the career stability of assistant principals. This study, performed in a large urban school district in the southeast United States, found that fewer years experience as an assistant principal resulted in a higher degree of upwardly mobile career stability. Newer assistant principals believe themselves to be more upwardly mobile than veterans in the same role (p. 120). Further, the study found that administrators who begin as assistant principals look to the district to satisfy their professional and psychological growth needs in order to obtain job
satisfaction. In order to produce positive outcomes, it is essential that school districts create supportive long-term staff development strategies for improving their administrative personnel’s complex leadership skills (p. 139).

Studies have supported the idea that while there are qualified individuals available (i.e., assistant principals), they do not wish to move into the principal position (Cushing, et al., 2003; Goodwin, 2002). The results of these studies were validated in MacCorkle (2004). In terms of motivation for an assistant principal to pursue a principal position, MacCorkle (2004) reported that 22% of respondents indicated that family and personal time concerns were precluding these candidates from pursuing a promotion and committing to more time away from their families.

The findings in Jeffords (2008) showed that practicing administrators prioritize different factors when considering advancement to a higher level. Economic security became the primary factor. The need for financial compensation in accordance with additional responsibilities, time on task, and continued professional development were of great importance. It is incumbent upon boards of education to become more cognizant of the working conditions and financial compensation provided for their administrators if they hope to retain quality leaders in their schools (Jeffords, 2008 p. 105).

Historically, there has been a great deal of research conducted on job satisfaction since Elton Mayo studied the work habits of the employees at the Hawthorne Western Electric plant in the 1920s (Pugh, 1990). Smith, Kendall and Hulin (1969) found no correlation between job satisfaction and performance. Gruenberg (1979) stated that productivity had a positive influence on job satisfaction. Barbash (1979) stated that the
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relationship between job satisfaction and performance-related behavior has yet to be significantly correlated.

Spector (1985) wrote, “Attitudes have shown to relate to behavior although correlations are typically modes. Withdrawal behavior, turnover, absenteeism, and withdrawal intentions are expected to correlate with satisfaction.” Bruce and Blackburn (1992) wrote, “Satisfied employees are more likely to experience high internal work motivation, to give high quality work performance, and to have low absenteeism and turnover.”

Bruce and Blackburn (1992) indicated that satisfied employees are more likely to experience high internal work motivation, to give high quality work performance, and to have low absenteeism and turnover (p. 6). To Gruneberg (1979), an individual’s feelings about the pay, security, and other benefits and rewards received from a job were of great importance to the individual’s well being. Additionally, Smith, Kendall, and Hulin (1969) stated that striving for ways to make workers’ jobs more satisfying was of humanitarian value, and job satisfaction was a legitimate goal in itself. Despite the unclear relationship between job satisfaction and job productivity, job satisfaction is still of general importance for management to consider.

There are reports of dissatisfaction among assistant principals (Calabrese, 1991; Kelly, 1987; Sutter, 1994); however, in general, assistant principals seem to like their jobs (Gorton & Kalaman, 1985; Kelly, 1987; Sutter, 1994). Kelly (1987) stated there was distaste among assistant principals for the two primary responsibilities with which they are most often associated: attendance and discipline. Of the variables hypothesized to have an effect on job satisfaction, supervisor relations and ability utilization (i.e., the
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work assistant principals were assigned) were reported. Relations with supervisors and the feeling that abilities are being utilized are important variables in determining whether or not an assistant principal is satisfied with the job.

Walker and Kwan (2009) found that a number of factors are linked with motivation for assistant principals to pursue a principalship: involvement with professional development, the desire to be a lifelong learner, and the applicant’s age. Specifically, assistant principals between the ages of 45 and 54 are more eager to assume a principalship than are either older or younger colleagues (p. 608).

When examining the evolving workload that assistant principals have, Murphy and Beck (1994) found that contradictory leadership demands confused and frustrated assistant principals by asking them to work actively to transform, restructure, and redefine schools while holding organizational positions historically and traditionally committed to resisting change and maintaining stability.

The changing nature of school administration--in terms of professional status, complexity of tasks, time demands, and accountability for results--is another deterrent to pursuing an administrative career (Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). Negative views of the principalship are reported in both the academic literature and the media (Cranston, 2007; Pounder & Merrill, 2001).

The perception among potential principal candidates is that one must be a superman to meet all the expectations of the position (Eckman, 2004). Increased job demands include greater accountability on the part of the principals for student achievement (Harris, 2007; Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). There is a de-motivation resulting from bureaucracy, excessive paperwork, and constant change (Cranston, 2007).
Men and women who entered the field as teachers years ago, and who have since garnered the experience and training to qualify as administrators are refusing to take that step (Sava, 1998).

The demands of principalship have placed more stress on individuals and made the job less appealing, more demanding, and, ultimately, have placed a great amount of new responsibility on those in this leadership position. The average workday and workyear has been extended. The typical workday of principals begins at 7 a.m. and ends at 7 p.m. They work an average of 54 hours per week, and they are contracted for an average of 240 days a year. In contrast, teachers are contracted for 180 to 190 days per year, and their workday is dramatically shorter. Principals are expected to attend PTA meetings, sporting events, plays, community meetings, and many other activities outside of school hours (Hinton & Kastner, 2000). Faced with that picture of the job at hand, it is perhaps not surprising that many potential principals are thinking carefully about whether they want to take on such a challenging role (Walker & Qian, 2006).

Today’s principal and the principal of the past may share similar duties, but the expectations and profile have evolved over the past decades (Hinton & Kastner, 2000). Winter and Morgenthal (2002) observed that the school principals of 30 years ago were in many ways the masters of their domain. Principals enjoyed a parental rather than a quasi-legal relationship with students and experienced far less formal and less frequent interaction with parents and community groups.

The school principal has been characterized as an underpaid workhorse, juggling the demands of instructional leadership, bureaucracy, official mandates, and adverse interest groups (Howley, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005) and is responsible to act in loco
Nationally, principal recruitment is one of the most critical issues facing public schools today (Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). Coupled with the increasing responsibility and accountability demands being placed on principals in these new times, making their roles more demanding and complex, there is strong interest in a context of the availability of a quality aspirant pool (Cranston, 2007).

Cooley and Shen (1999) conducted a study of 189 master’s degree students enrolled in a Midwestern university’s education leadership program. Study subjects were asked to complete a survey identifying factors that influenced their decision to apply for an administrative position. Those factors included the nature of the work (including demographic factors of the district); overall responsibilities; evening supervision of events; salary; district location; perceived community support; level of politics; interconnectedness of relationship between the governing body, school administration, and instructional/support staff; and reputation of the superintendent. The research supports the notion that there are numerous external and competing factors that influence career decisions.

Further research by Tirozzi and Ferrandino (2000) indicated that the emotional aspects of administrative responsibilities were a major consideration for 65% of the respondents when applying for an administrative position. Teachers often question whether the extra compensation and prestige is worth being second-guessed and criticized by both internal and external stakeholders. Teachers recognize stress as a critical part of administration.

Numerous conditions affecting the decision to seek or not seek a position as a school assistant principal or principal have been identified: lack of tenure, poor
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publishing of vacancy, inadequate funding, negative media reports, unpredictable satisfaction ratio, accountability measures, community relations, hours required to perform the job, stress, and insufficient compensation (Hinton & Kastner, 2000).

A significant factor affecting the decision to pursue or not pursue a building-level principalship is that while principals put stress on teachers to improve outcomes, teachers often do not lose their jobs over low accountability ratings; principals do (Hill & Banta, 2008).

State-by-state studies of factors influencing the decision to pursue or not pursue a building-level principalship are not available. However, a study conducted in Michigan provides a picture of factors judged to be significant by superintendents, human relations directors, principals, and administrative teams (Cusick, 2003). Study results indicated that salary compensation is a major factor. While principals earn $10,000 to $25,000 more each year in annual salary than teachers, they work between 20 and 40 more days per year. Perhaps more importantly, their days are often 10-12 hours long, starting between 5:30 a.m. and 7:00 a.m. and going into the evening with activities and events. Many would-be administrators, particularly those rearing children, look at the work time required and decide not to apply (Cusick, 2003, p. 2).

While money was mentioned first by study subjects, the main reason identified for the decline in qualified principal candidates was that changes in the job itself made it less attractive. Factors cited included legislated expectations and increased parental demands; and the expanding number of things schools are expected to do increases the number and kinds of responsibilities that fall to the principal: school improvement, annual reports, accountability, core curriculum, student safety, gender and equity issues,
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mission statements, goals and outcomes, staff development, curriculum alignment, special education, and accreditation (Cusick, 2003).

Other reasons noted in research for not pursuing a building-level principalship included complex and extremely time-consuming responsibilities. There is a lack of compensation for after school and weekend duties, and a perceived deterioration of the quality of family life brought about by the heavy workload of the principal. The sense of isolation from and conflict with different educational constituents also arose as a reason for not pursuing a building-level principalship. Even more troubling may be the physically and psychologically draining effects of trying to address multiple contradictory expectations with limited resources (Howley, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005).

Other conditions considered as disincentives and affecting the decision to seek or not seek a position as a school assistant principal or principal are that managing a work/life balance is easier in a current role, and high satisfaction in a current role creates little desire to change (Cranston, 2007).

Incentives associated with the principalship include making a difference for students and influencing the direction schools are taking. Being ready for more responsibility was characterized as an incentive. Furthermore, wanting a new challenge to expand horizons and wanting a chance to use good ideas were identified as incentives for pursuing the principalship (Howley, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005).

Prior research shows that school leaders are experiencing increasing dissatisfaction and occupational difficulties (Chapman, 2005; Friedman, 2008), thus prompting researchers to postulate that motivation impacts the role of the school leader. Work motivation is defined as a set of energetic forces that determine the form, direction,
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intensity, and duration of work-related behavior (Pinder, 1998). Much of the research
thus far has given particular attention to the relationship between motivation and
variables concerning attitude (work satisfaction), psychological health, and job
functioning (Fernet, 2010).

Self-Determined Motivation Theory

Self-Determined Motivation Theory considers not only the intensity of
motivation, but also its quality. Self-Determined Motivation Theory postulates different
types of motivation that lead to differential outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 1985). It includes
intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to
performing a task for pleasure, extrinsic refers to performing a task as an end, and
amotivation refers to the relative absence of intrinsic and extrinsic; it occurs when people
do not perceive a relationship between their actions and the outcomes and feel unable to
achieve their goals (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

There are several different types of extrinsic motivation: external regulation,
introjected regulation, integrated regulation, and identified regulation. External
regulation occurs when behaviors are regulated to obtain a reward or avoid a constraint.
Introjected regulation corresponds to the process whereby an external demand becomes
an internal representation (i.e., people put pressure on them to make sure a particular
behavior is performed). Integrated regulation refers to behavior that is performed not
only because individuals value its significance but also because it is consistent with their
identities. Identified regulation is defined as behavior that individuals choose to perform
because it is congruent with their own values and goals (Deci & Ryan, 1985).
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Self-Determined Motivation Theory postulates specific relations between the motivations and their psychological, affective, and behavioral outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Additionally, Self Determined Motivation (intrinsic motivation and identified regulation) fosters positive outcomes, whereas non-self-determined motivation (introjected regulation, external regulation, and amotivation) leads to negative outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 1985). A hierarchical model of Self Determined Motivation proposes that the different motivations operate on three levels of generality: global, contextual, and situational (Vallerand, 1997).

A study done by Fernet (2010) validated the use of the Work Role Motivation Scale for School Principals (WRMS-SP). The findings from the study on motivation support a multi-factorial structure on the scale and its invariance with respect to a principal’s gender and position (Fernet, 2010). Additionally, the study confirms the multidimensional nature of school principals’ motivations; the data suggest that principals have different reasons for engaging in their work or activities. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of construct specificity; the notion of specificity accounts for the variability of the psychological process inherent in a particular work activity. Last, the results show that principals’ motivations, particularly intrinsic motivation and identified regulation, are specific to work roles; in short, a principal can select something in one responsibility but not the next (Fernet, 2010).

Gender Challenges, Realities, and Trends

In To Climb or Not to Climb: The Probing of Self-Imposed Barriers to Delay or Deny Career Aspirations to be an Administrator in a Public School System, McGhee (2010) found that significant progress has made it possible to break the gender glass
ceiling, but there remains a disproportionate percentage of women in the higher educational administrative positions (p. 1). There continue to be barriers to pursuit by candidates, some of them self-imposed. Derrington and Sharratt (2009) replicated a 1993 study surveying women in Washington State who aspired to hold or already held a superintendent position. Administering the same survey 14 years later found that women still encountered barriers, but they were reported as self-imposed and not societal (i.e., institutionalized and rooted in societal practices such as gender role stereotyping and sex discrimination).

Studies have found the following relative to gender roles and gender stereotyping: Curphey (2003) found that males held a majority of administrative positions; however, the 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing Report (Cross, 2010) indicates that women comprise 75.8% of teaching positions in elementary and secondary schools, while in the 2007-2008 school year only 56% of women held a principal position in an elementary or secondary school (Battle, 2010). These findings suggest several things. First, there is a considerable gender gap, given the percentage of women teachers. Second, the two studies indicate a sharp increase in women who are serving in administrative roles over a four-year time span.

Roser, Brown, and Kelsey (2009) reported that, according to the Texas Education Agency, women in Texas have been the dominant gender in school administration since 1998, with 73.5% of elementary administrative positions, and 41.3% of junior high positions, and 29.8% of high school positions being staffed by women. Both Curphey (2003) and Glass and Franeschini (2007) reported a rise in women superintendents: 12% in 1990, 13% in 2003, and 22% in 2006. Hickey-Gramke (2007) reported that there is an
aggressive recruitment of high school principals, who are predominantly male, to become superintendents. Two-thirds of the nation’s schools are elementary schools and are led by women, making most of the superintendent pool men. Thus, if this form held true, according to McGhee (2010), only one in three superintendent appointments would be women.

McGhee (2010) was able to identify self-imposed barriers that hindered the pursuit of promotion by women: family anxiety (29% of respondents) and politics (26%). Additionally, findings suggest that women begin their career later in life, plan ahead, and earn promotions with increased confidence of preparedness. Education and certification are no longer barriers for women. They are making their own choices and establishing their own timelines (McGhee, 2010, pp. 9-12).

In a review of data from 125 assistant principals in Maine, results showed gender differences with regard to assistant principals' time spent on certain tasks. Females spent more time on instructional leadership, professional development, personnel management, and public relations as compared to males. Thus, female assistant principals were more visible and involved in tasks associated with programs than male assistant principals.

Whitaker and Vogel (2005) examined individuals from a Rocky Mountain state who had completed a principal licensure program and had applied for a principal position within a five-year period. The study found that age had an impact on whether or not assistant principals applied for a position and that a higher percentage of males applied for positions (21% to 14%) as compared to females, even though they are the minority gender in the profession. Ambition, salary, high-stakes accountability, and poor preparation were also cited as factors
While examining reactions of males and females as it relates to attributes of the principalship, Giesen, Freeman, Bishop, and Zietoun (2003) researched whether specific aspects of the principalship influence the decision making of men and women differently in the process of applying for a position. The results show that both men and women are likely to make their job choice decisions based on salary. Additionally, McGhee (2010, p. 12) cited that more women make their decision based on opportunity to engage in instructional leadership. Surprisingly, the demands of the number of hours required per week did not have an impact on either men or women to pursue a principalship.

Young and McLeod (2001) performed an exploratory study of women that focused on decisions to enter educational administration. Findings suggest career aspirations of women who ultimately enter the field of education administration are related to their career commitments, positional goals, and leadership orientations. Three factors affect their entrance into administration: administrative role models, exposure to transformative leadership styles, and the endorsement and/or support they receive during the process.

**Candidate Pool and Depth**

A shortage of administrative candidates has been predicted and confirmed by scholars (Afolabi, Nweke & Stephens, 2003; Carney, 2006; Fordham, 2003; Guterman, 2007; Moore, 1999; Papa, Jr., & Baxter, 2005; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). While the shortage has been reported most predominantly at the secondary level and urban areas and settings (Carney, 2006; Moore, 1999; Pounder & Merrill, 2001), research has taken issue with principal candidate quality more so than quantity (Carney, 2006; Kufel & Parks, 2010; McNeese et al., 2008; Moore, 1999; Pijanowski, Hewitt & Brady, 2009).
shortage in candidate quality impacts secondary levels, urban areas, and, ultimately, teaching and learning.

In an examination of principal mobility, Battle (2010) indicates that 10,690 principals chose to leave their positions during 2007-2008. It was noted that 1,880 of those had less than three years of experience, 2,110 had 6-9 years of experience, and 4,870 had ten years or more of experience as principals. It was found that 45.4% of those that left principal positions retired, 15.6% are working in a K-12 school but not as a principal, 33.2% are working in K-12 education but not in a K-12 school, and 3.2% are working in a job outside of K-12 education.

Battle (2010) reports that 79.5% of school principals nationwide remained in their positions for the 2008-2009 school year, 6.9% of principals moved to other positions, and 11.9% left the field of education altogether. The prospect of filling the nearly 11,000 vacancies nationwide is a challenge from a numbers perspective alone. Adding the various contexts of positional stress, responsibility, and accountability adds additional layers to the challenge.

The increased government-mandated demands for school leaders to improve low-achieving schools have contributed to rapid retirement of baby boomers and more early retirement of other school administrators (White, Cooper & Brayman, 2006). As the role of the school principal has evolved during the era of No Child Left Behind (and continuing during the Race to the Top era), the comfort level of principals to perform commensurate with student achievement expectations has waned.

Cranston (2007) found that a pool of aspiring principal candidates identified four main factors as potential incentives for seeking the principalship: capacity to achieve
work-life balance, school location acceptable to the family, good work conditions, and good remuneration. A wide range of variables determines the conditions affecting the decision to seek or not seek a position as a school assistant principal or principal. Central to these issues are factors such as the importance of school building-level principalship, the shrinking pool of principal candidates, and factors influencing decisions to pursue or not pursue the building-level principalship. Within the United States, and in other countries, similar concerns challenge school leaders in filling open principal positions.

A focus on principals comes at a time when the pool of people ready and willing to serve as principals is shrinking (Cusick, 2003). Shortages of applicants at all levels are reported, with authors reporting that the shortage of principal applicants is especially acute at the high school and middle school levels (Battle, 2010; Bowles, King & Crow, 2000; Ringel, Gates, Chung, Brown & Ghosh-Dastidina, 2004). A respondent to a survey noted, “I would hate to be trying to hire a high school principal right now--the candidates are just not there” (Winter & Morgenthal, 2002, p. 320).

Based on the statistical data from the National Center of Education Statistics (Battle, 2010), the previously cited situation in Michigan is not symptomatic of only that state; the data suggests a challenge nationwide, in excess of 10,000 vacancies. Although the average age of building principals has risen over the past 20 years and increasing numbers of principals are retiring, the large number of retirements does not alone explain the shortage of candidates because the position--particularly in secondary schools--has increasingly opened up to women, a significant source of potential candidates who traditionally had not been considered (Cusick, 2003).
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According to Lashaway (2002), “Many individuals who possess the necessary credentials see the principal’s job as impossible--a stressful, thankless endeavor that doesn’t pay…to compensate for the frustrations” (p. 3). Lashaway (2002) speaks to the reality that stressors in an era of accountability are clearly impacting the decision for applicants in addition to current administrators rethinking their decision to become principals. Peterson (2002) suggests that school districts in the United States are currently facing a critical shortage of well-trained principals (p. 229). The candidate pool is interacting with principal turnover to contribute to a shortage.

Hartle and Thomas (2004) highlight the challenges of leadership and the crisis found within that responsibility. Their research suggests low numbers of leadership candidates in applicant pools will only intensify the expected retirements by experienced leaders. Sterrett (2011) indicates that principals are the first to be labeled as failing and face expectations that are unrealistic (p. 48) even though they tend to take the most risks. In a study of Indiana principals, Boyland (2011) reported that 38% of respondents reported high job stress, 53% reported medium stress, and 7% reported low job stress (p. 5). These figures represent increases: 70% of principals with at least 5 years experience reported increases in stress over time, due in part to responsibilities connected to the accountability era (p. 6). The implications in Sterrett (2011) indicate that support measures to permit principals to perform in a manner that is congruent with academic expectations need to be implemented.

Trends indicate that filling open principal positions will become more difficult in the next decade as retirement rates of experienced principals increase, high percentages
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of current principals move to non-administrative positions, and numbers of qualified applicants choosing to become school leaders decrease (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003).

The Principal Shortage

The shortage of qualified applicants for building-level principals is not limited to a specific geographic area. Rural schools face challenges in attracting candidates due to location and smaller budgets (Bowles, King, & Crow, 2000; Ringel, Gates, Chung, Brown, & Ghosh-Dastidina, 2004). In 2008-2009 urban schools had 21,410 principals nationwide; 1,620 moved positions and 2,440 left their positions. Suburban areas reported 25,680 principals; 1,400 moved positions and 2,760 left their positions. Rural areas reported 29,080 principals, 2,290 moved positions and 3,570 left their positions.

Increasingly, literature suggests that the shortage of principal applicants may not be a shortage of individuals who are principal-certified and nominally qualified to apply for position vacancies. Succinctly, there is a shortage of teachers wanting to become principals (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000). There may be sufficient numbers of individuals qualified to apply for position vacancies, but they are not pursuing the job (Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). The replacement demand itself for the principalship would perhaps not be a matter of major concern were it not that there is increasing evidence that the aspirant pool is not all that large; that is, the number potentially moving into the principalship is smaller than expected (Cranston, 2007). The declining numbers of teachers seeking administrative certification and the fact that many who are studying for the degree do not plan to seek an administrative position after completing degree requirements, exacerbates the problem of replacing building principals (Cooley & Shen, 1999; Lashaway, 2002; Peterson, 2002; Hartle & Thomas, 2004; Afolabi, Nweke &
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Historically, teachers have represented the group from which the largest numbers of school administrators was likely to be drawn, but fewer and fewer teachers seem willing to seek administrative positions (Howley, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005). Teachers who do come into or are already in the profession are all too aware of the challenges confronting principals and are increasingly reluctant to embrace it (Walker & Qian, 2006).

Another study of teachers who hold principal certification shows that fewer than half are willing to consider the job (Cusick, 2003). Cusick reported that school executives noted that the number of candidates applying for principal positions was about one-half to two-thirds the number it was 15 years ago. A suburban Detroit principal reported that his school needed two assistant principals and had four applicants. A Michigan urban district personnel director recounted that “In 1989, when we had a principal opening, we had 100 or more people apply, and half were qualified. Now it’s 10 or so, and maybe 5 are qualified.” A principal interviewed during the study stated, “There are two teachers in this building who would make good administrators, but they don’t want to touch it” (Cusick).

Being qualified for, but not interested in pursuing, a principal position is not unique to Michigan. In a study of rural Montana schools, it was found that there were teachers committed to a particular school or community, and among those who called that rural community “home” were teachers who demonstrated leadership potential and teaching excellence and who would make good principals. Yet, those individuals were
not interested in pursuing a principal’s position (Erickson, 2001).

Getting effective principals into schools is a challenge, and literature indicates the challenge will continue well into the future. The process of becoming a principal is seldom compacted into a year or two of graduate leadership studies; rather, it begins much earlier when teachers as graduate students engage in professional activities with fellow teachers and principals. Teachers’ experiences in informal and formal leadership, both prior to and while participating in a training program, help to mold their conception of the principalship. Leadership studies alone do not help students conceptualize the work of principals or to begin the necessary socialization process (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003).

While applicant pools for principal vacancies are shrinking nationwide, researchers cite numerous factors impacting those applicant pools. Carnine, Denny, Hewitt and Pijanowski (2008) surveyed 197 districts and indicated that a reduction of candidates across all grade spans and school settings was reported. Superintendents in that study suggested that over 50% of applicants lacked the minimum advertised requirements for the position. Overall, 50% of the schools in the study reflected a moderate to extreme shortage of candidates.

In Pennsylvania, 5,242 people earned elementary and secondary principal certificates between 1995 and 1999, 26% more than the number of certificates issued between 1989 and 1994 (McKay, 1999); yet research still reports a shortage of qualified candidates (Carnine, Denny, Hewitt and Pijanowski, 2008). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projected a 13% increase in job openings for principals between 2000 and 2010, stemming in part from a large proportion of principals who planned to retire during that time period. Additionally, Advocates for Children & Youth (2007) released a study in
December 2007 that found “an alarming proportion of Maryland’s poorest and lowest-performing schools have the least experienced principals and struggle with high turnover in leadership.”

While the shortage has been noted, a study of how graduate level preparedness influences the effectiveness of school leaders was conducted (Orr & Orphanos, 2010). The study found a modest relationship between program type, internship quality, and leadership practices. It can be argued that self-efficacy is directly related to the quality of the leadership program. Candidates with self-efficacy are more inclined to be quality candidates.

The factors that influence a shortage are numerous. Murphy and Beck (1994) reported that principals are charged with greater accountability for teaching and learning. Dipaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) cited stress and time demands in addition to a variation of interest in the principal position, depending on the grade level span. Cusick (2003) reported conflicted demands and pressures associated with principal positions while Bass (2007) reported stress, time commitment, and the pressures of standardized testing.

The factors impacting applicant pools for the principalship may have many descriptors. However, common themes can be identified, and these factors appear to be consistent throughout the research. The age profile of current principals is consistent with the baby-boomer retirement phenomena (Brooking, 2008; Cranston, 2007; Cusick, 2003; Harris, 2007).

In a study of superintendent perceptions of hiring non-traditional applicants to the principal position, Hervey (2012) reported a declining pool of candidates for principal
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positions. Study respondents suggested that stress is negatively impacting the pool of candidates, especially in rural areas (p. 106).

Howley, Andrianaivo, and Perry (2005) noted that few empirical studies have addressed the issue of principal shortages, even with the increased emphasis on the need to recruit building-level principals. The profession is growing significantly more complex and constraining and is a source of considerable stress; principals often may lack the means of and support for doing a good job. The findings indicate that salary and work responsibilities impact candidate interest, as does the quality of family life. There is a perception that hiring practices tend to privilege certain individuals over others on the basis of their gender or ethnic identity. There are high demands for public school accountability and conflict management.

Summary

This literature review examined several components that research has shown to impact candidate interest in the principal position: perceptions of career stability factors relative to the assistant principal position as stepping stone and training ground, transition to the principal position, recruitment, mentoring received as an assistant principal, succession planning, positional preparation, and candidate tapping. The hybrid roles of instructional leadership and operational management were examined along with motivation theory, job satisfaction, role definition, and accountability. Last, gender was examined, as well as the depth of the candidate pool for open positions.

The areas of career stability, transition, recruitment to the position of principal, the manner in which assistant principals were mentored, succession planning, positional
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preparation, and candidate tapping were discussed in order to illustrate the breadth of factors that could potentially influence motivation to pursue a principal position.

The various roles an assistant principal plays, job satisfaction, accountability measures, expectations that are placed upon a principal, the evolution of the assistant principal position from management and student management tasks to instructional leadership, in addition to the conflict that takes place between the roles of school management and instructional leadership, were examined, as were personal demographic factors.
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CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors influencing the pursuit of a principal position by “sitting” assistant principals as viewed through the lens of Self-Determined Motivation Theory. This study shall answer the question “If one is qualified to be a school principal, has the professional certificate to serve in the role and experience as an assistant principal, what influences one’s decision to either pursue or not pursue a principal position?”

The study seeks to examine the strength of various factors that influence the decision process of whether to pursue a principal position or to remain in the assistant principal role. I chose to incorporate a qualitative interview approach in order to address this purpose through analysis of the experiences of assistant principals within the K-12 public school setting. In this chapter I explain the background of the study and why I initially became interested in this topic. Similarly, I provide a description of the methods used to answer the research questions. The design of the study is followed by a description of the selection of the participants and provides a profile of each assistant principal and his or her employment site. I then explain how I collected data, analyzed the data, and validated the research procedures and outcomes. This chapter also addresses the delimitations set in addition to the items that limit the approach of the study.

Background
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When I assumed my career as an education administrator, it was my assumption and my goal to become a principal of a school. I never once stopped to think for a minute that I would not pursue the principal position. My graduate work in a masters’ program was geared towards the attainment of an assistant principal position with the full understanding that I would eventually become a school principal as well.

I was appointed as an assistant principal and quickly assumed tasks that would put me in a position to either earn a promotion or a principal position. It was never an option to remain an assistant principal; I earned a position in the central administration after two years and worked on projects that focused specifically on teaching and learning. An opportunity presented itself to serve as the Director of Administration in a high school setting; after that experience and the combined experiences as a middle school assistant principal and central office administrator, I was offered a principal position.

It wasn’t until I was a high school principal and later a middle school principal that I would work with school leaders that were not like-minded regarding career goals. These colleagues pointed out the differences in their motivation and mine. They described a feeling of contentment with their professional destination. Many of the assistant principals I have supervised had no intentions or motivation to pursue a principal position. As I supervised these assistant principals, I recall being satisfied with their output from a global perspective but found it difficult to understand how satisfied they claimed to be.

In seven years as a principal, I have not yet been given an explanation by a career assistant principal or through my own experience working with them that offers an in-depth explanation regarding definitive answers; each colleague seemed to have personal
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reasons. Additionally, there was not consistency relative to their rationale. That inconsistency has driven the impetus to pursue this study.

The assistant principals with whom I have worked have all demonstrated excellence in one facet of their role or another. One was a deft manager of the master schedule, one filled the jack-of-all-trades role necessary in a large high school administrative team, another was adept at advising on current research and programming and recommending direction and changes, while another offered talent at being a consistent disciplinarian while supervising a large academic department. While these colleagues possessed a critical skill set, they did not possess the motivation to consistently pursue career advancement.

Conversations with the colleagues with whom I worked focused on an advantageous pay scale for assistant principals and the accountability driven culture of a school principal. However, it was incumbent upon my ability to supervise and lead assistant principals to have a true understanding of their career desires and the factors that influence the decision they make to either pursue a principal position or to stay in the current assistant principal position. I surmised that possessing a greater understanding of the issue would afford me the opportunity to cultivate their professional growth. The need for understanding these influences with greater breadth and depth has driven my research.

**Research Design**

The qualitative study incorporates a semi-structured one-on-one interview with assistant principals that are similar because they have served as assistant principals for five years or more and have either no interest in becoming a principal or have not been successful at attaining a position. The interviews took place during February, March, and
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April, 2013, in a convenient location for the participating study subjects. For the purposes of this study, all study participants were currently serving as K-12 assistant principals in public schools for five years or more and had chosen not to pursue a principal position. With the goal of self-disclosure among participants (Nall, 2010, p.1) the semi-structured interviews assisted in answering the question “Why do experienced assistant principals choose not to become principals?” The study subjects were guided through semi-structured interviews to promote the sharing and developing of experiences in order to generate ideas for consideration for this and future studies and to explore issues of shared importance.

Merriam (2009) reports that the main purpose of an interview is to obtain a special kind of information (p. 88), and those interviews are necessary when a researcher is interested in past events that are impossible to replicate (p. 88). Although Merriam (2009) indicates that interviewing is sometimes the only [sic] way to get data, Dexter (1970) indicates when interviewing is necessary: “Interviewing is the preferred tactic of data collection when…it will get better data or more data at less cost.” Patton (2002) suggests that the research in an interview endeavors to find out what is “in and on someone else’s mind” (p. 341). Patton explains further:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe…we cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings that they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The
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purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective. (pp. 340-341)

Merriam (2009) explains that semi-structured interviews include a mix of more or less structured interview questions, all questions are used flexibly, usually there is specific data required from all respondents, the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and there is no predetermined wording or order (p. 89). Ultimately, the researcher is to uncover the essence of an individual’s experience (p. 93). Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest the interview is to focus on the deep, experiential meanings that events have for individuals, assuming that these meanings guide actions and interactions (p. 105).

The concept of affording study participants the opportunity to build upon their answers, as well as the insights of the participants, speaks to the complexity of the range of answers to the research questions:

1. How does Self-Determined Motivation Theory (intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation) influence the decision for an assistant principal to pursue a principalship?
2. How does high-stakes accountability (i.e., No Child Left Behind; Race to the Top; Achieve NJ) influence an assistant principal’s decision to pursue a principalship?
3. What other factors influence an assistant principal’s decision to pursue a principalship?

The study participants were not compensated but were provided with light refreshments.
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The interview questions were developed by the researcher and were informed by the trends in the literature. The interview questions were drafted by the researcher and reviewed by a Seton Hall University professor. Additionally, assistant principals with between nine and sixteen years of experience served as a jury of experts and reviewed the research questions for wording, syntax, and applicability to the research questions in an effort to validate the research questions.

Merriam (2009) explains that the facilitation of interviews allows a myriad of question options. Experience and behavior questions ask study participants what they have been doing, opinion and value questions ask why a variable is significant from the lens through which they observe it, feeling questions address how they perceive something to be helping or hurting a situation, sensory questions answer what was said or shared in specific circumstances, background questions answer demographic-based items, hypothetical questions answer items of speculation (i.e., ‘what if’), devils’ advocate questions challenge respondents for an opposing view, ideal position questions ask respondents to describe optimum situations relative to the subject, interpretative questions are based on perceptions of what the researcher feels the subject is saying in an interview and makes attempts to illicit a reaction, open-ended questions do not presuppose which dimension of feeling or thought is most important to the subject, and clarity questions build support with the subject (pp. 96-99).

Interviews also allow for probes and follow-up questions. The use of probes and follow-up questions is a skill that comes from knowing what to look for in the interview, listening carefully to what is said and what is not said, and being sensitive to the feedback needs of the person being interviewed (Merriam, 2009, pp. 100-102).
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In accordance with Merriam (2009), the interaction between the interviewer and interviewees was respectful, non-judgmental, and non-threatening. The relationship between the interviewer and subject was influenced by the personality and skills of the interviewer, the attitudes and orientation of the interviewee, and the definition of the situation (pp. 107-109).

Each interview included authentic questions designed to uncover important elements and were based on Kruger’s Categories: Opening Question (in order to stimulate conversation and share experiences), Introductory Question (to develop with more specificity and examples), Transition Question (in order to develop with more specificity and examples), Key Question(s) (in order to develop a specific position relative to a concept and start to drill down to the core issue of the study), and Ending Question (to serve as an open-ended opportunity to develop points relative to the research problem being examined) (Krueger, 2002).

In order to overcome ethical issues relative to the facilitation of semi-structured interviews, the interviewer made efforts to put the interviewees at ease by assuring confidentiality, avoiding bias, establishing rapport through like experiences, explaining the format and the sequence of topics, incorporating a logical pattern to questions, maintaining an appropriate pace, and keeping timeframe commitments for each interviewee.

Population

The study was composed of practicing K-12 school administrators serving as assistant principals who have been serving under this certificate classification for 5 years or more and who have not demonstrated interest in pursuing a principal position at the
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time of the interview. The study population was comprised of assistant principals from Middlesex County, New Jersey, was gender-balanced, and was a cross section of K-12 grade spans (K-5, 6-8, 9-12).

Superintendents of schools were asked for permission to conduct research in their school districts. After permission was granted by a district superintendent, the sample was one of convenience. After being recruited, participants self-identified themselves as candidates for the study based on the parameters of being assistant principals for five years or more with no ambition to pursue a principal position.

To facilitate the study with limited impact on travel arrangements, the study population was established by soliciting candidates once permission was granted by the district superintendent. All assistant principals in the approved study sites were contacted through email. Those study candidates from approved study sites that did not qualify for the study self-identified themselves through responses with the researcher and were removed as study candidates.

**Sampling**

In order to examine how assistant principal motivation to pursue a principal position is influenced by role-related and personal factors, this study utilized a maximum variation sampling technique. This approach allows the researcher to detect commonalities among heterogeneous settings (Patton, 2002). It is further noted by Patton that “any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon” (p. 235). Finding and identifying common themes in settings that are diverse shall produce rich discovery for future research.
I selected 10 assistant principals from schools that represent four different levels of socioeconomic status (SES): low, middle-low, middle-high, and high. Additionally, the assistant principals represented a cross section of experience, ranging from 5 years to over 20 years of service in schools varying from 400 students to nearly 3,000 students.

Using census data, the state of New Jersey ranks its school districts in SES by classifying them according to the following criteria:

1. Percent of population with no high school diploma
2. Percent with some college
3. Occupation
4. Population density
5. Income
6. Unemployment
7. Poverty (NJ Department of Education, n.d., para. 1)

The classification of each district is called its District Factor Group (DFG). New Jersey codes them in the following alpha designations: A, B, CD, DE, FG, GH, I, and J. A community and district designated as an “A” district is at the lowest end of the socioeconomic status, and those labeled “J” are at the highest end of the spectrum.

Table 4 illustrates the range of district factor groups.
Table 4

*District Factor Groups in New Jersey and Socioeconomic Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A and B</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CD, DE</td>
<td>Low-Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG, GH</td>
<td>Middle-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I and J</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to offer a representative sample among school size and demographic types and to examine a variety of work-role expectations of assistant principals in these school types, I examined the pool of candidates who selected one assistant principal from a middle-low (DE) socioeconomic community, six assistant principals from middle-high (FG and GH) communities and three from high socioeconomic status (I) communities.

Furthermore, the assistant principals that participated in this study were required to have five or more years of experience as an assistant principal and did not have any interest at the time of solicitation of becoming a principal. Limiting the study in this fashion allowed me to focus on experienced assistant principals who have earned tenure rights and who, arguably, have garnered the experiences, skills, and attributes that would be required of any principal. Additionally, these candidates have the ability to understand, based on the experience they have had in working closely with a principal, what is required of a school principal and how it differs from the role of assistant principal. Intentional sampling enabled me to develop a cadre of assistant principals and investigate the barriers that are associated with the position and how those positions have influenced their interest (or lack thereof) in becoming a principal.
Assistant principals were recruited for this study once approval was granted by district school superintendents. Every school district in Middlesex County, New Jersey (n=26), was solicited for approval; approval was granted from 26.9% (7) of the districts. Assistant principals in approved districts were contacted through email; 37 assistant principals were contacted. Ten assistant principals (27%) consented to participate, two assistant principals declined to participate (5.4%), one assistant principal was on a maternity leave (2.7%), eight assistant principals (21.6%) did not meet the experience requirement of five years or more, and fourteen assistant principals (37.8%) did not respond to requests to participate in the study.

Profiles of the Participants and Sites

To protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants and their school districts, county names and idiosyncratic geographical details are not included in the profiles and findings. All participants, school districts, and geographical identifiers have been assigned pseudonyms.

New Jersey school districts are designated in groups by size (Group I, Group II, Group III, and Group IV); this is done primarily to group schools for interscholastic athletics, but it also is an indicator of school size. Despite not having group designations for middle schools and elementary schools, examining the group designation in which a district lies offers important insight to challenges impacting school leadership. Table 5 outlines the Group designations.
Table 5

New Jersey Group Designations for School Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group I</td>
<td>800 students or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group II</td>
<td>800 to 1200 Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group III</td>
<td>1200 to 1600 Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group IV</td>
<td>1600 students or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The composition of the candidates and research sites are listed in Table 6 and offers a cross section of three out of the four main district factor groups as well as three out of the four group designations found in Table 5. The ten study candidates came from eight schools and five school districts. Study participants that came from the same school were chosen because of the size and scope of the organization for which they worked, a Group IV high school. Additionally, an examination of their roles offered much variation and intricacies, coupled with a location in a highly politicized municipality; the combination lent itself to interviews anticipated to be rich in detail.
### Table 6

**Assistant Principal and Research Site Overview**

#### Study Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assistant Principal</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>DFG</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nora White</td>
<td>The Hill School District</td>
<td>Pella Roads High School</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Group IV</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Nielson</td>
<td>The Hill School District</td>
<td>Kingston Middle School North/Kingston Middle School South</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Group IV</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin Ryan</td>
<td>Pawnee School District</td>
<td>Cedar Bonnet High School</td>
<td>FG</td>
<td>Group IV</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Duconnick</td>
<td>Pawnee School District</td>
<td>Cedar Bonnet High School</td>
<td>FG</td>
<td>Group IV</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy Moore</td>
<td>Pawnee School District</td>
<td>Boone High School</td>
<td>FG</td>
<td>Group IV</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse Knight</td>
<td>Earth Ridge School District</td>
<td>Foster Middle School</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Group I</td>
<td>20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan Lotanzio</td>
<td>Pawnee School District</td>
<td>Burwell Middle School</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>Group IV</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eli Barr</td>
<td>Pawnee School District</td>
<td>Cedar Bonnet High School</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>Group IV</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon Bruder</td>
<td>Adams Oak School District</td>
<td>Due North Coventry Elementary School</td>
<td>DE</td>
<td>Group III</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Monella</td>
<td>Stately Spruce School District</td>
<td>Stately Spruce High School/Stately Spruce Middle School</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>Group I</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nora White

Mrs. Nora White is an assistant principal in The Hill School District at Pella Roads High School, which has an enrollment of approximately 3,000 students. Her role includes oversight of the 10 guidance counselors and the alternative school housed within Pella Roads, as well as oversight of all items related to student management and attendance for 750 students. Mrs. White serves in a school that is in an “I” district, which has a high socioeconomic student base.

Mrs. White has been an educator for 25 years and has served as an assistant principal for eight years and as a content area supervisor for three years prior to that. Mrs. White has been an administrator at The Hill School District but has been in three other districts in two other states as a teacher. Mrs. White has four grown children, all of whom have advanced professional degrees: one with an MBA, two with a Ph. D or equivalent, and one who will earn a medical degree in the coming months.

Mrs. White began her career in Colorado as a teacher of foreign languages; she is a native of Brazil. She worked as a teacher in the town in which she lived prior to earning a promotion to a supervisor of world languages in The Hill School District.

Mark Nielson

Mr. Mark Neilson, too, works as an assistant principal at The Hill School District (District Factor Group “I”) at Kingston Middle School South and Kingston Middle School North. Mr. Neilson’s responsibility is split between two buildings that share the same campus. One organization, Kingston Middle School South, was one of the first schools to adopt the middle school model and served as an exemplar nationwide. The second organization in which he serves as an assistant principal, Kingston Middle School
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North, was formerly the high school in The Hill School District until a construction project yielded a new high school. Kingston Middle School North functions unofficially under a philosophy that is less a middle-level model and more secondary in scope. Specifically, the manner in which staff members approach middle-level children relative to the needs of adolescents are more reflective of what is accepted at the secondary level.

Mr. Nielson has been an employee at The Hill School District for fifteen years; first serving as a teacher of physical education for seven years and an assistant principal for eight. Mr. Nielson was a teacher at Kingston Middle School North prior to becoming a “teacher leader,” which is an informal, unpaid, apprenticeship assignment that was designed to develop leadership capacities in its teachers prior to their earning a promotion to an assistant principal position.

Mr. Nielson served as an assistant principal for five years at Kingston Middle School North prior to having his assignment revised to include two middle schools. The reduction of staff that was a result of a $900 million budget reduction in education spending in New Jersey required The Hill School District, and virtually all others in the state, to reduce their tax levy. The Hill School District did just that. As a result, Mr. Nielson absorbed two assistant principal roles (Kingston Middle School North and Kingston Middle School South) in addition to being assigned oversight of middle school athletics and middle school facilities use and rental. The role Mr. Nielson has played as an assistant principal in eight years has evolved tremendously.

Mr. Nielson has a young family as well as a spouse that is an employee of The Hill School District and a teacher in one of the buildings in which he is an assistant principal.
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Erin Ryan

Mrs. Ryan is an assistant principal in the Pawnee School District (District Factor Group “FG”) at Cedar Bonnet High School. Mrs. Ryan has been an employee at Pawnee for over 27 years, beginning as a teacher in 1986. During her career she has had teaching roles in several buildings in the town, has married, and reared two children. Although she does not reside in town, her network in Pawnee is extensive.

After 19 years in the classroom at the high school and middle school level in the Pawnee School District, she was promoted to an assistant principal position at Cedar Bonnet High School. She has served as a teacher under what appears to be the most successful principal that Pawnee has ever had. Additionally, she has worked through a time of extraordinary strife for Cedar Bonnet High School, one rife with administrative changes that have put her alliances in question, coupled with how the public and governing body perceive her leadership.

Mrs. Ryan serves a host of roles as an assistant principal: she oversees discipline of one-third of the student body of 1,987 students, supervision of the family and consumer sciences program, supervision of all clubs and student activities, as well as the school website.

The role that Mrs. Ryan has at Cedar Bonnet High School has evolved since 2009; the retirement of a principal during a time of political rancor in Pawnee led to the local board of education’s appointing a principal with the clear direction to make changes, and to make them quickly. The school was identified as In Need of Improvement through the state accountability system; additionally, the school was
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viewed by many as ineffective and underperforming in many metrics, including the court of public opinion.

A new principal was appointed and immediately removed the responsibility of student discipline from two of the three assistant principal caseloads. As a result, Mrs. Ryan’s responsibilities experienced a true second-order shift from traditional assistant principal work that focuses on student attendance and management of discipline to activities that are closer to the classroom and the role of instructional leadership. The perception of Cedar Bonnet High School--and the charge of improving it--was the most pressing of jobs that the new principal set forth. Mrs. Ryan performed tasks reflective of instructional leadership for two school years prior to another administrative responsibility reorganization at the building level. She now, again, has oversight of discipline and student attendance as part of her responsibilities; the perception and performance of the school has improved.

Henry Duconnick

After a successful teaching career of eight years, Mr. Duconnick was promoted to be an assistant principal at the K-8 level in that same school and served in that role for the following eight years. During the fiscal crisis of 2009-2010 in the State of New Jersey, his district was left with the reality that they would have to eliminate the position of assistant principals across the district, one of the largest in New Jersey. Mr. Duconnick had to leave the district in which he had grown up and in which he had worked for 16 years. Mr. Duconnick has since served the Pawnee School District as an assistant principal at Cedar Bonnet High School for four years.
Mr. Duconnick was the first hire for a new principal at Cedar Bonnet. Both the principal and Mr. Duconnick were new hires from outside the district, which represented a break in tradition for Pawnee. Mr. Duconnick was immediately given the authority and oversight of all student management and attendance matters. With this shift, the principal allocated more instructional leadership items to the remaining two assistant principals, both of whom are in this study. The oversight of student management and attendance lasted for the first three years of his tenure in his current position; at present, the organization has been stabilized and normal order has been restored to the assistant principals serving at Cedar Bonnet High School. The assistant principals again share the responsibility of student management and attendance in addition to a host of other initiatives that are instructional leadership in nature as well as others that are focused on building management and the structural frame.

Mr. Duconnick feels he is seen as a new person and not connected to the Pawnee of the past. Despite that, he and his colleagues separately report a strong working relationship and affinity for collaboration.

Roy Moore

A former teacher at Cedar Bonnet High School, Mr. Moore was promoted to assistant principal at Boone High School in Pawnee School District over six years ago. He was a teacher for approximately 10 years at Cedar Bonnet and was recruited, and ultimately promoted, to the assistant principal position at Boone High School by the principal who was a former assistant principal and long time employee in the Pawnee School District. Although seen as an example of “old Pawnee” around town, the
principal is also revered as an exemplary leader of instruction. The principal was familiar with Mr. Moore’s work during their time at Cedar Bonnet High School.

Mr. Moore was promoted to the assistant principal position and has served in the role for six years. His time at Boone High School has been one of progression for Mr. Moore; he started under the tutelage of another assistant principal who was also a Cedar Bonnet transplant hand-picked by the principal. He was mentored by the veteran and now sees himself serving the same role to two new assistant principals six years later. While his mentor retired long ago, Mr. Moore now finds himself sharing his wisdom and serving assistant principal colleagues in a most supportive way.

Mr. Moore is currently interviewing outside of the district and does so with the support of the superintendent; he expressed gratitude that the superintendent shared his feelings and continues to support his candidacy.

Mr. Moore serves an important role for the principal; as the senior assistant principal, the role requires him to be active in classrooms and to be involved in areas of instructional leadership. Although he does not directly oversee any initiatives personally that are connected to instructional leadership, he does have a “seat at the table” when conversations are taking place. Mr. Moore is not responsible for tasks that are focused on student management and building management as much as his two colleagues. His senior position appears to have resulted in those responsibilities being lifted. He does have a discipline caseload to attend to, but gone are the menial tasks that take a great deal of time to implement and reap little reward as far as outcomes.

Jesse Knight

An assistant principal since 1990, Mr. Knight has served Foster-Rolfe Middle
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School for 23 years in the Earth Ridge School District (District Factor Group “I”); he was a teacher of science for 13 years prior to that. All of his 36 years of service have been at Foster-Rolfe in Earth Ridge. Mr. Knight is an assistant principal but also a community staple. He serves students that are offspring of those whom he taught in prior years; he is a former championship-winning soccer coach in a town and geographical location that has always had a large affinity for the sport.

His work at Foster-Rolfe Middle School focuses on social-emotional learning, the shaping of a respectful building climate in an active middle school that houses Grades 5, 6, 7, and 8. Earth Ridge is a town that has consistently supported education, has a high socioeconomic factor among its residents, and consistently produces the highest achieving students, be they in high school, elementary or middle school.

Despite that, however, Foster-Rolfe Middle School has also been commissioned by the New Jersey Department of Education with an initiative to reduce the size of the achievement gaps between its highest and lowest achieving subgroups as defined on standardized tests. The achievement gap at Foster-Rolfe is in excess of the 42.5% benchmark set by the New Jersey Department of Education Focus Schools initiative; in this case, the Asian-Pacific Islander and African American subgroups serve as the subgroups of greatest interest and disparity. Much of Mr. Knight’s work is to allow the principal to dive into items related to academics while he handles all items of student management, building climate, and social-emotional learning.

Joan Lotanzio

As an assistant principal in her eighth year, Ms. Lotanzio shared in an interview (3/5/13) that she had to break what she perceived to be a gender barrier. Ms. Lotanzio
works in at Burwell Middle School in Pawnee School District. Ms. Lotanzio completed the alternate route program to teaching sponsored by the New Jersey Department of Education. Prior to entering the profession, she served in a retail position.

Burwell Middle School is large (1200 students) and offers a challenge to school leadership. Pawnee School District is a “GH” district factor group and is a Group IV in size. The interview revealed concerns with politics; Pawnee has been widely known in Middlesex County circles to be a highly political hotbed to live and work in. The district lies in the fifth largest municipality in the State of New Jersey and the district has a well-earned reputation among education circles of functioning in a highly political atmosphere.

Eli Barr

An eight-year assistant principal at Cedar Bonnet High School in the Pawnee School District has afforded Mr. Barr a great deal of experiences. A math teacher, Mr. Barr cites family needs related to rearing a family with young children coupled with professional growth and, like Ms. Lotanzio, political pressure that seems to be ingrained in the Pawnee School District.

Mr. Barr is an assistant principal at a Group IV high school; in an interview (3/19/13) he shared that his career thus far as an assistant principal has felt like two separate time periods. His first five years were typical in the sense that he was learning the role of the assistant principal at the secondary level while working very closely with an administrative team and principal that were deemed to be a model team. However, as he tells it, for reasons unknown the political forces in Pawnee removed the principal and then branded the team that had served as a self-described “model” for others to emulate.
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These actions stripped the assistant principal of the motivation to pursue a principal position and forced him to redefine who he was from a leadership perspective.

Mr. Barr recounted dealing with relatives of board members, an interim superintendent who was making strides to be appointed as superintendent, conflicts of interest, and items that took the organization away from teaching and learning. The complex contextual layers that were a direct result of the political influences created a situation where professional growth was not being met; hence, the role of assistant principal was not preparing Mr. Barr to become a principal.

Sharon Bruder

A lifelong resident of the Adams-Oak School District, Mrs. Bruder has been an assistant principal at Due North Coventry Elementary School for five years. She was a teacher in the fourth and fifth grade school prior to that appointment. Mrs. Bruder grew up in Adams-Oak, and testimony given in an interview (2/26/13) shared that she feels as though she has a good amount of social capital that has resulted from her lifelong residency in Adams-Oak.

Mrs. Bruder is close to retirement and has a personal countdown. Mrs. Bruder has no intentions of becoming a principal. She appreciates her role as an assistant principal. Additionally, it seems that a strong relationship has developed between Mrs. Bruder and her principal and she has blossomed. Mrs. Bruder gets heavily involved in items of instructional leadership.

Adams-Oak is a Group III district in size and a “DE” district factor group, which means it is lower in socioeconomic status than the rest of the study sites. The community values the cohesive resident base, and it is not uncommon for residents to grow up in
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Adams-Oak and then choose to settle their family there. With that, Mrs. Bruder now works with parents whom she taught many years ago. Although she is seen from a structural and disciplinary base, she has garnered support and social capital from those with whom she works and interacts.

Mrs. Bruder is happy with her role as an assistant principal, does not appear to be driven by personal finances, and shared that she would not entertain a position that had increased responsibility. She is content and happy with her current role.

Susan Monella

Five years as an assistant principal in the Stately Spruce School District, a “GH” in socioeconomic status and a Group I district in size, have produced experiences that, thus far, have not adequately prepared Ms. Monella to be an assistant principal. A victim of budget cuts leading into the 2010 school year, she serves as the assistant principal at both Stately Spruce Middle School and Stately Spruce High School.

The interview (2/26/13) took place at a local restaurant; her request to establish an interview location outside of town foreshadowed that there were elements of the community wherein she worked that were a concern to her. The only study participant not to interview on his or her proverbial turf offered insight relative to the community in which she works by taking advantage of the ability to speak openly miles away from Stately Spruce.

Ms. Monella indicated micromanagement and both political and bureaucratic forces as inhibitors to the desire to become a principal. The central office administration was discussed, as was the community in general. In both cases, as it relates to Ms. Monella’s role as an assistant principal, they were cited as negative factors to her
experience as an assistant principal. Further, they have negatively impacted motivation to pursue a principal position.

However, Ms. Monella indicated that she felt a principal position would be in her future but explaining that it would be her preference to stay as an assistant principal for the duration of her career. Ms. Monella shared that she truly enjoys the assistant principal role, especially “being the nurse for students as compared to the doctor.” She predicted that she will be a principal only after she is directed and tapped to be, not because of her own interest.

Ms. Monella is a special education teacher and expressed that experiences in the that area of education have afforded her the opportunity to work with and make efforts to understand people from different walks of life; Similarly, it has assisted her in her role as assistant principal by working collaboratively with others, be they parents, students, colleagues, or people in her professional network. She had insights about the role of gender, personal parenthood, and some concerns relative to her personal situation and career trajectory.

Ms. Monella is a believer that her growth needs to guide her as to when she will be prepared for a principal position. However, she submitted that she approached her career in such a way that allows her to have experiences in all facets of K-12 leadership.

Validity and Reliability

Merriam (2009) reported that although qualitative researchers can never capture an objective truth or reality, there are a number of strategies that will guide the qualitative research to increase the credibility of findings (p. 215). In order to ensure both validity
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and reliability with the study, the researcher incorporated member checks, triangulation, peer review/examination and maximum variation with respect to the study subjects.

Member checks entail taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking if they are plausible (Strydom, 2012). Triangulation using multiple sources of data means comparing and cross-checking data collected through researcher focus group observations and interview data collected. When necessary, follow up interviews with the same people can be conducted (Merriam, 2009, p. 216). In this study, motivation will be triangulated with the pursuit of a principal position for sitting assistant principals and the influence of accountability on career intentions. Peer review/examination entails discussions with colleagues regarding the process of the study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data and tentative interpretations (Strydom, 2012). Maximum variation entails purposefully seeking variation or diversity in sample selections to allow for a greater range of application of the findings by consumers of the research (Strydom, 2012).

When discussing reliability, Merriam (2009, p. 222) explains as follows:

Because what is being studied in the social world is assumed to be in flux, multifaceted and highly contextual, because information gathered is a function of who gives it and how skilled the researcher is at getting it, and because the emergent design of a qualitative study precludes a priori controls, achieving reliability in the traditional sense is not only fanciful but impossible.

Based on the factors above, replication of a qualitative study is impossible and will not produce the same results. Although the study lacks reliability, if replicated, the
validity constructs as found above shall support the study design and produce outcomes that can be applied.

Interview questions were constructed to be aligned with and in support of the research questions that frame the study. The research questions followed the themes of the literature that informs the study: motivation, additional contextual factors, and accountability of performance. Assistant principals with between nine and sixteen years of experience served as a jury of experts and reviewed the research questions for wording, syntax, and applicability to the research questions in an effort to validate the research questions.

Data Collection

This dissertation seeks to uncover and examine what assistant principals appreciate about their current roles and how they could be altered at the policy level in order for districts to realize a maximum return from the position. The study seeks to uncover what about the role serves as a contextual stressor and how motivation, be it intrinsic, extrinsic, or an example of amotivation, impact an assistant principal in career movement.

The interviews helped me to understand much of the reasoning that assistant principal had for remaining in their positions for so long. Similarly, the interviews shed light into the layers that are not associated with teaching and learning that have to be attended to on a daily basis. Much of what happens in this area is the responsibility of the assistant principal and an area of great interest from a research perspective. The interviews offered clarity regarding career interests among a group of assistant principals with a range of 5 to 23 years of administrative experience.
The construct of the interviews allowed for the sessions to be tape-recorded. The most common method of tape recording offers a database for analysis (Merriam, 2009, p. 110). All responses were transcribed and coded; during the interview sessions, observer comments were made, as well as notations of observations of interview participation. The format of the interview transcript was established to enable analysis. At the top of the first page, identifying information was noted as to when, where, and with whom the interview was conducted, in addition to line numbering down the left hand margin (Merriam, 2009, p. 110). The interviews were conducted in a mutually convenient location in order to ensure that participants were at ease to speak honestly.

All interviews except for one took place at the office of the study participant. One suggested that there is a high level of political tension surrounding not only her position and school, but also her district in general. As such, an interview took place off campus in another municipality. The study participant appeared at ease, just as the other nine participants were. From the perspective of research, this was very important.

In order to develop inferences and models, all transcripts were coded; categories were established that are responsive to the research and the problem being examined. Codes were exhaustive and complete, mutually exclusive, desensitizing so as to help the reader understand the data, and conceptually congruent with the same level of abstraction per level (Merriam, 2009, pp. 183-187). As many codes as were necessary were utilized. In this fashion, some categories stand out in their uniqueness and reveal areas of inquiry otherwise not recognized. Coding in this fashion provided a unique leverage to the researcher in order to understand the relationship between interview outcomes and participant input.
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL MOTIVATION TO PURSUE A PRINCIPALSHP

When coding and reporting data, efforts were made to determine what findings are more relevant to report; the need for the researcher to recognize patterns and/or themes drove the data that were reported. The researcher searched the transcript text for recurring words or phrases. This qualitative data reproduction and sense-making effort analyzed a volume of qualitative material and attempted to identify core consistencies and meanings (Merriam, 2009, pp. 189-191) in order to address the research questions.

The research questions sought to uncover information about the role that Self-Determined Motivation Theory played in influencing the decision an assistant principal with five or more years of experience made regarding the pursuit of a promotion. Additionally, uncovering information regarding the influence of accountability formulas and other contextual factors were supported by the research questions found in Table 7. Table 7 is organized by triangulating the interview question, the research question it supports, and research cited in the literature review.
**Interview Question Alignment with Research Questions and Theorists**

**Interview Question Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Research Question Supporting</th>
<th>Theorist(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can you discuss the job responsibilities of an assistant principal and if they leave you professionally fulfilled and challenged?</td>
<td>Additional Factors</td>
<td>Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think back to your years and experiences as an assistant principal and talk about your fondest memory</td>
<td>Additional Factors Motivation</td>
<td>Ryan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are some memorable challenges you faced in your role as an assistant principal?</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Waters, Marzano, McNulty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are some reasons that make the assistant principal position attractive for you?</td>
<td>Motivation Additional Factors</td>
<td>Mintang, Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, Anderson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there factors that prevent you from moving on to a principal’s position?</td>
<td>Additional Factors Accountability</td>
<td>Portin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do your responsibilities as an assistant principal relate to the mission of improving instruction?</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Waters, Marzano, McNulty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you discuss your level of enjoyment in your role as an assistant principal?</td>
<td>Additional Factors Accountability Motivation</td>
<td>Chapman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe your relationship with your administrative colleagues</td>
<td>Additional Factors</td>
<td>Waters, Marzano, McNulty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you communicate with the principal?</td>
<td>Additional Factors</td>
<td>Madden, Denmark, Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there factors that inspire you to consider a role with increased visibility and responsibility?</td>
<td>Additional Factors Motivation</td>
<td>Browne-Ferrigno, Madden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Authors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you consider the court of public opinion to weigh heavily on principals and assistant principals?</td>
<td>Motivation, Accountability</td>
<td>Miller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the early part of the millennium <em>No Child Left Behind</em> impacted many facets of educational leadership. Now the <em>Race to the Top</em> waiver has asserted its influence on leaders. How do you perceive high stakes accountability? What is its impact on the way you view the principal’s position?</td>
<td>Accountability, Motivation</td>
<td>Dunleavy, Ryan, Waskiewics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like what you do? Do you feel fulfilled? How have the responsibilities connected to the role of assistant principal influenced your job satisfaction?</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Merz, Austin, Brown, Koru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do your professional responsibilities and expectations influence your interest in pursuing a promotion to a school principal position?</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Porter, Kaplan, Owings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have a direct vantage point of much of what a school principal is charged with doing on a daily, monthly, and yearly basis. How has that knowledge influenced your interest in a principal position?</td>
<td>Motivation, Accountability</td>
<td>MacCorkle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How have societal factors, coupled with your understanding of the principal position, influenced your motivation to pursue a promotion?</td>
<td>Additional Factors</td>
<td>Jeffords, Gray, Fry, Bottoms, O’Neill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From your perspective what are the most negative aspects of the principal</td>
<td>Motivation, Additional Factors, Accountability</td>
<td>Jeffords, Gray, Fry, Bottoms, O’Neill, Waters, Marzano, McNulty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>position?</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Additional Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are factors that keep people from pursuing a principal position?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It can be argued that the most qualified candidates to assume a principal position are the assistant principals who have (or should have been) groomed for a promotion. What do you think about that statement?</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Additional Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suppose you were a school board member who was looking to redefine administrative roles in a district; how would you craft the role of assistant principal in order to suit what you perceive your strengths and talents to be?</td>
<td>Additional Factors</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The decision to pursue a promotion is a personal one; what factors might go into your decision to pursue a position in the future? Talk to me about them.</td>
<td>Additional Factors</td>
<td>Orr, Orphanos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there anything that I have not asked you that you believe will enable me to understand a bit better why qualified assistant principals choose not to pursue a promotion to a principal?</td>
<td>Additional Factors</td>
<td>Orr, Orphanos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data examined the responses offered by study participants and were examined in relation to the research questions that drive the study. The study triangulates the research questions, the interview questions, and the data coded in the
The researcher engages in the analysis of data processed to answer research questions (Merriam, 2009, p. 176). The results of the study were reported through both description and quotation to provide the skeleton frame for analysis while leading into interpretation. The act of coding is the process of making notations to data points that strike a researcher as potentially relevant to a study (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). Code categories were constructed from the interview transcript. Categories of data were sorted, whereupon the data were housed as was appropriate. Marshall and Rossman (2006, p. 159) visualize these categories as “buckets or baskets into which segments are placed” (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 182).

Establishing code categories followed guidance offered in Merriam (2009) in order to establish an accurate reflection of study participant input. Code categories will be responsive to the purpose of the research and help answer the research questions. They shall be exhaustive—all the data that relate to each topic will comprise the contents of each category. The codes shall be mutually exclusive with a piece of data only fitting into one category. They shall be sensitized so an outsider can read the categories and gain some sense of their nature. The categories shall be conceptually congruent: the same level of abstraction will characterize all categories at the same level (pp. 185-186).

When analyzing the data codes relative to the input from the interview, narrative analysis was incorporated. Narrative analysis places the emphasis on the stories people tell and how these stories are communicated (Strydom, 2012). Qualitative inquiry
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involves a holistic picture of a program or phenomenon in a specific context (Patton, 2002, pp. 447-448).

The process of analysis of data included making inferences, developing models, and generating theory as it relates to the areas of assistant principal motivation to pursue a principal position in an era of accountability. Theorizing is a step toward developing a theory that explains some aspect of practice and allows a researcher to draw inferences about future activity (Merriam, 2009, p.188). Theorizing is defined as “the cognitive process of discovering or manipulating abstract categories and the relationship among those categories (Lecompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993, p. 239).

Table 8 below illustrates the codes that were used in the analysis of the transcripts.
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL MOTIVATION TO PURSUE A PRINCIPALSHIP

Table 8

*Codes for Data Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acct</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AcLd</td>
<td>Academic Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>Athletics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AmP</td>
<td>Amotivation for Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Attractive Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APExp</td>
<td>Assistant Principal Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Professional Articulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Att</td>
<td>Attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CE</td>
<td>Community Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CF</td>
<td>Additional Contextual Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clim</td>
<td>Climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTY</td>
<td>Communication Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curr</td>
<td>Curricular Review/Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CwP</td>
<td>Communication with Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DM</td>
<td>Difficult Moments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOE</td>
<td>State Mandates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Econ</td>
<td>Personal Economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eval</td>
<td>Evaluation of Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GF</td>
<td>Gender Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIB</td>
<td>Bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL</td>
<td>Instructional Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>Principal Candidates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD</td>
<td>Revision of AP Job Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JR</td>
<td>Job Responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LP</td>
<td>Lesson Plan Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mast</td>
<td>Master Class Schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM</td>
<td>Memorable Moments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Position Attraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>Parent Contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pers</td>
<td>Personal Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PersPe</td>
<td>Personal Perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PF</td>
<td>Preventative Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PO</td>
<td>Public Opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pol</td>
<td>Policy Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polit</td>
<td>Political Tension</td>
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<tr>
<td>PoP</td>
<td>Perception of Principalship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>Position Pursuit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPaA</td>
<td>Public Perception and Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PrinPer</td>
<td>Principal Perception</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is a qualitative study that collected interview data from current assistant principals in selected New Jersey school districts who have decided not to pursue principal positions despite holding the professional credentials by the New Jersey Department of Education to serve as a principal. This study, limited by the sample size, took place during the 2012-2013 school year. The study did not afford the opportunity to generalize findings to all assistant principals in New Jersey and does not explore the research problem in more geographical depth. Additionally, the study is limited by the opinions shared by the study participants and has to assume that those thoughts are honest and truthful. Similarly, the study relied on the experiences of study participants and, by extension, the way in which they were led and managed by their principals. Perceptions about workplace politics also limit this study and influence opinions of study participants.

Delimitations

The study included only assistant principals with five years or more of service in the same role and examined Self-Determined Motivation Theory as it relates to the factors that influence the decision to pursue a principalship. The study surveyed those who have the skills from a certificated and application/experiential standpoint to pursue a
Assistant principals with five or more years of experience fall into that category. The researcher interviewed both male and female subjects who serve as assistant principals and hold required credentials to serve as school principals. The study endeavored to survey a cross-section of assistant principals from an experience perspective: sitting assistant principal subjects with 5 to 20 years of experience were considered for inclusion in this study. Possible study participants were screened prior to a formal interview in order to ensure that the pool of interview subjects reflected a criteria match for inclusion in the study.

**Summary**

Chapter III explained the components of the research methodologies the study employed. This included descriptors of the research design, the population sample being employed, the limitations and delimitations, and the process for data collection, as well as the process for data analysis to perform the study.
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Chapter IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings of the participant interviews and analysis of data. The findings are based on the following research questions:

1. How does Self-Determined Motivation Theory (intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation) influence the decision of an assistant principal to pursue a principalship?

2. How does high-stakes accountability (No Child Left Behind; Race to the Top; Achieve NJ) influence an assistant principal’s decision to pursue a principalship?

3. What other factors influence an assistant principal’s decision to pursue a principalship?

The chapter is organized according to major themes that emerged from the qualitative coding process for the ten study participants: assistant principal job responsibilities; memorable moments in the role of assistant principal; difficult moments in that same role; attractive elements of the assistant principal position; preventative factors influencing career goals and, specifically, the pursuit of a principal position; instructional leadership roles taken on as an assistant principal; the role of assistant principal in the social and emotional learning of a student; relationships with administrative colleagues; communiqué approaches with the principal; assistant principal perception of the principalship; assistant principal perception of accountability and public opinion; assistant principal perception of ideal principal candidates; factors related to
Assistant Principal Job Responsibilities

Analysis of interview transcripts and documents revealed 160 data points when examining assistant principal job responsibilities. Based on respondent interviews, the administration of student discipline comprised a significant portion of their role and took on several different forms. The processing of discipline is a current job responsibility for all study participants; however, two had those responsibilities lifted, from 2010-2012 when a new principal re-assigned work roles. Those two assistant principals currently process discipline after an administrative reorganization of roles in 2013 in their school.

The style and/or types of discipline varied among assistant principals, schools, districts, and grade spans. While some assistant principals engage in traditional discipline, which they defined as the processing of cases in totality, others engaged in activities related to discipline that offered more specificity. One assistant principal participates in articulation and calibration exercises with the principal; another processes cases with the most at-risk students in a high school alternative education program, others focus specifically on transparency and interpreting the code of conduct as promulgated by the local board of education, another at the upper elementary level uses discipline responsibilities to foster improvements in culture and climate within the school. Other respondents indicated variation regarding who disciplines general education students and who works specifically with special education students.

Roy Moore spoke about his primary responsibilities as an assistant principal as follows:
Primary responsibility is still the discipline caseload and attendance. I still have 725 students in my purview. The nice thing about my school is that discipline and attendance is not overwhelming because of the type of students that the school draws from. However, there are times when it gets intense.

Assistant principals offered insights regarding the time of the day that routine discipline is handled in their respective schools. In order to make arrangements for unexpected items that require attention during the school day, there was a determination made at the organization level to process specific types of cases at specific times. For example, low level issues related to student attendance and behavior in need of correction is handled at the beginning of every day. Assistant principals also offered input regarding philosophical approaches to the administration of student discipline: treatment of students as people versus students as “a number.”

Assistant principals evaluate professional and support staff; the evaluation of staff comprises 9.74% of their responsibilities. The evaluation of staff consists of several different approaches. The most common approach that assistant principals pursued was the traditional, formal evaluation. In this situation, an assistant principal holds a pre-evaluation conference with the teacher, performs an evaluation of a full class period (not less than 45 minutes, but often delineated through the evaluation procedure as outlined in the local education association agreement with its board of education), and holds a post-evaluation conference.

Another approach that is used by all involved in the study is a classroom walkthrough. As it was defined in the interview transcripts, a classroom walkthrough offers a finite snapshot of what is transpiring in a classroom at a given time. Classroom
walkthroughs last approximately four to ten minutes and are followed by a calibration and debriefing activity among the evaluation team.

Assistant principals were able to delineate specific instances whereupon they are asked to serve as instructional leaders. That too offered differences among the grade spans. Those activities include the oversight of a targeted assistance program (AVID—Advancement VIA Individual Determination), facilitating department meetings, offering leadership to specific academic departments (non-core departments), serving as chairperson for the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools review, facilitation of Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, facilitating academically-based evening events (i.e., Astronomy Night, Literacy Night).

Assistant principals participate in and lead a variety of community events. Assistant principals run these events, participate in student-driven events, attend professional meetings, and represent their school at board of education meetings, and coordinate and supervise trips for students.

Examples of items related to community and family events that assistant principals plan, organize, and implement that support student growth and development are Family Math Night (academic literacy and skill building), Let the Children Lead Program (character development program and articulation with community) and Astronomy Night. The assistant principals in this study participated in activities that take place after the framework of the academic day and make efforts to expand opportunities for students.

Assistant principals participate in the supervision of academic departments. While supervising departments, the assistant principals are charged with the evaluation of
Assistant Principal Motivation to Pursue a Principalship

All staff under their purview, examining the course offerings and recommending ways to increase academic rigor, budgeting for items for purchase at the classroom level, overseeing the process of distributing materials for classroom use, overseeing the process of grading and adherence to the department grading policy, creating external experiences for students (i.e., Job Shadowing in the community), leading the process to examine textbooks, recommending the purchase of new textbooks, distributing those textbooks upon arrival, and facilitating training.

The responsibility of student management, too, plays a large role in what is expected of an assistant principal. Each assistant principal that participated in the study indicated the inherent variability of his or her role. They literally could not predict what would take place on a given day. They could predict that their day would, in fact, be unpredictable.

In terms of student management, assistant principals are expected to be visible in the cafeteria, processing a large group of students in and out of serving areas in addition to egress and regress at the beginning and end of every period. Assistant principals play a role in addressing issues at which others have been unsuccessful; with that, they mediate between parties, be they teacher-student or teacher-parent in composition. Assistant principals supervise hallways at passing times, especially those at the high school and middle school level; they meet with representatives from special service departments for students classified for special education services, facilitate office-based discussions with students, and complete the paperwork that follows those conversations.

Additionally, assistant principals in nearly every case oversee the intervention and referral services initiative at their respective schools in order to ensure that students
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL MOTIVATION TO PURSUE A PRINCIPALSHIP

achieving two or more grade levels below standard receive additional support. Similarly, the assistant principals oversee and coordinate the process of developing a support plan for these students.

Assistant principals in the study also were assigned to oversee and lead the athletics department. That role is a complex one, consisting of several layers: management of finances, coordination of scheduling of contests at the county and district level, management of student transport, and all elements of communication and coordination between parents and the school.

All assistant principals in the study reported being deeply involved in student attendance matters. One assistant principal with a large caseload (662 students) shared the approach taken in order to address items of excessive absences (more than 4 full day unexcused absences). In order to address an entire caseload, 10 students per week are brought in, as appropriate, in order to draft a plan to reduce the amount of absences and ensure that academic credit is granted.

All assistant principals reported having a significant role in student testing; these programs take on many forms. State-mandated assessments (i.e., HSPA, NJASK 3-8) are administered, as are PSAT exams, SAT exams, final exams, mid-term exams, advanced placement exams, and exams related to English Language Learners.

Assistant principals also reported a host of activities that add to the flavor of their role in their respective building. The oversight of curriculum and program development is a frequent responsibility, as is the review of New Jersey Department of Education policies and regulations (i.e., Achieve NJ teacher evaluation).
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL MOTIVATION TO PURSUE A PRINCIPALSHIP

Other responsibilities that were reported indicate the need to establish connections between administrative practices and the mission of the organization. This was reported by an assistant principal who had discipline removed from her caseload; she was charged with improving the public perception of the organization. The school had been deemed to be a School in Need of Improvement by the New Jersey Department of Education due to its low student achievement results on high-stakes assessments. After the removal of the principal, his successor directed the assistant principal to work on items that were more focused on the mission of the school: teaching and learning. The role of the assistant principal evolved to ensure that administrative practices consistently are congruent with the mission of the organization.

Prior to the 2011-2012 school year, a law was passed in New Jersey to combat issues of harassment, intimidation and bullying (HIB) in all K-12 settings. This mandate has fallen onto the shoulders of assistant principals in many school districts in New Jersey. The assistant principals in the study all reported involvement with matters related to HIB, inclusive of formal oversight of the program with specific designations as the building Anti-Bullying Specialist, a position that each school in the state is required to have. Further, assistant principals offer formalized intervention programs (i.e., Respect for All) in order to assist students, especially those at the middle and elementary level, with the decision processes they choose to pursue.

Three assistant principals in one building have a goal of having all students in their first period class by 7:40 a.m. They adhere to this priority every morning. All three assistant principals individually shared this goal and communicated its relative success.
From an academic standpoint, assistant principals indicated participating in lesson plan review, the authoring of curricula, articulation with subject area supervisors and conducting walkthrough evaluations with administrative colleagues, overseeing situations that require credit recovery for students in academic need, the development of formative assessment programs (Northwest Evaluation Association--NWEA) and the development of the master schedule.

Again, looking through the management and structural lens, assistant principals were also charged with tasks that would enable the organization to function and operate seamlessly. To this end, assistant principals were charged with oversight of the school website, overseeing all student activities and facilities rentals, mediating between conflicted parties, distributing keys, providing supplies, counseling students, oversight of student parking, and engaging in employee discipline.

The job responsibilities of the assistant principal are increasingly varied and offer a snapshot into literally every major component of school administration: academic leadership, structural management, human resource management, and community relations.

Memorable Moments in the Role of Assistant Principal

Assistant principals in the study reported memorable experiences in the role. Nearly half of the responses indicated memorable experiences as it relates to areas of leadership. One assistant principal shared an experience of his opportunity to lead a building when the principal was on an extended leave. Another shared how his ability to lead initiatives and students offered him a gateway to positive student relationships and away from the filing of administrative paperwork. Two others indicated the ability to
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL MOTIVATION TO PURSUE A PRINCIPALSHIP
lead a school through the second order change of an administrative overhaul and the examination of instructional practices while completing the Accreditation for Growth process for a Middle States Commission of Secondary Schools application. Two assistant principals added that offering a new initiative through the process of examination to implementation was especially memorable.

Community factors play a role in memorable moments. Two participants shared that the support of residents in the town in which they work is especially pleasing and have offered positive experiences. Sharon Bruder explained as follows:

We have always tried to promote veterans in our town; we have always been a very veteran-centered town. My son was a marine who was stationed in Iraq. He was spending a school year away from home, and for me it was one of the hardest times because you never knew from day to day what was going to happen or what kind of phone call you were going to get. Well, five teachers got together and started a community involvement project that asked every student in the school to design a square to a quilt. The plan was form quilts and mail the quilts to military stationed overseas. My son was one of the recipients. There were also sons and daughters of residents of the district that they were going to send their quilts to. The whole thing was done under cover, and I never knew anything that was going on. One day my principal told me to run an assembly, and they surprised me with a quilt for my son. I cried tears of joy for an hour, and that was my most memorable experience as an assistant principal.

Similarly, others have shared great coordination between the local police department and the school in order to ensure that students and staff members are safe.
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL MOTIVATION TO PURSUE A PRINCIPALSHIP

Others indicated that when students come back to visit the school, it is not unusual for it to be a student to whom considerable time and care was given. When they come back to update on personal successes it has provided an intrinsic or extrinsic feeling of success.

Ms. Lotanzio explained as follows:

Last year there was a young man standing at the counter, about 24 years old. He was from my first year teaching here nine years ago, and I saw his face and I just started to laugh because it was someone that I never thought I would see again, certainly not someone I thought would pass through these doors again. The change you see in kids is important. Clearly that young man took the time to come back; my work with him had an impact on him. Those visits are rewarding.

Similarly, the ability to establish student relationships and cultivate those relationships further has created an environment that has assisted both parents and students. Establishing positive relationships has afforded students the opportunity to have an advocate in the form of school leadership; the ability to have someone for whom to advocate has resulted in a situation that is most positive for the assistant principals in the study.

Leadership and positive moments have taken on many different forms among the study participants; a student suicide placed an assistant principal into a leadership position. Although the memories of the circumstances are most devastating, the assistant principal conveyed trust that was shared that led her to assume leadership of a most difficult situation. It has served as a point of definition for the study candidate.

Areas of student conduct and parent communication based on that conduct offers assistant principals the opportunity to establish support systems between school and
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home. In addition, leadership activities that have enabled assistant principals to serve as leaders and influencers of parents have been a refreshing experience. Based on input from the study participants, the role of the parent has been most challenging in recent years. Offering programs to support parents, both with student academics as well as human growth and development, was reported as a positive experience for assistant principals in the study.

One assistant principal shared how impactful simply seeing the students with whom he worked graduate was:

Cliché as it must be, when we are at graduation and it’s your class, as an assistant principal it means something when you see that the kid that for a long time wasn’t going to make it, does make it. When you see them walk across the stage for their diploma, there is something to say for that. Experiences like this matter to me as an assistant principal.

Following the line of establishing community support, an assistant principal indicated that establishing community events in order to establish support for his school has been a tremendous experience. Another assistant principal had her entire community rally around her and her son, who was a decorated war hero after service in Afghanistan. The entire town and school community prepared a secret celebration of his service and used it as a civics lesson for the school as well as for much of the community. These moments had a powerful impact on at least one study participant.

An assistant principal shared a community-based project that he leads, which offers great satisfaction to him as an assistant principal while solidifying the value of his work:
I run an event called AB Day. It’s a large fundraiser, but it’s the first time that I have seen a real community-based event that the school puts on; it’s not a student activity or a community event, but a school event. There are all sorts of homes and communities around this school, and we love to celebrate what is going on at my school. That is a nice feeling because there is a lot of money this side of town. Families are really big at making sure their kids are taking an AP class and getting into the best colleges, but there was not a communal sense in this part of town. It was a nice thing to initiate here. We now do a tailgate to kick off the beginning of each sports season. These events matter.

As school administrators, assistant principals tend to spend a high percentage of their student contact time with the most at-risk students. As that is the case, the ceremony of graduation gives a great sense of pride for assistant principals when students with whom they have interacted so intensely over a long period of time realize their potential and attain this milestone.

Universally, the assistant principals in the study indicated the need to have their professional growth enhanced; they shared that they have been satisfied due to the many memorable experiences that they have realized. However, many of the experiences reported in the study did not impact teaching and learning per se. The assistant principals in the study reported appreciating the importance of adhering to the structural frame, but they underscored the power of human capital in their work.

By making a positive out of a negative, Eli Barr shared how a memorable moment can bind an administrative team together:
Dealing with the school during losses is a tough thing to do. We had a kid collapse and die at track practice. Trying to deal with that the next day is tough. Figuring out funeral plans and how to support the family from the school level was critical. Arranging for counselors from the Traumatic Loss Coalition and coordinating them was important also. We all stuck together and became closer during the process.

The assistant principals in the study were able to identify how the role they serve was attractive, and each had memorable examples.

**Difficult Moments in the Role of Assistant Principal**

Just as the management of second-order change offers positive and memorable experiences for assistant principals, the management of that change is the source of difficult experience too as it relates to the role of assistant principal. A major theme among the study participants has been the manner in which the State of New Jersey has implemented an evaluation instrument for teachers as well as for principals and their assistants.

This study had participants whose study sites were chosen as a pilot district by the New Jersey Department of Education to implement the regulations for the revised teacher evaluation instrument (legislatively titled Achieve NJ). Those participants shared angst and frustration with the manner in which the change was led and facilitated. Additionally, there are circumstances regarding the implementation of the second-order change that resulted in great concern for the assistant principals responsible, largely, for implementing and leading the change at the school and classroom level.
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Ultimately, the assistant principal is responsible for the implementation of every initiative that reaches the school level. Be it a mandate from the legislative level, an interest from the local board of education, or something directed from the principal level, the assistant principals assume their positions with the keen understanding that they will have to implement decisions, ideas, and initiatives not cultivated and promoted by them. Providing a voice in the process would be of great benefit to all assistant principals.

One assistant principal lamented being held back in the position as far as holding decision-making power and explained the following:

I came into this job that you don’t leave teaching and everything you loved about it to become an assistant principal. You do it to become a school leader and impact things on a broader base. While assistant principals get in the room as far as listening to discussions and sitting on committees you don’t necessarily get to drive things.

Despite this, however, most assistant principals that participated in this study did not translate the lack of transparency and inclusiveness in the decision making process as it relates to their participation as an Achieve NJ pilot site to their desire to become a principal. A negative experience working in a pilot school for Achieve NJ did not have a negative impact on their interest level to pursue a principal position. Most of the assistant principals that participated in the study simply offered the solution of inclusion when discussing what moments have been most difficult and cumbersome as it relates to their role. Again, they have not used these experiences as an impetus to pursue a principal position, just that they be included and have a seat at the proverbial decision table.
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Just as elements of student management proved to be source of success for certain assistant principals, others have grown tired of that component of their role in their respective buildings. Specifically, assistant principals that have to engage in HIB investigations shared that the process is time consuming; what used to take an hour now takes a day as the result of constricting legislative requirements. Additionally, navigating both sides of the “support/discipline” line has been an area of difficulty for assistant principals.

Jesse Knight spoke about HIB legislation and regulations:

It takes up a whole lot of time, far more time than is necessary. In past years, prior to the HIB laws, I could handle these problems efficiently. I mean, we always handled them, but I would call a parent directly and deal with it. I would say this is the situation and this was taken care of. Now, I have to call witnesses and bystanders and everybody involved. People get upset because now they feel like an HIB investigation is going to be placed in their permanent file. It’s just so much time. What in the past was a two-hour job is now a four-hour job.

As we continued to examine the issues and challenges of student management as it relates to the role of the assistant principal, the percentage of time spent with high-profile students does in a sense chip away at the emotional foundation of the assistant principal. The study participants have reported pining to have more consistent interactions with teachers and students who do not pose constant challenges from a management standpoint.

The respondents reported viewing their role as a staff developer for the teachers as how to deal with difficult behaviors. Erin Ryan shared the following:
I have always been able to show teachers how to assert their authority so they can get the students to change their behavior. I am the person who cleans up an issue between two kids because they are fighting or arguing; I am the person who has cleaned up many a conflict between teacher and student. Whatever needs to be done in our role as assistant principals has fallen on me.

Roy Moore explained as follows:

A third of my day is involved in talking with kids in the office as well as some of the paperwork associated with those conversations. I like to give discipline referrals back in 24 hours, but there are days like today where I was out of the building for 3 hours (interviewing a slate of supervisor candidates). I am not able to adhere to that timeline for discipline referrals. So, that backs things up and then I don’t get into classrooms, as I would like.

When discussing difficult moments from the lens of an assistant principal, one participant shared that the over-ownership of the teachers in his building of student success was extremely frustrating. He elaborates in detail. The school is extremely high performing; however, as the study participant explained it, he feels that the success is due to the principal and the students, not the teachers, that they have become stagnant as a group and have not modified instructional approaches to demonstrate growth. According to him, Instruction in 2013 is the same as it was in 2003. The teachers have not changed, the students perform under even the most challenging of circumstances and always will--despite the teachers to whom they are assigned. The lack of willingness of a teaching staff to progress and modernize, regardless of the students whom they teach, is an extraordinary source of frustration for one study participant.
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Roy Moore explained his frustration:

Kids are what make our school. Great instruction is not seen. Even for those students that need it, good instruction is not seen. Even with the special education teachers or in the lower level classes in the track system that we have here, you don’t see the teacher as the reason for success--it’s the kids. In the new teacher evaluation model (Achieve NJ), I believe that is going to force the discussions to be greater or more beneficial. But they (teachers) are still going to come with the stance of “It can’t possibly be me.” That’s a battle that has been most glaring for me as I have gone from being a good assistant principal to being a good instructional leader. I have seen how much resistance there is; there is no malice, but there certainly is resistance to change what they are doing. I don’t think it’s going away; no matter where I go, I don’t think it’s going away.

The challenge of enforcing policies promulgated by a local board of education makes the role of assistant principal difficult. Assistant principals are charged with reviewing policies, applying them to real life situations in their school, communicating the policy to all major stakeholders and remaining consistent in their application of the policies revolving around school governance; it is a difficult balance to navigate.

Other items that have proven to provide difficulty include engaging parents and orchestrating a unified front of support for students on a number of different levels. Whether it is creating an attendance improvement plan, an academic support plan, or something that is related to social-emotional growth, engaging parents and families in the process for the most at-risk students continues to provide a tremendous challenge to assistant principals that participated in the study.
Attractive Characteristics of the Assistant Principal Role

The assistant principal position offers flexibility for those serving in the role to perform a host of tasks that enable them to feel connected to the school in a positive way. One assistant principal explained that the attraction to a career in education—specifically teaching—was the ability to impact the lives of young people. A factor that led to attraction to the assistant principal position was the flexibility that the position allowed for more in-depth opportunities to impact the learning community at large. One assistant principal indicated that an initiative that she spearheaded regarding character education and the development and support of a positive learning climate afforded the opportunity to have a positive announcement with a corresponding inspirational quote made every day of the school year. This flexibility gave this assistant principal the feeling of globally supporting the school in a positive way.

Another example of positional flexibility regarding the attraction to the assistant principal position allowed the establishment of targeted assistance programs for those two or more grade levels below standard. An assistant principal further explained that the position allowed for the exposure to a host of student and educational programming in which they would not typically have the opportunity to be involved. The flexibility of the position serves as a professional development catalyst.

The attractiveness of the assistant principal position spoke to interests that assistant principals have in working with projects that are academic in nature. No assistant principals suggested that the position allowed them to get engaged in items relative to student management that have negative connotations; i.e., discipline.
Assistant principals reported appreciating the global outcomes that the flexibility associated with the position offer. One assistant principal shared that the school is one big class to impact and influence. Another said the base to assert influence is broader. A third indicated feeling accomplished and proud about his role in education. Yet another simply stated that the opportunity to impact children is a large determinant in job satisfaction. The activity that is more widespread and focused away from student management is fulfilling for assistant principals.

Two assistant principals in the study were afforded the opportunity to be taken out of student discipline for two school years. During that time they were directed to spearhead initiatives that were designed to improve the public perception of their school. During that experience they were focused on initiatives that were more directly connected to the core mission of the school (instruction and achievement). This experience allowed the focus to be on responsibilities that are more closely associated with the principal position rather than the assistant principal position. The positional flexibility offered to them provided an opportunity for greater connection to the mission of the school as compared to the work they had been engaged in as assistant principals in prior years.

Erin Ryan explains as follows:

For two years I didn’t do any discipline. I did co-curricular, building management, anything and everything that had to do with the public perception of our school as well as just managing the building--more dealing with the level of instruction--that kind of thing. As a disciplinarian, I have always been able to show teachers how to assert their authority so they can get the students to change their behavior. I have always been adept at doing that. Once teachers start doing
that, they can start teaching the kids. I would not have been able to do that if I had not been taken away from discipline for awhile because I was not someone who had any knowledge of what was going on in the classroom.”

Roy Moore goes into detail as well:

There was a time period when we were a school In Need of Improvement. The pressure at that time was poor public relations. That is one thing that I am proud of. When the new principal said, “Roy, clean this up,” I was able to. He took me out of discipline and into the classroom. School Choice from NCLB is now gone. I was able to develop some data and establish a plan. Instead of spreading out the initiative, I took control of it because I was out of discipline and did it well.

The assistant principal position continues to offer growth; the concept of growth was a consistent layer of testimony offered by the study participants. Mark Nielson (Interview 3/12/13) offered evidence of being in leadership positions since the age of eighteen. Oversight of large-scale athletics facilities thrust him into a position of authority at an early age in comparison to other study participants. The ability to learn from experiences and apply them to new situations proved to be an interest to study participants.

Study participants expressed the need to feel fulfillment. As that is the case, much of their interest in the assistant principal position revolved around feeling a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment through the job responsibilities associated with the position. The attractiveness of the position centers on growth; one assistant principal has the talent to facilitate the master schedule, while another has the talent for planning and organizing. The opportunity to become engaged in a variety of activities drives the level
of attractiveness that study participants verbalized. However, all study participants were able to offer great detail about what attracts them to this position.

One study participant reflected on the quality of mentoring that the assistant principal experience has afforded her. The principal with whom she works demonstrated how to drive initiatives and engage stakeholders in the process of educational reform. Having the exposure to engage in activities that are reflective of leadership-driven activities positively influences positional attraction.

The study participants conveyed a deep affinity to working with children on a non-instructional level as well. Working with students offers a sense of fulfillment to assistant principals. Having the ability to work with students offers a vehicle for study participants to create deeper connections that, in turn, result in attraction to the position. One assistant principal shared that the proof in connecting with students and the fulfillment it provides is realized when students return to visit and offer stories of success that they have experienced. Adding to fulfillment is when those that return were considered to be at-risk when enrolled.

True affinity for students was shared by all the study participants. Formal interviews revealed that working with students made assistant principals happy. Working with them in several different forms gave study participants a connection to the work and fostered a strong attraction to the position.

The assistant principals in the study universally enjoyed the position in which they were employed. Nine of the ten assistant principals have no interest in pursuing another position and that the attractiveness of the position is the flexibility to craft projects, interact with students, and engage in activities they report to be pleasing.
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The assistant principals reported feeling supported through buffering that takes place between them and the principal. Their role rarely receives questioning about outcomes or political pressure. They work at the pleasure of the principal and focus on supporting the mission conveyed by him or her. The lack of bureaucracy that was universally reported by study participants was construed to be a positive feature of the role.

Roy Moore (Interview 3/19/13) shared that while he put pressure on himself to perform at a high level, “there were external pressures that tried to hamper my ability to do my job as an AP, but my principal did a great job keeping external influences away from me as an AP.”

Looking at the position of assistant principal through the lens of professional development, the position affords the opportunity to continue to evolve as an administrator, establishes the level of responsibility, and places assistant principals in the position to lead the school if the opportunity presents itself.

Assistant principals in the study reflected on the concept of power as it relates to the position as well as its influence on the attractiveness of the position. Sharon Bruder (Interview 2/26/13) enjoyed that when she spoke, there was an understanding of the authority that is related to the school leader position of assistant principal.

At the beginning of my tenure, there were parents who felt I was too hard or that I was not flexible, but I think over the course of time I learned how to bring parents to my side better than I did in the beginning. These past five years have, for me, been a learning experience as to how to lead parents to where I want them to go.
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The power in the assistant principal position, as it was explained by another study participant, allows his or her actions to impact the greater organization. The title, another study participant explained, encompasses a variety of different layers; the attraction to the position is connected to the power of the position.

When asked about interest in pursuing a principal position, the study participants, except for one, were steadfast in their beliefs about remaining in their current position. The testimony reflected a true appreciation for what they were charged with doing every day.

The focus of the principal’s responsibility for budgets and curriculum is not an area of interest of the study candidates. Rather, the thought of not having a relationship with students, as another study participant shared, is professionally devastating. Another commented on the amount of meetings that principals have when discussing the benefits of the assistant principal position. Overall, assistant principals do not want to feel disconnected; they expressed a need to be involved and to interact in a community-based position rather than as a principal, which is largely considered by study participants to be a lonely role.

In her interview (3/12/12), Nora White was adamant about her satisfaction with being an assistant principal as well as the manner in which the administrative team with which she works functions.

My relationship with my colleagues is wonderful. We have such an atmosphere of respect. I love working with my principal. You can discuss ideas, and he will always listen. He lets us discuss ideas and it’s a team of five of us that work together very closely.
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Additionally, she shared that the school she works in is a “monster” from a size perspective and that she does not have interest, at the moment, in being a principal.

Less than one year ago she was approached with the possibility of pursuing the principal position and did not express interest in pursuing the position. She concedes that if the right position were to present itself, she would consider it, while underscoring that the organization would have to be smaller in scope (overall student enrollment).

I don’t know if I could have any more responsibility! I can’t fit any more into my day. They can throw anything (projects, work) at me, and they know I won’t say no. I host dinners and go to meetings; but I always say that if I had younger children at home, I couldn’t do this job. No way. Now that my children have grown, I can do this job. Right now I love what I do and am not looking forward to anything else, especially a principal position.

Roy Moore concedes that if one has to be an assistant principal for the remainder of one’s career, doing it at Boone High School is where you want to do it. The students on the north side of Pawnee are high achieving, have minimal discipline issues or attendance concerns, and appear to be focused on achievement. The resulting organizational climate makes being an assistant principal in this environment a pleasure. However, Moore wants more and feels ready to assume a principal position. Much to his disappointment, however, it will have to be outside of Pawnee.

In an interview (2/27/13) Jesse Knight consistently referred to the line of demarcation between him and the principal; she was responsible for anything related to academics; he, for anything else. As such, his testimony shed light on the concept of social capital that he has built within the school, the district, and the municipality. In a
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sense, nobody has a stronger reputation in town than he, regardless of anything else that takes place in the school or district, be it perceived or otherwise. Knight is comfortable with his role as an assistant principal and cited several reasons—most of them result from legislation or mandates at the NJ Department of Education level—for not wishing to pursue a principal position.

His interview revealed that it was to be an “understanding” that he would take on the role of principal of the elementary school in the district about six years ago, but he chose not to pursue it. After that vacancy, he lost interest in the principal position altogether and focused his efforts on improving school climate, social-emotional learning, and improving on all structures and processes in the school.

Preventative Factors Influencing Career Goals and the Pursuit of a Principal Position

When discussing factors that inhibit assistant principals from pursuing a principal position, over one quarter of responses indicated distaste for political influences and pressures associated with politics. Each study participant verbalized a concern for the political tension that is inherent in the assistant principal position.

Political tension was conveyed in a host of ways: unannounced school day visits by the board of education members, having board of education relatives in schools as employees, staff members as leaders of the local teachers association who are related to board of education members, staff members in need of formal discipline that are related to board of education members.

Eli Barr indicated that his mere association with his former principal, by virtue of being his assistant, precludes him from discussion of promotion:
In my district, definitely, there are factors holding me back. The principal that I worked for was let go and I was branded as one of his ‘guys.’ That label limited me. But it was OK. I was working under him and didn’t want to be disloyal. Since then, well, I was obviously on the wrong side of the coin. That’s just the way it works in this district. I was branded with the wrong person. I am not a self-promoter and might have been able to rise above the mess had I been. In this profession you have people that do the work and people that promote the successes of the work. I did the work and here I am. Still.

Joan Lotanzio (Interview 3/5/13) shared that she “doesn’t play politics well” and that she simply doesn’t want to get involved in the role of principal for this reason. The participants shared being impatient with politics, and one believed that “a poker face” was something that she could incorporate into her professional toolkit. She refuses to consider the political framework with every question or challenge that arises; additionally, she believes that the level of politics is so pervasive in her district that it predates several superintendents and is not hopeful that any superintendent could improve it.

Two assistant principals in the study shared a belief that they have been branded negatively based upon the performance of a former principal who has since retired. Roy Moore (Interview 3/19/13) explained that the tenure of this principal was so volatile that his entire administrative staff was either transferred or branded as unfit to be a principal. I could have made the jump, but the political tension was a lot to handle. The superintendent that got rid of the principal was also his head football coach years back. He hired him; he knew him. Even got rid of him, you know. Was he
really going to back me if I was connected with the principal as well? Probably not. If the principal had left on good terms, maybe.

Moore continued and discussed the determination of a team due to political factors:

For a while, everything was good. We were seen as a model team of administrators over here. We were seen as really good and then it fell apart. When it did, I could have jumped ship (which would have been wrong) or go down with it. I went down with it. I think that was the right thing to do. I needed to be loyal to the principal. That didn’t help me career-wise and proved the point of the power of politics.

Erin Ryan (Interview 4/12/13) actually went so far as to ask members of a hiring committee that recommended her for the assistant principal position eight years ago if she was as bad as the branding had suggested, then why did she get recommended for the assistant principal position to begin with. Answers, although generalized by the responder, suggested that the political framework is a cumbersome framer of public thought and not to engage in it. Ryan commented as follows:

The way that I have been perceived by people is also a factor. They have tried to make that perception gospel all the way through. There was a point in my career three years ago; I spoke with a colleague who is an assistant principal here and said, “I have no idea how I got a job as an AP. If I am that bad, why would they even give me a job as an AP?” I said obviously I was good enough to have the job or was it that I knew somebody? In our first years together, we saw a lot of bad things happen politically that affected our perception as possible principal
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candidates. That has taken a long time to change, and I don’t think it has changed even now. I am here for 27 years. I got this job right after college. I love being here, and I have never wanted to leave. I love everything about this town and this job. Everything.

Items related to the economy, seniority, and tenure also are a factor for assistant principals when discussing what prevents them from pursuing a principal position. One study participant revealed that he was fearful of performing at a standard that does not meet expectations and losing the security of tenure and seniority. The economy, too, is making assistant principals in the study nervous as it relates to gauging their interest to pursue a principal position. Mark Nielson (Interview, 3/12/13) explained:

I have a young family: a four-year-old and a two-year-old. For the moment I feel that I am learning and growing in this role. Everything is always changing through evaluation structures and the like. I am pretty comfortable where I am right now. I have been here for 16 years and to move now in these economic times, especially how I have seen this district really shrink its budget and staff, I do worry about the loss of tenure and the impact of seniority. However, I am tenured in two different positions here; it does provide some protection. It’s more about the protection right now than anything with the way that the economy and the school budget are like.

The concept of motivation was discussed in great detail with study respondents. Study participants cited a lack of interest for the principal position with age; as their age increased, the interest in the principal position decreased. Sharon Bruder (Interview 2/26/13) simply shared that she was “not yearning to be a principal,” and Jesse Knight
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(Interview 2/27/13) cited the decrease in student contact as a negative of the position; losing the perceived benefit of the position of assistant principal when considering a move to a principal position resulted in being unmotivated to pursue a promotion.

While Knight shared that he “didn’t need my own school,” Bruder shared that she thinks she has just that as the result of the relationship between her and the principal. When prompted further, Bruder shared that the duties and responsibilities that she handles are such that teachers respond to her leadership and direction in the absence of the principal. When prompted to share further, the study candidate explained that the principal works on items that she perceives to be “intellectual,” not management or leadership. Another study candidate echoed the thought of having the title of principal and felt he was already perceived to be the “heavy” in the building as compared to his principal.

When considering the idea that a principal position would come with an increase in compensation, nearly all participants shared that they are happy with their current rate of compensation and did not cite more money as a factor to pursue a principal position; the study candidates are not motivated by money or personal finances. Only Erin Ryan indicated any personal concerns relating to finances.

Study candidates referenced personal decisions as it relates to their disinterest at the present moment for a principal position. One indicated that she would want an opportunity, just not now. She didn’t cite what would have to happen, however, to feel differently. Duconnick, Neilson, and Lotanzio have young families. Similarly, Moore does not perceive himself to be a self-promoter.
Participants cited the expectations of the principal role as a deterrent to pursue the position. For instance, the concept of being charged with keeping people happy is not a component of the position that is considered to be appealing. Further, the expectations are perceived to be unrelated to students, the human capital that they have come to appreciate so much through their student contact in the role of assistant principal. Another candidate is fearful of the pressure he will place on himself in order to perform the principal role well.

The challenge of ensuring that all children are successful academically is a deterrent for Jesse Knight; he believes that an assistant principal needs to establish order so that the principal can address academic needs. Mandates from either the federal or state level play a critical role as well. The teacher evaluation legislation that was promulgated in the state of New Jersey was cited most often by study participants. When asked for more specifics regarding how the evaluation system impacted their interest, study participants shared concern about having student achievement goals for every student in their school as a part of their evaluation.

In all, the concept of job affinity--their love of being an assistant principal--is the most significant deterrent to pursuing a principal position. The assistant principals in the study truly care deeply about serving in that role. While there are a great many preventative factors, as described above, it must be underscored that assistant principals in the study truly enjoy what they are charged with. Sharon Bruder summarized her affinity for the role: “I love every second of my job. Absolutely, without a doubt. I love every second of what I do. I love being with the children. I adore what I do, which is why I have no desire to be a principal.”
Instructional Leadership Roles Assumed as an Assistant Principal

Assistant principals reported involvement in large-scale projects that required them to be leaders of instruction in their respective buildings. Three at the high school level also engaged in academic department supervision. They shared that they developed annual evaluations, recommended the addition or deletion of specific courses based on need, developed a department-based budget, oversaw the input of grades, set up job shadowing for students, and ordered supplies and textbooks.

All assistant principals evaluated instruction and participated in classroom walkthrough evaluations for teachers under their purview. A point reinforced by one study participant was the process that was taken in order to provide feedback to teachers at the classroom level. Another participant indicated that although he does engage in instructional leadership, that role is admittedly splintered and does not take place as often as it should. Another participant shared an expectation to visit five classrooms per day on a walkthrough basis in order to collect data.

Sharon Bruder compares grade distributions and state-mandated assessment results in order to afford teachers the opportunity to have an understanding of the group of students they are inheriting. Another participant also monitors grade distribution.

Two assistant principals report establishing connections between administrative practices in their schools. The principal with whom they work charged them with improving the academic programs and public perception in the school. As such, making connections between administrative practices as it relates to the mission of instruction and achievement was reported as an instructional leadership practice.
Assistant principals in this study have had direct oversight of curriculum development; they have written curriculum, developed new courses and led initiatives related to implementation. Further, the coordination of curriculum leadership as well as the leadership of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) was consistently reported as a responsibility. For example, Joan Lotanzio indicated how the PLC movement that assistant principals oversee translates into work-embedded professional development; she oversees “high-functioning PLCs--probably the best PLCs in the district. Through different principals in the building and philosophy at the district level, the PLCs have evolved to professional development.” Lotanzio oversees all PLC meetings in her building and deems them to be “high functioning.”

Bruder creates intervention activities for students achieving two or more grade levels below minimum standard. Conversely, Jesse Knight takes care of the structural management of the building in which he works, and the principal addresses all items relative to instruction and achievement.

Study participants cited more examples of instructional leadership: instructional coaching and the delivery of guidance department curricula; the pursuit of competitive grants and funding opportunities; the development and implementation of learning objectives for students; development of partnerships with colleges and universities to assist with items related to student achievement; developing new teacher seminars, fostering an inclusive environment that recommends quality candidates for hire to the principal; developing the master schedule; developing a teacher and student partnership that allows students to grow and excel.
Assistant principals reported directly leading the Intervention and Referral Services initiative. As it was explained in a formal interview, this process is both exhaustive and inclusive; several different members of the professional staff participate in this process. Members include, but are not limited to, teachers, school counselors, child study team members, student assistance counselors and other administrators. The leadership of the Intervention and Referral Services process is one that includes the coordination of voices from across the organization to assist students with issues related to achievement and comprehension of learning standards. Henry Duconnick and Roy Moore both oversee the Intervention and Referral Services program in their building and report a sense of accomplishment in the outcomes of student support.

An interview with Sharon Bruder revealed a balance to her role as an assistant principal at Due North Coventry Elementary School between student management and items that are traditional assignments for an assistant principal as well as instructional leadership. These factors, coupled with her age, proximity to retirement, and enjoyment of her role as an assistant principal have served as justification for remaining in this position for several years.

Bruder explained her affinity for the position further:

I feel I have more flexibility here than my principal because she is out at meetings at different schools. There is so much. There is this; there is that. She says to me in the morning she am going to another meeting, and I always respond, “Where are you going today?” Here in this role I can have the opportunity to walk around the school. I can go into classrooms. I can go with the students at lunch. I can go out on the playground if I want. Sometimes I can’t get out of the office and feel
as if I am chained to a desk. This position gives me freedom. I don’t want to be involved in all the bureaucratic paperwork that is not hitting the students right between the eyes.

It has been noted in the Review of Literature that assistant principals tire of the propensity for negative student interaction that comes with processing student discipline matters. Some yearn for projects that are more academically inclined and thus end up having interest in the principal position.

An assistant principal describes a hybrid relationship where he is afforded the ability to act as an instructional leader in some ways:

I don’t universally get to drive instruction in my role. I am in a building where I have a fantastic instructional leader in the principal. We certainly do our debriefing--she and I, the Guidance Director, and supervisors--but there is no doubt in my mind that we are taking her leadership. What happens as far as what will my role be is where I am exercising some independence. But, it’s not in the organizational structure to say I am in charge of academic initiative A or B. I have a role where I give teachers feedback about how to write lessons and utilize objectives; I have an authoritative voice in that. I have power in that sense.

However, there is no mistaking that I take the leadership and direction from my principal.

There are different levels of instructional leadership examples as one moves through the grade spans. What was reported from the elementary level was not consistent as one moved through the grade spans. The higher the grade level, the less control over driving the instructional leadership initiative.
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Relationships with Administrative Colleagues

All assistant principals in the study reported positive working relationships with their colleagues. Nora White offered that her experiences on district level committees have afforded her the opportunity to collaborate more effectively with her building-based high school administrative team. Another elementary assistant principal shared that there was debate between her and her principal, but that debate did not put a strain on their working relationship.

The debate between the principal and assistant principal is an interesting case to note. There is an age difference between the two of nearly 25 years; the assistant principal has no interest in the principal position, and the principal is fairly new to the role after a successful experience as middle school assistant principal. The assistant principal is a lifelong resident of Adams Oak Township and an employee at Due North Elementary School. She offers a unique perspective and, specifically, believes in ability grouping. A description of the debate that has ensued clearly puts her on a different side of the argument than others:

I firmly believe in ability grouping. I have always had a belief in that. It worked in the 1960’s and we put a man on the moon. I think it’s important. I think when you put children in a class of differing abilities, those on the lower end of the spectrum don’t have a shot because even before that teacher asks the question, that gifted and talented student has his or her hand raised; and that other student is still processing what the teacher asked for. I firmly believe in ability grouping, which we can’t do here. We are really not allowed because it is not the ‘in’ thing to do in education (2/25/13).
Other assistant principals in the study indicated that the relationship with administrative colleagues is such that any issues that need to be addressed are done so internally. Another suggests that it is their responsibility to adapt to the needs and desires of the principal and not the other way around. The principal, the researcher was reminded, serves as the immediate supervisor.

The influx of a new evaluation instrument in New Jersey has led collegial relationships to be more collaborative from a perspective of professional development according to study participants; most reported that articulation sessions between study participants and their administrative colleagues (like-school and like-district) continue to take place in order to implement this legislatively driven mandate by the 2013-2014 academic year (two study participants are piloting the use of these evaluations in their district during the 2012-2013 school year).

A culture of trust and respect was reported by study participants. One assistant principal indicated that he has earned the trust of others in his district by virtue of his status as the senior assistant principal. Others indicated that collaboration and work relationships are healthy, with their perception of the principal to be a positive one. Another participant, however, indicated that district-wide collaboration has decreased; this was attributed to a new superintendent as well as overall workload.

Mark Nielson, an assistant principal at The Hill School District is shared between two middle level organizations and indicates that there are differences in dynamics that afford him the opportunity to thrive in two unique environments. Above all, positive relationships are reported:
I think my relationship with administrative colleagues is really good and that we have established a good rapport with one another. Going back and forth (between buildings)—there are different dynamics in each. I have known the other assistant principal for ten years. I have seen another principal come in who works really well with us. Another assistant principal and I have known each other for a long time, and we have worked closely for the last three years. All eight years that I have been an AP we have had a collaborative relationship. The principal here comes from the elementary level and brings in a lot of experience. He’s a great guy and we have a great atmosphere. We have added supervisors to our administrative team; we try to stay on the same page about things. If there is an issue to be worked out we find the time to sit down and work it out together. We take care of each other and have each other’s back and take care of issues in house first (3/12/13).

These two middle school administrative teams coordinate with each other and ensure professional articulation between both leadership teams on a monthly basis in order to ensure that appropriate calibration between the schools is aligned with district goals.

While most of the participants reflected positive relationships, one indicated there was strife between building-level leadership, including her, and those at the central office. Susan Monella, an assistant at Stately Spruce Middle School and Stately Spruce High School, reports the following

I find that in this particular district that the central office micromanages my work. Whatever the charge of the day is (“from above”) you go with it. I am a good
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listener and do whatever I am told. In this district, they tend to have to be that way, but it’s also a micromanager type of relationship (2/25/13).

She continued and reported that her superintendent often checks virtually everything that she does.

When discussing the level of collegial relationships, the principal and how he or she fits into the administrative group was a topic of clarity with the study participants. All participants indicated a “very good working relationship” with their principals. One indicated her principal is knowledgeable in special education and a source of information from which to learn. Another principal was described as open to suggestions, opinions, and thoughts. Yet another indicated that a principal fosters discussion to cultivate ideas and initiatives, and that close collaboration is the result. More feedback describes principals as people who solicit ideas, who practice active listening, and who develop partnerships. Another assistant principal compliments her principal, indicating that she processes information in a timely manner.

The trend of discussing professional factors when examining the level of collegiality among administrative teams continued in responses by participants. Responses were varied but spoke to various factors that influence and impede school leadership. Those responses include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The reality that the AP position is at the building level; it’s really just you and your principal
- Sometimes in administrative circles you don’t know whom to trust
The addition of a supervisory layer to perform the administration of discipline in order to allow assistant principals more time to tend to academic leadership is recommended.

Although top-down decision making exists, the ability to process those decisions is afforded to me as an assistant principal.

There are personal factors that are discussed as it relates to the level of collegial relationships at the assistant principal level. Mark Nielson reflected on his relationship with the central office administration at his district:

I am a hard worker, and the central office reaches out to me for opinions or committee participation. They see my strength as a planner, implementer, and developer. My administrative career has had some ups and downs, but as of late my role in athletics and facilities oversight has enabled me to prove my worth and improve relationships and perceptions with colleagues (3/12/13).

Last, the concept of trust was an important theme among those that participated in the study. They reported the importance of the following:

- Feeling of trust by the principal
- Feeling that the relationship with their principal is “solid”
- Feeling that the level of communication with the principal is “great”
- The principal asks me to handle projects from start to finish

The study participants reported various experiences in terms of the level and types of communication with their principal. In terms of coding and frequency of responses, seven assistant principals indicate that their primary method of communication with the principal is through email. Seven candidates indicate they communicate by telephone,
and one indicates that text communication through the use of a cell phone is the predominant communiqué. Six assistant principals indicate having face-to-face meetings on a regular basis, and one indicates most communication is done through a two-way radio.

Study participants indicated a host of conversational styles when interfacing with their principals. One suggests she provides the facts and makes a recommendation in order to guide the principal. Another, however, indicates that after six years as an assistant principal with the same principal, regular meetings have waned. A third assistant principal focuses intently on communication schedules because he works in two middle schools on adjoining campuses; keeping multiple administrative teams remains a challenge. Another assistant principal reported having what he termed “rubber stamp” status from his principal.

There are personal factors, professional factors, and conversation and communication factors as well as trust factors that all play a role in the level of collegiality between assistant principals and their administrative teams.

**Assistant Principal Perception of the Principalship**

The perception of the principal position by career assistant principals, as defined by this study, has revealed much variation between study subjects. The manner in which subjects perceive the principal position was shared in a variety of contexts.

When discussing the roles that principals play as compared to assistant principals, Ms. Monella, an assistant principal in a Group I district, shared that she “wants to be the nurse instead of the doctor.” Monella explained that she likes the level of contact that she has with students as an assistant principal. She has a strong preference to maintain the
level of interaction that has a first-responder effect to it. Being a principal, from her perception, does not offer that latitude.

A consistent aspect of feedback during the interviews of assistant principals was the appreciation of the opportunity to impact change and people. Ms. Lotanzi expressed sincere appreciation and satisfaction with the assistant principal position as well as her role:

I still think for me it was the ability to make a difference and effect change. At this point in my career, I think I have done a lot and lived a lot as an assistant principal. With me, it’s more than a title; I am satisfied where I am. I love what I do. I am happy with the building I work in--I am not miserable with what I do (3/5/13).

The perception that stems from a distrust of the political framework was a consistent concern of assistant principals in the study. The assistant principals interchangeably defined accountability as politically driven as well as agreeing that it is a positive attribute of education. Below is a summation of comments as they relate to the political framework of the role of principal:

- Eli Barr: There is accountability at every step of the way (4/11/13)
- Erin Ryan: I have been branded incorrectly from political misconceptions because my principal was weak (4/12/13)
- Eli Barr: There is no buffer from the central office (4/11/13)
- Henry Duconnick: There is too much politics in the role of principal. Period. (4/5/13)
- Eli Barr: Your name goes in the paper when things don’t go well (4/11/13)
• Susan Monella: I can’t imagine the impact on teachers with the new evaluation model (2/26/13)

• Roy Moore: Political influences are disastrous (3/19/13)

In addition to examining the political base that is connected with the principal position, other items emerged from the manner in which assistant principals in the study perceive the principal position: themes of compensation, negative perceptions, career path options, amotivation, burnout, leadership, satisfaction, and personal factors (i.e., family priorities).

Compensation was not cited as a critical factor; Susan Monella indicated that there was no attraction to the position solely because of the money. The other nine study participants indicated in a humorous fashion that they would all like to earn more money.

When discussing personal career paths, Roy Moore indicated the desire to “get my stuff together and fly below the radar.” Moore did suggest that he would like to run a district, but as he perceived himself to be a political target, there is an understanding that “the school I run doesn’t have to be in the district I am in now.” Additionally, Moore felt that he needed to be confident in his ability to leave prior to doing so—and that he was getting closer to that comfort level.

Roy Moore continued to discuss the perception of the principal position and stated the following during his interview:

• I need to have external pressures minimized for me to be a principal.

• I have a new child and am in need of normalcy at home first.

• Political influences regarding the principal position are disastrous.
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- I know what to do with difficult students and irate parents; that could transfer well to a principal position at some point.
- I need to stabilize my own working environment.
- Principals are isolated.

Moore conceded in the interview that he does want to be a principal and makes reference to “completing the journey” relative to his desire to serve as a principal. He has had conversations with his principal and superintendent relative to his career goals. He has been told by the superintendent—seen as an outsider who has hired outside candidates for high level positions almost universally—that he is viewed as a “high school guy” and that since there will be no movement soon from either of the high school principals at either Cedar Bonnet High School or Boone High School, he should look outside of the district if he wants to pursue a principal position. To that end, Moore has done so.

When asked about hiring trends in his district he explained the following:

The trend is to hire from the outside for big positions. That is the sentiment. There is not doubt that this town’s reputation is on the outside. Nepotism. The reality is that there are good positions in the district. I am stuck, though. I had a one-on-one conversation with the superintendent, where he said that he only sees me in one grade span and nothing else…I would like to hear that what I have done in this district is transferrable to another grade span.

The assistant principals that participated in the study are clear in their understanding of their role and steadfast in their enjoyment of it. There is great concern about the layers of politics, particularly in the Pawnee School District. All participants indicated enjoying the layers of professional responsibility and satisfaction that they
garnered from their position. Their interest in the principal position has been influenced by their appreciation of being assistant principal, negative perceptions of the principal position, career path realities, amotivation, burnout, and personal factors; i.e., family priorities.

**Assistant Principal Perception of Accountability and Public Opinion**

The implementation of No Child Left Behind ushered in an era of accountability that impacts all reaches of public education. To that end, the era of accountability plays a role in the perception of the principal role with current assistant principals. The study subjects identified three areas relative to accountability: public opinion, accountability, and perception.

Assistant principals reported that public perception is a large component of how they perceive their role, and it has the ability to impact them. There was a variety of layers in their responses, however. Ms. Lotanzio shared that parts of accountability impact interest in the principal position and that the framework of the public’s ability to hold public servants accountable is “part of society now.” Additionally, she shared an agreement with accountability in principle but is concerned with the process. It is flawed in her eyes. Her advice to others was to “learn to deal with it” and sees her responsibility as a leader to enable teachers to see their greater role in the accountability formula and how it impacts student achievement. She reiterated on several occasions, in several ways, that the outside world is not permitted to filter into her decision making process throughout the course of every decision and every issue. Last, Lotanzio is certain to have students drive the decision process rather than the opinion of the public or an accountability formula.
Nora White is an ardent supporter of accountability:

I think it should have a big place in our world. I think all the students we serve should have the opportunity to learn, and we as educators should make sure that we are affording that to every single child. It’s our role as professionals. We need to have a time of accountability, even if it is from the outside. The Achieve NJ legislation will do this. Everyone needs to be held accountable because if we are not accountable, then the students suffer. I don’t have a problem with accountability and never did.

Mark Nielson acknowledges the presence of perception and accountability but does not believe it has an impact on his plans to be a central office administrator; instead, he focuses on “being happy and confident with yourself.” He is steadfast about being the organizational adhesive that maintains the organizational systems in a school. He feels that the assistant principal is critical and suggests that without the position “the principal would not be able to get the work done.” He does feel, however, that despite the importance, in his eyes, of the assistant principal position, there is considerably less stress in that position to make decisions.

Like Lotanzio and others, Nielson believes that public opinion does not shape how he pursues his responsibilities. Even though the current political push is for instructional leadership and student achievement, there is not a great deal of stress that is placed on the assistant principals. While he acknowledges that the public spoke and the legislators listened, he makes great efforts to function consistently regardless of what the public thinks.
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Nielson is most interested in a central office/district level leadership position. He does not appreciate the relationship between parents and the principal; parents look to the principals for all the answers to solve the problems with their children and, in the end, question everything that the principal does. Having been an assistant principal for eight years, Nielson can comfortably say that his observation of the principal role has resulted in a decision to pursue other administrative roles. Ultimately, the pressure of the principal role impacts his role of the position negatively.

Jesse Knight, an assistant principal for over twenty years, believes that he has no control over results on high-stakes assessments. Ultimately, his status as a career assistant principal and proximity to retirement leads him to the opinion that he does not concern himself with academic accountability and perception; he shares that he is “simply at a different place” in his career. He says that public perception does not impact his decisions or the process that he takes to arrive at them. From the lens that he looks through, however, he shares that his principal is impacted by public perception and is “no longer shot out of a cannon.” Explaining further, he explains that there is more calculated urgency from the principal to improve rather than trying to achieve everything all at once.

Not only does Knight have no interest in the principal position, he works directly with administrative interns who, he feels, share the same opinion about the assistant principal position. Ultimately, the town in which he works is a small one. He enjoys a great professional reputation. He feels that the feelings that people have about him are either not strong ones or are such that they don’t impact the decisions that he makes. Knight acknowledged, however, that the pressure that his colleagues share is much
different than what he experiences. His age and experience as an assistant principal put him in somewhat of a protected class. Ultimately, Knight is an assistant principal in a different position than what most participants shared during the interviews.

When addressing the concept of accountability, Nora White suggested that the profession should, indeed, have accountability to measure performance. This opinion was shared among all ten of the study participants. However, she shares a different, more positive, story about accountability. As it relates to parent involvement, she has indicated that inclusive, consistent parent contact has enabled her to foster relationships that have resulted in a strong sense of positive perception from the community. Additionally, as a result of the relationships developed, she shares a closeness with parents and has never been challenged by a parent. Accountability and public perception, according to White, has been a positive experience.

Nora White reports loving what she does for a living and adds that the public perception does not impact what her career goals are. Additionally, she does feel that the principal position is one that is extraordinarily difficult, citing excessive hours, while emphatically sharing that she does not want to be a principal because it would take her away from the work at the teacher and student level that she enjoys so much.

Sharon Bruder operates from a transparent base when dealing with the public and their concerns for excellence. She shares that she loves her job and feels that it pushes her to improve and be excellent. She brings work home at night, on the weekends, and even on vacation to demonstrate to herself how important her role is. With that said, she does so because she loves her role and the students she serves, not because of what the public wants her to be or do.
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When asked further about accountability, however, she rephrased her opinion by saying she feels the effects of accountability and that she feels stress often but tries very hard not to show or share it. The quality of her work, in her eyes, speaks for itself and solidifies her reputation publicly with the parents; she feels she has placed extra emphasis on academics as the assistant principal.

Eli Barr shared that the public perception and accountability beliefs held by others do not influence his decision making much. When asked for expansion, he acknowledged that the town in which he works is consistently rife with issues that reside, predominantly, in the political framework. In discussing public perception and accountability further, Barr explains that he does not care about their opinion (of him) but does care that they understand his position. He feels that “it’s in my nature for people to understand me, but maybe not agree with my position.” Despite what he presented as a rigid perspective, Barr welcomes the challenge of accountability. While it was described as “a huge task,” it was also labeled as “exciting.” He considers himself a believer in accountability and an “influencer of change,” while supporting an evaluation structure focused on outcomes.

Discussing accountability more deeply as it relates to his career goals, Barr explained that, “I can’t say that I will be afraid of accountability at some point although I have some concerns of being evaluated.” He is steadfast in his belief that accountability measures are worthwhile and that what matters most is the resulting directional clarity relative to organizational mission.

Erin Ryan, too, shared that accountability and public perception do not influence day-to-day decisions, even in a highly politicized area. Ryan cites the reality of having
administered discipline to local board of education members’ children in a fair and balanced fashion as proof of her approach to decision making. She bluntly stated, “I don’t aim to please the community with my decisions” and adds that she has “been told she doesn’t play politics well but will never change for others.” Ryan shares that the community attempts to influence her decisions often.

Eli Barr discussed political tension as it related to the stressors of his role as an assistant principal:

There is internal tension. There is high political tension. My first couple of years here we had the son of the board president who was the head of the teachers association. Talk about conflict! In terms of “You know, we don’t like this or that.” I was at the time a non-tenured assistant principal, and there was a great deal of political pressure. Having to write negative reports on someone who was the son of a board of education member--that is not an easy thing to do. We have always had political tension. Board of Education members would show up at the schools during the day without announcing their presence.

Erin Ryan supports accountability; she prefers to have a roadmap to meeting standards, which was a consistent perspective shared by other study participants as well. Ryan shared a story about her personal children and accountability during her interview. She explained that every time her children got into a vehicle with her, they asked where they were going; if they didn’t get an answer they perceived to be complete, comprehensive or truthful, they continued to inquire until they were satisfied. They look at the driver to be honest and open with the intended direction as well as to provide a seamless, logical collection of routes on which to travel that are both predetermined and
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disclosed. Ryan views accountability in the same fashion as transporting young children: be clear; offer a method of successfully completing the task.

Henry Duconnick, like all other study subjects, indicated that the opinion of the public does not weigh heavily on the decision making process he engages in when making decisions as an assistant principal. The decisions are universally in the best interests of the students. A believer in accountability, Duconnick feels comfortable with the subgroup analysis that was ushered in during the initial era of accountability beginning in 2002.

However, he does recognize that accountability of student performance has played a role in his disinterest in a principal position. Ultimately, there is a great deal at stake for him from an accountability perspective; thus, he is not pursuing a principal position. A young father with concerns regarding his ability to provide for his family, Duconnick is not in a position to take the risk of a new position, in his perspective.

The responsibility of rearing a family represents too much of a risk for Duconnick as compared to the challenge of accountability at the principal level. Ultimately, the impact of accountability is far too heavy to bear at this point in Duconnick’s career. However, the awareness that accountability has fostered has made a particularly strong impression.

Ms. Monella is consistently at odds with her community; when prompted about accountability and public perception, she shared that “I am not a good fit to be a principal in the town in which I currently work; my vision and the town’s vision conflict.” When asked to elaborate, she referred on several occasions about “the tide” and how it was making what she considered to be a seismic shift. Ultimately, she reinforced her opinion
assistance in principal motivation to pursue a principalship

by saying, “I can’t be a leader of a school in this town.” She feels pressure from the central office and superintendent that she works for and feels, in addition, that public opinion is a tremendous factor in the town. She feels that she is consistently vulnerable for someone to attack her.

Monella discussed a set of morals that will not allow her to be influenced by external sources. However, she incorporates both board and school policy to drive her decisions. The responses that were given from Monella were reflective of the political framework affecting her role as an assistant principal.

When addressing the concepts of public perception, Roy Moore shared that “most Americans have been to school so they think they can comment on it.” With that said, Moore (who works in a highly politicized town along with study participants Ryan, Duconnick, and Barr across two high schools) indicates that he does not think about public perception or public opinion with great seriousness or care. Simply stated, it does not play a major factor in the manner in which he carries out his responsibilities. In the end, he is steadfast in his belief that he was hired to impact students, not the public, and therein lies his ethical code.

While he does not agree with elements of how high-stakes accountability is being implemented in the nation, as well as in New Jersey, he is in support of the legislation. He feels strongly that the message of the legislation is faulty; to be standardized test-dependent is a flawed way to proceed. However, he is appreciative of precision when it comes to instruction, and student support has to be laser-like and accurate.

When asked to discuss his status in the organization from a perspective of perception, he shared some troubling thoughts: he sees himself as “just an AP” and that
the only time he has a dialogue about performance is when he makes an error in judgment or execution. He shares that self-promotion is not a skill, that he has virtually no relationship with the superintendent and that any method of communicating between himself and executive level leadership is done through the principal.

In her interview, Erin Ryan expressed a desire, though not a burning one, to be a principal. She offered reasons as to why she was not: politics and bureaucracy. During her tenure as an assistant principal, she was overly supportive of a principal who chose to retire; rather than be non-renewed and granted tenure, the principal retired. That support put her into another camp politically and has rendered it difficult to earn a promotion on merit. Ryan appears to struggle with the fact that she is not a principal and holds the belief that if one is worth a promotion to an assistant principal position, one is also automatically worth being a principal if one so desires. Ryan does aspire to a principal position and is at the point where she understands that in order to earn a promotion, she will need to leave the only district she has ever known.

During her interview, Ryan professed an affinity for Pawnee; belief in the town is why she feels so strongly about the district and town in which she works. Leaving those comforts has recently come to the fore. To that end, she has begun to pursue positions elsewhere but has not been successful yet.

Ms. Lotanzio indicates “not playing politics well” in an interview; the researcher was able to observe how these elements have permeated throughout the district. Much of the interview was void of discussion about teaching, learning, student management, and student outreach. Rather, there were other contextual layers that outline her belief of why
she is not a principal and what factors are precluding her in all likelihood from being a principal in Pawnee.

Eli Barr’s interview revealed that he went through a process of “dusting off” when he felt he was branded to be one of the ousted principal’s “guys” and summarily denied promotion. Further, he shared that the “dusting off” process has revealed an administrator who is regaining confidence and looking forward to an appropriate fit when searching and accepting an administrative position as a principal elsewhere. It is his assumption that he will either be an assistant principal for the remainder of his career--approximately 20 additional years--or he will have to leave the district in order to pursue a principal position. He noted, strongly, that he has no problem leaving the only organization and district that he has ever known professionally in order to pursue such an opportunity, should one present itself.

The concept of accountability is universally accepted by all study participants. As leaders, they embrace the social imperative of ensuring that instruction maintains high quality, as does its outcomes.

**Assistant Principal Perception of Ideal Principal Candidates**

Study participants were asked about the ideal person to be a principal; of specific interest was whether career assistant principals could identify what about the assistant principal position would prepare one for the principal role.

Henry Duconnick indicated that the assistant principal position fosters much growth opportunity and opportunity for understanding the importance of the decision making process as it relates to school leaders. Additionally, Duconnick feels that the
assistant principal role is more than simply student management; being exposed to a host of items is critical to success as a principal.

Mark Nielson focused on the transition of the principal. Being an assistant principal provides the ability to become involved in many different initiatives. Those that serve in the assistant principal position will have the ability to become as well versed and well rounded as any other candidate and thus make a smooth transition to a principal position. The assistant principal position offers the ability to learn about every component of school leadership.

Nora White feels that experience as an assistant principal is a pre-requisite for any principal position simply for the exposure to a variety of experiences. However, so too is experience as a teacher. She spoke about being the “lead learner” and underscored the importance of having experience at the classroom level.

Roy Moore feels strongly that the “devil is in the details” for making a smooth transition from an assistant principal role to a principal position. Similarly, having front line experience offers the opportunity to have a diverse set of skills at the time of transition. Given the manner in which items arise in public school administration, having the experience at the assistant principal level is a requirement for school leadership. Further, in line with the notion of accountability, any principal candidate has to have access to curricular and instructional items. The need for expertise in this area is critical.

Jesse Knight was adamant that experience as an assistant principal is necessary and that districts should hire a current assistant principal as its principal. All of the items relative to school management are a critical experience as it relates to transitioning as a
school leader. Additionally, Knight strongly suggested that there is great value to hiring in-house candidates.

Eli Barr is weary of the learning curve for any new principal. He suggested that a sitting assistant principal is a necessity to promote to a principal position in order to decrease the learning curve for transition to a new position. He simply cannot see any new principal promoted without assistant principal experience.

Ms. Lotanzio indicated that experience as an assistant principal would be “enormously helpful” but did not specifically state that it was a necessity. She did offer much more information to highlight her position, however. She needs a principal with a clear understanding of the master schedule functions, of how to interact with students when meting out discipline, of the evaluation process, of the finance process, and of all of the complex challenges that any principal will encounter. She also shared that there was nothing in her personal principal preparation program that adequately prepared her to assume the principal position.

To highlight a point, Ms. Monella indicated that in her district several central office administrators have never worked at the school level in a leadership position; it is evident. The understanding of school level needs is a critical component to leading a school. The principal is required to understand “every single dynamic” of the various positions in the school; having prior experience as an assistant is the only way to ensure that.

Erin Ryan suggested that as a principal one needs to be confident; she asks, “What better job gives me confidence to be a principal than the assistant principal position?” Similarly, Sharon Bruder says, “My principal was an assistant principal for
five years, and she is a darn good principal. So, yes, I believe it’s critical to be an assistant principal first.”

The voices of consistency among the study participants have spoken with clarity and precision; the best principals were assistant principals first. Additionally, there are no other roles or even training programs that prepare one for the principal position. What did not get addressed by any participant, however, was an acknowledgement that they were all describing themselves: successful assistant principals who are choosing to stay in their current positions instead of pursuing the challenge of the principal position.

**Factors Related to Gender in the Role of Assistant Principal**

The topic of gender and its role in promoting or inhibiting an assistant principal was a topic that was broached in the interviews; however, only a fraction of the participants offered insight regarding the question.

Ms. Monella was the most verbose of the study participants. She referenced a gender ceiling and the fact that as a woman, socializing and collaborating with men is difficult. She submitted that women have a hard time earning promotions to a principal position. However, with that said, she suggested that her central office administration should be sensitive to this since that group is comprised solely of women. Monella is unmarried, although she plans to marry, and is already concerned about a possible maternity leave. Specifically, she fears lack of support if and when she takes a maternity leave.

Ms. Lotanzio perceived a glass ceiling until she earned an assistant principal position eight years ago. At the present moment, however, she does not relate to the glass ceiling argument. She did state, however, that women need to have a family plan in
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place prior to becoming an assistant principal. She reinforced her experience on
maternity leave through a principal and superintendent who were supportive.

In his interview (3/12/13) Mark Nielson referenced his role as a father and a
parent several times. Additionally, he did not feel any pressure to accelerate a position
search for a principal role. During the interview, Nielson indicated wanting to measure
his need for growth prior to accepting a position for a principal role alongside the needs
of his family from a perspective of non-fiscal support. The notion of choosing to pursue
a principal decision is, most certainly, one that balances needs of academic leadership
with family responsibility. I had the clear impression that Mr. Nielson would not
compromise one for the other.

Henry Duconnick is a man who has interest in a principal position but only when
the timing is conducive for that promotion. A family man at heart, Duconnick bases all
career decisions on how it will impact his family. He speaks with great clarity and
extraordinary precision about his decision process and how current timing is not
conducive to assume a position. He further acknowledges that the timing may never be
suitable.

Proposed Job Descriptions and Policies for the Governance and Oversight
of Assistant Principals

Study participants were asked to envision that they were a legislator or served on
a local board of education. They were prompted that they would have the opportunity to
craft either legislation or a job description that offered more definition to an assistant
principal position. They were asked how the assistant principal position could be revised
to be inclusive of more tasks that are reflective of an accountability model and
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Commensurate with the skills that need to be developed in order to pursue an assistant principal position. As was stated in the Assistant Principal Job Responsibilities section, study participants offered over 160 data points to consider when examining the role of an assistant principal. The study participants all verbalized truly enjoying their work but indicated that the responsibilities that they have in their schools is far too spread out to make an impact.

Nora White, Susan Monella, and Eli Barr separately offered that there should be a secondary administrative layer involved in public school administration at the building level in order to afford the assistant principal the opportunity to examine instructional practices outside of the evaluation process. White cited the need for assistant principals to be comfortable doing tasks historically the responsibility of principals.

Mark Nielson suggested that the role of the assistant principal needs to change to be supportive of the classroom level and the delivery of instruction. Being instructionally sound as a leader was discussed at length; the assistant principal needs to be conversant in all phases of instruction, as the principal is.

Erin Ryan feels the assistant principal needs to be charged with oversight of educational programming and function as a servant leader at the classroom level. Ryan works in a large, organizationally complex district where subject area supervisors have more instructional clout and power than assistant principals. She suggests that assistant principals be charged, specifically, with having leadership of large-scale academic challenges. Duconnick, a member of the same district, also favors instructional leadership and an expectation of curricular expertise. He shares that over time the “instructional sharpness loses its edge.”
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Roy Moore, too, a colleague of Duconnick and Ryan, believes that the only true way to effectuate change in the product of K-12 public educational organizations is to legislatively address the job description of assistant principals. To have one local board of education revise a job description that ensures that assistant principals function as instructional leaders will do nothing to the global outputs.

Jesse Knight believes that the principal should be involved in the curricular and instructional components of every organization; and there should be personnel, namely the assistant principal, who is charged with oversight of all structural and management items. He continued and indicated that “when building operations occur, you can positively impact the school culture.” Knight believes that the possibility of the culture impacting instruction is a large positive determinant of improved instructional outcomes. He did not recommend any further intervention with the job description of assistant principals.

Sharon Bruder and Joan Lotanzio, too, recommended that the shift has to take place, at the very least, at the legislative level with each state; however, she was adamant that funding from the federal level be tied to state and local board of education compliance. Lotanzio is steadfast in her belief that more is required from the assistant principal; hence, making the position be as an expert of instructional implementation is critical.

The study participants believe that legislators need to make specific laws mandating the role and responsibilities that each state level and local board of education has in implementing opportunities for instructional leadership from the assistant principals in order to effectuate change and offer them opportunities for motivational
growth and preparation to pursue a principal position. Failing that, implementing an additional layer of support in the form of disciplinarians is required in order to allow assistant principals access to the classroom on a consistent basis.

Summary

In this chapter I reported the findings of this study in order to answer the overarching research question, How do the factors of motivation and accountability influence a career assistant principals’ decision whether or not to pursue a principal position? I presented the findings of the interviews, which revealed items that influence assistant principals with five or more years of experience in the decision making process when considering a principal position.

The study produced findings relative to the influence of Self Determined Motivation Theory on study candidates. The first finding indicates that all of the assistant principals in the survey have a high level of self-efficacy and are not unmotivated. They did, after all, pursue a master’s degree and certification to be an assistant principal.

The second finding indicates that accountability is a factor in the decision making process. However, the measures of accountability, specifically as it was promulgated in the regulations for Achieve NJ, lend oversight to all administrative positions, not just that of the principal. The assistant principals in the study did not equate the mandates in Achieve NJ to be significant enough to drive their own evaluation. By virtue of the way that the legislation was written, the assistant principals are at the mercy at the school leadership plan that is devised, ultimately, by their principal. Regardless of the plan and its quality, all student achievement results for all tested grades will be connected to the
evaluation for an assistant principal. The opportunity to drive that evaluation and develop a plan to support their evaluation as they see best fit does not serve a motivating context for an assistant principal with five or more years of experience to pursue a principal position.

The study examined contextual factors that influence motivation to pursue a principal position. The study found that family construct influences motivation, an affinity to their current work-role responsibility increases motivation to stay in the position, and the influences of public opinion are insignificant as they relate to motivation, as is compensation; all study candidates reported being comfortable with their current salary structure. Study participants do not perceive the principal to be a role that attracts them enough to leave their current position.

In Chapter V, I will provide a summary of the findings in relation to the research questions and a discussion that further relates the findings to previous research and the theoretical frameworks.
Chapter V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

Chapter V summarizes the findings of this study of assistant principal motivation to pursue a principal position. I will discuss the relationship between the findings and previous research. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research, policy, and practice.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

4. How does Self-Determined Motivation Theory (intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation) influence the decision of an assistant principal to pursue a principalship?

5. How does high-stakes accountability (No Child Left Behind; Race to the Top; Achieve NJ) influence an assistant principal’s decision to pursue a principalship?

6. What other factors influence an assistant principal’s decision to pursue a principalship?

Summary of Findings

The study sought to extend the research base on motivation of assistant principals to pursue a principal position by asking the following questions and offering hypotheses to each:

Research Question 1
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How does Self Directed Motivation Theory (intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation) influence the decision of an assistant principal to pursue a principalship?

**Hypothesis**

Those assistant principals that choose to pursue a principalship do so because they are intrinsically motivated, have high self-efficacy, and feel prepared for the position; they value challenge and the application of professional development under advantageous environmental and institutional conditions.

**Findings**

The assistant principals in the study demonstrated intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy based on the nature of their roles as well as the graduate study that it took to attain them. Additionally, they appreciate and accept professional challenge. These elements of the hypothesis are accepted. However, the assistant principals in the study do not feel prepared to assume a principal position, thus rejecting this element of the hypothesis.

The study produced two levels of findings relative to the influence of Self Determined Motivation Theory on study participants. The first finding indicated that all of the assistant principals in the survey have a high level of self-efficacy. The assistant principals all displayed confidence and a belief that they were performing at or above standard. There was never a question or doubt as to their perceived skill level. Their motivation to pursue a promotion to a principal position, however, was not closely connected to their self-efficacy.
Each assistant principal believed that he or she can assume a principal position. Only one in the study has taken the initiative to do so and was actively interviewing. Two assistant principals self reported being interested in pursuing a principal position but have not been assertive in the pursuit of one. Those who believed in their ability to influence school performance, which is an understood prerequisite for a school principal, were clear in their convictions and offered specific examples of how their experience as an assistant principal influenced their desires and belief about performance.

The second finding spoke to study participants being comfortable in their role as assistant principals, in being reassured regarding what is familiar to them in their role, and in their belief that they have been placed in a position to be successful. These candidates were comfortable with structural management and carrying out the mission of the school. They were not confident about, or had interest in, establishing leadership vision. They were more comfortable with structural management and carrying out the mission already established. They considered themselves to be adept at implementing the vision of the school and structurally managing the organization so that the principal can lead.

Career assistant principals felt comfortable as assistant principals, not as future principals. The role that assistant principals function under offers much exposure to the structural needs and leadership of the organization. However, that exposure does not entail academic leadership, which is a requirement of the principal position.

In an examination of the hypothesis and findings relative to the first research question, the one study participant that was actively pursuing a principal position was intrinsically motivated and valued challenge. The assistant principals in the study that
were not actively pursuing positions reflect the same values. Whether or not a study participant was in pursuit of a principal position did not impact their value of challenge or application of professional development. They still pursued their assistant principal positions with energy and precision while gaining much from the experience of their role. Those outcomes include professional growth and role affinity.

**Research Question 2**

How does high-stakes accountability (No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, Achieve NJ) influence an assistant principal’s decision to pursue a principalship?

*Hypothesis*

The era of accountability is a factor in the decision process to pursue a principalship; however, motivation to pursue a principal position decreases when factors of the environment and the institution are advantageous.

*Finding*

Accountability was a factor in the decision making process when assistant principals with five or more years of experience made a decision to pursue a promotion to a principal position. However, the measures of accountability, specifically as it was promulgated in the regulations for the most recent Achieve NJ legislation, lend oversight to all administrative positions, not just that of the principal.

Assistant principals reported professional accountability to be a factor in the decision making process. Additionally, they considered the comfort of an assistant principal position to be advantageous regarding the evaluation of their performance as compared to the principal position. The assistant principals in this study neglected the logic that the principal drives instructional leadership, student outcomes, and the
accountability rating for their performance. Assistant principals did consider the ability to drive student outcomes and their own performance ratings as a reason to pursue a principal position.

Assistant principals expressed support for their principal, verbalized strong working relationships with each of their principals, and a belief that the academic leadership they are working under would satisfy accountability measures in their favor.

Assistant principals reported knowing that their skill set is not inclusive of academic leadership, but rather structural. While there is an overwhelming confidence in their ability to serve as leaders of the structural paradigm, the opposite is true as it relates to instructional leadership.

An examination of the hypothesis and findings indicated a confirmation that professional accountability played a role in the decision making process whether or not to pursue a principal position. Assistant principals considered the factor of professional accountability to be a deterrent to pursuing a principal position. The findings confirmed the hypothesis.

Findings that pertained to the belief in the principal to whom they report and his or her ability to navigate through the accountability formula resulting in a successful performance rating for both the principal and assistant principal was prevalent. These findings correlated with the hypothesis regarding the influence of accountability over assistant principals as a deterrent to pursue a principal position.

Research Question 3

What other factors would influence an assistant principal’s decision to pursue a principalship?
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Hypothesis

Family construct, financial compensation structure, assistant principal perceived preparation for role assumption, the types of responsibilities that a principal delegated to an assistant principal, and unexpected outcomes are contributing factors influencing an assistant principal’s decision to pursue a principalship.

Finding

Family Construct

Family responsibilities and dynamics have a strong influence on assistant principals. Study participants reported the needs of young children and spouses to be greater than the desire to pursue a principal position. The understanding of the time commitment that is required to satisfactorily serve as a principal was a strong influence on career assistant principals.

Assistant principals that reported strong concerns with balancing family needs did so with the understanding of what it takes to be a successful principal, as they consider the one they work under to be successful. Additionally, those that cited family as a concern in pursuing a principal position see the personal importance of being a constant presence in their family far more important than being a school principal.

Work-Role Satisfaction

Assistant principals in the study reported enjoying their role. There was a significant lack of desire to pursue a principal position among the majority of study participants. This can be attributed to satisfaction in the role being currently served coupled with the feeling of unpreparedness for the skills required to be a successful principal due to the responsibilities that have been delegated to them by their current
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principals. The current experiences allow for role stabilization but do not increase
preparedness.

Court of Public Opinion and Political Influences

Assistant principals were not prepared to navigate negative public opinion or local
political influences. Their strong preference was to work in isolation apart from political
influences; further, they appreciate the level of buffering that takes place from the
principal as well as the district administration that allows them to focus on structural
management.

Personal Perception of Principal Position

Assistant principals in the study perceived the principal position as a professional
pitfall and see the merging of academics and politics coupled with a decrease in teacher
and student contact to be unappealing. Assistant principals perceived the principal
position as unattractive and one that lacked flexibility, in large part because of the
responsibilities connected with the position as the result of Achieve NJ and No Child Left
Behind. Ultimately, there was little that was perceived to be advantageous to being a
principal.

Compensation

Personal compensation factors in the form of annual salary do not influence
assistant principal motivation to pursue a principal position. Not only do the assistant
principals in the study consider their pay to be appropriate based on the role that they
serve, they also consider the principals in the districts they serve to be undercompensated
for the responsibilities connected with the position.
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All of the assistant principals earned salaries in excess of $100,000 (with two in excess of $130,000) and were confident that they were able to maintain financial comfort. Given the flexibility that the position provides, coupled with decreased responsibility, as it is compared to the principal position, assistant principals feel that the salary that they command is a fair one.

When examining the hypothesis and findings, contextual factors of family construct, job and role satisfaction, political influences, and perception of the principal position all contributed contextual factors that impacted study participants when considering the pursuit of a principal position.

The contextual factor of salary was not reported to be a hypothesized factor that influenced study candidates when considering a principal position after five years or more as an assistant principal. There was a reported understanding that the profession has limitations on compensation structures.

Major Themes

Self-Determined Motivation: Theoretical Foundation and Applicable Findings

Self-Determination Theory is an approach that not only considers the intensity of motivation but also its quality (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Self-Determined Motivation Theory has three subsets (extrinsic, intrinsic, and amotivation) and focuses on how social and cultural factors facilitate or undermine people’s sense of volition and initiative, in addition to their well being and the quality of their performance.

Extrinsic Motivation: External, Introjected, Integrated, and Identified Regulation
Extrinsic motivation has several subsets that are important in Self-Determination Theory: external regulation, introjected regulation, integrated regulation, and identified regulation.

**External regulation.**

When examining extrinsic motivation, the concept of external regulation occurs when behaviors are regulated to obtain a reward or avoid a constraint. (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In the study there were no participants that indicated influence of external regulation. Study participants were happy with their compensation; none indicated they would pursue a principal position strictly for the financial impact. No participants reported avoiding a principal position to avoid responsibility.

**Introjected regulation.**

Introjected regulation corresponds to the process whereby an external demand becomes an internal representation; it occurs when people self apply pressure to make sure that a particular behavior is performed (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The manner in which high-stakes accountability impacts assistant principal outputs is an example of introjected regulation. The external demand of improved student achievement gets internalized and creates intrinsic motivation to meet the criteria of the accountability formula.

The influx of Achieve NJ legislation drives much of the introjected regulation motivation. The study did not produce any examples of introjected regulation that prompted the assistant principals to change their practice, but the assistant principals did offer suggestions on how to streamlines processes connected to their job responsibilities in the form of personnel support so they could be more prepared to attack the parameters of Achieve NJ.
Integrated regulation. Integrated motivation refers to behavior that is performed not only because individuals value its significance but also because it is consistent with their identities (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The study participants were all in the role of assistant principal because the responsibilities related to the position were consistent with their career interests.

The assistant principals in the study were motivated by the ability to contribute to the larger scale and context of their school; they wanted a very large class (school) that they could impact positively. The assistant principals spoke about viewing the entire student body as their proverbial class. They indicated a great interest of seeing that the entire school moves forward and progresses positively. The assistant principals in the study view all of the students they serve as their class, and job responsibilities are tailored to impact them.

Identified regulation. Identified regulation is defined as behavior that individuals choose to perform because it is congruent with their own values and goals (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The study participants, particularly those that were vehemently against becoming principals for either professional or personal reasons, demonstrated high levels of integrated motivation; some liked being the “nurse rather than the doctor,” while others simply enjoy implementing a vision and carrying through assignments that improve the greater organization. In all, however, there is great satisfaction with the outcomes of performing the role of assistant principal.

Intrinsic motivation.
Intrinsic motivation refers to performing a task for pleasure and/or satisfaction (Deci and Ryan, 1985). The study found that participating assistant principals had a high degree of intrinsic motivation. Although there were examples of intentional relationships and high-level methods of communication between assistant principals, their administrative colleagues, and the principals under whom they work, being an assistant principal has the propensity to be a lonely endeavor. The study participants enjoyed their work and perform it with a high level of intrinsic motivation.

Oftentimes it was described as the broad scope of the role that intrinsically motivated sitting career assistant principals; the combined interactions with students, staff members, community members, administrative colleagues and projects created situations that intrinsically motivated assistant principals in a way that resulted in professional enjoyment and fulfillment.

It was postulated that the study participants who would be positively impacted by intrinsic motivation would be driven to have interest in a principal position. The study participants revealed that although there was only one that was actively pursuing a principal position, all participants did experience intrinsic motivation as it related to all functions of their role as assistant principals. It was demonstrated through the quality of their work as it was conveyed, the richness of their testimony, and their steadfast belief in their career aspirations, be it as an assistant principal or otherwise.

Amotivation.

Amotivation is the relative absence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. It occurs when people do not perceive a relationship between their actions and the outcomes and feel unable to achieve their goals (Deci and Ryan, 1985). The study findings do not offer
any instances of amotivation; each participant finds his or her role to be one that is driven or influenced either intrinsically or extrinsically.

The phenomena of Self-Determined Motivation Theory have an impact on the desire to pursue a principal position for sitting career assistant principals as it relates to the role that assistant principals in the study perform. Career assistant principals demonstrate a high level of self-determined motivation theory as it relates to the four components of extrinsic motivation as well as the tenets of intrinsic motivation.

**Work-Role Appeal and Satisfaction**

The study found that each of the study subjects achieved levels of enjoyment from their role as an assistant principal. There were factors that influenced their enjoyment associated with the role; those factors are particular to the study participant and are dependent on individual experiences, contextual factors, and preferences. Additionally, there are factors outside of intrinsic enjoyment of the assistant principal role that impact career aspirations of assistant principals.

The assistant principals in the study ultimately fell into one of three categories: assistant principals who had neither designs of being a principal nor did they want to pursue any other position besides an assistant principal position; those who would not rule out pursuing a district level supervisory/leadership position while still not having interest in the principal position, and a third group (one) in the study who represented assistant principals who wanted to be a principal but were not yet successful because of contextual factors that are debilitating them from earning a promotion.

The assistant principals reported no less than 160 roles and tasks that are assigned to them in their roles; they are expected to perform all of them well. Having
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responsibilities that are reflective of great breadth but little depth from the perspective of preparation of an assistant principal for a principal role through meaningful tasks of instructional leadership were not reported as a negative factor by study participants.

The breadth of the role represents an example of role attraction; study participants reported being appreciative of the flexibility that the position offers. Assistant principals were in the position to be exposed to a variety of projects and initiatives. They appear to have the ability to be able to drive how those roles are carried out and developed.

The study subjects appreciated their role as managers of their buildings; none take umbrage to that component of the role. Testimony offered indicated that they understood their role and what it would entail prior to assuming the position. There is an understanding that, ultimately, their role is to be a support to and to assist the principal in the direction of the building.

There were no delusions; upon hire, assistant principals were placed in positions to manage the structure of school cultures. The role of the principal is something vastly different. The legislatively approved Achieve NJ that delineates how assistant principals are to be evaluated is to have a great deal of influence on the role of assistant principal.

There is a sea change, however, in the industry. The influences of high-stakes accountability have had an impact on their interest and pursuit of a principal position. Achieve NJ intensifies the challenge and the stress related to the second-order change.

Many assistant principals seek to perform tasks that prepare them for the principal position by doing tasks that are actually reflective of that principal position. Regardless of their career aspirations and their motivation for the role, the assistant principals in the study reported a desire for tasks that are more instructionally inclined than structurally.
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The reality, however, is that the assistant principal is subject to the comfort level and desires of the principal whom they serve. It is not generally understood that assistant principals earn the right to work on roles and responsibilities that are typically principal roles at their choosing.

The political landscape reflects the change that influenced study participants’ concerns about their role and desires for future framing of policy. The need for assistant principals to demonstrate leadership capabilities with project oversight and leadership for major instructional initiatives has become an important skill, especially since the implementation of Achieve NJ. High performing assistant principals are those that can influence instruction at the classroom level as well as manage student behavior.

When discussing instructional leadership, many assistant principals placed teacher evaluation and supervision as a driving example of how the stagnancy of their roles is impacting motivation to pursue principal positions, particularly given the evaluation expectations. The assistant principals in the study were not able to point to specific outcomes that they have led that truly prepared them to be a principal, the lead learner, of a school.

The study found that most assistant principals were not consistently placed in the position to pursue many of these outcomes. All but one falls into this category. The outlier represents the one assistant principal candidate who was actually interested in earning a principal position but was held back by contextual factors.

Discussion

This study began with a brief overview of the changing landscape of the school principal position. The nature of the research considered how enrollment forecasts,
leadership pipelines, principal candidate supply, and the contextual factors of increased responsibility and accountability contribute to assistant principal motivation to pursue a principal position.

The impetus for this study began in 2000, when the Institute for Educational Leadership reported that enrollment forecasts would increase the need for principals by 10% to 20%. In 2002 the National Center for Educational Statistics reinforced a school leadership pathway and pipeline that promotes from the assistant principal position to the top position in school level leadership; the study found that nearly two-thirds of principals had experience as assistant principals. Commensurate with what this study found regarding assistant principal comfort in the role, The Wallace Foundation reported in 2003 that there are challenges to supply and retention of principals across the nation. Lovely reported in 2004 the void that would exist in the principal position by 2010; the National Center for Education Statistics affirmed that an attrition rate of 45%, totaling over 10,000 vacancies, affirms this finding.

In 2006 the U.S. Department of Labor reported that as accountability demands for the principal position increase, additional pressures could be transferred to the assistant principal position. Achieve NJ (2013) legislation has confirmed the transference of accountability stressors on assistant principals as they consider the factors that detract them from pursuing the principal position. This transference had a negative impact on assistant principal motivation to pursue a principal position. What is lost is the motivation to move from a position with a moderately increasing level of accountability to one with a vastly increased level of accountability.
Mirroring what the study found, Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) reported that the detractors of pursuing the principal position—increased responsibility, accountability, and tenure considerations—impacted the desire to pursue the top building level administrative position. This study, too, was aligned with the findings in DeAngelis and O’Connor (2012) that found that there is a true lack of interest in the principal position.

**Contextual Factors Influencing or Impeding Interest and Candidacy in a Principal Position**

The study participants reported being satisfied with the role that they play as assistant principals. However, there are considerations that each assistant principal has confronted when making the decision to remain in the assistant principal position. Study candidates reported being influenced by political tension, appreciation for the work-role relationship as an assistant principal, family and personal factors, assistant principal perception of the principal position, the influence of state mandates on performance, and considerations of tenure and job security through earned tenure.

**The Presence of Politics**

The notion of political tension reflected an undercurrent in the study. Each subject reported municipalities that were overly involved politically in the administration of education. The items described centered on meddling from members of the local board of education. To prepare oneself from a logistics perspective presented a major hurdle. From a preparation standpoint, the sitting assistant principals are not placed in the position to handle political pressure. They observed it frequently but are benefactors of the method by which they have been buffered from external factors by either their principal or positions at the central office level.
The study showed a lack of preparation to handle challenges that are either politically charged or of interest to those people that are politically motivated. Study participants do not demonstrate confidence in the skill set to approach these situations; assistant principals cannot hide their true positions and feelings on a topic, nor do they have interest in learning how to navigate these challenges. To manage these situations well requires experience and exposure; typically, the assistant principal has neither.

**Work-Role Appreciation and Its Influence on Career Aspirations**

The role of assistant principal offered opportunities that are vast and far-reaching; the 160 data points that comprised the responsibility of assistant principals are proof positive that the assistant principal role is varied and full of opportunity. The position enabled practitioners to become engaged in a host of activities that allowed them to attain professional fulfillment. The study revealed that the advantages of the principal position are not strong enough to attract career assistant principals to pursue a promotion to the top position in school leadership.

Though it is understood that the principal position is the top position in school leadership, it is not an overly desirable one. The government focus on outcomes-based leadership (NCLB, Achieve NJ) signals a significant shift away from personal contact, implementation of leadership vision, and large-scale structural management. The principal position has shifted so far towards an outcomes-based position that it has limited the interest that career assistant principals have in leaving their position.

**Personal Factors**

The assistant principals in the study cited personal reasons for not wanting to pursue the principal position. Insight reflected the importance of their personal lives both
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from an accessibility perspective as well as a quality of life one. Assistant principals are also spouses and parents and serve other roles in their family constructs. Much is required of them in those roles. The role of the assistant principal offers the flexibility to play these roles outside of the workplace while being provided the exposure to components of school leadership that attracted them to the position in the first place.

As reported through the Wallace Foundation (2003) and National Center for Education Statistics (2010), assistant principals are not eager to pursue the principal position. The study reported reticence among assistant principals as to whether they want to have their personal lives consumed by the accountability measures of oversight that are associated with the principal position.

In concert with the psychically and psychologically draining effects of addressing the multiple contradictory expectations with limited resources relating to the principal position as reported in Howley, Andrianaivo, and Perry (2005), the study found that the recruitment of school principals is a challenge. It should not be assumed that an assistant principal wants to pursue a principal position.

This study did not produce one singular profile of career assistant principals with five or more years of experience. One was more motivated than others, some would pursue a principal position if given the opportunity but could not explain why, and others were vehemently opposed to the principal position altogether while displaying a high level of role affinity as assistant principals.

The perception that career assistant principals had about the principal position was a significant influence relative to motivation to pursue or not pursue the position. Based on their experiences with the principals with whom they work, the study
candidates perceived the principal position to be demanding and unpredictable. These findings are aligned with those reported in MacCorkle (2004) that reported that there was only slight agreement that principal responsibilities were defined.

The study found that assistant principals’ work-role responsibilities are spread across a wide continuum in the schools in which they work. The thinly spread responsibilities do not result in an air of preparedness. These findings are aligned with those reported in *Education Leadership: A Bridge to School Reform* (Darling-Hammond, 2007) that outlined the areas of leadership found to positively impact student achievement. The responsibilities that principals are expected to have are not aligned with assistant principal responsibilities as found in the study.

The assistant principals in this study viewed their role as challenging but rewarding; they see the principal position as increasingly so, thus limiting their belief in their ability to perform the role with great success either from a preparation factor or a support factor. These findings are in agreement with the importance of mentoring that Gray, Fry, Bottoms, and O’Neill (2007) propound, which highlights that mentoring fails to commence on the first day that an assistant principal assumes a position. Additionally, these findings are aligned with the research of Harris, Muijs, and Crawford (2003) that reported that the difficulties of coping with expanded responsibilities deters assistant principals from applying for principal positions.

Current assistant principals are overwhelmed. They have interest in serving a different role in the line of a lateral move professionally. The line of progression for position pursuit would be to move to a district level supervisory position; for example, a K-12 supervisor of a subject area or a director of curriculum. In the eyes of the study
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participants, the line of progression does not typically include the pinnacle of school leadership. This finding is of particular interest because it was not identified in the review of literature as a popular career path.

The study reported that the layers of accountability are complex and comprehensive. Achieve NJ (2013) legislation has reinforced that. The study reported that career assistant principals appreciate being the implementer of leadership vision rather than the crafter. The study reported an analogy that offers clarity and separates the two roles of principal and assistant principal. Some gravitated towards “being the nurse as compared to the doctor,” while reporting an affinity to facilitating student contact and support.

Career Stability and the Influence of Gender

Career stability was reported by Miller (2008) and MacCorkle (2004) as being influenced by district initiated leadership academies; participation in these academies resulted in stabilized roles for assistant principals. The study did not report any instances of leadership academies where future or current leaders were supported. The work-role responsibilities in excess of 160 data points speak to the variability of the role and the usefulness of a leadership academy to those serving as assistant principals.

Miller (2008) found that women are more inclined to serve in the assistant principal role as compared to men. The gender representation of this study was an even split between ten candidates, mirroring findings in McGhee (2010) which reported significant progress in breaking the gender ceiling. The 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing Report (Cross, 2010) reported that over 75% of teaching positions are held by women, but only 56% of principal positions. The gap between the two indicates that men are
more likely to be appointed to the principal position. The study also found that women are more content with being assistant principal.

There is literature examining the impact of gender on motivation to pursue a principal position. Derrington and Sharratt (2009) replicated a 14-year-old study that found that women are still encountering barriers to pursuing these positions, but now they are self-imposed. The findings in this study are mixed as they relate to self-imposed limitations. One female assistant principal loves her role; two others stay away from pursuing a principalship because of politics. Another prefers student contact, and another cannot imagine being more challenged than she is already, indicating concern as to a capacity and preparedness level for the principal position.

McGhee (2010) supports the finding that barriers women face are largely self-imposed. Every woman in this study found a reason not to be a principal, role affinity and politics being among the most prevalent findings. In terms of style and attention, the manner in which women assistant principals function leans more towards instructional leadership as compared to men (Hausman, Nebeker, & McCreary, 2002). Through the 160 data points as they relate to work role responsibilities, the study found that assistant principals certainly have the opportunity for academic leadership if they choose to pursue it.

**Transition to the Principal Position**

The transition of assistant principals to the principal position is a consideration when examining the motivation of assistant principals to pursue the principal position. Darling-Hammond (2007) identified the traits that principals have that allow teachers to be successful; it should be noted that the principal skill set is vastly different than the
assistant principal one. Further, she highlighted the lack of support that principals receive in their transition from assistant principal to principal, thus making that unattractive to sitting career assistant principals. The study found agreement with these findings; the assistant principals’ roles are so varied that aligning these responsibilities to the skill set of a principal is a challenge.

Several initiatives across the United States support candidate transition and preparation. Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia initiated a training program, as did the Maryland State Department of Education. Orr and Orphanos (2010) examined the concept of transition and found that the integration of instructional and transformative leadership incorporated student achievement data to guide their decision-making. These findings are in conflict with the management (rather than leadership) roles and responsibilities that assistant principals typically report. As was noted several times throughout this study, leadership preparation programs that were initiated in districts that employ study participants were not reported.

Transition to Instructional Leadership

Austin and Brown (1970), Koru (1993), Weller and Weller (2002), Bates and Shank (1983), Black (1980) and Smith (1987) all found that the assistant principal position is focused on non-academic responsibility that asks those serving in this position to be managers of the structural frame of educational organizations. The findings of this study are in agreement with these findings.

Contrary to these findings, the assistant principal is no longer considered to be a position that is focused on attendance and discipline, as was reported in Nebeker, McCreary, and Donaldson (2002). Given the vast number of responsibilities and new
Legislatively driven accountability measures, there are many priorities that are of importance that were reported in this study, not just discipline and attendance. Two assistant principals in the study were taken out of discipline altogether in order to attend to items of academics.

The likelihood of increased performance if assistant principal tasks are reconfigured was reported by Glanz (1994) and Denmark and Davis (2000); but Celikten (2001) and Simpson (2000) indicate that the trend to structural management continues with discipline, textbook allocation, supervision of cafeteria, locker assignment, and overseeing student activities as the most prevalent activities. This study reported agreement with those trends but did offer evidence of responsibilities that are driven to improve teaching and learning as well. Most notably was the facilitation of classroom walkthroughs and academic department supervision (at the high school assistant principal level).

Dunleavy (2010) found that the assistant principal has to be involved in curriculum, staff development, and instructional leadership. These findings are supported by Ryan (2011) and Waskiewicz (2012), who indicate that the assistant principal is undergoing a second-order change from being a manager to a leader of instruction. This study supported these findings. Although the study reported 160 responsibilities, there was also a strong presence of academic leadership in the study.

**Personal Factors and Motivation**

When examining motivation to assume a principal position, Miller (2009) found that age correlates with motivation; younger candidates exhibited increased interest. The
age of 51 proved to be the closing of the interest and motivation window. There was only one candidate that actively pursued a principal position in the study.

Edwards (2009) found motivation to be correlated with fewer years of experience. The one assistant principal in this study that was eager to pursue a principal position had six years of experience. Those with more experience did not report interest in pursuing the principal position. Younger assistant principals consider themselves to be more upwardly mobile than their counterparts with more experience.

Walker and Kwan (2009) found that motivation to pursue a principal position is linked with a number of factors: involvement with professional development, the desire to be a lifelong learner, and age. This study supports these findings. The lone study participant that was interested in a principal position was involved in professional development, was under the age of 51, and referenced the desire to be a lead learner (i.e., principal) of a school.

The study examined the role of the assistant principal, the responsibilities associated with the position, and the motivating factors that influenced the pursuit of a promotion to a principal position. What was found was a role that was spread across a wide continuum of projects and responsibilities and lack of interest in pursuing the principal position.

This study also sought to examine the influence of Self-Determined Motivation Theory on career assistant principals to pursue a principal position. This study identified factors that influenced experienced assistant principals’ interest in pursuing a principal position by asking the question “If you are a qualified school principal with experience as an assistant principal, what influences your decision to pursue or not pursue a principal
position?” Assistant principals reported enjoying their work, being dedicated to their families, and not having interest in the various contextual themes associated with the principal position.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The dissertation illustrated the many facets that comprise the assistant principal role coupled with personal factors that either inhibited or promoted motivation to pursue a principal position. The study illustrated that, as a group, assistant principals were committed to their role, had a high level of efficacy, and were influenced by integrated motivation, intrinsic motivation, and identified regulation. Assistant principals in the study have a belief in their ability to serve in this role successfully. Similarly, assistant principals in this study believe in their ability to execute the leadership vision established by their principals.

The study illustrated the impact of legislation and accountability measures connected to the evaluation of school administrators. Study participants verbalized concern with the parameters of the legislation and their perceived impact on the position of school principal. Last, this study also identified long-term career interests of assistant principals with five or more years of experience of sidestepping the principal position in lieu of pursuing a district subject area supervisory role.

This study can be expanded for future research by offering an examination of the political framework connected to the role of assistant principal. When the topics of politics and bureaucracy and the influence both have on the role of assistant principal were explored, interview data had an emotional richness.
Research that expands on the level of the influential contextual factors of politics and bureaucracy will allow for a greater understanding of the impact on assistant principal preparation for a principal position. Research that focuses on the preparation of assistant principals to effectively handle components of the assistant principal role that are challenged by the political framework will allow the research base to have a greater understanding of preparation of assistant principals to navigate the challenges of politics.

This study can be expanded to examine those who wanted to be principals in the district they currently serve in but have been unsuccessful in that pursuit as it relates to their individual perception of the political framework in the district they are employed by and the challenges that are associated with it. The concept of professional preparation for navigating the political framework should be considered in order to establish successful practices and approaches when navigating the nuances of the political framework and keeping the focus on teaching and learning.

Expansion of this study to include examination of a district in excess of 10,000 students while offering a mixed methods approach will offer explanations regarding the influence of the political framework. Qualitatively, focus groups to discuss career assistant principal perceptions of the political framework, how it impacts their role as school administrators, and the influence of politics on the role played by boards of education and superintendents in the governance and personnel appointments can be formed. A study examining the political framework and its impact on motivation that sitting assistant principals have to pursue the principal position can be considered.

Quantitatively, a study framed by offering a survey to study participants that combines Claude Frenet’s Work-Role Motivation Survey combined with an original,
developed, and validated survey that examines the level of bureaucratic and political interference in the principal position is recommended. The marriage of these two surveys would offer findings that demonstrate the impact between the political framework and motivation to pursue a principal position.

**Recommendations for Policy**

Achieve NJ legislation mandates student achievement outcomes are tied to the evaluation of educators. The legislation offers a critical measuring stick for practitioners; Achieve NJ results in precise professional expectations for school leaders. What it did for clarity regarding accountability and the role school leaders play, while ensuring that teaching and learning are taking place with intended student outcomes, reinforces the importance of the role of school leaders, inclusive of assistant principals.

Achieve NJ offers definition about intended outcomes for school leaders. Assistant principals have student achievement results that measure the effectiveness of their leadership practice connected to their annual evaluation. Current policy connects metrics that define assistant principal effectiveness to the leadership of the school principal. It is recommended that policymakers define the intended outcomes of the assistant principal role and create measures to support the position of assistant principals through their own leadership. It is recommended that policy be implemented to support assistant principal growth and development.

Standard 6 of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium offers depth and perspective to the responsibilities of school leaders. Standard 6 of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium reads, “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and
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influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.” Policy
instituting tenets of Standard 6 into the responsibilities that assistant principals encounter
would add depth and capacity to the position.

Policy makers should create a teacher-leader endorsement with a New Jersey
instructional certificate that serves as a requirement for those seeking to move from an
instructional position to an administrative one. The endorsement, earned through a
program of graduate study or hours of professional development offered by colleges and
universities or nonprofit educational organizations that have been approved by the NJ
Department of Education, is a policy recommendation to increase the readiness and
performance of assistant principals. The policy recommendation also aligns the work
responsibility of assistant principals to evaluation expectations through Achieve NJ.

Policymakers should require a teacher-leader professional certificate as a
requirement prior to assuming a position in school administration. It is recommended
that this position in each school be charged with the following responsibilities: leadership
as a teacher mentor, member of the school improvement panel, instructional coach,
professional development coordinator, professional learning community facilitator, or
any other position in which teachers are helping other teachers advance in the profession.
This policy will allow for experiences that foster the professional growth required for
assistant principals to assume principal positions.

In order to impact extrinsic motivation for assistant principals to pursue a
principal position, policymakers should consider a pay cap for assistant principals.
Assistant principals in this study are all compensated above $100,000; while those in the
study were considered career assistant principals and have met performance standards
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL MOTIVATION TO PURSUE A PRINCIPALSHIP through the evaluation process, they also have the potential to impact teaching and learning just as they have impacted the structural frame. The pay cap for assistant principals has the ability to positively impact the tenets of intrinsic motivation and thus the pool of candidates of sitting assistant principals that are pursuing principal positions.

All of the study participants were successful in their roles as assistant principals. Moving forward to positions that ask either more of them or require a different skill set will impact extrinsic motivation to pursue a principal position.

An examination of the superintendent of schools salary cap illustrates that those impacted pursue positions that earn them a salary based on the conditions. A pay cap has impacted the motivation of the school superintendent pool. Instituting policy at the assistant principal level may influence how long assistant principals remain in current positions.

**Recommendations for Practice**

School principals need to place their assistant principals in the position to be successful as it pertains to both the assistant principal position and the principal position. The role of the assistant principal needs to be reflective of what would be required and expected of the principal. The current format of focusing assistant principals on the management and structure of the organization needs to be examined. Rather, the role needs to be one that offers less breadth of responsibilities and more depth of documented leadership responsibilities, coupled with demonstrated instances of growth and improvement of teaching and learning.

The intent for the assistant principal position should be to develop those that have the ability and skill set to be future principals. Assistant principals have to engage in
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tasks that are academically inclined and focused on outcomes of teaching and learning. As the position is constituted, the assistant principal is charged with doing any tasks that a principal deems necessary, oftentimes without connection to the overall mission of the organization. Adhering to student outcomes as it relates to the role of assistant principal is critical to improving the skill set of this important position.

Achieve NJ, whose regulations require that the evaluation of assistant principals mirror that of their principals, needs to drive the decision-making process that principals have when determining their assistant principals’ job responsibilities. Practice needs to be implemented whereupon assistant principals are granted major academic program oversight. Assistant principals need to be offered the opportunity to lead and function as a principal would. Assistant principals need to function in an environment that measures growth from one year to the next as it relates to their leadership ability.

There are politically influenced elements connected to leadership that do not entice assistant principals to pursue a promotion to a principal position. Assistant principals in this study verbalized an inability to effectively approach and address areas of political influence due to a lack of exposure. Offering opportunities to address issues that are political in concert with the school principal will afford assistant principals appropriate exposure while fostering preparation for an assistant principal to assume a principal position. While it is critical to reduce political intervention and involvement and for local governing bodies to make the attainment of goals relative to the principal position an area of great interest, affording assistant principals the opportunity to be exposed to these situations is an important practice outgrowth.

Summary
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Chapter V summarized the results from the study by reviewing each research question, hypothesis, and finding. Comments highlighting the outcomes for each research question and whether or not the hypothesis was confirmed was noted as well. Discussion related research from the Literature Review in Chapter II to the findings in the study. Chapter V closed with recommendations for future research, policy, and practice.
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Assistant Principals: Strengthening Leadership Identity for Professional Growth


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Appendix: Interview Guide

Opening Questions

- Can you discuss the job responsibilities of an assistant principal and if they leave you professionally fulfilled and challenged? *(Additional Factors)*
- What is a normal day like for you? *(Additional Factors)*
- How many years have you been an assistant principal in this school district? *(Additional Factors)*
- Think back to your years and experiences as an assistant principal and talk about your fondest memory *(Additional Factors, Motivation)*
- What are some memorable challenges you faced in your role as an assistant principal? *(Accountability)*
- What are some reasons that make the assistant principal position attractive to you? *(Motivation, Additional Factors)*
- Are there factors that prevent you from moving on to a principal’s position? *(Additional Factors, Accountability)*

Introductory Question

- How do your responsibilities as an assistant principal relate to the mission of improving instruction? *(Accountability)*
- How do your responsibilities foster social and academic growth for students? *(Additional Factors)*
- Can you discuss your level of enjoyment in your role as an assistant principal? *(Additional Factors, Accountability, Motivation)*
Describe your relationship with your administrative colleagues. (Additional Factors)

Describe the district administrative structure. (Additional factors)

How do you fit into that structure literally or figuratively? (Additional Factors)

How do you communicate with the principal? (Additional Factors)

Are there factors that inspire you to consider a role with increased visibility and responsibility? (Additional Factors, Motivation)

Do you consider the court of public opinion to weigh heavily on principals and assistant principals? (Motivation, Accountability)

Does the court of public opinion impact how you pursue your professional responsibilities? (Motivation)

In the early part of the millennium No Child Left Behind impacted many facets of educational leadership. Now the Race to the Top waiver has asserted its influence on leaders. How do you perceive high stakes accountability? What is its impact on the way you view the principals’ position? (Accountability, Motivation)

Can you describe how NCLB and RTTT impacts any decisions you might make in terms of pursing a principal position. (Accountability, Motivation)

Transition Questions

How many principals have you worked for? (Additional Factors)

Do you like what you do? Do you feel fulfilled? How have the responsibilities connected to the role of assistant principal influenced your job satisfaction? (Motivation)
Do your professional responsibilities and expectations influence your interest in pursuing a promotion to a school principal position? (*Motivation*)

If there is something, can you define that source of what prompted you to believe you could be a principal? (*Motivation*)

**Key Question(s)**

- Do you find your annual salary to be suitable for your lifestyle? (*Additional Factors*)
- You have a direct vantage point of much of what a school principal is charged with doing on a daily, monthly, and yearly basis. How has that knowledge influenced your interest in a principal position? (*Motivation, Accountability*)
- Do you feel you want to be a principal? (*Motivation*)
- What is your relationship with your Superintendent like? The Board? (*Additional Factors*)
- How have societal factors, coupled with your understanding of the principal position, influenced your motivation to pursue a promotion? (*Additional Factors*)
- How do you perceive the principal position to be from a job satisfaction and role clarity perspective? (*Motivation, Accountability*)
- From your perspective what are the most negative aspects of the principal position (*Motivation, Additional Factors, Accountability*)
- What are factors that keep people from pursuing a principal position (*Additional Factors, Accountability, Motivation*)
Ending Question

- It can be argued that the most qualified candidates to assume a principal position are the assistant principals who have (or should have been) groomed for a promotion. What do you think about that statement? (*Motivation, Additional Factors*)

- Suppose you were a member of a school board that was looking to redefine administrative roles in a district; how would you craft the role of assistant principal in order to suit what you perceive your strengths and talents to be? (*Additional Factors, Accountability*)

- The decision to pursue a promotion is a personal one; what factors might go into your decision to pursue a position in the future. Talk to me about them. (*Additional Factors*)

- Is there anything that I have not asked you that you believe will enable me to understand a bit better why qualified assistant principals choose not to pursue a promotion to a principal? (*Additional Factors*)

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