PRINCIPAL EXPERIENCES OF SUCCESSION

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Abstract: This multiple case study explored the experiences of school principals and the usefulness of Peters' (2011) succession planning model. Ten purposefully selected principals from varying grade levels were interviewed; none reported a formal succession plan, and all had been assistant principals. The study concluded the assistant principal position has been useful in training future principals. Further, all principals had experienced a form of informal succession planning through recruitment and mentoring. Principal recruitment and sponsorship into their positions was the norm; however participants were confused by the inconsistent hiring preferences and procedures. The study concluded a formal succession plan benefited principals through transparency. Nine of the 10 participants felt overwhelmed and had career plans past their current position, although none were seeking a new job. Stress diminished through various support systems. Mentoring was considered a successful induction practice and a good principal support used by all principals; therefore, mentoring was essential to the principals' functioning. Recommendations were for districts to create succession plans with state and professional organizations support. Detailed interview data were coded to identify themes, triangulated with observations and artifact data, as well as within Peters' (2011) conceptual framework. The three elements of Peters' (2011) model were found to be useful descriptors of a fluid, dynamic model which could be used to create educational succession plans.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The political realities of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2001) have forced public schools to focus on enhanced student performance over a short period of time. Although schools that have enacted reform measures have enhanced student performance, the number of failing schools is disproportionate to the multitude of reform initiatives and resources available for use. An explanation for these inconsistencies in school performance may lie within the different succession plans put into place as one school principal resigns the position and another person assumes responsibilities.

Hargreaves (2005) studied the succession preparation and implementation of three schools that struggled to sustain performance throughout the transition of leadership. The schools were not unlike a business trying to train a predecessor for a predicted employee resignation. In Hargreaves' (2005) study, Blue Mountain's principal planned for his succession from the moment he accepted the position. He hired his assistant principal in the hope that when he left, she would take his place. Four years after being assigned to Blue Mountain, the principal found himself promoted and the assistant principal indeed did take his place. The principal's vision for the school continued and the school thrived.

In contrast, another failing school had their principals removed abruptly without any planning. The first principal's removal resulted in an instantaneous change of the school's climate. The school improved under new leadership and the principal received a promotion after a brief period of three years. Once again, no succession plan had been established for the school before the principal vacated the position. The school's progress declined immediately. The third school, which was located within an affluent established neighborhood, received a new principal with no previous experience. When this school's principal unexpectedly moved, the new principal rushed in without an opportunity to discuss her vision with the staff. The original principal's programs unraveled in just a few months. The school vision moved away from the programs that had been started to achieve district reform policies. After several years, she also transferred without a succession plan. These examples show the power of leadership change in sustaining student achievement and reform. When succession plans are followed and teachers are committed to the school's reform, the progress of the school can be maintained (Davidson & Taylor, 1999; Fauske & Ogawa, 1983).

This case study explored succession planning experiences of principals in the public school arena at the elementary, middle and high school levels. Succession plans allow school districts to predict school needs as well as provide principal support both prior to assuming job responsibilities and during their employment.

Statement of the Problem

Various school reform initiatives to improve student academic performance have been the focus of political agendas (Minthrop & Sunderman, 2009), professional conferences (Fuller, 2007) and publications (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 2009; Goodlad, 2004; McCombs & Miller, 2009; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Parson, 1999; Rothstein, 2004; Tapscott & Williams, 2006). The enactment of NCLB (2001) placed an even greater focus on student achievement with economic sanctions enacted for schools that are judged as inadequate (Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009).

Research indicates that some schools are improving their academic performance after implementing reform measures (Purkey & Smith, 1985). The number of schools progressing, however, is disproportionate to the plethora of plans, seminars, literature and resources available to enhance student learning (Barnes, 2008; Beabout, et al, 2008; Bryk, Kerbow, Rollow & Easton, 1998; Carr-Chellman, Alkandari, Gursoy, Ma & Pastore, 2008; Fullan, 2009; Johnston & Wartel, 1998; Lakomski, 2001McCombs & Miller, 2009; Seller, 2001).

One way to explain these inconsistencies in school improvement is through the notion of principal succession. For instance, sustainable reform takes considerable time to implement and plan (Blakely & Tomlin, 2008; Kavanagh, 2006). The leaders at the forefront of the change usually are building level principals. Principals, however, often leave a school before true reform takes place or shortly after a brief period of success (Carlson, 2009; Hart, 1995; Reynolds, Brayman & Moore, 2008; Young & Fuller, 2009). Education (Manderschield, 2008; Santora & Sarros, 1995; Wilm, 2009), nonprofit organizations (Froelich, McKee & Rathage, 2011; McFarlan, 1999; Middleton, 1987) and business (Carlson, 2009; Fauske & Ogawa, 1983; Kesner & Sebora, 1994; Nicholson, 1984) have

recognized the need to retain and plan for leader succession in order to maintain productivity. This study reflects the experience of ten principals from three southern schools and explores the school principals' reflections and thoughts on succession planning as it pertains to their current positions.

<center>Purpose of the Study</center>

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore principal experiences of succession planning. I also looked at the types and effectiveness of district resources used to support the principals. The results addressed the themes and differences experienced by principal leaders in succession planning at the high school, middle and elementary levels of public school.

<center>Research Questions</center>

The research questions in this case study explored the experiences described by ten principals at the elementary, middle and high school level using the Peters' (2011) study as a framework. The following research questions guided the study:

1.   How do public school principals describe their succession planning experiences?

2.   How do principals' described experiences relate to Peters' (2011) dynamics of succession planning (planning, sustaining and forecasting)?

3.   What succession practices have the principals found of benefit in their daily tasks?

<center>Theoretical Perspective</center>

The study explored the nature of leader succession through the assumption that meaning can be derived only through a subjective lens of constructivism. Constructivism has been supported by numerous social scientists as a useful perspective in qualitative studies (Crotty, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Neuman, 2000). The social construct view holds that

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each individual creates a separate meaning behind an event that is perceptually different from anyone else. "These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas" (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). Constructivist theories are inductively developed by deciphering meaning from individual perspectives and interactions. Reality obtains its meaning through a social construct created by each individual (Patton, 2002). Constructivism begins "with the presupposition that social reality is relative to the individuals involved and to the particular context in which they find themselves. Change the individuals and you change reality" (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 39).

This study used Peters' (2011) theory of Dynamic Leadership Succession as a conceptual framework to view the elements involved in leadership change. Peters (2011) described the process of leader succession as forecasting, sustaining and planning. These elements are seen as fluid and evolving; each element contributes something to the other. Studies on leadership change often focus on only one aspect of the process and ignore other facets. I explored succession in a holistic fashion. Therefore, the use of Peters' elements gave my study the structure to examine the subject matter. The three research questions addressed in this study fall under the three elements of the Peters' (2011) study.

<center>Subjectivity Statement</center>

The social constructivist stance assumes the following position:

> Social life (or any other knowledge about anything, for that matter) involves both
> understanding the meaning that interaction has for the participants and realizing that
> any analysis of society is made from some standpoint or perspective that informs the
> analysis. Knowledge of the social world is neither objective nor subjective, but

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intersubjective based on the shared meanings and understanding of the people being

studied and the shared meanings and understandings of the disciplinary community

doing the studying. (Warren & Karner, 2010, p. 6)

Because I am the instrument through which all data were collected, I have described my prior

experiences that colored my study in the following paragraph.

During my thirteen years in public education, I experienced the interrelated nature of

school reform, leadership changes and professional support. I witnessed schools that were

highly functional in regard to state and cultural standards that immediately became

dysfunctional when the principal stepped down. Conversely, I have seen reform continue

when a new leader steps into the position with only slight vision changes.

The tension placed on a leader stepping into a reform situation is tremendous. Recent

research findings show that both leaders and teachers require support through mentoring and

professional development to implement and sustain positive school change (Chapman, 2005;

Conley, 1993; Davidson & Taylor, 1999; Duke, 1998; Hargreaves, 2005; Nicholson, 1984). I

experienced this turmoil first hand and witnessed the emotional upheaval for principals and

teachers as roles are redefined often before the organization's vision and mission have been

reworked. These issues are highly personal and often school employees are reluctant to share

information. Placement of a teacher or principal in a new school calls for a socialization

process. Current research shows that principals who are mentored and receive professional

development before assuming their position as well as during their employment, report the

practices as being beneficial (Gross, 2004; Hargreave & Fink, 2006). This research will serve

as part of a foundation for best practices in planning for leadership change.

Significance of Study

With the continued pressures and sanctions placed upon schools to show academic progress by NCLB, principal succession will continue to be an issue in the movement towards school reform. This study's findings add to the body of literature that can guide school boards and superintendents in human resource decisions that involve building principal changes. NCLB sanctions fall into place after a 3 year period of the school being placed on the failing schools list; therefore, succession planning may be crucial to allow a new leader to immediately step into a position with all the tools necessary to succeed ("No Child Left Behind", 2003).

Leadership succession has long been a topic of study in the business arena (Fulmer & Conger, 2004; Kesner & Sebora, 1994; Rothwell, 2005; Vicere & Fulmer, 1996). Only recently, however, has education begun to explore the ramifications of succession planning (Bush, 2011; Byrne-Jimenez & Orr, 2012; Parylo, Zepeda & Bengtson, 2012; White & Cooper, 2011). This study adds to the body of educational research and helps to advance the field in a similar fashion as succession planning research has in business studies.

Limitations of Study

Qualitative research by its nature does not make generalization to other groups outside the study. Rather, qualitative analysis through the case study method serves to explore through the collection of indirect data of the experiences of those studied (Creswell, 2009). To offset these limitations, the procedure of triangulation was used to confirm data that was otherwise an individual's interpretation of reality (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). I used artifacts and personal observations to support interview data.

A potential research bias in the collection of data was participants responding in a manner that was expected of them by the researcher rather than as their reality would dictate (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Individual differences among participants' willingness to share information and their ability to convey information was expected to vary from individual to individual (Creswell, 2009). Recognizing these limitations, I constructed probing questions which helped elicit rich responses from my participants. In order to offset the participant bias of being studied, I allowed each participant to choose the time and place in the school to meet. I presumed that if the participants were at ease, they would be less likely to alter their responses to interview questions. In addition, I used a structured interview protocol to ensure that I asked participants the same questions. Probing questions facilitated clarification of responses and provided additional depth.

Further, the study allowed for limited observations due to my time restraints and those of the school leaders. During the interview process, I took handwritten notes of the participants' interactions with other people, their mannerisms as well as what type of artifacts were displayed. When appropriate, I asked participants to comment on a specific artifact to validate my interpretation of their meaning and use. I used public records to corroborate the participants' analysis of student test measures and program offerings.

Definitions of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms have been defined:

Coaching – a specific relationship where an individual is taught a specific lesson to improve their job performance by another individual. This relationship can be formal or informally sanctioned by the organization (Gross, 2004).

Forecasting – the act of training and recruiting principal candidates who can be successful

in the position while allowing for the least amount of disruption in the school

(Peters, 2011).

Human Resource Plan – the written and unwritten hiring practices and support structures for

professional development adhered to by a school district.

Mentoring – a relationship between two individuals; each helps the other perform at a higher

level on the job (Peters, 2011).

Mission – a written or implied statement that defines the reason an organization exists.

Network – the group of individuals a person can count on to be of benefit in a work setting.

Principal Succession – the event where a school principal leaves a school and another person

takes on their role.

Professional Development – a learning experience that allows an individual to develop new

skills towards the goal of improved performance on the job.

Problem Based Learning – a teaching practice that involves expecting the student to reason

through the objectives of the teacher by completing various projects and reflection.

Reform – implementation of changes "to correct a deficiency in the current educational

system without changing the essential elements of the system" (Horn, 2002, p. 1).

Relationship – a group of two or more people who interact in a mutually beneficial fashion.

Role – a pattern of behavior based on an individual's cognition of what their responsibilities

are in relationship to others.

Role Ambiguity – stress felt by an individual due to his or her not understanding the

expectations of their specific job in the work place.

Role Conflict – stress felt when a person is expected to perform two different tasks that
    conflict with one another philosophically or physically.

Role Overload - stress felt when an individual is expected to perform beyond their
    physical limitations.

Student Achievement – student academic progress as defined by the federal government
    according to funding requirements of NCLB legislation detailed statistically as
    average yearly progress for a specific school.

Support – any intentional or unintentional behavior that helps an employee perform at a
    higher level at their job.

Succession Plan – an organization's plan to promote, train and replace essential personnel
    towards the goal of causing the least amount of disruption to the group's
    performance.

Succession Planning and Management Program – "a deliberate and systematic effort by an
    organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop
    intellectual and knowledge capital for the future and encourage individual
    advancement" (Rothwell, 2005, p. 10).

Sustaining – district support of principals in the form of specific resources that help them
    succeed in their position. Sustaining resources can be financial support of the school
    by funding employment, curriculum, special programming and teacher professional
    development as well as direct support services for the principal (mentoring,
    professional development) (Peters, 2011).

Vision – the focal point of reform whereby specific goals are set.

Summary and Organization of the Study

This qualitative study explored the succession planning experiences of ten principals at different school levels (elementary, middle and high school) from the southern United States using a multiple case study method. Although business management has long been aware of the benefits of succession planning, education has been slow to acknowledge the potential benefits in published research. Further, since the introduction of NCLB legislation, the study had a direct significance on the defined success of schools through succession planning practices. This study used a constructivist view to explore the experiences of ten principals in regard to succession planning and its perceived impact on the school.

This study is presented in five chapters. The first chapter includes an introduction to the study, the problem statement, research questions to be addressed, significance of the study, researcher as well as pertinent definitions. Chapter 2 provides a review of past and present literature in the area of succession planning in the fields of business, the nonprofit organization and public school education. Chapter 3 details the methodology used in conducting the case study of ten principals and their experiences of succession planning. Chapter 4 contains the results from the personal interviews as well as my observations and description of various artifacts. Chapter 5 discusses the study's findings as they pertain to the specific research questions addressed and the implications the results have on Peters' (2011) theory. Past research and potential areas for future investigation are also addressed.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The expectations of No Child Left Behind (2001) have persuaded schools through

the lure of federal funding to pool their resources toward continually higher levels of

academic achievement defined by student performance on specific standardized test

measures. Despite public educations' focus on academic reform, public schools

continually are labeled as failing by agreed upon NCLB standards (Elmore, 2004,

Rothstein, 2004; Sunderman, 2008; Tienken & Orlich, 2013). The process of succession

from one principal to the next may contribute to the inconsistencies in school

performance.

The following review of literature explains the current focus on public school

leadership through a historical analysis of the impact of the federal government's

involvement in reform, the importance of sustainable leadership and the current research

on succession planning. Academic success has come to be measured through the

requirements set forth in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left

Behind, 2001). Further, government pressures can require a school leader to turn the

school's testing scores around in a short period of time. This is in direct conflict with

research that asserts that reform is a slow process (Blakely & Tomlin, 2008; Kavanagh, 2006). Research shows that in the succession of one principal to another the sharing of an identical vision as well as mentoring support will minimize the negative effects on the organization (Hargreaves, 2005). Although the business community has used succession planning to ensure the financial vitality of an organization, research has not examined the public school system's use of succession planning in regard to principal leadership and its influence on pupil performance (Fullan, 2009). According to Peters (2011) model of succession planning, the three components that can help meet an organization's need to transition and support leadership are forecasting, planning and sustaining.

The following literature review covers the historical basis of accountability pressures placed on schools through a government funding system requiring accountability with a focus on student achievement on end of year test performance. These funding related pressures often place unwanted stress on the reform measures principals have in place because principals are either forced or opt to leave their positions before the reform process is complete. The change of one principal leader to the next can mean the loss of momentum towards improved student performance (Fullan, 2009). Succession planning has been noted as a best practice for some time in the business and nonprofit public arena; however, education as a field of study has only recently acknowledged an interest in succession planning. The chapter includes a discussion of the unique political pressures felt in the education field, the current research trends in educational succession planning and practices in not-for-profit organizations and businesses. The focus on the three different environments (education, nonprofit and

business) in the following review examines organizational best practices to ensure stability and success during times of leadership change.

Federal Impact on Schools

Despite the conspicuous absence of any federal dictates on public education in the constitution and the requirement of the Tenth Amendment that delegates all powers not given to the federal government as reserved to the state's jurisdiction, education of the nation's citizenry has been a federal topic of discussion since the Merriam Report (1928). The report analyzed the public education system of the American Indians. Though the American Indian students' education did not closely resemble today's system, some of the exact recommendations for reform continue to be affirmed through presidential reports on education in the last fifty years (A Race to the Top, A Nation at Risk). The report stated "It is true in all education . . . that methods must be adapted to individual abilities, interests and needs. A standard course of study, routine classroom methods, traditional types of schools . . . would not solve the problem" (Meriam, 1928, p.346). Although the report is based on recommendations for the American Indian's education, the report appears to support the constitutional interpretation that the federal government's influence should be removed from state education as found in other documents supporting general education in America. Almost twenty years later, The Truman Report alongside the Truman Presidential Committee on Civil Rights reported on the state of education in the United States. Though the Truman report focused on higher education, the report's recommendations reflect a number of the current expectations for public education as a whole. The reform measures suggested included abandoning the European style of education in favor of a curriculum designed to meet the challenges of a

democracy; expanding the number of students attending college, integrating vocational education with liberal education; extending tuition free education to include the freshman and sophomore years of college and an increase in federal monies for various types of financial aid. Further, the report framed the need for a quality education for all American students on the basis that public education held the promise for America's future during a time period viewed as potentially catastrophic (Jones, 1949).

Post World War II fears of communism and the threat of nuclear war continued to fuel the push towards education reform to insure that America's youth would be competitive in all world arenas. Political attention focused on using federal dollars as an incentive for public education to solve civil, economic and world issues. The National Assessment of Educational Progress became the flag flown to declare the need for educational reform. NAEP, a branch of the federal Department of Education, routinely tests random national sites to report on the progress of America's students and education system. President Eisenhower's Committee on Education, Beyond the High School (1956), added momentum to the National Defense Education Act: Selected Outcomes report. Behind the High School (1956) analyzed the use of National Department of Education Administration Title funding. The report concluded that funding for reform had influenced the nations' youth but called for additional data for accountability to prove that the nation's schools were indeed making progress (Flattau, Bracken, Van Atta, Bandeh-Ahmadi, de la Cruz, & Sullivan, 2006). As the politically inspired fear of America's educational system falling behind internationally increased, President Kennedy appointed Theodore Sorensen to manage an educational task force. The volunteer task force made up of the top education minds of the time created the report

entitled, New Frontiers of the Kennedy Administration: The text of the Task Force for the President (Graham, 1983). Though documentation of the task forces' findings are sketchy at best and the actual document's content is difficult to obtain, one can easily reason that the four bills that eventually found support for education reform were furthered by the document.

President Kennedy's first attempt to reform education after securing the Peace Corps in 1961, included federal funding for elementary and secondary schools over a three year time period. The 2.3 billion dollars would be used for both building of schools and teachers' salaries. Though congress rejected the majority of the president's bills, Kennedy did enact a number of provisions taken through the House Education Committee. These included funds for colleges and universities, a vocational training program, grants to libraries and the modification of the Impacted Areas Act. Kennedy's New Frontier fell short in his life time, but continued through the legislative enactment of President Johnson. By the close of 1965, Kennedy's vision had been achieved to the extent that congress had been nick named "The Education Congress" of 1965 (Graham, 1984, p. 83). The four main education bills entrenching federal dollars into education were the Higher Education Facilities Act, The Library Construction and Services Act, The Vocational Education Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (Brown-Nagin, 2009; Graham, 1983).

Political changes since World War II further set the stage for an argument for federal involvement with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. President Johnson received credit for the passage of ESEA, but the ground work for the bill had been laid by Kennedy, Eisenhower and even Truman, who

worried about America lagging behind technologically in a global market place. After Kennedy's assassination, Johnson revised the bill as part of his "War on Poverty" by funneling most of the federal government reform aid to poor schools (Clayson, 2002, p. 158). A former teacher who witnessed poverty's impact on his students, President Johnson believed that equal access to education was vital to a child's ability to lead a productive life. His secondary goals were to ease the civil unrest in the country by helping the poor by raising the educational level of the entire country and in the process to improve his political standing (Brown-Nagin, 2004). In 1965, Johnson later signed the Civil Rights Act. It is through Title VI of the act that federal government agencies obtained the right to make federal aid dependent on their compliance to federal mandated reform (Thomas, Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2009). Here lie the roots of federal involvement in indirectly dictating program and curriculum requirements through the threat of relinquished federal aid.

President Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education's 1983 report entitled, "A Nation at Risk" became the match that ignited the fuel for current reform measures. The report cited a drop in SAT test scores from 1963 to 1980 and pointed to the United States' education system as lagging behind that of other countries. The commission created 38 recommendations in five categories (educational content, standards, time, teaching competencies and federal leadership in education). Though no new legislation became enacted as a direct result, the public had been galvanized toward school improvement. Politicians "expanded the federal role in education to meet political and policy goals" (Sunderman, 2009, pp. 6-7). Reform continued into the1990s with a push toward outcome based education and a change in focus from equity to excellence in

education. This contrasted with the earlier New Deal public education reports and actions based on the assumption that economic hardships were not due to personal issues, but social inequity (Sunderman, 2009). This led to a focus on the educational performance gap found between racial minorities and white students. Outcome based education became a natural starting point to evaluate reform measures that required students to meet specific standards or minimal levels of proficiency (Brown-Nagin, 2009). On January 23, 2001, President Bush signed the NCLB legislation established on the outcome based philosophy of setting high expectations and holding students and schools accountable through state wide standards testing. Through the act and for the first time, sanctions withholding federal funds became a reality for economically struggling public schools (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2004). As the years progressed under the NCLB Act, public schools continued to fall short of the mandated reform efforts required by the federal government. As states grappled with the inevitable loss of funds during a time of economic hardship, President Obama authorized The Race to the Top Program. The program allowed states to apply for an alternative grant program rather than follow the NCLB formula. The 4.35 billion dollar funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 led to states competing through a funding rubric. Each state's application was reviewed, scored and published for public review ("Race to the Top," 2011).

The historical context of political reports and actions taken at the federal level in response to civil rights and other equity issues gathered speed throughout the years. In response, politicians point to the United States public education system as both a part of the problem as well as the solution. Schools do not function as inanimate entities

oblivious to social influences. Public schools are functions of the individual stakeholders that support them. As a result, school reform takes on many configurations with innumerable influences. These human influences confound the problem of research and a one-size-fits-all solution to public school reform criteria that the federal government has made dependent on funding (Rothstein, 2004).

Guthrie (2008) analyzed the results of reform through the federal dollar requirements imposed on schools and the changes these requirements inspired. He concluded the intricacies of the federal financial awards have created a system where financial policy is the same as general policy. His research contends that the lack of change created by reform measures can be explained by the absence of a national vision for education. He argues that the network of special interests groups combined with the political system cannot produce reform. Further, the current federal pressures on schools are often inconsistent with reform goals, creating pressure for rapid change with almost immediate results (Fullan, 2009).

<div align="center">Teacher Impact on Learning</div>

From the ashes of the failed accountability measures in NCLB, researchers and educational professionals continue to search for the panacea to reform increased student performance in the midst of schools scrambling to qualify for as many federal dollars as possible. Hargreaves and Shirley (2008) synthesized international and American reform research to make essential recommendations for principals to move education past standard accountability measures and into a creative phase of reform. The authors called for curriculum that allows for individual student choice as well as components that inspire community growth. Students and stakeholders need to be engaged and feel a sense

of identity with the school as well as a sense of responsibility. Shirley (2008) stated that teachers of high caliber are essential, as are supported professional learning communities. They proposed that data be collected and used to inform teaching strategies, but never to drive instruction. Collaboration between students, teachers and schools is viewed as an essential component in successful reform.

In Darling-Hammond's (2000) study using policy surveys and National Assessment of Education Progress data, clear results showed that teacher qualifications (certification and teacher knowledge) made a significant difference in student learning outcomes. Sanders and Rivers (1996) studied the impact of highly qualified teachers on fifth grade students in urban Tennessee. The study found students who had quality teachers for three years in a row scored 83 percent better in one district and 96 percent better in another. Students who had the least effective teachers over these three years in the same districts averaged at the 29th percentile and the 44th percentile, exhibiting almost a 50 percent difference. Researchers found that student scores in math achievement could be predicted from the instructor quality ratings over the three year period. They concluded that the quality of teaching had not only a cumulative, but also a residual effect.

In a longitudinal study that followed students from kindergarten to eighth grade, Hamre and Pianta (2001) found that the student's relationship with his kindergarten teacher could predict academic success as well as behavioral issues. Student learning has been noted to require four basic elements--engagement in the topic, social support, an opportunity to learn and quality teaching; the teacher is only one aspect of the puzzle (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005). Principals perform their duties at the intersection

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between instruction delivery and professional learning communities. The caliber of teachers hired, the supervision/mentoring that teachers receive, the school climate and the professional development opportunities are controllable to the extent that the resources can be created.

<div align="center">Impact of Principal Succession on School Performance</div>

Recent empirical studies have shown that principals impact academic achievement through their influence over teacher performance and student engagement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Heck & Hallinger, 1999; Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Prestine & Nelson, 2005). Principals indirectly affect student learning through their influence on stakeholders, the vision and mission of the school, organizational structures of the school, professional associations and school culture (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Teacher turnover rates have been shown to be higher in schools where principal turnover has occurred (Baker, Young & Fuller, 2007; Levy, Fields & Jablonski, 2006). In addition, teacher turnover has been linked to low student performance as well as to the "serious negative financial and educational impacts on schools" (Fuller & Young, 2009, p. 18). In a study conducted by Hargreaves and Fink (2004), seven schools were analyzed for the ability to achieve school reform while working through leadership change along with federal pressures to increase student test scores. The researchers found "that leadership succession is rarely successful" (Hargreaves and Fink, 2004, p. 10). The first school listed in the study, Stewart Heights High School was classified as a "revolving-door," a term used by MacMillan (2000, p. 53), because they rarely kept a principal beyond two years. When the first replacement principal came onboard, Stewart Heights High School had not made substantial academic

progress in years. After three years, the replacement principal had turned the school around and it was showing academic promise. As the district began to experience a leadership shortage, the successful principal was promoted to a district office position. His assistant principals were moved to other schools. The school's next principal (the third principal to the school) did not have prior administrative experience. Being catapulted into the reform process with additional pressures placed upon him for academic improvement, the new principal and his assistants could not support his predecessor's progress. After three years, the district moved this principal to yet another school. Four principals left the school in the span of six years (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). When successful school principals are moved from their schools, a loss of academic student performance may result. Further, when a school is struggling, reform may take years to foster.

> Quick-fix changes to turn around failing schools often exhaust the teachers or the principal and improvement efforts aren't sustained over time. The principal's success in a turnaround school may lead to his or her rapid promotion, but then result in regression among teachers who feel abandoned by their leader or relieved when the pressure is off (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. 57).

An organization's success is dependent on not only the current leader's decisions, but also on the decisions of those who came before him. The preservation of improvement will further depend on the organization's ability to find and develop new leaders. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) found,

> Leadership succession is repeatedly spoiled by poor planning. Succession plans either go awry or there is no real planning at all. Repeated and rushed successions

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don't push schools along an upward curve of improvement but around and around

on a perpetual carousel in which all of them move up and down with depressing

regularity. (p.71)

In order to function successfully, school districts need to have a plan to replace

their leaders. The business industry recognized this need prior to the public sector and the

field of education (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Large businesses have begun focusing

their daily routines around the function of succession planning (Rothwell, 2005). There is

a growing recognition that retention of a quality work force is paramount to sustainability

as well as to profits. Organizations that choose to ignore succession planning will find it

difficult to continue their success from one leader to the next (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Succession in Business

Leadership succession has been a topic of contention in the business arena for

over four decades (Fulmer & Conger, 2004). The acknowledged need for corporate

succession planning gained momentum after the World Trade Center terrorist attack in

2001 (Rothwell, 2005). The disaster left major corporations with a loss of their most

relied upon leaders. There were no trained backup employees to replace those lost. The

top American companies had not created a succession plan through the human resources

process of promoting identified replacement personnel prepared to take charge (Fulmer &

Conger, 2004). Changing demographics in the United States also provided an impetus for

the business industry to delve further into the process of weaving succession planning

into the fabric of their companies. The United States Census Bureau projected that the

largest companies could lose up to forty percent of their work force at one time due to

retirement (Rothwell, 2005). In addition, businesses struggling to compete with foreign

markets are minimally staffed. Though this is highly effective in reducing costs, it often leaves companies with an inadequate bullpen of trained candidates to step into vacated positions in the company. As a result of the "increasing value of intellectual capital and knowledge management, it is more necessary than ever for organizations to plan for leadership continuity and employee advancement at all levels" (Rothwell, 2005, p. xx). Traditionally, however, companies have preferred quick and easy fixes to employee replacement issues. Businesses initial focus on succession planning dealt solely with those executive leaders that were in the top echelon of the company. Researchers believed that the general population of employees could be replaced with minimal strain on the company (Pitcher, Chreim & Kisfalvi, 2000). With the minimization of employee numbers, however, has come a realization that general employees and executives may be the sole owners of vital information that can bring a company to a level of poor performance quickly in the event of that individual's loss (Rothwell, 2005).

Succession planning takes on different aspects depending on the company's commitment to the process in addition to attributes such as the firm's size, age of employees, culture, degree of profitability in the market place, board directors' views as well as past and present CEO's influences (Pitcher, Chreim & Kisfalvi, 2000). Corporate giants like Dell and Lily have created elaborate employee sustainability systems that focus on succession planning for leadership positions. District, national and international manager and CEO performance is tracked. Each individual is given a designation of being promotable to specific positions, being highly competent and trainable into additional positions or needing some type of improvement. Identification of talent, development of talent and mentoring activities are aligned with the company's goals. For

example, after Enron collapsed a number of firms became aware of the importance of

ethics in the work place to ensure their company's survival. Taking ethics as a component

of their employee evaluations, many businesses began defining what integrity looked like

in their companies as well as culturally defining the reasoning behind the emphasis.

Due to their emphasis on professional development, these companies view hiring

from outside sources as a failure for their human resources department and mentoring

management (Fulmer & Conger, 2004). Early research showed that whether an executive

successor is hired from within the company or outside the company could be equated

with whether or not the predecessor had been viewed as successful or had been liked. In

the situation that new ideas were being sought out in order to recreate a more successful

company, then hiring an outsider tended to be preferred. When company goals are being

met, incumbents are more likely to be chosen from current employees that exhibit the

skills of their predecessor (Pitcher, Chreim & Kisfalvi, 2000). Research confirms that a

succession event can indeed have positive as well as negative effects for a company

(Beatty & Zajac, 1987; Davidson, Haveman, 1993; Worrell & Dutia, 1993). One could

speculate, therefore, that companies that focus more resources on succession planning

anticipate hiring from within and believe their current organization to be functioning

adequately. Not unlike education, even the earliest empirical research showed that a high

company turnover rate often accompanies succession of leadership (Pitcher, Chreim &

Kisfalvi, 2000).

Alongside economic forces pushing the downsizing of employee populations,

employees have learned that company loyalty is not always rewarded. As a result,

executives often hold 5-7 different positions during their careers. Remaining in one

position over an entire career can result in limiting promotions and professional development (Fulmer & Conger, 2004). At the same time, companies realize that when an employee leaves they not only have to fill the position, but valuable company information may be lost. The recognition of the loss of employee loyalty combined with the motivation to retain employee knowledge ushered in the use of the fully functioning succession plans. The incorporated plan's goal examines ways to retain employees through professional development and career opportunities that will benefit the employee as well as the company. This is a sharp detour from the initial plans that simply created a flow chart of potential candidates that may or may not have been mentored to take on the next step in job responsibilities (Fulmer & Conger, 2004).

These factors have led to companies competing over talent. As a result, organizations pursue more "involvement by individuals who are participants and candidates." (Fulmer & Conger, 2004, p. 7). In addition, employees receive detailed and candid feedback. Tools used to openly discuss employee performance include evaluations based on specific company goals through a list of competencies guided by the company's vision statement, portfolios and performance data (Fulmer & Cogner, 2004; Rothwell, 2005; Vicere & Fulmer, 1997). The result of companies' use of diverse sources of data in succession planning has led to a focus on professional development through mentoring, career assignments and outsourced educational opportunities.

The fully functioning succession plan not only examines the company for excellent candidates to replace essential personnel should they retire, but also addresses professional development issues as well as retention of individuals who might wish to leave the company voluntarily for better pay or additional training.

Succession in Nonprofit Organizations

Similar to publicly held entities and schools, nonprofit organizations have a number of unique characteristics that influence their ability to effectively use succession planning techniques. Unlike employee numbers in the big corporations, employee numbers in nonprofits are not large; therefore, their reserve of leadership candidates is nonexistent or small. The not-for-profit organization cannot offer a competitive salary due to political pressure by the community and board to keep overhead to a minimum. This makes it difficult to recruit leadership outside of the nonprofit sector. In addition, unattainable job expectations make the nonprofit leadership position less attractive to those entering the job market for the first time. Individuals who value personal time find the position unattractive due to the long hours needed to ensure success for the organization. Further, organizational boards often lack the expertise to plan and execute a succession plan (Froelich, McKee & Rathge, 2011).

The not-for-profit organization has in the past relied on business research to drive their best practices. Kesner and Sebora (1994) reviewed over thirty years of succession research and found only five published articles regarding the nonprofit organizations in a list of 130 articles published between 1980 and 1993. Schall (1997) noted that research in the area of succession planning picked up substantially in the nonprofit arena after 1992 (Schall, 1997). The discrepancies between nonprofit and business entities requirements combined with the mission statement differences make business theories inadequate to drive succession practices for the nonprofit organization. For example, the companies' end goal of profitability differs sharply from the nonprofits' focus on services to the community. Unlike the business sector, nonprofit organizations are dependent on

volunteers. An ill-defined relationship between the executive director and nonprofit board of directors, also contributes to the unique qualities of the nonprofit entity (McFarlan, 1999; Middleton, 1987).

In their study examining 501(c)(3), charitable nonprofits and 501(c)(4) cooperative community organizations, Froelich, McKee and Rathge (2011) found that more than 70 percent of the organizations believed that succession planning should be considered "very important" (p. 13). Sixty percent of these organizations reported, however, that few policies or actions were put into place to address succession planning. Fewer than 20 percent of the organizations surveyed reported a developed formal plan of action in the event of the loss of their executive director. In addition, charitable organizations face the same predicted increase in retirement of leadership from the baby boomer generation as do companies. Nonprofits further prefer leadership candidates from within the organization or at least from another nonprofit organization. Charitable nonprofits expressed the difficulty in replacing their leadership, due to the charismatic nature of the position. Sixteen percent of the organizations anticipated looking for their next executive at the national level. All of these factors suggest that the challenges and needs of the nonprofit organization are similar to those found in the arena of education. Interesting to note was that in Froelich, McKee and Rathge's (2011) study of nonprofit organizations, only twenty percent of the individuals interviewed who were leaving their leadership role were seeking a similar position. Unattainable expectations and long working hours were listed among reasons for wishing to leave their position.

Succession in Public Entities

Public schools are among nonprofit organizations, but thrive within even tighter restraints as public entities. Publicly owned operations face the challenge of "sustaining innovation and programs in the face of changing administrations, politics and priorities" (Wilkerson, 2007, p. 1). In a case study, Wilkerson (2007) examined two institutions in the public sector for best practices for succession planning. The institutions were the Oklahoma Department of Corrections and the New York City Department of Juvenile Justice. These two institutions were designated as "the most comprehensive public sector models in the literature" (Wilkerson, 2007, p. 2) based on Schall's (1997) succession points. These included providing support for programs and staff that were not affiliated with the public sector as well as at least one mentor for the incoming replacement administrator. Further, steps were taken to ensure that the new administration would continue to receive help with programming while building a strong group of support employees. When possible the organizations arranged for national attention for past programming to encourage continued program momentum. In addition to organizational support, the departing leader's assistance was sought out to prepare employees. Departing leaders welcomed the new leader while sustaining momentum towards their designated goals. Additionally, employees in lower ranked jobs were trained in higher level positions that prepared them for future challenges. The exiting leader often trained his successor to ensure an awareness of all programming and the organizational requirements that were contingent on the organization's success.

The Oklahoma Department of Corrections' daily operation assumes that talent development is a constant need and of highest priority (Wilkerson, 2007). When leader

openings occur, candidates are recruited formally through postings as well as through personal contact with high ranking staff that encourage them to apply. During a series of vigorous interviews, the candidate is given feedback on his performance in the past and present. After a candidate has been chosen for a leadership position, he/she is given an opportunity to meet with staff as well as receiving developmentally appropriate training and any needed resources. The department director handles a lot of the new leader's training directly by acting as a mentor. The use of these succession planning strategies demonstrates to the employees and the new leader that the organization is committed to the process and the organization's mission.

Both organizations studied reported struggling to keep succession planning as an organizational process not a separate program or department. One of the most common pitfalls in the public sector is to leave succession planning to only the human resources department (Wilkerson, 2007). Succession planning ideally should be a part of the fabric of the culture of the group (Rothwell, 2005; Wilkerson, 2007). Another issue often found within organizations is the tendency to handpick successors (Santora & Sarros, 1995; Shiffman, 2009; Wilkerson, 2007). Though hiring procedures discourage the leader from selecting their replacement in the public sector, pre-selected succession occurs on a regular basis. To combat this natural tendency, the organization first and foremost should be clear about their vision and mission. They then need to recognize the employee competencies needed for the organization to succeed. Regular analysis should address measuring the group's performance and gaps in employee development. By focusing on these specific aspects, the succession planning process is supported throughout the transition from one leader to the next. In addition, by developing needed talent within the

public agency, the pool of candidate leaders is enlarging at the same time performance is being increased as a whole (Rothwell, 2006; Wilkerson, 2007). These recommendations are in stark contrast to earlier articles that addressed executives in how to individually plan for their succession and deal with the personal issues involved rather than the organization's need to create a system of planning for succession (Santora & Sarros, 1995).

<center>Succession Planning in Education</center>

Educational research echoes the organizational theorists' views by acknowledging the need to attend to succession planning (Hargreaves, Moore, Fink & Brayman, 2003). In order for a leader to effectively step into another's position and student success to continue, a coherent succession plan to coordinate the change from one leader to another is essential for student success to continue (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hargreaves, Moore, Fink & Brayman, 2003). The plan should emphasize the transfer of knowledge from the outgoing leader to the incoming leader as well as staff information that would allow the new principal to be sensitive to the emotional, social and cultural upheaval that principal rotation and succession often generate (Reynolds, et al, 2008). Despite the copious amount of research supporting the need for a succession plan, this is rarely the case in education (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Kesner & Sebora, 1994).

In an examination of four Georgia school systems, Zepeda, Bengtson and Parylo (2012) used Rothwell's (2010) 15 characteristics of successful succession planning as a basis for a study that provides one of the few theoretical views on the process of leadership succession. Although Rothwell's theoretical characteristics were created from numerous studies of non-educational organizations, Zepeda, Bengtson and Parylo found

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the characteristics helpful. The Georgia school districts, however, showed an additional characteristic--community collaboration. Zepeda, Bengtson and Parylo (2012) interviewed superintendents, central office administration, human resource directors and school principals at all educational levels (elementary, middle and high school) in four school districts. Four themes came out of the qualitative study: a sense of urgency, the importance of developing leaders, mentoring leaders and creating collaborative relationships outside the school district. Zepeda, Bengtson and Parylo (2012) found that the sense of urgency felt by the district in regard to predicting employee turnover and human resources planning depended upon the size of the district. Smaller districts reported, "One thing that limits us is the fact that we are smaller and we don't have as many positions as we have people who want to move up" (p. 145). In addition, the smaller districts expressed a need to hire someone they knew would be successful.

All four districts supported their leaders through a leadership development program based on either standards or research. Indian Hills, the largest district, used a multiple approach to maintaining leaders within the district through a leadership academy to recognize interest and talent as well as professional development based on the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium combined with the National Association of Secondary School Principals 10 skill dimensions. Though their plan was not as elaborate, the smaller school districts relied on the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement to provide the professional development needed to successfully lead a school. In regard to mentoring, all four districts reported some type of mentoring program as well as a belief in the program's benefits. The largest school system used a pool of retired principals that had an excellent track record of student performance to

mentor current principals. These mentors were not required to evaluate the principals in order to reduce the principals' reluctance to disclose their true challenges in the position. The smaller districts were found to use informal mentoring within the district or an outside agency.

Researchers reported that analysis of the data revealed the use of collaboration within the districts. However, the theme of collaboration could not be matched to one of Rothwell's (2010) 15 succession characteristics. District collaboration included professional development through participation with the university leadership programs and the Georgia Leadership for School Improvement group. Collaboration has been viewed as a major issue in succession planning by other authorities in the business world. Vicere and Fulmer (1997) saw collaboration as essential due to the current trend in eliminating any nonessential activities or personnel to compete in a tight market. In such an environment, businesses rely on collaborating with one another as well as within the subdivision of the parent company. The ability to effectively communicate and work with these internal and external resources has been identified as the "shadow pyramid" of an organization (pp. 58-60). Vicere and Fulmer (1997) stated, "It is quite common today to talk of 'outsourcing.' This establishment of a network of supplier/partners of goods and services in noncore areas is often viewed as a key to building efficiency and flexibility into an organizational structure" (p. 59).

Based on a similar study of principal succession in Canada, Hargreaves and Fink (2006) described six education practices viewed as successful though they have not been tested empirically: (1) successions plans should be considered long before a leader resigns, other employees should be given time to prepare for the loss of the leader, (2)

succession planning should be included into annual school planning, (3) plans should be the responsibility of many different people to keep leaders from cloning themselves in the next generation, (4) plans should be prescribed on the needs of the school and future needs for reform, (5) plans should be clear and transparent, (6) plans should use specific standards to address needed leadership traits (pp. 71-72). These six succession strategies are aligned to Rothwell's (2010) characteristics of a good business succession plan (Zepeda, Bengtson & Parylo, 2012).

The conceptual framework to address succession planning focuses on the significance of forecasting future employment needs of the district, sustaining principals' efforts through effective support and planning procedures for leadership transitions (Peters, 2011). Many educational studies focus on developing a portion of a succession plan; however Peters (2011) views the effective structures of succession planning in education as a seamless organizational function that includes forecasting, planning and sustaining.

Succession planning in the business world could be a useful guide to the public school setting based upon the studies of Zepeda, Bengtson and Parylo (2012). Although there is support for planning and training of a predecessor in both education and business management literature, there is a sparse amount of information on what a succession plan should entail. Many researchers have limited themselves to only one of the factors of succession planning within public school districts, either retention, sustaining or hiring practices.

School Leadership Retention

Principal succession and teacher retention have been found to be positively correlated (Fuller, Young & Baker, 2007). When a principal change is made every three years or less, teachers are more likely to seek out other employment options. Since research has shown that teacher retention is linked to increased professional training costs as well as student achievement (Levy, Fields & Jablonski, 2006), it would follow that principal succession in the public school system is paramount to the school's success. School reform is accomplished through the sustained intentional work of the principal to create a school vision that focuses on improvement throughout a number of years (Fuller, et. al., 2007).

Gross (2004) recognized the challenges of keeping the progress of reform moving in a school. He stated that by understanding the process, a democratic leadership within the school could help withstand the challenges of succession through the stability of teacher/leaders given the power to sustain the change through the principal succession process. The Evolutionary Leadership Choice Model (Gross, 2004) combined research findings to develop three stages of leadership decision making to be made by a leadership team within the school. The first stage depends on the school's decision to initiate change (Initiation Stage) or embrace tradition. This decision typically occurs after a school has been functioning under the same leadership for five years. During this time of decision making a turnover in leadership would predict that if reform were seen as imperative an outside leader would be the likely candidate not an inside hire with similar attributes to his predecessor (Pitcher, Chreim & Kisfalvi, 2012). The second stage of the Choice Model is to create continuity or a mission shift. This requires about a two year period in

which the school chooses to continue in the direction initially planned or realign their process. The last stage is renewal or perceived stagnation. At this junction, the staff has grown through reform and has a need for a renewed focus or challenge. Ideally, these stages would be processed by one principal; however, the likelihood of a principal remaining at a school through the nine plus years of reform would be rare.

After reviewing 81 key post-1980 research articles in educational journals, Cotton (2003) concluded that the school principals' roles and their behaviors do have an impact on students' academic success. Results of a similar study by Masci, Cuddapah and Pajak (2008), showed that the high school principal's role is important in maintaining stability in the school while initiating change through teacher leadership. Change will either enhance or threaten teacher satisfaction by either uniting or dividing teachers within the school. By encouraging change through teacher leadership, principals stabilize the change process by allowing it to unfold at its own pace.

Duke (1988) found that principals who were contemplating a career change expressed frustration with the many demands placed upon them. One principal commented on his/her dilemma:

> The conflict for me comes from going home every night acutely aware of what I didn't get done and feeling after six years that I sought to have a better batting average than I have. The principalship is the kind of job where you're expected to be all things to all people. Early on, if you're successful, you have gotten feedback that you are able to be all things to all people. And then you feel an obligation to continue to do that, which in your own mind you're not capable of doing. And that causes some guilt. (p. 309)

In response to these pressures, a larger number of principals retire early each year and an increasing number of teacher leaders are making the decision to not pursue administrative careers (Duke, 1988).

The education reform crisis is not confined to the United States. In a recent study, Bush (2011) noted that England and South Africa are both focusing on principal succession strategies that will help them recruit, develop and support principals in their public schools. The study shows that England has a difficult time recruiting and maintaining principals due to low pay and demanding job responsibilities. England traditionally runs advertisements for applicants. Under normal circumstances, they have to search out candidates repeatedly to obtain an adequate pool of applicants. After an exhaustive search, employers often settle for the best leader they can hire. In comparison, the position of principal is seen as lucrative in South Africa thus, the Bush (2011) study found a large pool of applicants. The national South African Department of Education, however, does not feel that their principal or headmaster applicants are sufficiently trained due to the low academic test scores observed in the country. Though England and South Africa are different countries with varying pressures, both have placed an emphasis on succession planning (recruiting, training, supporting and analyzing turnover) to improve their education systems. South Africa's national system lends itself to homogenous hiring practices that could stifle reform. England's hiring pool is self-selected and should allow for a more diverse group of applicants (Bush, 2011). In discussing England's educational human resource issues, Thomson (2009) stated that "succession planning is a major plank in any cogent strategy to address the risks inherent in the supply problem" (p. 32).

Low principal retention further hinders efforts to improve academic performance within a school. Reform and increased student performance have been shown to require the same key factors that allow principals to influence schools: creating a vision of academic success and implementing cultural change (Fullan, 1991; McAdams, 1997). Not only does organizational change take substantial energy, it has to be perpetuated over a long period of time. Current research shows that principals require a minimum of five years to implement reform efforts to increase student achievement within a school (Fullan, 1991; McAdams, 1997: Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). In a time when NCLB, Primary and Secondary Education (2001) funds require that a school not be considered in need of improvement more than three years, it would appear that principals are leaving or being replaced just prior to reform having taken place in the schools that are the most in need of change. Principal succession may not only halt reform efforts while reducing student learning, but also result in considerable monetary losses for the district. Recruiting, hiring and training practices are costly in regard to man hours spent. In addition, the loss of a principal is often associated with lower academic performance by students (Fuller & Young, 2009).

Fuller and Young (2009) examined principal retention rates in the public school system of Texas using 14 years of employment data (1996-2008). The findings revealed that principal retention rates varied by school level (elementary, middle or high), academic performance level of the school, whether the school is rural or urban, and the students' socioeconomic status. Elementary principals were shown to have the highest retention rates for five years. Forty-six percent of the elementary principals remained in the same positions for 5 years or more. This is in sharp contrast to the high school

principals' succession rates of thirty-one percent in the same position for 5 years or more. Principals at all levels were found to retain their positions longer if the school had a high academic performance rate and the socioeconomic status of the students was higher. In addition, rural rates of principal turnover were higher than urban. Of those principals leaving within the Texas educational project examining years 1996 through 2008, 90% did not accept another principal's position. This is seen as extremely important information for the education community because "it means we have a constant revolving door of new principals who have not had the opportunity to hone their skills and become experts at school leadership" (p. 17). Fuller and Young (2009) stated that the Texas study's findings further suggest that student achievement could suffer from the lack of experienced principals within the system.

> Given our other research that suggests principal stability is positively associated with decreases in teacher attrition, increases in teacher quality and increases in student achievement, the high turnover rates of principals is troubling. This is particularly true of high-poverty, high minority and low-performing schools most in need of leadership and teacher stability. State and district policies makers certainly need to focus much greater attention on this issue if they want to improve schooling outcomes for all students and close the achievement gap (Fuller & Young, 2009, p.18).

Hiring Practices

The business community has long acknowledged the necessity of forecasting employment needs and creating succession plans. Fulmer and Conger (2004) showed that an organization without plans for succession will eventually fail. It is only a matter of

time before the company's weakest employees remain to dissolve the company from within as the employees move on to becoming even weaker leaders.

America's approaching demographic trends confound the problem of maintaining a constant source of top notch principals. Historically economic growth in America is in proportion with the population of up and coming leaders. These leaders are traditionally between 35 and 44 years old. This population group in the United States has been projected to decline by 15 percent between 2000 and 2015 (Fulmer & Conger, 2004). The looming retirement of the baby boomers will usher in not only a shortage of personnel, but also a shortage of the quality leadership that propels organization forward prosperously. Evidence of this trend can be seen in the recruitment of Fortune 500 companies for leadership. When companies are unable to adequately train future leaders within their company ranks, they join the search of other like-minded companies in competing for a small number of top notch leaders (Fulmer & Conger, 2004). England has reported education leadership shortages due to the aging of its citizenry (Bush, 2011) not unlike the United States in education and business leadership (Rothwell, 2005; Zepeda, Bengtson & Parylo, 2012).

Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, Foleno and Foley (2001) surveyed 853 superintendents in regard to their leadership needs at the building principal level. Although over half of the superintendents were satisfied with the expertise of the principals employed in their district, a large percentage (48%) did not believe their leaders had the skills needed to efficiently run a school. Of particular interest in this study, 40% of the superintendents believed principal leaders were hard to hire. A related study by Pounder, Gavin and Shepherd (2003) found that principal shortages have been reported in the public school

sector since around 1950. However, these shortages are not a reflection of the number of certified administrators; most states report that they certify more administrators than what the current need is assumed to be (Lankford, O'Connell & Wyckoff, 2003; Pounder, Galvin & Shepherd, 2003). One variable influencing the lack of qualified applicants is an unwillingness of certified educators to take on the additional stress, long work hours and strict accountability measures (Winter & Morgenthal, 2002).

In the absence of a formal succession plan, schools report informally grooming and "tapping" teachers to become the next principal in the district (Myung, Loeb & Horng, 2011). Sponsorship and self-identification are two forms of recruiting educator administrative talent. Lortie's (2009) study reported three out of four principals promoted within a district were found to have been sponsored in pursuing an administrative career. Sponsorship can reflect a sponsor bias toward their own ethnic group or a preference of males over females. Myung, Loeb and Horng (2011) noted that most sponsored candidates were prepared to replace another leader through various career experiences that would allow them to further their leadership skills. These efforts are rarely formalized into a succession management plan. This may be largely because the philosophy behind succession planning is opposite that of public education in the United States. "The practice of formally identifying promising teachers from among the entire teaching staff in a school, clashes with the egalitarian ethic among teachers" (Myung, Loeb & Horng, 2011, p. 699).

Mentoring as Leadership Support

A survey of 215 teachers who held certificates in administration in Louisiana revealed that half of the respondents did not aspire to be a principal. Two of the reasons

listed were the complexity of the job combined with inadequate support (Bloom &

Krovetz, 2001; Daresh, 2004). Lashway (2003) outlined factors in leadership stress.

These stressors included the complexity of the job, isolation from colleagues, lack of

emotional support and requirements of assimilating into a new school culture. Chapman

(2005) stated, "Newly appointed leaders require engagement in a systematic program of

learning and induction based on an analysis of a person's previous experiences and

capabilities integrated with the needs of the particular school, system and context in

which they serve" (p. 23). In one of the few educational succession handbooks available,

Gross (2006) stated, "There is no pre-service preparation that can provide even a gifted

educator with the experience that she or he will need. It is clear to me that new principals

need and deserve sustained, dependable guidance" (p. xi).

Mentoring has been shown to be an effective means to provide induction support

to principal leaders (National Association of Elementary and Secondary Principals,

2001). A mentor is an experienced individual who can bridge the knowledge gap in

regard to specific aspects of a school (Chapman, 2005). The National Association of

Elementary and Secondary Principals (2001) noted in their principal standards guidebook

that regardless of the amount of experience in the education field, newly positioned

principals can benefit from a mentoring relationship. Mentoring can be seen as a useful

cognitive learning experience as well as a way to gain organizational insight and

socialization (Daresh, 2004). Participants in a mentorship program report greater feelings

of success on the job. Further, school districts have found higher levels of productivity

along with positive job related attitudes (Daresh, 2001). Documented benefits from a

formal mentoring program are an increased sense of confidence, socialization to subtle

relationships within the organization, increased communication skills through voicing

best practices and increased feelings of belonging to the district (Daresh, 2004). Research

shows that the type of support for principals through mentoring, however, is uneven

within districts and across the United States (Gross 2006).

Principal mentorship programs continue to differ not only by district but by state

(Educational Alliance at Brown University, 2003). Dunavin (2004) studied the mentoring

practices of a large urban school district found in the southwestern part of the United

States. Of the 118 principals and assistant principals surveyed, 27% had experienced a

formal mentoring training as a means of introduction to the district. An additional 60%

received no formalized mentoring during induction. Thirty-three percent of the assistant

principals had an informal mentor during induction their first year (Gross, 2006). Daresh

(2004) reported that 32 states in the U.S. had endorsed either laws or policies that

required new principals in public education to receive mentoring support.

Although the focus on principal mentoring in the United States has been on the

benefits for new principals, mentoring has been shown to be effective in all career stages

in the business arena when the protégé's goals are taken into consideration (Kram, 1985).

Educational research has found mentor principals can benefit from the mentor/mentee

relationship through increased motivation, reflection and career advancement skills

(Daresh, 2004).

> Mentors who are attentive to the potential of those with whom they interact are
>
> able to capitalize on a new source of knowledge, insight and talent and they may
>
> be able to translate this into their own professional growth and advancement
>
> (Daresh, 2004, p. 505).

The benefits to school districts of providing a mentoring program include a culture of life-long learning, increased job performance motivation and productivity, development of evolving skills and higher levels of employee self-esteem (Daresh, 2004). Despite the overwhelming benefits to districts, however, mentoring programs have been shown to be detrimental in some situations. For example, school districts continually find it difficult to fund required mentoring programs. As a result, some districts attempt to hire principals who have prior experience and do not require the support. Another funding issue is a lack of training for mentors and protégés. When specific goals and roles are not set down by the organization, the relationship can become unproductive (Daresh, 2004).

Leadership support has been shown to be crucial to principal success. When asked to discuss the many types of support principals use to prepare them for leading a school, Malone (2001) states that principals will usually cite other leaders in the schools as their primary resource for support. Business has used the practice of mentorship to prepare the next successor for a long time (Rothwell, 2005). With the new found pressures of NCLB, mentoring has been found to be an important factor in education succession plans (Education Alliance at Brown University, 2003).

Peters' Succession Planning Model

Peters (2011) created a leadership succession model based on her study of urban principal turnover experiences and educational research in the area. In sharp contrast to previous research (Fauske & Ogawa, 1983; Kesner & Sebora, 1994; Nicholson, 1984), her model describes succession planning as a fluid and dynamic system that consist of three elements (forecasting, preplanning and sustaining). Forecasting is the process of training and developing future leaders in the district to ensure a pool of principal

candidates who can be recruited to fill vacant positions. Sustaining is the process of supporting principals as they enter their positions and throughout their careers. Preplanning includes the selection of a new principal and "a transition plan that includes both the new principal and the outgoing one" that includes the faculty and allows for clarification of the school's mission as well as organizational stabilization (p. 68). My study analyzed the usefulness of Peters' (2011) model and used the three elements to interpret the data.

Peters (2011) emphasized throughout her work that the model is not linear with clear cut elements. For example, professional development might be considered both an element of forecasting if it pertains to a future job requirement while at the same time being a sustaining element if the professional development helps the principal function in their current job position. Mentoring is yet another activity that could be considered in all three elements depending upon the stage of leadership the principal is experiencing at the time. In addition, forecasting can take place before or after the elements of sustaining and preplanning.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

This review of literature presented the evolving interest of succession planning in the education field brought to attention through economic pressure on schools to show student achievement through standardized testing. An examination of research from the business, nonprofit and public sector on succession planning revealed some similarities in the challenges facing the organizations as well as potential solutions. Though there is support for planning and training of a predecessor in both education and organizational management literature, there is sparse information on what a succession plan should

entail. Peters' (2011) research gives a hint to the fluid nature of a functional succession plan through the elements of forecasting, planning and sustaining. Zepeda, Bengtson and Parylo (2012) have further displayed that business research on succession planning can be applied to the educational arena. My study furthers this line of research by exploring principal perceptions of succession planning elements as described by Peters (2011). Chapter Three details the methodology used in the study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the succession experiences of principals in the public school arena at the elementary, middle and high school levels. A better understanding of principals' experiences of succession planning could lead to informed human resource and professional development decisions in public education. Chapter 3 delineates the focus of the study, the characteristics of qualitative research design, a description of participants chosen, procedures for data collection, the specific process used in analysis of the data and a summary of the research design with a focus on issues in trustworthiness.

Characteristics of Qualitative Study

A qualitative methods design was used in the study, allowing me to interview principals in a naturalistic setting. I also observed the interactions of the individuals in the chosen setting. In addition, the interviews took place in a location where the participants felt safe in sharing potentially confidential information and artifacts. Having familiarized myself with information from public mediums prior to interviewing the participants allowed me a greater understanding of the participants' worldviews. Under the constructionist viewpoint of qualitative research, I examined "the complexity of views

rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas" (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). Further, the use of case study procedures allowed for an "in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations" that is central in answering the questions posed in this case study (Patton, 2002, p. 230).

The study of succession planning is a relatively new area of interest in the field of education. For this reason, terminology and general practices may have been unknown to participants. Allowing the participants to answer open ended questions along with observations of participant environments and artifacts had the advantage of not using specific language to define or explain a phenomenon. Participants used their own language to relay experiences of succession events without a technical knowledge of the succession process. "The researcher keeps a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research" when using the qualitative method of study (Creswell, 2009, p. 175). Further, the method does not require the researcher to choose fixed variables to study, but allows the data to dictate the emphasis or themes (Creswell, 2009).

This descriptive case study approach explored the topic of leadership succession. Case study inquiry allowed me to examine organizational processes in detail as well as particular events from the viewpoint of several principals. Case studies have been acknowledged to allow for a "holistic description and explanation" (Merriam, 1998, p. 25) and are best suited for "situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context" (Merriam, 1998, p. 25). The case study strategy further allowed me to use a number of different data collection methods (Creswell, 2009). Different data resources help to "validate and cross-check findings" (Patton, 2002, p. 306) each having its

own unique limitations. The use of triangulation from multiple sources of data gave me a holistic perspective of succession planning in the districts chosen (Patton, 2002). Triangulation in this study included analysis of transcribed interviews, collection of various artifacts and documented observations from interview sites.

The cases studied were bounded by time and group (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Yin, 2009). A case study will "take the reader into the case situation, a person's life, a group's life or a program's life" (Patton, 1990, p. 387). I examined each principal as a case bounded by their unique position in a specific district in one of three education levels (elementary, middle or high school). The multiple case study method allowed me to analyze the data for "detailed description of themes within each case (within-case analysis), followed by thematic analysis across cases (cross-case analysis)" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 31). Using multiple cases for analysis (three participants from two districts; four in the third district), I compared and contrasted the participants' experiences of succession planning in regard to their natural environment. Conjectures were made from one case to another by building upon inductive reasoning through the commonality between cases in regard to succession planning. Patton (2009) stated that extrapolations can benefit research analysis when they are formed from rich descriptions with prudent research designs. The use of extrapolations for analysis often produces "relevant information carefully targeted to specific concerns about both the present and the future" (Patton, 2009, p. 584).

<div align="center">Participant Selection</div>

I implemented purposive sampling techniques in order to provide information rich cases suitable in qualitative methods (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2009). Data were collected from 10 principals in the Southern United States to allow for a shared education system.

Participants were selected from three urban school districts with a student population of over 7,000. Holding the district size constant helped ensure similar organizational challenges and environments. I made the assumption that school district organizational configuration influences the pattern of succession planning used in the district as well as principal responsibilities. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) emphasized that qualitative research should always focus on the environmental factors of the study because human behavior is a result of an individual interacting with the environment. For example, school districts with over 7,000 students are likely to have separate departments that deal with the succession planning process (curriculum planning, professional development and human resources).

Within each district selected, I interviewed a principal from each building level (elementary, middle, junior and high school) who met the criteria of being employed in a public school district as a principal for more than one year but not more than 6 years. I assumed that without a full year of experience, the principals would not be able to recognize what succession experiences had been of benefit to them. I restricted the years of experience at a particular school to under 6 years for participants based on research findings that show that reform implementation review is recommended after five years (White & Cooper, 2011). Participants were not selected based on gender, age or length of time in the educational field.

I anticipated building level differences due to the unique developmental curriculum demands each age group places on their school. Peters (2011) further used financial resources provided to a school as part of her definition of sustainability. Therefore, I felt being able to break out the different functional requirements for different school levels was important. For example, a 1992 study by Heck showed that secondary principals spend fewer hours on instructional tasks than do elementary principals.

Instrumentation

Qualitative research is characterized by the use of the researcher as the instrument to collect and analyze data (Merriam, 1998). I interviewed participants one time to obtain their perceptions of succession planning. The interviews ran from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes in length. Interview questions were designed to address the following research questions:

1. How do public school principals describe their succession planning experiences?

2. How do these described experiences relate to Peters' (2011) elements of succession planning (planning, sustaining and forecasting)?

3. What succession practices have the principals found of benefit in their daily tasks?

I used a standardized open-ended format for the interview questions. The standardized open-ended interview format required that each question be completely worded before the interview takes place and that all participants receive the same question (Patton, 2002). Open-ended questions are advantageous because they can be scrutinized by other individuals; variations in interviewing technique is minimalized; the interview is focused; and responses are "easy to find and compare" (Patton, 2002, p. 346). Stake (2010) stated that open ended questions are an effective method when the researcher wishes to explore the participant's story. I used probing questions with standardized probes. The purpose of the probes was to elicit elaboration on initial responses from the participants (Patton, 2002; Neuman, 2003).

Data Collection Procedures

After gaining approval of my research proposal, I applied to the Institutional Review Board of Oklahoma State University for approval to conduct this study. Upon the formal institutional approval for the research, I contacted the superintendents of the selected school districts to seek support and consent to interview principals within their district (Appendix E). Once I obtained the superintendent's approval, I emailed the building level principals to set up an interview time (Appendix C). When scheduling the time for the interview, I made arrangements to send the participant a copy of the informed consent agreement with a brief introduction of the study as well as a copy of the questions to be used during the interview (Appendices A and D). Care was given to not disrupt the participant's daily schedule. To further enhance the subjects' comfort level, all interviews were held at the school with the interviewee determining the place and time of the data collection.

Prior to the scheduled interview, participants were asked to sign the informed consent letter allowing me to use their information and the artifacts collected (Appendix A). The consent form gave a brief description of the study and assurance of confidentiality. After signing the consent form, I asked participants to choose a pseudonym to identify them in the study to further ensure confidentiality and anonymity (Appendix B). Two of the female participants selected names that many people would consider male names (Denver Jackson and Danny Weaver). I assigned pseudonyms to the schools and their districts to further protect participants from being identified. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions in regard to the study or confidentiality measures.

A numerical code allowed me to link triangulated data together without my direct knowledge of the person involved. The codes list, consent forms and data were locked in

separate file cabinets within my residence. I secured all data retrieved from the interviews, observations and artifacts at all times and in my possession.

Reliability in qualitative research is achieved through the researcher's interview methods being similar for each instance that data is collected and recorded (Creswell, 2009). Documentation of the research process and multiple steps are seen as an appropriate means to ensure that case study data is reliable (Yin, 2009). I maintained a research journal noting my specific actions and observations from the time I approached the potential participants until the conclusion of the study for the purpose of examining reliability. Creswell (2009) stated that the use of different types of data from one participant adds validity to the research by building "a coherent justification for themes" (p. 191). The method of using more than one form of data collection is termed triangulation. I used observations, public/private artifact collection, note taking and journaling to triangulate my data. Prior to each interview, I sought out public artifacts through the use of an internet search engine and examined school website information in the areas of succession planning (planning, sustaining and forecasting) in regard to the specific school and participant. When artifacts were offered by participants or found on the internet, I took notes on the information and printed specific pages of interest. I further took note of observations of the environment the participants worked in as well as mannerisms during the interview. All documents retrieved from the interview were coded numerically to allow for data analysis. I took notes on each document immediately after the interview and then later on during analysis as needed.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews that were electronically recorded. The use of an electronic recorder has been shown to allow researchers to focus on field notes

rather than attempt verbatim hand written transcription (Patton, 2002). I took field notes on

all observations during the interview. Downloading the digitally recorded interview data,

allowed me to vary the playback speed and thus, increase transcription accuracy. I gathered

artifacts prior to the interview from sources available to the general public as well as from

participant at the time of the interview. The artifacts of interest to me included student

academic performance, professional development offerings, school planning documents and

district documentation of succession events.

Patton (2009) iterated that the immediacy of transcription and analysis of interviews

and observations "is critical to the rigor and validity of qualitative inquiry" (p. 383). After

each interview, I took care to transcribe the data in a timely manner that allowed me a clear

recall of the field notes and nuances of the interview. I made additional notations in regard to

speculated information in my journal. Participants were contacted in a timely manner when I

needed any additional clarification in reviewing the transcription of the interview. If the

response of the participant was unclear, I did not assume or guess what a participant meant

during an interview. Doing so would have reduced the validity of the study and created

ethical issues. Requests for clarification of the interview data were handled through email.

Participants were asked to review their transcribed interview for clarity and accuracy. This

process of member checking helped determine the quality of qualitative analysis by having

the participants decide whether or not I transcribed their intended answers correctly

(Creswell, 2009). I remained in contact with all the participants through email exchanges.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

The task of data analysis is an ongoing process that involves making sense out of the

data at deeper and deeper levels. I used Creswell's (2009) systematic procedures to code the

data. The first step in preparing the data for analysis was transcribing the interviews, typing up all field notes, arranging journal entries and scanning artifacts. I read all case data initially for first impressions and sense making. Then, I made notations in the margins of any concerns I had about the data collection method, questions remaining or initial themes. Next, I chunked my data into pieces according to natural topic changes. I used the pre-code technique of highlighting any "rich participant quotes or passages" that are of initial interest (Saldana, 2013, p. 19). The initial coding process included analyzing one document at a time for meaning. I noted my thoughts about the text and its content on the chunked piece of data in the margin. Topics were derived from the notes on these chunked pieces of data. The topics were then categorized as "major topics, unique topics and left overs" (Creswell, 2009, p. 186). Going back to my data, I abbreviated the topics into codes written next to each chunk of data. After further analysis of my codes, I categorized my topics with descriptive words.

Next, I coded the chunked data according to Peters (2011) aspects of succession planning (forecasting, planning and sustaining). I examined Peters (2011) elements to determine if the theory adequately described the process or if additional subcategories were required to explain the principals' experiences. I also examined the data for relationships between forecasting, planning and sustaining. The analysis was carried out as a simultaneous, on-going process throughout the collection of data and afterwards. I read through field notes, analyzed interview transcription notes and reviewed artifacts throughout the collection process using the above cited steps to code my data.

I analyzed all the data using a three step process. First, I sorted through the data using a coding system that allows for relationships to emerge freely from the data. This was done

through a process of creating hard copy note cards of the transcribed interviews. Next, through an analysis of the theoretical basis of the data I looked for commonality among the coded items and theoretical orientation. Through this process, I examined the transcribed data for commonalities and differences in word usage as well as conceptual themes. The last step sought to cross code relationships between the items. I coded individual cases separately using the above process. After I coded all cases, participant data from within the same district were analyzed for themes as a group (3 or 4 participants for each district) as well as across districts by building level. In the last step of the analysis, I looked at the relationship between all data collected (total of 10 case studies combined).

<div align="center">Ethical Considerations</div>

In order to adhere to strict ethical standards, I obtained Institutional Review Board approval to conduct the study (Appendix F). Creswell (2009) stated both the participant and the environment where research has been conducted should be respected. Any potential harm to a participant must be evaluated by an institutional review board in order to ensure that participants are not at physical, psychological, social, economic or legal risk (Creswell, 2009). I answered any participant's questions to their satisfaction regarding the Informed Consent Form or about the study itself. Further, I explained the purpose of the study to the principals as well as how they were selected as participants. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential. The participants chose a name from a list of generic pseudonyms. I assigned pseudonyms to schools and districts to further ensure the anonymity of the participants. In addition, I secured all research materials to reduce the risk of a breach in confidentiality.

It is important that participants benefit from the study as well as the community of researchers and me (Creswell, 2009). Benefits from participation in the study included: knowledge gained from reflecting on past experiences, an opportunity to contribute their experiences to a larger body of knowledge in the field of education and insight into research methods used in the study.

<div align="center">Trustworthiness</div>

Issues of trustworthiness addresses whether or not the qualitative study reflects the reality of the participants as well as whether the study's findings are reproducible in a similar setting in a similar time frame (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The constructivist qualitative inquiry requires a different set of terms to describe the different standards from that of quantitative analysis (Patton, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1986) used the term "credibility" in comparison to the quantitative terms of internal validity, "transferability" in comparison to external validity, "dependability" in comparison to reliability and "conformability" in comparison to objectivity to discuss the rigor in qualitative studies (p. 76-77).

Credibility

Credibility is the criterion of whether or not a study's "findings are accurate and credible from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants and the reader" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 125). Merriam (1998) described internal validity in qualitative research as being composed of triangulation, member checking, length of observations, peer examination, participation of others and researcher biases. Credibility is a key factor in the study's research design (Creswell, 2009). Triangulation or the use of multiple sources of data

is considered to provide research credibility by allowing the researcher to check data from one source against that of another for similarities and differences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009). Patton (2002) stated triangulation is a means of "comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means within qualitative methods" (p.559). Triangulation allows the researcher to make multiple comparisons to check whether observations, interviews, participants' perspectives and documents are in agreement (Patton, 2002). I triangulated 10 participant interviews, journal entries noting the details of the study, observations made during the interview as well as the analysis of artifacts obtained over the internet and from the participants.

The length of time that the researcher is involved in the study is another aspect of credibility. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) stated, "Prolonged involvement in the field facilitates a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study, conveying detail about the site and the participants . . ." (p. 113). The experience the researcher brings to the study and the time spent during the study both affects research credibility (Yin, 2009). In this study, I examined three districts' websites for artifacts pertaining to succession planning and printed screen shots and documents when applicable. The artifacts furthered my overall knowledge of the districts as well as provided additional data for analysis. I interviewed 10 participants for approximately an hour each. If the need for further information arose, I requested additional time from the participants for clarification of the interviews or artifact information. In addition, I have experience in the Southern and Central United States public school setting that allowed me to relate my experiences to data.

In order to ensure that my personal biases were not reflected in the data transcription, I sent each transcribed interview to the participant interviewed for review. This process has been defined by researchers as "member checking" and is seen as a means to create credibility (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2009).

Transferability

Unlike quantitative methodology, the goal of qualitative research is not to generalize study findings to a larger population by using a representative sample. Qualitative research provides rich description to allow the reader to decide "whether similar processes will be at work in their own settings and communities by understanding in depth how they occur at the research site" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 113). Transferability as a function of trustworthiness can be assessed by the details given from the study and the rich description (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). Stake (2010) stated researchers "pay attention to the diversity we have to work with. We describe that diversity for readers, but we also speak specifically of the likelihood that the findings would be different for other situations" (pp. 197-198). During the data transcription process, I inserted concise information from observations of the setting, participant's mannerisms and vocal inflection taken from transcribed field notes. I struck specific identifying information from the transcripts that could lead to participants being identified in order to protect the participant and exhibit researcher integrity. However, I included participant background information to enhance trustworthiness. Merriam (1998) stated that transferability can be enhanced through the use of multiple case studies with interview questions that have been predetermined. Each of the interview participants interviewed were considered a case study. Interview questions were standardized and are detailed in Appendix D.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the ability of the researcher to give specific information in regard to how the data was collected and the consistency used in coding the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). I kept a journal of my research experience including details of how each step of the research progressed and what decisions guided my data collection.

I took great effort to transcribe recorded, observed and dictated data in an accurate and timely fashion. In an attempt to foresee and address ethical issues that could be present or develop through the course of the study, I developed a trustworthiness chart as shown below (Table 1).

Table 1: Trustworthiness of Data Collection

Criteria/technique	Example of activities	Data presentation
Engagement	Avenues of communication included email correspondence, interviews and telephone conversations. Access to district websites and associated materials.	Methodology: sampling procedures Data presentation: case studies
Observation	I observed participants during interviews as well as preparing for the interviews and disengaging from the interview.	Observation: sampling procedures Data presentation: case studies
Interview technique	I followed qualitative interview protocols. I have met all university coursework, assessment and accountability standards that establish me as an authority as a researcher.	Observation: sampling procedures Data presentation: case studies
Triangulation	I used multiple data sources. These sources included interviews, observations, reflections and public/private documents.	Methodology: sampling procedures and data analysis
Member checking	I asked the participants to review their transcribed interviews for accuracy and provide additional information. I cross checked transcripts with handwritten notes as well as reviewed transcribed interviews for errors with the tape.	Methodology: sampling procedures and data analysis
Purposive sampling	I chose schools located in the same area with student populations over 7,000 that were urban to minimize other variables that may affect the districts' organizational	Methodology: sampling procedures

	functioning.	
Thick description	I described the participants, the school and the district they led in according to my field notes and transcriptions.	Data presentation: case studies
Access to an audit trail	I kept documents that could be reviewed including: transcripts of interviews, observation notes and various artifacts (webpages, shared documents, news articles and personal communications).	Use of a field journal to create an audit trail
Reflexivity	I used self-reflection to clarify and review themes. I reflected on my biases during the process and as I create my research conclusions.	Use of a journal to create an audit trail; observations; self-checking for biases

Limitations

Qualitative research by its nature does not make generalization to other groups outside the study. Rather, qualitative analysis serves to explore through the case study method indirect data through the experiences of those studied. From the constructionist perspective, reality occurs through a process of sense making for the researcher as well as for the participant (Creswell, 2009). To offset these limitations, I used the procedure of triangulation to substantiate data that is otherwise an individual's interpretation of reality (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002).

My presence in the interviews could have biased my data collection. Participants behaving differently than usual due to being studied or participants responding in a manner that is expected by the researcher could have created a bias in the collected data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Further, individual differences among participants' willingness to share information and their ability to convey information varies from individual to individual being interviewed (Creswell, 2009). Recognizing these limitations, I used probing questions to help

elicit rich responses from my participants. In order to help offset the participant's bias of being studied, I allowed the participant to choose the time and place to be interviewed. I presumed that if the participants were at ease they were less likely to alter their responses to the interview questions. I further reduced the likelihood that participants would answer the questions in a manner they think I want them to by creating unbiased interview questions. All the participants received the same questions and I read all of the questions to them.

Another limiting factor in this study is that artifact reliability cannot be assured (Creswell, 2009). Artifacts that are created by individuals and the district could hold misinformation or misrepresented information. Participant artifacts can be difficult to validate. When appropriate, I asked participants to verify the authenticity of a document or specific information. I also used the interview data to collaborate documents (Patton, 2002). The results of this study should reflect the experience of 10 principals from 3 southern schools located within an hour of each other. The schools ranged between 7,000 and 10,000 in pupil attendance.

I took care to ensure that I treated the participants in an ethical manner with due respect that reflected positively on the nature of the research. Further, I documented the data collection methods while being vigilant in transcribing data in a timely fashion that lent itself to triangulation. I safeguarded all information collected to guarantee confidentiality of all individuals and schools involved in the study. By keeping a continuous research journal and personal analysis of potential biases, I monitored trustworthiness issues. In addition, participants reviewed the transcribed information for accuracy.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The multiple case study reported here explored succession planning as experienced by principals. The types and effectiveness of leadership resources principals used in performing their job responsibilities were a focus. The study highlights the impact specific leadership resources have on the principal's functioning and the school's success. In an era of high accountability, resources and support for principals could be a key factor in student achievement. The business community has acknowledged the need for succession planning to ensure continuous company profits into the future (Rothwell, 2005; Vicere & Fulmer, 1996). Education has begun looking at the possible implications succession planning has on student achievement and organizational functioning (Bush, 2011; Parylo, Zepeda & Bengtson, 2012). The findings of this study may assist district administration plan for employment transitions, hiring practices and support resources for building principals.

This chapter reports the succession experiences of principals as they became acculturated to their positions as school principals. Emphasis is placed on what leadership resources or practices they found beneficial. Further, the interviewed principals' remarks are analyzed through the lens of Peters' (2011) elements of succession planning as a tool to understand the fluid process and impact of succession events.

Interview participants were selected from three neighboring school districts with a student population of over 7,000 in a southern state. Within the Cane Valley and Fairview districts I interviewed one principal from each of the three building levels (elementary, middle, high school); in Belmount District, I interviewed four principals from four building levels (elementary, junior high, middle and high school). All participants were subject to the same credential and accountability standards. The interview protocol (Appendix C) consisted of six open ended demographic questions and 15 open ended study focused questions. Throughout the interview, I asked probing questions as needed.

Interview Questions and Responses

The participant interview data are grouped by the experiences principals had coming into the principalship, experiences they had of leading the school in change and the supports they found of benefit in their work as well as by case for analysis. Interview questions 1 through 6 focused on the process of becoming a principal from their initial interview to becoming aware of the unique facets of the principalship; questions 7 through 10 examined the principals' experience in leading the school; questions 11 through 13 address what resources the principals used in leading the school and what resources they would have liked to have had. The final questions, 14 and 15 addressed

their future career plans. Participants often skipped from one topic to the other; therefore, specific questions did not always elicit answers pertaining to that specific question. As a result, the interview responses reported here are not always in the order they were answered.

The Principals' Demographics

Principals interviewed ranged in approximate ages of 38 to 68 years old based on either an estimate from the years taught or participants' disclosure. One principal directly disclosed his age while others discussed when they would be retiring. The principals' years of experience in their current positions ranged from 1 to 6 years.

Table 2 - Years of Principal Experiences

Principal	District	School	Years Teaching	Years Assistant Principal	Years Previous Principal	Years as Principal
Denver Jackson	Cane Valley	Rosewood Elementary	14	6	3	3
Carol Smith	Cane Valley	Holmes Middle School	6	4	2	6
Matt Turner	Cane Valley	Cane Valley High School	11	2	6	1
Danny Weaver	Belmount	Butcher Elementary	12	2	4	2
Ed Freeman	Belmount	King Junior High	8	3	3	2

Todd Lawson	Belmount	Olson Middle School	5	5	5	2
Carl Roberts	Belmount	Belmount High School	5	4	4	1
Sherry Taylor	Fairview	Alread Elementary	10	3	8	2
Don Gordon	Fairview	Harrison Middle School	14	3	8	1
John Johnson	Fairview	Fairview High School	4	0	4	4

All participants but one had previous experience as an assistant principal ranging from 2 to 6 years. Further, all of the principals interviewed had five or more years' experience in the classroom with the maximum classroom experience being 14 years for Denver Jackson. Three of the principals interviewed in the study had previous experience as a building principal. John Johnson of Fairview High School reported having 8 years' previous experience and Matt Turner of Cane Valley High School reported 10 years' previous experience as a principal. Ed Freeman had previously led as a principal in two small schools before accepting a position in Belmount. The participants' predecessors lead their buildings for 2 to 8 year stints. All of the participants were from the region except one who had relocated due to her husband's changing jobs (Danny Weaver). Four of the 10 principals interviewed were women (Denver Jackson, Danny Weaver, Carol Smith, Sherry Taylor). Data collection from district websites and confirmed by participants included a count of the number of assistant principals each principal had

employed at their school. The 6 male principals and 4 female principals in the study
employed 20 assistant principals, 5 females and 15 males. Of the 4 female principals, 3
worked with male assistant principals. Table 3 shows the gender of principals and their
assistant principals with totals. Seven out of 20 assistant principals were female. Male
assistant principals outnumber the females 3 to 1. Of particular interest, high school
principals had 4 female assistant principals; middle school principals had 2 female
assistant principals at the same school under a male principal, and the elementary had 1
female assistant principal.

Table 3 – Principal and Assistant Principal Gender Comparisons

Principal		Assistant Principal	
Name	Gender	Males	Females
Denver Jackson	Female	2	0
Carol Smith	Female	1	0
Matt Turner	Male	1	1
Danny Weaver	Female	1	0
Ed Freeman	Male	0	2
Todd Lawson	Male	1	0
Carl Roberts	Male	3	2
Sherry Taylor	Female	0	1
Don Gordon	Male	1	0
John Johnson	Male	4	1

The following case reports are organized according to the district where principals were employed (Cane Valley, Belmount and Fairview) and by the building level they led (elementary, middle, high school).

The Three Districts Studied

I conducted 10 interviews in principals' offices in three different districts. Denver Jackson, Carol Smith and Matt Turner were employed by the Cane Valley district with a total student population of 15,027. The district consists of 15 elementary schools, 4 middle schools and 3 high schools. The median income for Cane Valley was $51,535. Denver Jackson had the only school which had an "achieving" status under NCLB. Both Denver Jackson's school and Carol Smith's school were honored by the state for being in the top 20% of the state in academic performance as measured by benchmark exams. Cane Valley spans 256 square miles.

Danny Weaver, Ed Freeman, Todd Lawson and Carl Roberts were from the Belmount District with a total student population of 15,492 with 18 schools. Belmount has 1 high school, 4 middle schools, 3 junior high schools and 9 elementary schools. The median income for Belmount was $61,680. Belmount consists of 31.5 square miles. All of the Belmount schools studied were considered schools in need of improvement according to NCLB guidelines. Danny Weaver and Ed Freeman, however, led schools who were acknowledged as being in the top 10% of the state in academic performance.

Sherry Taylor, Don Gordon and John Johnson were from Fairview district with a total student population of 9,421. Fairview has 1 high school, 4 middle schools and 8 elementary schools. The median income for Fairview was $36,447. Fairview school

district covers 113 square miles. The three schools studied did not meet NCLB guidelines for achievement, but Don Gordon's school was honored by the state for student achievement.

Table 4 summarizes the socioeconomic status of the school according to the free and reduced rates, the NCLB state department status, whether the school was in the top 20% in academic performance, and the amount of additional funds the school received. The financial award formula allotted $100 per student for schools making the top 10% of the achievement list and $50 per student for schools making the top 20% of the achievement list. All of the schools who were honored on the 2014 list were also honored in 2013.

Table 4 – Socioeconomic Status and Achievement Status for 2014 -2015

Case Studied	Percent Free or Reduced Lunches	State Department Status	Honored by State Amount Received
1. Denver Jackson	55	Achieving	Yes – 10% $40,613.45
2. Carol Smith	64	In Need of Improvement	Yes – 20% $39,611.15
3. Matt Turner	68	In Need of Improvement	No -
4. Danny Weaver	13	In Need of Improvement	Yes – 10% 50,312.57
5. Ed Freeman	32	In Need of Improvement	Yes – 10% 70,761.80
6. Todd Lawson	29	In Need of Improvement	No -
7. Carl Roberts	28	In Need of Improvement	No -
8. Sherry Taylor	80	In Need of Improvement	No -
9. Don Gordon	57	In Need of Improvement	Yes – 20% 25,942.13
10. John Johnson	30	In Need of Improvement	No -

Cane Valley District - Denver Jackson

Rosewood Elementary has one male assistant principal with a student population of 460 students with 55% receiving free or reduced lunch. Rosewood is the only achieving school out of the 10 visited for this study. Rosewood Elementary principal, Denver Jackson had agreed to meet me at her office. The school sat tucked off of a main street in a residential neighborhood; the front doors were easily identifiable. Awnings protected the sidewalks that led to the well maintained building. Entering the triangular shaped front office, the secretary asked me to have a seat and announced my arrival discreetly.

The office walls consisted of the pastel green cement blocks decorated with a painting and a bulletin board. A visitor sign-in sheet sat on the ledge alongside name tags. No staff appeared concerned about my presence there nor did anyone directly ask who I was other than the secretary. Teachers zoomed cheerfully into the workroom and briefly discussed children. When they noticed I was there, they lowered their voices. I waited as the assistant principal and the principal discussed a child who did not have a permission slip to go on an outing. The principal agreed to make a special attempt to reach these parents who were not English speakers.   Upon finishing her conversation with her assistant principal, Denver Jackson directed her attention to me. Greeting me with a nervous smile, she motioned for me to come into her office. She was dressed in a pair of blue jeans and a sheer pastel shirt with a blue thermal undershirt. Her blonde hair hung just past her shoulders. Her desk had a small number of items on the top including an

iPad on the far side. The largest wall of her office held a book shelf which she referred to several times during her interview by pointing to a referenced book's location. The office had an old school formal ambiance with her sitting behind a desk and visitors sitting on the opposite side.

Denver sat back in her chair as she contemplated how she would transition the building when she eventually left her position. "I would make myself available as a consultant to help. But also, I would step aside and let someone come in and take over. Maybe share my experiences that I had when I came in," she stated with a somber expression. She relayed that if her replacement was "foreign to what is going on at Rosewood," she would share the school's history with them. "Just knowing that background, I think may help. It was smooth for me, but I had been in the building."

Denver has 22 years' experience in education in the Cane Valley district after having taken a two year "hiatus" to another state. On returning to Cane Valley, she taught for five years. She reported coming into the principal's position at Rosewood Elementary in Cane Valley through a series of "taps," often referred to in the interviews as being encouraged. "The assistant superintendent for elementary called me and encouraged me to apply for the assistant principal job at Rosewood. Then when the principal retired, I stepped into that role." Denver did not know if she was ready for the principal's position due to her family responsibilities. The encouragement of the school's faculty helped her decide to apply for the position, Denver stated as she placed her hands neatly clamped together on top of her desk,

I have a good relationship with them. I guess they didn't want someone else

coming in and changing things so they thought that it was the lesser of two evils

to encourage me. But, you know, it was just the next most natural step.

She felt she would not have applied for the assistant principal position if she had not been

encouraged to do so. In regard to applying for the principalship at Rosewood Elementary,

she lifted her eyebrows and explained,

I think it was kind of expected and I kind of knew that. I feel the area assistant

superintendent though would have supported me if I didn't want to apply. I still

went through the same process. There was, you know, obviously several that had

applied.

The interview process for the principalship consisted of two interviews. One interview

was with the assistant superintendent and the second was with the superintendent. Denver

did not know if additional applicants were interviewed or not. "She interviewed everyone

and then called a couple back for final interviews. I assume that--unless it was just me."

Denver stated that the interviews were "thought provoking" but she was not intimidated.

"I was comfortable because I had worked with the superintendent and the assistant

superintendent." She knew the assistant superintendent from having interned with her

during graduate school to obtain her masters' degree. She was not worried that she would

not receive the position because "I thought that within the district I was the best fit. But, I

did not know obviously who had applied outside the district."

Unique work assignments from her previous principal/mentor facilitated Denver's

move to the principalship. She met her mentor prior to applying for the assistant

principal's position at Baker. "I did some professional development for her," she explained. "That is how I met her and then once I was encouraged to apply for the assistant principal job here. . . After that, we were close. I just soaked up all I could from her."

Denver felt that her initial mentor benefitted her by giving her the "total picture." Of key importance, Denver cited her mentor as emphasizing the need to network and develop building management skills. She related,

> I did not always appreciate the networking part. . . . I think the other was just how you manage the building. My strength is probably instructional leadership. My grow area was probably the management piece. Though I am a detail person, I just want to help the teachers teach and help the students learn. So, I had to learn that management piece and she was good to help show me how to balance that.

Since she became the principal of Rosewood Elementary, one of Denver's mentors retired, but she continues to keep in touch with her several times a month for support and general information.

In addition to mentorship support, Denver found the professional development opportunities in her district to be beneficial to prepare her for the principalship. Although a lot of the training focused on the assistant principal responsibilities, she had opportunities to learn about specific principalship issues as well. "Some of our professional development training is on the financial training and things that the assistant principals typically don't do. But, there is that kind of build from within. And so, I received information there." Not unlike a number of the other participants in the study,

Denver expressed the challenge of having to complete a school budget and considered

that the weakest part of her preparatory training. She had worked on the school's budget

as an assistant principal with her principal/mentor. Denver perceives the district as being

deliberate in providing professional development that meets the specific demands of

administrators. She stated,

> I think that even with some of the recent openings, the district has looked at those
>
> that are applying and those that aren't and asking themselves what would make
>
> them better leaders. . . . I know they are just trying to build capacity from within.

Another beneficial resource for Denver was the state required principal's

induction training facilitated by the state education department and the state's school

administration professional group. Every first year administrator was required to attend.

A mentor was assigned to each new administrator for support for the year. Denver's

assigned mentor had been her principal, who was very active in the professional

organization that supported the initiative. Denver recalled that sometimes she did not

want to make time to attend the regular cohort meetings and her mentor would tell her,

"You need to go because that is where you are going to learn and grow, or you are going

to get to share struggles and learn new ways to address things." She expressed frustration

at having to give up time from the school building, but felt it benefitted her immensely.

Having been an assistant principal at Rosewood Elementary for five years prior to

accepting the responsibilities of being a principal were of great benefit in becoming

familiar with the faculty. Denver felt that if one were an administrator new to the building

as a principal, the district would make sure the newcomer attended a faculty meeting and

a professional development session "with the teachers to try and get to know them before you just hit the ground running." Following this unofficial policy, Denver followed suit when she hired her assistant principal. "I had planned it so he could see personalities and conversation and not just a sit and get kind of professional development."

When asked if she experienced any difficulties in transitioning from the role of being an assistant principal to a principal, she conveyed that although she had been comfortable completing teacher evaluations as an assistant principal, she had never taken any disciplinary action against a teacher.

> I didn't have to ever do any of the disciplinary type things. We just had a couple of incidents where there needed to be further action so writing a letter to file and having those types of conversations was probably the most difficult.

As a newly appointed leader to the school, Denver reworked the school's mission statement. She wanted to "start the year by making sure what we were all going to hold ourselves accountable to." Further, she sought out stakeholder input to address the new vision for the school through existing school committees like the Partners in Education, "just to make sure everyone was onboard and committed to this." Rosewood Elementary was listed by the state's department of education as needing academic improvement according to their agreement under NCLB. If a school continues to be designated in need of improvement over a three year period of time, the state education department begins the sanction process that can lead into a required change in school's administration after five years (No Child Left Behind, 2003). "So, choosing our goals was not difficult. We knew that we had some improvement and then the next year we were an exemplary

school. That was a nice change." Denver expressed her relief that her first year had been academically successful because "we made some great improvement. We had some teachers retire and some new ones come in. We just made a few changes that worked, thank goodness."

Denver's experience as an instructional leader helped her establish her efforts on improving the academic performance at Rosewood combined with hiring an assistant principal who complemented her skills. She shared,

Hiring the right person was huge because he (assistant principal) brought another level coming right out of the classroom. He had some varied experience in high school and in elementary, in special ed. and other areas. His real focus was he wanted to be a literacy facilitator.

She further believes her instructional leadership skills helped her bond with the faculty during her first year. Denver stated,

I think that they respected me because I got in there with them. I will go to a professional development and I will sit with them and say, "Can I come in and watch or help or team teach." Plus, it just keeps me apprised of what is needed. It is just so different than 10 years ago when I was in the classroom.

Denver relies on several different sources for professional support to meet the leadership needs of Rosewood Elementary. Having three years' principalship experience, she looks forward to attending the state's administrator's conference in late summer. She stated,

The new things coming through the system are usually discussed there. If there is

a focus I need for leadership, I usually can turn to something that I learned there.

Then we write professional growth plans and that is usually where we determine

our focus or I do for the year.

The resources she used and the school's goals have changed from year to year depending

on the school's focus and their individual growth plans. Some years, everyone's growth

plan looked a lot alike. This year, everyone's growth plans were pretty different even

though the school's focus was on implementing a new strategy from a book she and her

assistant principal have been reading. Her growth plan was centered on communicating to

stakeholders the schools' achievements. The assistant principal's growth plan goal was to

work more with teachers through professional learning communities. Denver believes the

changes in leadership resources she uses are more geared to instructional leadership now

than when she entered the field. "I've just seen more emphasis on quality professional

development and more of a focus on instructional leadership and what is going on in the

classroom more than business management."

When addressing a specific leadership dilemma in the school, Denver's primary

resources are her peers and the people she works with in the district. She could not think

of a resource she did not have that would have benefited her when she began the

principalship. She stated, "You know, sometimes, you don't know what you don't know.

And so, I don't know what else would have been out there for me to access or for me to

tap into."

Last year the elementary principals in the Cane Valley district started a professional learning community (PLC) as a resource to address those issues that are specific to the elementary schools on a monthly basis. Denver enjoys the meetings; she stated,

> The meetings have been really good because we really hone in. It is not our assistant superintendent's agenda though she always asks us what we want on the agenda. By the time we have had a meeting with district personnel and then we have just an elementary focus all in one day, you have run out of time.

She contended that one of the advantages of working in a large district was that she has a "great network" that she can access for support.

A future resource that Denver hoped to take advantage of was a three year program put on by the state and the local university for principals, Master Principal Academy. She has been reluctant to commit to the program due to job responsibilities and family demands. "Hopefully next year, I will go and start the Principal's Academy. I have just kind of put it off because there have been things here and I kind of have a lot of the knowledge from when I went as an assistant principal."

When asked about her future plans, Denver does not foresee leaving the district for employment. She accepts that it will be up to the district's discretion how long she works past being eligible for retirement but wants to continue working.

> I have eight years, no seven years until retirement. But, I don't think I will retire when I am eligible. I will support whatever process the district wants to put in place to make it a smooth transition. It is hard to anticipate because you don't

know what is going to happen. I think they'll be changing district leadership before I leave. And, I do think there will be some retirements. It is so hard to think about what would happen, but I will do my best to make it a smooth transition for children, for parents, for teachers.

Reflecting on her career at Rosewood, Denver lamented, "There is so much to help support and strengthen our abilities as leaders. The problem is always time." The time requirements of the principalship are less demanding now that she is in her fourth year. She stated, "I try to get out of here to spend time with my family, but I still take it home." Another difficulty in using support resources was she found herself too "caught up in trying to help grow our school and promote student achievement that I don't always focus on my growth."

Cane Valley – Carol Smith

Holmes Middle School student enrollment was 768 students with 64% of their students receiving free or reduced lunches 2014-2015. Carol Smith has two male assistant principals. The school was currently considered to be in need of improvement by the department of education as well as being in the top 20% of state in academic performance. Older two bedrooms homes and an apartment complex surrounded Holmes Middle. The two toned brick building had a flat roof and covered sidewalks leading to the school for student dismissal. The front office of the school was open glass to a central hallway which appeared to function as a cafeteria. Student projects hung from the tiled walls, as did a banner declaring the school's mission. The office clerk picked up a phone

and let Carol Smith know that I had arrived. As I sat in a chair in a red vinyl visitor's chair, various students and visitors moved in and out of the office.

Within five minutes, Carol Smith emerged from her office and greeted me with a gracious smile and a handshake. She led me to her office where we sat at a medium sized utilitarian table across from her small older desk. To the far side of the room a wall was lined with bookshelves filled to the ceiling with three ring binders and books. The walls were bare of decorative or functional items alike. Carol wore a black suit. Her blonde hair was cut at shoulder length. I estimated her age at 48 years old due to her having mentioned retirement combined with her years of experience in education after having a short career in business. Carol spoke at an easy pace and lacked the region's characteristic southern accent. She had reviewed the questions and the consent form thoroughly prior to interview. As she began answering the questions, it became clear that either she did not understand the intent of the first few demographic questions or she did not wish to come out and answer them if she did not have to. After several probing questions, she explained the process involved in becoming employed as the principal at Holmes Middle School. Although her mannerisms did not show that she was nervous, as the interview progressed, she gave more elaborate answers with richer descriptions.

Having initially earned a bachelor's degree in business, Carol began her career in education as a vocational business teacher within the district. She taught business education for six years at the junior high level before accepting an assistant principal position at a neighboring junior high in the district. After four years as a junior high assistant principal, she applied for the assistant principal's position at Holmes Middle School. Having heard that the district would be reconfiguring their building grades and

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eliminating junior high schools, she applied for the position as a career move. She functioned as an assistant principal at Holmes Middle School for a couple of weeks prior to her principal moving up to a district level administrative position. Her predecessor had been at Holmes for two years prior to his promotion.

Carol began the interview reflecting upon her first mentor, Dr. Jones.

It is a lonely position. Having that person who I know that I can trust and whatever I say he's not going to hold it against me in a court of law is important. It is just nice to have both sides of it. If I just need to blast or if I really need to know if I am out of balance here or if I am not. Is there something that I'm missing? A third party who has been there, someone has been in your shoes, I have found very helpful.

She met Dr. Jones when she was a teacher and he was a middle school principal in the district. Later when she attended the state's Master Principal Academy, Dr. Jones was assigned as her mentor for the program. She notes that having a mentor has benefitted her through being a "sounding board" and "balance keeping."

Carol also attended the state required leadership training where she was assigned a mentor for a year as a new assistant principal. When discussing her assigned mentor, she said,

It was a joke. Everybody had a mentor. Mine was my principal and he is a great man, but during that half day, whatever it was, was of no benefit to me. None. What I learned from him was because he was a good person and he knew I had hopes of being a principal someday.

She further acknowledged that the mentor relationship helped him because he did not mind giving her assignments of things that were difficult for him to do or he did not like doing. "Although I think there was great intent behind the program, it didn't go to scale [The program did not have the weight or support needed to be successful.]," she said, tightening her jaw.

Later in the interview, Carol shared that she considered her past principals as mentors and the principal she worked under at the junior high school helped her learn the responsibilities of the principalship. "As far as being a principal in general, Mr. Brown, the man I worked for, did a beautiful job prepping me and letting me take on responsibility there. We had and still have a very good professional relationship." Carol smiled when she recalled that sometimes she wanted to take on the tasks assigned her and sometimes she did not, but all of the assignments helped prepare her for administrative responsibilities. One of her mentors she had as a teacher has since retired; however, she still keeps in touch with him.

No one encouraged her to apply for the position of assistant principal with Holmes Middle School. In fact, her current principal did not want her to leave. She revealed, the job became available during the summer; therefore, she did not even have an opportunity to discuss the matter with any teachers in the building. Carol shifted in her chair as she recounted how she was interviewed for the position. "They had a panel of teachers or people from the building here that I interviewed with them first and then, I guess just conversations with the admin (administration) offices." She did not find the interviews intimidating because she knew four of the administrators who interviewed her. "If I were going to a district where I didn't know anyone, I think that would be very

different." When asked if she worried that she would not receive the position, she vehemently replied,

> Sure. I was going to be here either way because I was an assistant at the time. It was nerve wracking not knowing who your boss was going to be because I came here thinking it was going to be Bill and then when that's changed and you no longer know who that's going to be, there's a little bit of nervousness there.

Once she had been hired for the position, she had the opportunity to spend about two weeks with the outgoing principal and a district administrator to become familiar with the specific role responsibilities as the school's principal. However, she did not have an opportunity to acquaint herself with the faculty prior to accepting the principalship. She recalls,

> The main thing for me was not knowing what the norm was here or the middle school. I say that because since I came in as an assistant that means that I had to replace myself after I became principal so two of us were brand new to the building. That takes out a lot of norms as well.

Although Carol had an existing second assistant principal, she did not see him as a good resource. As she recalled an incident of norm breaking, she sat forward in her chair and shook her head.

> I vividly remember thinking, "I have to tell them when to breathe. Why do I have to tell them everything?" There are some things that you should just know to do and do it. But, because I came from a junior high and we are very independent as secondary people. I struggled the most with, "Why do you have to ask me that?"

Because I am one that just sets boundaries and then you work however you need to inside those boundaries. That's my leadership style. That's not what they were used to, obviously, because everything was questioned. "How do you want me to do this? What about this? What about this?"

Despite her preference to allow her staff to work within a broad set of boundaries, she had to be more specific until they became accustom to working with her. Carol expressed surprise that the past principal had taken care of so many small tasks himself rather than delegate them. When he left, a lot of the procedures he used were gone. She stated,

Holmes is a great school and it was long before my leadership. So, things that you would just assume that were in place and things that you heard that were in place from previous administrators weren't. I got here and I expected that and I tried to just pick up and go with it and it was not there on its on. I have no doubt that systems were in place, no doubt. But, they walked out with that administrator because they didn't function on their own when I got here.

She went on to discuss that creating building norms and procedures continue to be a challenge for her. Her goal for when she leaves the position was ". . . no one faces what I did and that was start from scratch and figure out everything."

In order to better acquaint herself with the staff, Carol relies on blind surveys. In response to the Master Principal Academy, she started the year with a new faculty meeting practice of beginning each meeting with a team building activity. When the practice began, she placed herself in charge of the activity. Now, however, she has delegated the responsibility to her teachers on a rotating basis. She decided to delegate

the activity ". . . because I kept hearing, 'We don't even know each other.'" She believes that teachers will be less critical of the activity if they are in charge of it. Frowning she explained,

Even though I was doing it every month because I felt like I was doing things constantly and I would still hear, 'We don't even know each other." Is it my job to teach you everybody's name? So, making them responsible for it and I am still hearing it.

Carol related that she found it difficult to get to know her staff personally. "I'm not a real social person on a personal level. Professionally, I'll charge them with a squirt gun. Personally, not so much." She explained, some of the faculty has a need for her to be their personal friend. However, in order to be able to evaluate her teachers fairly she felt the need for ". . . a certain amount of distance so there's a balance there." When her teachers have undergone personal tragedy, this has allowed her to get to know the faculty better. "You have gone through difficult times with some teachers. They have lost loved ones, divorce, whatever."

Carol's vision for student academic success hasn't changed a lot because her focus has always been on accountability measures. Sitting up tall in her chair, she looked over and pointed to her bookshelf lined with three ring binders and stated,

I'm a data girl, that's my background. I was an accounting person before in my business days. So, I'm a data girl. I've always been one to look at data and results and see what we are missing and what we need to do to improve upon.

What has changed was Carol previously focused solely on academic student performance when she led at the junior high school level. "We focused on content. How are they performing educationally, academically?" Being a leader of younger students has caused her to reflect on the child as a whole person not just as a learner. She also stated that philosophically the school's responsibility has changed.

> We have to be concerned with what we use to be able to say, "Well, that's the parents' job." We can't do that anymore and I am not sure we ever could. Over time, what has changed me is that there's much more to focus on than just the academics.

When I asked Carol how her initial experiences as a leader affect her efforts on improving student academic performance, she reflected upon the cognitive changes that she went through moving from the role of being an assistant principal to a principal. "When you hold the reigns and you're who is going to answer for it, speak to it, it becomes different automatically. It's no longer the same, even as an assistant. Since that was a strength of mine, I followed the data." In addition, the stress of "when you have to present something whether you want to or not; whether you agree with it or not; it takes character; it takes a different type of character. It has been a challenge." She also considers the timing involved in implementing new district initiatives as well as delegating responsibility because she does not want to overwhelm her teachers. Drawing her lips into a line, Carol described her dilemma,

> When things are being poured onto you and you're expected to get it done, whatever it is. How do you do that without overwhelming your teachers? It's just

continuing the pulling. How do you balance what you push off and what you
don't? How quickly do you push it out or not?

To help her make these difficult decisions, Carol relies on her mentor's support, her
administrative team and department chairs. She explained, "I have built systems of
leadership teams that I work with often, but the reality is that at the end of the day, it's on
you." In particular, she has a strong relationship with one of her assistant principals who
also attended the Master Principal Academy as well as having been a principal himself
prior to accepting his current position. "We have a strong camaraderie that we share
together." Carol reiterated, "It's a very lonely job; it really is."

During the course of her administrative career, Carol has experienced a change in
the leadership resources that she uses. She stated,

Technology has made a big difference because things are more available to you.
Video conferencing and the webinars are a couple of the resources I've used.
Where before you might have to read a book and I'm not real big on reading
books, at this point it is much more available, things are more available to you in
more visual format or two way conversation format.

Due to the demands that accountability placed on the school and the teachers, Carol
found professional development to be essential.

I have been very proactive with starting pieces of accountability, knowing that it
was coming. So, I would start it and get some kicking and fussing until it was in
place then the other schools would start for the first time while we had it in place.
My teachers were like, "Oh, well, we've been doing that, at least bits and pieces

of it, if it isn't full force." Those are things that I have to stay on top of and stay in front of as a leader.

One of the chief frustrations that Carol expressed was the multitude of student achievement scales being used for accountability at the state level. The state department of education had just acknowledged Holmes for being in the top 20% of the state in academic achievement. The school received a cash reward and accolades for its accomplishment. In contrast, she was expecting a state assigned grade of a "C" on a scale of A, B, C, D and F for her school. "The state came up with this grading system. The grading system is on an assessment that no longer exists. You are never going to be able to compare to it or know if you grew from it," she said, touching the flat surface of her necklace with her hand. It is hard to decide how to lead your faculty when "everybody looks at things so differently." As a result,

> It is very hard to find what target you are really shooting at because everybody's piece of the pie and everybody's lens is different. Yet, that's how you are graded. That's how you're accessed and it is so different. It makes staying your course very difficult. What do you hang your hat on? All of those accountability pieces being so varied and so many make it almost impossible.

Carol views a lot of the conflicts in accountability being due to individuals making state and federal decisions that affect schools by people who are not educators. "The decisions that they are making don't make sense. Pulling out a grade system on an assessment that is no longer given? In whose world is that logical?" she asked.

Another consideration in the accountability challenges discussed by Carol included how quickly teachers can implement new teaching standards into their classroom. All the while, she keeps in mind the proposed changes she introduced may be replaced or scrapped as soon as they are ready to be used.

So, that has been the challenge of late, is trying to stay ahead of everything that is coming down the pike and knowing that it all won't go to fruition. It can't. It's not logical, but pick the pieces that might have the strong hold on my teachers or on my kids.

Further complicating matters, she has to continue to take "care of everyday matters at the same time. I think that's been the most difficult thing is trying to stay ahead of the game while you are playing the game."

Carol had no difficulty thinking of several resources that would have benefited her upon entering the job that would have enhanced her ability to direct school reform. Starting with her leadership classes in college, she stated,

I had finance, but, but nobody talked to me about individual school budgets and mandates. It was a superintendent view of finance so nobody really taught me what's okay to use in your school budget funds. What can you purchase? What can't you purchase? Those things that are state mandates, there isn't any district policy on it.

Two of Carol's supervising principals were credited with teaching her to complete a school budget, though they were not willing to share the details of their school's finances. "What you want is really resources preparing you for that chair." Another example she

gave was planning professional development for the staff while staying within state guidelines. Pursing her lips together, she stated,

> Nobody hands you anything that says, "Okay, Carol, here is what you have to get in this year." So, there are those kinds of resources that are invaluable. You need them, but to my knowledge there is no handbook that says for a . . . principal, here is what you need to know on a yearly basis.

Carol felt such a resource would have been valuable "because a person is not always available. At the time, you may be too overwhelmed to even know what to ask." She confided that she and her assistant principal were addressing the need.

> We've been developing that play book on a monthly basis so that anybody walking into a middle school job in district or in state at least has an idea of what to be thinking about and looking at because it is a blind tunnel.

It became clear to her a state wide procedure manual was called for after she mentored an out-of-state assistant principal and realized the large number of resources the assistant principal needed to be given in order to complete her job responsibilities.

> When you come in totally blind out of district, out of state, it's quite overwhelming especially if you don't have those people in place who are there to support you and say, "Here's. Here, here, here, here."

When asked what her professional goals were for the future, Carol did not hesitate in responding that she wanted to earn a doctorate degree. She explained that though she considered herself happy as a building level administrator, she would be interested in

working at the district level. Though she expressed no desire to be a superintendent, she aspired to be an assistant superintendent. She concluded,

> My passion is how do I help? How do I facilitate teachers to get the best results for kids? I think it would be nice to end my career at the admin level, but if not I am very happy at the building level. After nineteen years, I don't see myself leaving Holmes Middle School, but I don't know."

On reflection, Carol amended her comment to include a possibility of working at a university. "I have twelve years left, we'll see, we'll see."

When asked if she had any idea of how the transition would be handled during her eventual replacement, she explained that she has been "training people along the way to be both administrators and leaders in the district and so I would hope that would be honored." Carol believes that hiring someone from the building was the best chance the "norms system" in the building will stay in place. She anticipates not having an official voice in the final hiring decision; however, she does believe the district will consider her recommendation. "The best that I can do is try and prepare people and have them and in place and if they're so lucky to be chosen, I've done my job." Carol sees part of her job as being a mentor to her faculty. She expressed a desire that one of her two assistant principals become the building principal if she were to leave.

> If it were John -- if I were to leave today -- I would certainly want John to get this building. We are professional friends, but we're personal friends, again we went through the academy together or at least Phase III of it. You build those relationships. They don't die.

Mentoring was viewed by Carol as beneficial to both parties. The faculty member benefits by being able to broaden their understanding at the same time it helps support her.

> It just helps push along the things that I need, that I want to see and need to see happening and because I'm training them, I know it is going to be done the way that I would do it myself or again at least I can set those boundaries.

Her district mentors have helped her broaden her viewpoint as well as helped her realize that "tough times are inevitable." When she discussed her primary district mentor, she stated, "He's not going to tell you what to do, but he can give you other perspectives and help you see a fuller, a bigger picture. Which is what I think, I am able to give to my teachers who are in leadership positions." She believes that too often "all we see is what's best for us or what's in our vision. You have to be transparent to help people see another point of view." In order to understand how your building fit into the larger scheme of the district it was important to have a mentor's perspective.

Carol battled gender biases when she began leading as Holmes Middle School's first female principal. The faculty had a preconceived notion that a soft spoken woman would not be able to discipline the students effectively. She did not realize the faculty's reluctance to trust her in the role until she had gained their confidence and they shared their initial hesitation at the year's end. Carol stated,

> After that, I started having teachers who started saying, "I think I could do that." One of them was my basketball coach, she went to get her administrative license and I was her mentor and then two other teachers in that same building did and I

was their mentor. In this building, I have had five who have gotten their

administrative license in the last nine years and I mentored them and many of

them are in administration today. That's my job is to facilitate people to be the

best that they can be and I enjoy it.

She saw herself as an alternative role model for leadership for both men and women. She

appeared proud of being able to mentor her faculty when she said, "The fact that I got to

mentor that many says something. That is a lot of people in a short period of time that

I've at least had an influence on. I enjoy it."

Cane Valley District - Matt Turner

Cane Valley High School's large modern designed campus was located on the

outer edge of the city. I noticed a wide cement awning hung over the main entrance; it

appeared to be able to accommodate a large student group at one time. Glass surrounded

the entire office area allowing a good view of anyone coming in or moving about in the

front hallway. The building felt sterile but not foreboding. One of the secretaries

enclosed by a wood partition similar to those found in a court room greeted me and

ushered me through to where Matt Turner stood at his office door with a welcoming

expression and hearty handshake. He was of average height with dark hair, and dressed in

a coat, slacks and a tie of royal blue color, the school's color.

Despite windows forming two of Matt's four office walls, numerous plaques,

pictures and sports memorabilia were either hung or propped up for display. A number of

the plaques that lined the window were acknowledging his volunteer efforts in various

principal associations. He had a modest sized desk that appeared to be for his personal

use only and a large oval table where we sat for the interview. As I presented him with the consent form, he moved back into his chair.

As we began the interview, Matt recounted that he had been a principal in a small, rural district for 10 years prior to applying to the Cane Valley district for an assistant principal position. He had worked two years as an assistant principal before being offered the principalship at Cane Valley High School. He recalled learning about the principal leaving the building to be promoted to be the assistant superintendent in the district, "I showed interest in the principal's position and they showed interest in me. It was just a situation two years ago as an assistant principal here. The principal left and I just kind of slid into that spot." Matt recalled two of the three other assistant principals had not expressed an interest in the principal's position. The other assistant principal "had just been hired as the director of the New Cane Valley High School." Matt's predecessor had been the principal for six years and had been an assistant principal there before accepting the principalship. "He was an outstanding principal, did a great job. It's been a challenge. I just maintain and don't let the train fall off the tracks was all we were trying to do," Matt stated as he shifted his legs under the table.

The factors that helped Matt decide to apply for a principal's position,

> Go back to the early age of influence from my high school principal. I had a very
> good high school principal . . . I knew that I wanted to work with kids at a very
> early age and that I wanted to coach for a while, but I knew that eventually
> that I wanted to be a high school principal.

When asked if he had anyone he considered a professional mentor, he listed two people in chronological order of his career. His first mentor had been his high school

principal as a student, the other his supervising principal as an assistant principal. His first mentor has now retired and his second mentor went on to become the assistant superintendent of that district. He continues to talk to both of his mentors regularly. Matt confided having mentors had provided various benefits:

> It's helped me to realize that we are a lot like police officers. . . . That's one of the things that Dr. Davidson really helped me with is to help me understand that policeman, fireman, you're dealing with many crises every day and just to step back and take a deep breath and don't rush to a decision. She really helped me in seeing that.

Matt felt like he had received a lot of encouragement to apply for the principal's position at Cane Valley High School. Those encouraging him included his mentors, fellow assistant principals and peers in the area. One of his mentors from his previous principal position expressed that he did not want him to leave the district because "he had hopes of me someday sliding into the superintendent's position there, but at the same time, he was an encourager." Even if he had not received the encouragement that he did to apply for the position, Matt responded that he probably would have gone ahead and applied for the principalship because it had been his goal from an early age.

> I just knew at an early age what I wanted to be and I knew that this school, this location was a dream opportunity for me. So, I probably would have applied, but getting the encouragement from my peers, my coworkers here, really made it much easier in the decision.

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After having discussed applying for the principal's position with his predecessor, Matt felt confident that he would be offered the position although "nothing's ever a done deal." He believed that the area superintendent saw him as "a good fit" for the position. He had been there for two years and "they were happy with my job performance that I was doing here. I know Dr. Cohen and Dr. Davidson, our superintendent and deputy superintendent were very pleased." Matt went through one interview with Dr. Cohen and Dr. Davidson for the position and he "felt very good walking out of that interview."

He did not find the interview process intimidating either as an assistant principal or as a principal. He attributed this to the district's culture. "I felt very welcomed in the interview." He also believed he did a good job answering all of the interview questions. "I can't recall the questions, but I felt confident in the terms of my background and some professional literature and things that I read and things like that and how I keep up with current trends in education."

At the conclusion of the interview, he felt "confident" he would receive the position, but:

> There was doubt because again, I didn't know who else they had interviewed. I am sure they interviewed others and there may have been somebody with a doctorate degree which I do not have. . . . But, I still felt confident. I wasn't worried, I will say that."

He conveyed that his past principal, the current assistant superintendent, was not included in the interview in order to insure the decision was not biased.

Prior to accepting the principal's position at Cane Valley High School, Matt had the opportunity to become familiar with role responsibilities through his position as an assistant principal. He stated, "if I came from another district and been thrown in this seat four years ago, I would have been a miserable failure because I was on such a huge learning curve." Matt discussed the large difference in the size of the high school he came from with 250 students compared to Cane Valley High School with 2,100 students. The experiences that he "gained as an assistant principal those two years" were valuable. He learned the school's systems as well as the culture of the building. It gave him the confidence to know that he could contribute to the culture of that building. Matt stated that the principal spent a lot of time with him as a mentor while he learned his administrative role as an assistant principal. Now that his mentor is the assistant superintendent, they continue to talk regularly and he continues to be a strong influence on Matt's leadership.

Matt spent one day doing nothing but getting to know the faculty prior to taking on the official job responsibilities as an assistant principal at Cane Valley. Although he was still working as a principal over 5 hours away, he took a professional leave of absence for a day. He stated that he "just hung out for the day and went to the faculty meeting at the end and got to meet a lot of staff that way to acquaint myself with the staff." Once he was "onboard" he became familiar with the department chairs and leadership team during the first week before the students returned from summer break. The same leadership team has facilitated his continuing to get to know the faculty as a principal through their bimonthly meetings where they discuss teacher's student performance data. In addition, "over time" he has been able to acquaint himself with the

faculty by "going in when they're having lunch and going in and just sitting down at a table with them and having a conversation with them. Let them know that you care about them." He also, stated that doing classroom observations and "seeing what the teachers are doing and having conversations with them about what they are doing in the classroom" helps him know his faculty better.

As a new leader to the school, Matt approached the school's mission of student performance through collaboration. He stated,

> Whatever it may be, it has to be through a collaborative approach. The old days of the principals coming in and dictating what's going to happen, I think those would be very detrimental to the leader in any building especially in one of this size.

One of Matt's goals was to facilitate two way communications as often as possible throughout the building and with stakeholders. He grinned, looking off to the side and then began,

> It's got to be dialogue not monologue. It can't be that way. . . . When I have students come in and whatever, we come to the table. When I have an assistant principal that wants to come in and talk, we come to the table. I don't want to sit behind my desk. I want to have conversations. I want to communicate because it is two way.

He preferred face to face conversations to electronically transmitted messages because he found them to be misleading. He wants to "come to the table" with stakeholders if possible.

Matt's vision for student academic success has changed due to his realization that he needs to take into consideration diversity issues on the campus. He believed this was extremely important when you consider that the campus has about 35 students on the campus that do not speak any English and 40% of their population is of Hispanic descent. Due to these academic challenges, he has come to define academic success for his students on an individual basis rather than on test score performance.

> Success for this one student may just be getting all "D"s and graduating. . . . So, the way it's changed for me is you have to look at the individual students and that is hard to do when you have two thousand students.

Matt addresses individual academic differences through the use of six counselors on their teaching staff. Another initiative that he used to increase the number of students graduating each year was a freshman transition program. As an assistant principal, Matt was placed in charge of this program, and is excited to see the transition initiative's results this year in the number of seniors graduating on time. He expects to have 96% of their seniors graduate this year. Leaning forward onto the table, he discussed the specifics of the initiative.

> The program gets those freshmen with an upper classman as a mentor for them to have conversations with. "How's it going? How are your grades?" And, there are social activities; there are academic activities with the freshmen and these, what we call Link Crew Leaders. It has just really been a good program for us and really helped the culture of our building.

When confronted with specific leadership concerns, Matt told me he uses his administrative team as his first resource. His administrative team consists of himself, an administrative assistant and four assistant principals. He expects his team to be open and honest with him.

> I told my assistant principals this and I believe this with all my heart, if I make a decision that is wrong, I expect for all four of you to be coming in that door saying, "Mr. Turner, we need to talk." Because, if there is something that is not right and you know that it's not right, let's talk about it. You're not going to offend me by saying, "Mr. Turner we don't agree with you on this." I'd rather hear that than me make a bone headed decision that I didn't see something on that they did and then it hurts the school culture, hurts the school, hurts the students or whatever.

> His other resources for leadership support are his colleagues in the district at the other schools. Matt explained that the size of the district makes a lot of difference on the kind and amount of support received from peers.

> Great colleagues, great friends, we're fortunate in a school this size that we have that team right here. When I was in a small school in another district, it was a phone call and that was it. We have administrative meetings here. We will have 70 something administrators in a meeting. When I was at the smaller district there were four of us. So, there are a lot more resources here in terms of personnel resources that you can go to.

He also relies on professional organizations for professional development and advice.

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When Matt discussed his administrative team he revealed that mentoring of his assistant principals was his job. "They come to me with questions all the time and that's what I am here for. If I can't serve them, then I'm not doing my job either." Giving good advice is only part of the job though for Matt. He stated that he "values" his administrative team's opinion. "I may not be the smartest person in the room and that is okay if I know that I have good resources with me then I know that it's going to make it all better."

Matt stated that the leadership resources that he uses now have not really changed over the period of time that he has been leading the school.

> I haven't had time to change over the two years. What I anticipate and what I hope happens is that I continue to stay here and I am here for another 10, 15, 20 years whatever that time may be and that I become even more of a go to person for other people in the district. That would be my hope.

The resources that Matt would like to have had access to upon entering the job that would have enhanced his ability to direct school reform were "more training and experience in classroom observations and working with teachers to become better instructionally." When he took on a principal position fourteen years ago, he did not have the skills he needed to be successful at being an instructional leader. "I was more of a manager of the school instead of an instructional leader of the school." It is important that you "make time to get into the classroom and work with teachers and develop professional development opportunities for them to improve their instructional strategies in the classroom."

Matt did not attend the state's required yearlong leadership training because it was not in existence at the time he became a principal. He did, however, work with the state's administrative professional association to create the new administrator program alongside of the state's department of education. He specifically worked to create the mentoring program. Though the state department of education tracks the principal's induction training, the professional administrator's association provides the trainers and the mentors for the program. Matt confided the chief importance in the program is "just having conversations with other professionals in your profession. It is a resource for you."

When asked what his professional goals were, he stated:

I'm at the point in my career that you see the light at the end of the tunnel, but you just hope there's not a train coming at you. That's the big thing. My goals are to continue to be in education, for my state and for my school. My goals are to be here another 10, 15 years.

Matt reflects on an ongoing basis about what will be his legacy. Excitement filled his voiced when he shared with me that he wanted to be remembered,

As a principal who cared about his staff, cared about his students, he was an effective leader who listened to the people that he was working with and he always had that ability to communicate and talk with the people and not at people.

Early in his interview, Matt made the comment that he might move out of the principalship and take a superintendent's position despite being content being a high school principal. At the end of the interview he reiterated "I've resigned to the fact that I

may retire as a high school principal. You know what, if that happens, I'm okay with that. I'm working in a great school district." As we continued to talk, he reiterated his interest in moving to the district level leadership.

> If somebody said, "Ha," you know, "Matt, we want you to lead our school as the superintendent." I have those credentials now. I have all the qualifications for that. I'm not saying that I won't pursue that. I will say that I am very happy where I am at, and it would have to be a very nice offer for me to go do something like that. So, my goals are to be here and just continue to be the best that I can be as an educational leader for my school, for my state.

He considered attending the Master Principal Academy or getting his doctorate in the future. He was accepted in a doctoral program located in the city he lived in prior to coming to Cane Valley. He decided at that time he would accept the principalship in Cane Valley and put off his degree plans. Last year he filled out the paper work to attend the Master Principal Academy, but decided he would wait and pursue his doctorate when his children were out of college. He has five children; three currently are attending a university. He explained that he and his wife discussed his not going back for his doctorate degree and instead taking the position offered to him as an assistant principal at Cane Valley High School. Having his children attending college nearby and the ability to lead in a larger district were important considerations in making his decision to move. He explained that he and his wife discussed the move. "We just had that conversation, 'The opportunity is here. Four of our five kids are in this area. It is going from a small double "A" school to a large 7 school.'"

When I asked, Matt did not know how the transition would be handled during his eventual replacement. However, he did comment on what he hoped would happen during the transition.

I would prefer one of my assistant principals to assume my position when I leave. However, I do know that three of the four are not interested in becoming a principal. The other is and I would strongly recommend him for the position upon my departure. I would definitely make myself available to support the new person. I would hope that I would be allowed input on the new person, but that is not a guaranteed assumption. It would largely depend on the nature of my departure. If I was promoted in the organization, I think that I would have a large amount of input. However, if I left for another organization, I might not be afforded that opportunity.

Belmount District – Danny Weaver

Butcher's enrollment was 554 students with 13% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch rates. Butcher Elementary has one male assistant principal. The school was considered in need of improvement according to the state department of education and NCLB; however, it holds the honor of being in the top 10% in student achievement (Table 4).

Butcher elementary school sat in a well-kept neighborhood with an easily identifiable marquee. As I approached the front door, a woman briskly walked over and opened the locked door, explaining that they had been having trouble with the door's

operation. I introduced myself and she invited me to have a seat while assuring me that she would let the principal know that I had arrived.

The foyer of the office was divided by a large beige colored counter that sat in front of two small wooden desks. The woman who had ushered me into the building sat at one of them. The office was painted in tan and white with warm muted colors on the wall hangings and furnishings (brown, rust, tan). Sunlight flooded into the windows from the side combining with an array of lamps. Individuals in excellent spirits flowed in and out of the office. They chatted with one another briefly, smiled and moved on.

After only a few moments, Danny Weaver strode down the hallway of offices to greet me with an outstretched hand. She wore a gray pant suit with a tailored shirt. Her hair was short, straight and dark brown. She was unique among her administrative peers in the district because she appeared to be of African American decent; though she did not reveal her age, from her disclosure of her years' experience in education and family obligations, I estimated her to be around 38 years old.

Danny led me to her office at the end of the hall. She waved her hand at her desk and apologized for the stacks of papers lined up around her computer. Both of her university diplomas hung on the wall near her desk in matching frames. There were not any visible personal items in the office. Across from her desk in the corner sat a small round table with two comfortable black high backed chairs. She sat down and motioned for me to do the same. Smiling, she moved back in her chair and fretted with her hands for a moment.

Danny told me, she has been the principal of Butcher Elementary for two years. Prior to accepting the principal's position, she was the assistant principal at Butcher for two years. Danny taught elementary school for 12 years before taking on an administrative role. Her initial application for the assistant principal opening at Butcher came about through a chance meeting, she confided. She and her husband met the then assistant principal of Butcher Elementary at a restaurant and he encouraged her to apply for his position. Shortly after she completed her online application, she was interviewed for the assistant principal position by the principal and the "young gentleman" who had referred her. She did not find the interview intimidating but was nervous when she went.

> The individuals that I was interviewing with, we have very similar styles and so, it was very easy for me to talk about some of my beliefs as an educator. And so, as I was able to do that, it became more of a conversation more so than an interview. . . . . They smiled when you came in. Where, I've been in some interview where they just kind of looked like it was some kind of Russian Inquisition.

Danny shared that she had been interviewed by a neighboring district and completed four interviews before she was turned down for the job. She went through two interviews for her current positon as principal at Butcher. She believes that she "ended up where I needed to be and I was okay with that." She stated, "The interview process is very intense around here, period, compared to other places where I have lived and interviewed." She did not anticipate the competition for education positions in the region.

> Not only are you competing with people from out of state that are applying for these positions, but you are also competing with people who have been in the

district, where the district knows this person, that person has been loyal to the school system.

When Danny went to interviews in the area, she found herself at a disadvantage because she was not employed within the district. She explained,

> It just kind of depended on what that person was looking for. If they wanted someone who had a different viewpoint than they typically see, than you had a really good shot. But if some people are like, "Well, I might need to stay home grown," than you know that, kind of, worked against you.

> She left the interview at Butcher Elementary "feeling pretty positive about me being one of the final candidates." She stated, "My superintendent told me there were sixty people that applied. . . . . I was just a little shocked that's all because I had only worked as an assistant principal for two years."

> Being an assistant principal in the building gave her the opportunity to become familiar with the specific role responsibilities there prior to becoming the school principal.

> We had PLCs (professional learning communities) for A.P.s (assistant principals), and so during that particular time, we had someone from the district office that would come out and talk to us about: this is what you are responsible for and this is what you do. . . . but I also received a lot of training from my previous principal as well.

After Danny was hired as an assistant principal, she began coming to faculty meetings to acquaint herself with the teachers in the building.

> From that point on, I just kind of made a list of things I wanted to do to embed myself into the culture. I started forming relationships with teachers and getting to know who they were, learning their names, knowing a little bit about their backgrounds, whether it be professional or personal. . . . And, then, I took a couple of days off of my current job that I had. . . . I went in and visited and did some observations in the classroom so that I could get an idea of their teaching styles and things of that nature.

It took her two days to observe in each classroom. She used the summer months "to organize and get moved into my office and things like that. And, to see what the school's goals were and how we were going to get there."

In order to further become acquainted with the faculty, Danny began a lead off activity for faculty meetings called "Five Minutes of Fun." She learned this technique from the Master Principal Institute that she had attended for this year. By coming up with "ice breakers" for each meeting, she began to know her staff better. She believes that "it is important for me not to know them just in a professional light but to know them in a personal light." In addition, she walks the halls of Butcher Elementary every morning. This allows her to say hello to the staff and inquire about them personally.

To further her efforts in getting to know everyone, she and her assistant principal took on a Christmas Card project where every person's family in the building received a card with the staff member's photo on it that read, "We thank you so much for allowing

us to have your family member in our building. They make all the difference every day for our kids." It is her hope that the project will help:

> Build a family atmosphere because what I've found is when people feel the connection to their job, they're going to perform better. . . . That is the number one thing is that the kids are being able to feel like they can learn. And, you can't do that if everybody isn't in a position where they're happy to be here.

Danny also believed her willingness to really listen to her staff helped build a positive culture as well.

> They have frustrations and sometimes they tell me things that I don't want to hear. They tell me things that I don't want to listen to sometimes, but I know that after they have a venting session with me about something, that they feel passionate about that is not going well . . . that makes them feel validated I think, a lot of the times.

She said that she asks them, "How do you feel that I can support you in this?" Listening is not something she enjoys doing but rather something she believes she should do. By listening, "I can get the most productivity out of that person. . . . People can't always operate off of a frustration level. . . . I have to be a good listener. I have to be a good supporter."

> Having been successful in the classroom along with mentoring other teachers helped Danny decide to pursue an administrative position. She stated,

> I started working on the leadership team at the schools that I was working in. And then, my principal, my previous principal said, "You know, I think you would be really good in this capacity." And then they started giving me more responsibility

that would help lead me to that. I applied to get into a program where I could actually get my admin (administrative) certification.

Danny saw the transition from teacher to principal as a "journey." She stated that she "had a lot of factors and a lot of mentors that pushed me in that direction."

When Danny worked in another state, she developed a special relationship with her supervising principal after taking a position as a literacy specialist. During this time her principal gave her a lot of different responsibilities. She would tell Danny,

"You'd be really good at this! I know you don't think that right now, but you would because you kind of already lead your team in doing x, y and z." And so, that kind of spirit in her gave me a lot more responsibilities; and then, I got to shadow her a lot; and I was always reading educational research. And so, it just, kind of naturally went into, "Maybe you should go ahead and apply to go into this program to get your cert." And so, then I did and here I am.

Danny reported having a mentor as beneficial. She stated, "I always found that someone was holding me accountable." Her mentor had her reflect about what she was doing. She always made her think through implementation,

Which for me was really positive because so often I think that not getting that purposeful feedback for a lot of people puts them in a place where you become stagnant. If you always hear, "You're doing a great job." That doesn't really help you grow as a professional, but she was the type of person that would say, "You did a great job on this, but have you thought about doing this."

Danny continues to use her mentor's method of reflecting while working with her teachers. She often asks herself, "How do I talk to my teachers? What can I offer to them that would be helpful for them?" She expressed that it was much more difficult to keep reflection notes as a principal than it was as a teacher because there are so many different initiatives going on at once.

Although Danny believes she benefitted from her out-of-state mentor, she believed her mentor delegated her responsibilities out of necessity. She stated that her mentor,

> Just kind of took me under her wing to do a lot of the things that maybe she didn't have enough time to do a lot of the time. Just because she was over a building of over 1,100 elementary kids and we had ten grade levels of everything. . . . She had two assistant principals, but even then, they were very inundated with a lot of things.

As a leader new to Butcher Elementary, Danny decided on her approach to the school's mission of student performance by working on the school's vision and mission statement. They had a vision and mission statement "but no one here on staff created that vision and mission. That was my primary focus, we need to get a vision and mission statement that actually reflects our current today." Danny had the faculty analyze student data and decide what they wanted the students of Butcher to "look like." She recalled that she told them,

> "Ladies and gentleman, we have to live that every day. If we say, all kids can learn, what does that mean to us?" And, surprisingly enough, most people were like, "Wow, I didn't know that conversation was going to be so long." We spent

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at least a good three months at the beginning of the year in staff meeting just talking about our vision and mission and our kids.

When I asked Danny how her vision for student academic success had changed since she came to the school, she told me that they focus on the whole child and the school was child centered. As examples of how her leadership has changed, she stated, they are involving students in announcements and surveying them on their interests.

When discussing accountability Danny stated,

I feel like we have always had accountability. It may not have been in the form that the government sent a mandate down to tell you that you have the accountability, but as a teacher, I came into a field where I always had accountability. My accountability was the most important accountability. It was to make sure that your kid was a life-long learner and they were successful as a learner. For most teachers, that is all the accountability that they need. I don't need you as a government official to raise test scores. . . . . I'm already wanting to do that. I want my kids to be successful. . . . What I know that I need to focus on is: How am I going to do? . . . . You don't need to tell teachers what they need to do. You need to make sure to provide the how and the resources on how they can do it.

As Danny continued on the topic, she sat up straight in her chair and her features became somber. "Teachers don't come into the field to leave a child behind," she stated. "So, you have to understand that but most importantly you have to make sure that teachers are equipped to not leave a child behind. What does that come down to? Resources." Continuing to vent her frustrations, she disclosed that she had worked at a

school that had been shut down for not making adequate yearly progress under NCLB. She explains that they received "thousands of dollars to hire new people. . . . By the end of the year, our test scores were through the roof." Once they were successful, the government pulled the additional funding. "Same thing happened again. So, that told me, it's all about resources and having the right people in the right positions."

When confronted with specific leadership concerns, the resources she used to address these issues are human resources. Danny revealed,

A lot of times what I use is my own PLC with my colleagues. . . I could see doing this when I've been in this profession for fifteen years is asking them, "Ha, this is my situation. . . . What would you do here? How can you help me?" And, then too, I depend on central office to give me guidance. You know, any type of concerns that I have as an administrator. . . . I have to constantly reach out to people that I know may have been here before. . . . I put out a lot of my questions to get the opinions and perspective of other people.

Danny reported that she meets with her elementary PLC once a month. In addition, she shared, the elementary administrators "meet as a leadership team with the central office people once a month. Then we meet as an overall leadership team with the central office with everybody there including high school and middle school and junior high." She has three meetings a month with different groups of colleagues that help support her.

If she were to have a problem, the first person she would call was a fellow elementary school principal in the district from what she referred to as her "sister school."

I call it my sister school because we are on the same calendar. We rely on each

other quite a bit to get answers to questions. . . We look very similar in concerns

and so, I will call her a lot to talk to her about different things. You have to have

that. Can't do it all by yourself.

"Seeking out leadership resources is different as a principal than as a teacher,"

Danny stated as her phone started to ring. Excusing herself, she answered and quickly

dismissed the person and promised to call them back. Sitting back down she took a deep

breath, smiled and began, "You have to seek resources a lot. Very different from . . .

being a teacher because sometimes they just get handed resources. . . As a principal, no.

You have to seek resources." Danny views all of her stakeholders as a potential resource.

She explained, "I have to build my capacity, my relationships with these people. Because

if I don't, I never know what kind of expertise that they hold."

In addition to knowing her faculty, she stated that her community is a vast

resource for her.

I do really make it a point to go out into the community a lot. . . . Talk to my

parents to see if they may have some of the resources that I need. For example,

we need a new PA system. I had no idea how to order one of those. I didn't know

what kind of capabilities I needed. I just know that I want to do X, Y and Z.

That's it. I had a parent who was an audio person and so I called him on the phone

and said, "Ha, I need this, this, this and this. Can you tell me what I need to get."

And he is like, "Yeah, I'm going to research it for you and I'll get back to you."

And, that is what he did.

The major change in her usage of resources from being an assistant principal to a principal she commented was "You always have to know what tools are in your tool box."

The Master Principal program has also been a new resource for her tool box. She shared,

> It is exceptional to be up there, in my opinion, just because you're learning PD (professional development) for what you are doing as a leader. You know, and how you are working with adult learners. That's the paradigm shift that you have to make because most of us that are A.P.s and principals, you were a teacher and so a lot of times you tend to teach adults how you would teach a kid. And, what I am learning through this is, yes, you want to use some of it, but then also, you want to dig into some of the other modalities that you might not think about.

Further, it has made her aware of "certain things that I just never really thought about like, in a faculty meeting maybe I shouldn't just stand up there and regurgitate a bunch of things," she commented. "You think instantly that they're adults so they should be able to sit and pay attention. Yeah, not so much. So, things like that. That has really opened up my eyes and created an awareness for me." Danny has not been assigned a mentor yet, but has found the collegial atmosphere of attending the first year to be of benefit to her. She explained,

> It is myself and two other colleagues that are in Phase I and so we are going up together. It helps us reflect together. . . "How are you going to use it in your building?" "Oh, that's a great idea, I didn't think about that."

The information learned in the Master Principal Academy moved into her PLC as she shared her experiences with the group. She smiled and explained,

> We will share different ideas that we learned through the mountain. For example, we created a vision and mission for our PLC this year and we used the very technique that we used in Master Principal to actually come up with the vision and mission.

> When she discussed the mandatory principal induction training, her speech immediately became formal and her tone serious. Danny felt that the training was not helpful and asserted, "It would have helped for them to have conducted a survey first with the new administrators to see possibly what would be some areas that they needed some help in." In addition, she was not assigned any additional work or reflections to complete. "So, I was just going to the meeting without really any follow up or reflection that I had to do. . . . It was a lot of sit and get." She also commented,

> Some of that stuff was completely, over my head and was probably more principal oriented because it was all of us mixed together. Which, I can tell you, this job, yeah, we have a few things in common, but not a lot. Not a lot.

Not unlike a number of the other principals I interviewed, she would have appreciated having had more instruction on completing a school budget. She also did not feel prepared to deal with parent concerns. A few of the questions she would have had answered were: "How would you talk to a parent about this? How would you address this parent?" Another topic she would like to have had addressed through professional development was special education law.

Danny explained that the district provided professional development on best practices in special education; however, she felt that because the state department of education audited paperwork statewide, they should have provided her with training. Of specific interest was the wordage needed on writing up individual education plans. Danny reported, "I had to figure that out myself and that was only after, and I am serious, it was only after I had an issue. . . . I felt like that if I'd had the training before hand, I wouldn't have had that issue."

Further frustrating her experience in the induction program, Danny was assigned a first year principal as her mentor. She never met with her. She stated, "I'm just thinking that she was so overwhelmed with her job that she didn't have time to meet with me." In addition, since they never met she did not feel comfortable using her as a resource if she had a question. "I couldn't really pick up the phone and just call her," Danny shared.

Upon entering the principalship, the resource that would have enhanced her ability to direct school reform Danny confided was a "great mentor."

> Somebody that is seasoned and has been successful because you always need that person that you feel that you can trust, that you can go to ask those questions that you may not feel comfortable asking someone else. And, I have never been assigned anything like that, but I have gone out and sought out someone like that and asked the opinion of my previous principal and what were her thoughts about people that would be a good resource for me. And, she directed me in a good direction that would be good.

When asked what her professional goals were for the future, Danny rambled a bit before answering. "I have always wanted to get a PhD in urban studies. . . . That's where

I have always wanted to go in and actually work with school reform. That is where most of my experience has been in."

She shared that her long term goal for Butcher Elementary was to:

Implement an RTI (Response to Intervention) program that stays when I leave because to me, that is what true leadership is. When you know that some of your leadership initiatives are so embedded in the culture that when you leave or something were to happen to you, it's still going on. I think that would be my goal, having a lasting legacy. . . .

Like the other participants interviewed, Danny anticipates staying with the district but qualified her answer.

I never know from year to year. When you have a spouse and you have a family, sometimes you don't know. So, I anticipate, yes, I will be with the district, but there are times when I don't know. Just because of my professional goals, I'm not sure if my district reflects those personal goals. Professional goals rather, meaning that if I want a degree in urban studies, I really need to be in . . . an environment where there is an extreme need for school reform. When I begin to think about those things together, sometimes . . . I am just not sure how long I will be here and try to meet those professional goals of mine.

She does not know if she will stay in her current geographic area.

There are times when I feel like I need to be fed in a different way. Cultural diversity is very, very important to me. . . As much as we say we want to be culturally diverse, I'm not sure we always embrace it.

Danny vented her regret saying,

We don't have foreign language in the school when studies show that foreign

language should be embedded in your elementary curriculum, not in high school.

Because, I truly believe as an educator, my goal is to educate a child to be a

global learner. (She looked down and grimaced.) It is all good if everybody all

stays in this state, but everybody is probably not going to stay here, and so

they need to know what it looks like in the world. That is what I struggle with

here because we don't always want to look at education from a global perspective.

When asked how the transition would be handled when she left, she did not hesitate

answering. She described the process:

Typically, how we do it, is this, of course you let people know that you are going

to be transitioning out. . . . Who would be on the hiring committee would be the

assistant principal, some directors from the central office, some teachers. They

will interview the first wave of people. HR (human resources department) will

pretty much get the first round of people that you will interview and then you will

interview with all of these people. Then they will send those last few names to the

superintendent and the head director over instruction. And, then, you will

interview with them and you'll know whether or not you got the job. Then that

person then comes back to me, and we will come up with a plan on how they will

introduce themselves with the staff and those types of things. And, then, I just

kind of, let it be.

I asked her if she anticipated having any input into what type of person needed to be

hired and she replied, "I think that that happens because I know that my previous

principal was very influential in saying, 'would be perfect.' I would say, that I would think that you would have that input."

Belmount District – Ed Freeman

King Junior High has a student population of 739 students and a 32% free and reduced lunch rate. The school was labeled as in need of improvement by the state department of education and NCLB guidelines. The state has honored King Junior High School as among the top 20% of the school's in academic performance in 2013 and 2014 (Table 4).

King Junior High School was a 7th through 8th grade building located off of a major street in Belmount that backs up into a residential neighborhood. The school was located on King Way Street. A large dark brown metal awning hung over the entrance to the school that appeared highly effective at keeping students dry as they unloaded from cars and buses. The building was constructed of a tan colored brick with a slightly pitched roof. Entering the lobby of King Jr. High in Belmount, everything appeared well kept, clean and inviting to visitors. There was a sign that notified visitors that they might be videotaped, but I did not see any cameras at the entrance. A round table sat in the middle of the office and two students worked on assignments at the table. The students did not seem to be in trouble or in distress. A woman at a desk greeted me and offered to get the principal for me. She motioned to the opposing wall to a row of 10 chairs and invited me to have a seat. The office was calm and quiet. The only traffic into the office during my brief wait was a parent coming in to leave a lunch box.

A medium built man wearing a nice pair of slacks and a tailored dress shirt worn open at the color stepped around the corner. With an appraising but warm expression, Ed

Freeman surveyed the room until he caught my eye and immediately greeted me with an outstretched hand. He was fair skinned with gray hair, clean shaven and of average height. I estimated his age to be around 56 from the years he reported having taught in education and his discussion of having started his family later in life.

"Come on in," he commanded as he moved away from the hallway toward a long credenza in the front office. Digging into a tray of bread, he explained he was fighting off midmorning hunger. I followed him back to the hall and to a room a few feet away. A large walnut desk held court over his office with an overstuffed executive's chair behind it; a visitor's chair to the side. In the back, a small table with the local university logo imprinted on it and two matching chairs sat. He moved towards his desk for the interview but then changed his mind. It may have been because I hesitated at the table, assuming he would not want us to be at his desk. It appeared he had been working on a report from his computer. His desk had a number of paper piles neatly stacked on each other. Framed wall hangings decorated the walls. He started on his family late in life, he stated with pride as he pointed to their pictures on the bookcase. His children appeared to be about 9 and 10 years old.

As we sat down, he began telling me a story about a parent who had complained that a teacher had eaten in front of her child. The parent wanted him to create a school wide policy prohibiting teachers from eating in the classroom. He said, he did not agree with that and wouldn't. He politely explained to her that teachers did not get scheduled breaks and often had to work through lunch leaving them to take care of snack breaks as they could squeeze them in. He stated he often experienced the same problem with board members who were accustomed to managing the local corporation. Their philosophy was

if we can save a few cents here and there, it will make a big difference in the overhead. Schools couldn't be run like businesses because of the human factor, he stated with frustration.

Before we started the interview, a younger woman came into the office and teased him about parking where he had told everyone else not to. When she left, he explained that she was one of his two assistant principals. He bragged about both of his assistant principals and stated that either could run the building in his absence.

Sitting in the chair across from me, he fidgeted with his wedding band anxiously as he began to explain the career path that led him to King Junior High and the city of Belmount. Ed's administrative career started in another area of the state as a principal. He attended one year of the Master Principal Academy before being promoted to the central office as the assistant superintendent. Despite his success in the assistant superintendent position, Ed wished to move to Belmount. He began "courting" them as a future employer by developing his skills in computer technology. The district hired him for a temporary grant funded technology position. The following year he took the position of assistant principal for academic services at the high school. He remained in the assistant principal position for three years before moving into the principalship at King Junior High School.

Ed taught for eight years prior to becoming an administrator. His predecessor led King Junior High for three years before she was moved to a new building in the district. He recalled, "Ms. Cooper was selected to be the principal a year and a half prior so, everyone knew that this position was going to be open."

When I asked Ed what factors had influenced him to apply for a principal's position, he smiled and sat back further in his chair. He could remember wanting to be a coach/teacher since he was a child. He stated, "When I became a coach teacher, I was only in the business a few years, and I started feeling that tug of administration. I felt led or called or whatever or however you want to say that." He began being acknowledged as a leader when he was a child and as a teacher. "I had building wide and district wide leadership roles as a teacher and coach. It was just a natural progression."

He believed that "the best leaders are perceived as being part of the team, no better or no worse than anyone else, but respected in their vision." He went on to state, "I'm not much of what you would call a boss, I don't think. I see myself more as a lead learner, vision concept builder, morale booster, relationships. That is where I focus my efforts."

He was the only principal that stated he did not have a professional mentor. He explained,

> I've tried to learn from all the people that I've worked with. So, whether that be my other coaches that I worked with or other teachers that I got to know or who I reach out to. We're having a conversation between the other three junior high principals and one of the middle school principals, now. We have breakfast Friday morning early. I have a digital personal learning network, you know, global. So, I just reach out to people and try to learn from people, but there has not been that one person that I would actually consider as a mentor.

When Ed's current position came open in the district, he did not apply for it. "I assumed they didn't need me in the position. In the world that I grew up in, in small

schools, when an opening happened at the administrative level, the superintendent had an idea of who he wanted." Since they had seen his work in the district for over three years, he assumed they would call him if they wanted him for the position. They did not call him. "So, I didn't apply." The application deadline came and went.

> Then, one day my phone rang and it was the human resources director and executive director of communications and they were just like, "Why didn't you apply?" And, I was like, "I figured if you all wanted me, you'd call me. Isn't that the way it works?" "Oh, no. Mr. White is really big about people applying." And I said, "Well, should I apply?"

He leaned back and crossed his legs, smiled and shook his head as he remembered the event. "And they were like, 'Yes, you should apply.' And so, I went over there that day and applied."

> Ed expressed confusion about the application process that he went through as he explains,

> I still think that that if I am the superintendent, I am going to keep my eye out, like, I am a principal now. So I'm keeping my eye out for teachers. If I hear good things from the counselor across the street and I have an opening, I call that principal and say, "Ha, I'm going to talk to that teacher and try to recruit them." It is like college football, you're trying to recruit players.

Ed looked over at his cell phone lying on his desk as it began ringing. Apologizing for the interruption, he crossed the short expanse and hit the top button on the phone then sat back down and continued to state that if he were the superintendent of the district,

I would know all your principals. . . . I would have a talent list. I need a principal

to go to this school and he needs or she needs these kinds of set of skill, I'm going

to look at what I've got.

Sitting forward, he declared,

They did a nationwide search. They placed adds in all the publications,

nationwide search. And, both times they've hired people that were already in

Belmount. So, when they had this position open, they posted it state wide. I don't

think it was posted nationwide, but then they ended up moving me. So, I just think

that it is easier to hire and pick good people, especially if you know them, you see

them work every day, you know what they are capable of.

Ed favored in-district hiring because he believed that an outsider could come in and do a

great job in the interview, but not do a good job for the district.

Initially, a three person panel interviewed him. It consisted of the executive

director of human resources, the curriculum director and the professional development

director, everyone employed in the central office administration but the superintendent.

After reaching across the room to silence his phone again, he stated,

They had selected out four or five people. So, then they moved two names

forward to Mr. White, our superintendent, so then I had a one-on-one with him.

So, did the other candidate, then the board didn't really interview us. They just

went on his recommendation.

The interview process was not intimidating for Ed. He confided,

I didn't find it intimidating since they had called me. I felt like unless I just go in

there and screw up because they had all this time to find who they wanted. I just

kind of got the impression that they didn't find who they wanted.

Going into the interview, he told me:

I prepared a two or three page packet, one page per thing that I wanted to discuss.

So, I went in there and I tried to steer them to my presentation as they asked

questions. If you can tell them this is my beliefs, this is my plan, and this is where

I will take the school and you just focus on that. Then, that is what I like to do

when I go into an interview. I try to flip it around where I am selling more than I

am playing offense more than defense.

Leaning on the small table next to him, he told me he views his role as a leader to

first and foremost know his faculty. He stated,

When I was the instructional technology director, I would actually have had two

of the junior highs at that time and the high school was my schools. And so, I had

actually, while I was in that role, been in this building as a technology specialist

coach.

Ed felt like the teachers knew him and recognized him from his involvement in the

building with technological resources. He recalled,

The most beneficial thing was that I got to come in January. . . . It was just like

that quick. So, people are looking at you. "What's he going to do? Who's this

crazy guy coming from the high school? Why didn't they hire one of our

assistants? You know, why didn't they move somebody up and leave us alone?"

But, it turned out to be great because I just kept it between the ditches. I didn't change anything.

At the end of the year, he experienced a piece of good fortune. The teachers were required to make up two snows days after the students left for summer break. Ed explained, "After the school let out and when the half of those teachers that had left were gone (teachers whom had transferred) and I had hired some people, we had two days and so we just started at the base." Instead of focusing on accountability, he began by having the teachers reflect on their mission in education. He asked them, "Why did you teach? Why did you become a teacher?" He made the professional development about "things that the teachers wanted to hear. They don't want to hear about Common Core and they don't want to hear about accountability and principals are so crazy if they make those their focus." Ed stated,

> I've got good friends and that is what they preach all the time, test scores. And, I would just hate working for them. We just talk about why did you teach? "I teach because I love kids, and I want to help kids." And, we just built this, what we call, "Kings Ways," hanging on the wall over there. It says, "How we do stuff."

He leaned back and pointed to a piece of paper with curled edges tapped to the wall with the school's mission printed. Recalling the process he and his assistant principals went through he stated, "We looked at what is our message? What do teachers want to hear?"

When new administrators ask him for advice, he always tells them,

> The two most important things, when you first introduce yourself to your new staff and that first not quite faculty meeting, not the hour long thing, but . . . the

first two days that you get, you help lay it out. What your system is. Things we do

today have roots in those first two days.

Ed "switched the focus over to kids. What's best for kids? . . . . Is it the test score? Or, is

it, you know, the King Way traits, that went welcoming, involved, leading, dependable,

cooperative, ambitious, teachable, serving?" He attributed the school's current success

on having "those two extra days and they knew me before those two days arrived and

they had seen me smile."

As he reflected on his first year at King Junior High School, he commented,

Just hire good staff, we got to pick a lot of those kids, teachers, you know because

we had so many leaving. We really got to mold it. We lost half of our staff and

we got a quarter of our staff from one of the other junior highs.

Since so many staff changes had been made as well as all the 8th grade students

graduating, Ed and his assistant principals struggled with how to "incorporate these

people into the King culture?" They decided to lead like the school was brand new. "We

were opening a brand new school. . . . So, the teachers just started from scratch."

Ed acknowledged that an important part of his job was mentoring his assistants to

take over his position.

I feel like part of my job is to make sure if I leave . . . these two, they're ready.

They can slide right in here, either one of them in this place. I mean, they'll miss

me, but the things that we've planted are just going to continue to grow.

He sat forward and frowned as he vented his frustration that one of his assistant

principals had never been exposed to a school budget.

She's probably been an assistant principal for 10 years and she had never seen the school budget. The principal always kept that away from them. We have a budget meeting tomorrow and both of them will be sitting with me and they'll know how it works and what their requirements are. I don't make them come to those. It is an open invitation.

Ed relies on his assistants to help him make "big decisions about the school." He stated,

And sometimes, they tell me to do "A" and sometimes I do "B" . . . because I pull the trigger. But, I'm going to let you hold the gun and point it around . . . but if it's a big shot, I'm not going to lie; I have to pull the trigger.

He appreciates his two assistants:

When we walk out that door, the three of us are on the same page. They don't ever run down the hall and say, "I told him not to do that and he did it, anyway and, if he'd just listened to me."

Ed has continued to get to know his faculty through twice a month faculty meetings. Having come from a large high school where all of the faculty could not fit in one room, he takes advantage of being able to meet. "Here we can all get in one room and so we, twice a month do that and it's not about announcements, it's about celebrations."

When asked how he decided on his approach to the school's mission of student performance, he shared,

The number one task was to fill the assistant principal spot. One of the assistant principals was leaving, one was staying, so, that was step one, get the best assistant principal that I could find. Someone that I thought would be a great principal someday. We hit a home run there.

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It was through his collaboration with his three assistant principals that he decided that creating a new mission for the school would be their first step. "We started with my beliefs which is something that I have learned from the leadership academy." He stated the procedure he used was his biggest take away from the Master Principal Academy.

> A leader should be crystal clear about what you believe. You need to be able to put it on one page and be able to consistently communicate that in a manner that is going to inspire people to follow and be able to consistently point towards that regardless of what new governor comes, Common Core changes, president gets re-elected, accountability measures change.

Ed explained he has been in education for 26 years and watched things come and go. From this experience, he felt bad for the principals who focused on the most current political test score requirements. If Common Core standards go away, then their teachers are going to be left wondering what to do. "And if it changes here, the next day, we won't even care or know. It won't matter." He predicts his teachers will respond, "Oh, we're not Common Core anymore? We're King Way anyway, so, let's just go. How can we help kids?"

As Ed discussed accountability, he related "a lot of superintendents put that on principals. That is how you are evaluated. . . I know we have this A to F rating system coming to our school." He did not understand why the state had decided to rate schools. He did not mention what he believed King Junior High School's grade would be, but he does vent his frustration at having 90% of his students scoring proficient on mandatory benchmark exams and yet they are considered a school in need of improvement according to NCLB guidelines.

> We need improvement at King Junior High. Every school in Belmount needs
> improvement. I just looked at the school where I grew up in, that is poverty and
> it's achieving. . . . I wouldn't put my kids anywhere else in this entire state
> (Belmount District).

Accountability measures should be able to measure true successes according to Ed. He stated,

> I get emails from parents all the time saying, "Your school is so amazing. My kid
> has always hated school and they love school." And, you get that stuff and you're
> looking at that on a day to day basis and then they send this crap out. And you're
> just like, "I hope people know."

> Having experience in districts that were accustomed to low achievement

compared to Belmount, he had to change his frame of mind. It became "more about meeting an expectation. It's not acceptable for any kid not to be proficient. We look outside the state to national." Reflecting on his leadership in the first school he led at he confided,

> I was the principal that preached the test scores and preached that and morale
> went down, scores went up. You know, scores jump by leaps and bounds because
> we were so terrible. If you just get your teachers to quit calling in sick, your
> scores are going to go up 10 percent. Little things like that. . . . It is just pitiful,
> you know. Quit just using work sheets, read the chapter and do questions at the
> end. Have them even look at the standards. Have you looked at the standards?
> "Why should I look at the standards, I have a textbook?" That's where some
> schools are at.

When asked if morale improved as the test scores showed some success, he replied,

> Once they got the test scores everyone felt better about the test scores, but I don't
> think that the staff felt towards me like this staff does because every time I stood
> in front of them I was talking about test preps . . .

Reflecting on his leadership style over the years, he stated he would do things differently if he could go back in time. He would like to have led his other two schools the way he has led King Junior High School.

> The more that I read, the more that I study, the more I talk to other people, listen
> to feedback that I get from teachers outside this building that have friends inside
> the building, that call and say, "If you get an opening in math, I want to come next
> year to your building because I can't believe the things that I am hearing." I just
> realized that it is all about those relationships and why you went into teaching in
> the first place. If you can focus on that, teachers are inherently good, inherently
> they are going to try and be better. If you are out front showing them, modeling
> that, pulling them along, then your scores can't do anything but get better and stay
> good.

> When confronted with specific leadership concerns, Ed turns to his administrative

team first and then to his PLC group in the district. He boasted to me that they have been "in an email conversation on one topic for the last two days." The main change that he has observed in the way he uses leadership resources over the years has been his use of "digital personal learning networks." He confided, "I plug in, connect to those resources and I read a few blogs and I look at what's going on out there in the world. Those resources have changed almost daily."

The one resource that Ed would like to have had upon entering the position and still would enjoy would be more funds to allocate for technology and the freedom to create his own technology policies. He stated, the resources I would like most "would be more freedom in the world of technology resources and then of course more money."

Ed's professional goals are like most of the participants', he was happy being in his current position at King Junior High School, but he expressed,

> A small desire to get back at the central office level. I think that there are some things that I could help move the district forward in, some things that I thought that they brought me up here to do in the first place that I never had the freedom to help do.

He does not anticipate leaving the district or the geographic area.

When asked about how the transition would be handled during his eventual replacement, he gave the question considerable thought. He responded that it would largely depend on under what circumstances he left under. If he retired from King or was promoted to the central office, he believed the district would hire one of his current assistant principals and move a teacher from the faculty into the open assistant principal's position. He sat up and smiled as he stated,

> This thing would just keep rolling. If they are dumb, which they are sometimes, I'll even take one or two with me, they'll hire someone new, come in here with guns a blazing . . . and flip the thing over or they will come in here and take it to a whole other level.

If it is possible, he wants one of his current assistant principals to take over his position. Ed explained with an apologetic tone in his voice, "You get married, you know. You pour

your heart and soul into this thing. You want to see the King Way; you want to see that continue." He hopes that his legacy to the school is that "the teachers love and want to be here, the fact that the kids love and want to be here and the fact that we're innovating, using new practices."

Belmount District – Todd Lawson

Olson had a student population of 600 students with 29% of their population qualifying for free or reduced lunch rates in 2014. The school has been listed as in needs of improvement according to the state department of education, however, it has been acknowledged by the state as being in the top 20% of the state in student academic performance for the last two years.

Olson Middle School was located in the residential section of downtown Belmount surrounded by ill kept apartments as well as large maintained older homes. As I drove past the school's iron archway proclaiming the school as the home of the Hound Dogs, it was not an entrance. Behind the iron arch stood an old style tan and brown brick two story building with several parapets that were reminiscent of a castle. The building evidently had been added onto along with a new entrance to the school. Driving around the corner, the building's design changed to form sharp angles out of matching brick.

As I entered the office, I noticed a secretary talking to a parent in a soft cordial tone. The secretary remained behind a desk styled counter that could seat two. Comfortable arm chairs sitting between end tables lined the wall by the door. I sat down and waited for the secretary to finish talking to the gentleman. Before I settled in my seat, Todd Lawson rushed out and greeted me with an outstretched hand and warm smile. He

was a tall man with short, dark brown hair. He wore a dark gray pair of slacks and an open neck dress shirt. He was approximately 38 years old based on his self-reported number of years in education. He had a youthful appearance, however, that would place him in his late twenties or early thirties.

Immediately, Todd showed me back to his office which consisted of a large black formal table in the middle of a large room with an oversized credenza against one wall and a smaller credenza against another. His laptop computer lay open with the screen pointed toward the opposite door and a small stack of papers nearby. I looked around the office and complimented him on the large table. He stated that it showed a lot about how he liked to work. He wanted to always be collaborating and be a part of the school team. I thought it was interesting that he did not find a desk necessary to assert his authority or organize his paperwork.

Allowing me to settle into a chair with my note pad and recorder, he crossed the room to a refrigerator nestled out of the way and pulled out two bottles of water and offered me one. Then, relaxing back into one of the conference chairs with his legs outstretched and crossed, Todd explained this was his third year at Olson Middle School. He began his career in a neighboring district where he taught middle school geography and reading. During the five year period he taught, he went back to school and obtained his master's degree and administrative certificate. He then took a position as an assistant principal for an elementary school for two years and then an assistant principal position in a middle school both located in the Cane Valley district. Todd remained at the middle school as the assistant principal for five years before he accepted his current position in

the Belmount district at Olson. His predecessor, Ms. Snow, led the school for five years

before being assigned to open up a new school in the district.

Todd learned about the position through a conversation with Ms. Snow. He

recalled,

I talked to her at a conference and I said, "Ha, I just wanted to let you know that I

interviewed for a position that I really, really wanted in Cane Valley. It didn't

work out. It is all good. They don't owe me anything. I don't owe them anything.

But, I've been loyal to them and I think it is time for me to pursue other

opportunities. I know you are opening a school, will you need an assistant"

A grin crossed his face as he remembered the conversation from so many years back and

he continued,

She and I sat down and talked. And, she said, "No, you need to, you need to

interview for my job." I said, "No, I don't need to do that. I need to learn the

culture of the district. I need to learn the people."

Todd's current assistant principal was the assistant principal for Ms. Snow as well. He

confided,

That was also a part of the change because he was the other finalist for the job. I

was the jerk principal coming in who took his chair and it was supposed to be his.

We have a phenomenal relationship now, but certainly his feelings were hurt.

I completely understand it.

Ms. Snow had encouraged him to apply for the assistant principal's position at

Olson earlier in his career, however he turned her down. He stated, "It would have been

interesting for me to come over here as an assistant, but it all worked out well." He

praised Ms. Snow's experience and knowledge as a principal. "There are a few principals in Belmount that I certainly look to. Those are the people I want to have conversations with and those are the people I can grow with. She is certainly one of those people."

When asked what factors helped him decide to apply for a principal's position, Todd did not hesitate before he confided,

I just feel like you get to a point as an assistant where you feel like the scope could be bigger. You have confidence that you can do it. You certainly are nervous going into it about everything. If you are an assistant, you are doing it the way the principal wants to do it. As a principal you get to make those decisions about student learning.

Todd continues to consider the assistant superintendent of human resources in Cane Valley to be his mentor despite his now being in another district. Todd continues to talk to him regularly. "I texted with Rich last night; I talked with him on the phone this morning. Yes I do, certainly feel like I have a mentor." In addition, he sees the superintendent of Belmount as a mentor to him as well.

I would say that Rich is more my global mentor. But, I would say my superintendent, Mr. McDaniels, would also be considered a mentor of mine, certainly. I don't feel like there is any conversation with him that I can't have. I don't feel like it is a supervisor/supervisee role even though I am very well aware of that is what it is. I feel like I can call him and say, "Ha, I've got this situation and I feel like it is going to blow up . . . what can you offer? What are your ideas?

When discussing the type of benefits he has experienced from having mentors, he stated, "It is very powerful just seeing things through different lenses, because I need to open up the blinders. I think just getting a different perspective is important." He further cited his relationships in professional associations and his participation in the Master Principal program as resources for him.

> I feel like I benefit through a lot of conversations with these people that are not considered my mentor by title. But, I am listening, you know. I am really listening to what they are saying and really digesting what they are saying.

The Master Principal program also assigns the participant a mentor in their second program year. The mentor would be someone who has either been through all three phases or was a trainer.

After taking a slow sip of water, Todd revealed he regularly accesses his Principal Academy mentor and benefits from the practice learned in the program of having a "critical friend." Since his assistant principal has attended the academy also, they both use the information and processes learned through the program to communicate and lead the school. "He will come in and say, 'critical friend.' What we know right then, is that it doesn't leave the walls and I need your honest opinion," Todd shared then pursed his lips in thought.

Todd also, attended the required administrator induction training that assigns a mentor to all participants as an assistant principal. He confided with irritation in his voice, "She was my principal that first year at Owen Elementary. . . She was my statewide mentor, but she was my mentor in title and that is about as respectful as I can say it." Grimacing, he leaned forward and continued,

To be really honest with you, she and I had some pretty really rocky roads. . . .

We were both student focused which was great, but we had different philosophies

about things and so it wasn't always a great relationship. It wasn't even one of

those relationships where I was, "Well, okay, I can learn from this and I will grow

and I can improve." It just didn't fit. It just didn't work. . . . Mentors are the

people you naturally move towards.

The two individuals who encouraged Todd to apply for his current position were

his previously mentioned predecessor, Ms. Snow, and a friend, Ray, who had previously

been the assistant principal at Olson. Todd disclosed he had attended classes with Ray

while earning his master's degree and now goes to church with him. Ray went back into

the classroom prior to Todd applying for the principal's position. He explained that Ray

had encouraged him to apply. "He reached out to me and we had breakfast and he was

like, 'You, need to do this. Like this is, this is you.'"

When asked if he would have applied for the position without encouragement, he

quickly answered, "No, I wouldn't have." He went on to explain that after having been

turned down for the principal position in Cane Valley, he had lacked confidence in his

ability. He recalled,

For probably six months after that my confidence was totally broken, totally

shaken. I had worked blood, seriously, blood sweat and tears for that district. . . .

What I realized about the whole process is that hard work was a part of it. . . .

What I didn't realize was it also is about the people who are above you and about

the decisions that they make and the things that they see in applicants and the

things that they don't see.

Todd believes that the people who are employed in the school are the key factors to whether or not the school will be successful. "You know what schools start with is people, period," he stated, sounding indignant. "And, if you have the right people, you can go be in a farm house out in Des Moines, Iowa and it wouldn't matter. It isn't about the building, it is about the people." Todd brought over several teachers to Olson when he moved from Cane Valley to Belmount, "Just people who were so strong and they needed to be in a building that I was running," he explained. In addition, he requested to keep, John, the existing assistant principal despite his predecessor, Ms. Snow, wishing to take him with her to the new school.

The interview process for Todd's current position as principal involved an initial panel interview with 12 people. Leaning back, he rubbed his hands together and recalled,

> I sat at the end of the table and they were very, you know . . . "My name is Debbie, I am such and such" and they went around and around. I didn't remember any of their names and my head was spinning. And I was, "What have I gotten myself into? This is Belmount. I don't belong in Belmount."

He had prepared a presentation for the group. "I am just talking 90 to nothing and talking about my philosophies and how I would formulate instructional teams and what my leadership structure is like and my non-negotiables for a school." Leaving the interview in his car, he called his wife and told her, he did not think he would be offered the position because of his poor interview performance. He was surprised when he received a call back to interview with the director of human resources and the superintendent. The second interview ran for over two hours. He stated,

We talked about everything. We talked about questioning techniques. We talked about RTI (Response to Intervention). We talked about culture. We talked about hiring. We talked about leadership. We talked about research based instructional strategy. We talked about software verses people. We talked about the building grounds. We talked about respecting school culture for Olson because it's been around for so long. We talked about the university team. We are talking, we're having a conversation and we have a few guiding questions and Mr. McDaniels is just writing the whole time. Writing and writing and writing, and I have to say by the time I got out of there, he had to have taken 10 pages of notes.

Leaving the second interview, he remembered phoning his wife again and telling her,

"If I don't get that job," I said, "I will never be a principal. . . That went better then maybe any discussion that I have ever had about education with anybody. If that doesn't happen, I will be really disappointed because I felt like that was rock star status." I put all my chips on the table. This is what you are getting with me. If it meets what your standard is, than let's get to work.

Once he was offered the principalship at Olson, he went back to Cane Valley and texted his mentor, the human resource director that he had accepted the offer during an administrative meeting.

"They offered it." And then he, he texted me back, "Did you accept?" And, I said, "Yes." And then, all of a sudden, I saw that he was still texting and then the whole senior team was up there. All their phones go off. And, they are looking. And then like, two of them look back.

When Todd went back to sign his contract Mr. McDaniels asked him,

"Is there a question, like, that you would like to re-answer?" And I thought that was (hesitated and smiled) pretty legit. I thought . . . he is looking at it from the perspective of you're a reflector; you're a learner. So, what was it about the interview that you took away? . . . . He gave me that voice and that is really where he was building capacity into me. I didn't see that at the time, but he was building capacity in that two to two and a half hours.

Todd believes that an interview process should always be intimidating. "You should take it seriously." He recalled that his previous interview in Cane Valley for a principal's position there had been "Very cold feeling. Very just, they'd made their decision feeling, you know."

Todd was hired in November for the following school year. He explained, "That gave me a full semester to basically be an assistant principal full time in Cane Valley and be a principal full time in Belmount." This helped him become familiar with the specific role responsibilities prior to becoming the school's principal. Sitting up straight in the chair and in a steady voice he explained,

> I had a great opportunity that a lot of principals don't have. I had six months of basically training with my predecessor. She would answer all of my questions. She'd answer all of my text messages. I look back now and we kind of laugh . . . about the questions that I asked. . . They were really easy questions. . . She never held judgment.

Although it was difficult preparing for his new position while maintaining his old assistant principal responsibilities, it helped him begin to know the faculty at Olson. A technique Todd used to further help him understand his staff was inviting them to attend

interviews for new employees. "When they asked a question that wasn't on my questions, I could kind of see what was important to them. I could get a temperature of where they are in their own teaching and in their own education," he explained.

Further, Todd felt that it helped the faculty become familiar with him. "They would see me in my comfortable clothes and it just started making me more of a person." He believes that it helped build a positive culture in the building.

Since accepting the principalship at Olson, Todd has adopted a policy they call "fun and focused." He told me, the staff's work can be difficult and therefore having fun was a priority. There are a number of social outings that the staff can participate in during the year as well as celebrations. In addition to team building activities, he believed that it was important to know how your teachers are doing professionally and personally. He and his assistant principal periodically review the staff.

> We go through every single person and then we spot out three people that we feel like they are just killing it and they're just knocking it out of the park, and three people who we feel like need some additional resources.

When asked how his vision for student academic success had changed since he came to Olson Middle School, he pondered the question for a moment and then replied, "I use to talk a lot about being data driven and I had a conversation with a third grade elementary teacher." Presenting professional development with another district employee, Todd used the term "data driven" repeatedly. Todd recalled one of the participants commented, "You know, we've got to have a conversation about this. I keep hearing data driven. . . . Are we really data driven? Or, are we student driven?" Todd recalls looking at him for a moment, before answering,

"You know what, Peter? You are exactly right." I said, "I think we are student

driven and we are data informed. . . . A lot of this is because of the wiring of the

previous district where I came from. It was, all about data, like data notebooks,

data binders, data documentation, data excel documents, data, data, data. And,

that is important and that does play a big piece in student learning, but we miss

the social and the emotional when we always talk about data driven.

Todd reflected on how his initial experiences as a school leader had changed. He

did not feel the accountability as an assistant principal he does now as a principal. In a

matter of fact tone, he explained,

As a principal, I bear it every day. It's on my shoulders. There are 72 employees

out there; there are 605 students. All of those students have parents who are

looking at us, and how we are doing things, and whether we are doing things the

way they learned, and the way they think it should be done, and the way that

works best for their kid.

When I asked Todd what main resources he used when he was confronted with

specific leadership concerns, he stated, "I think. I reflect." He recalled an event from the

previous day. A situation with a teacher turned out well because he waited to address the

issue until he had time to reflect upon it. He and his assistant principal have also created a

system to frame their coordination of their leadership efforts. Todd shared,

He'll come in and I'll say, "Urgent, important or both." We've got a kid who has

chickenpox. We've got to get the letters out or whatever, yeah, certainly, that is

urgent and important. We've got to take care of it right now. And, when we get to

the point where we have multiple urgents and importants going on, then we tag team.

Todd sees his mentors as a great resource also. He gave an example of how his mentor helped bring perspective to a situation. "We were at a meeting yesterday, and I felt like one of my colleagues was coming at me a little bit," he said, pausing for a moment before he continued. To gain perspective, he called his mentor. "Man, Dave,' I go, 'Am I like misreading this? . . . Are you all talking about something about me?' And he is like, 'Todd, you are overthinking this.'"

The resources that Todd used have changed over the period of time which he has been leading largely due to the influence of the Master Principal Academy. Further, he believed advances in technology have made it easier to access and use the multitude of principal resources. "If you want to improve and you want to grow with the internet and online courses, committee work, board memberships, it's on you. You've got to want it," he stated, moving his chair forward as if imparting a secret.

When asked what resource he would have liked to have had access to upon entering the job that would have enhanced his ability to direct school reform, he stated without hesitation,

> We need it now. . . We need two full time counselors in this building. We have one full time and then we have a half time, who is here for two and a half days. . . And, we need that, and we need a full time instructional facilitator.

Todd's professional goals for the future are to:

> Grow. Improve. Look for new opportunities. Grow people. Grow students. I want students to see that we are trying to improve and we're trying to get better. I

might like to try and do something at the district office at some point. My dream

job would be assistant superintendent for middle level education.

Todd continued to explain it was unlikely that the district would need a middle level

superintendent due to the size of the district.

Todd told me that he had discussed his professional goals with his supervisor. She

asked him, "Where do you see yourself in two years, Todd?" He responded,

If I'm the principal at Olson for the next 10 years and this district will have me

and the parents don't run me off or whatever, I am great with that. I am blessed by

that. I feel like that is a wonderful thing. If you come to me at the end of the year

and say to me, "Todd, your giftings are being an assistant principal at an

elementary school, I trust our leadership that that's where they feel like I am

needed. I would do that.

Todd leaned forward on the arm of his chair and lowered his voice before confiding,

I certainly would love someone to come say, "Ha, Todd, there's a job down

town." Those kinds of conversations have taken place to be really honest with

you. But I just feel really blessed to be here right now. It is hard work and I

leave exhausted many, many, many days, many days and I realize, "What am I

doing to myself?" But my feet hit the floor now and I know I can get through it. I

like it and enjoy it.

Todd was not sure how the transition would be handled during his eventual

replacement, but could only assume that it would be similar to what he had experienced.

"Again, I feel very fortunate that I had those months even though I was running crazy

trying to do that job and doing this." He further stated that he would not want to be on the hiring committee for his replacement.

> I would take myself completely out of that process because I'm so close to him (assistant principal). . . Our district doesn't work like, "Ha, you're up." It doesn't work that way. It, it is very much apply, be interviewed, go to the committee, talk with the superintendent.

He commented,

> When the superintendent comes to me and says, "All right, talk to me about John. What are the highlights? What are the lowlights? What are the glows and grows, you know." I could be able to tell him those kinds of things. But, I know that I would need to be respectful to the process.

Todd went on to say that he and his assistant principal, John, had discussed his preparation for becoming a principal just the day before.

> I said, "You've got to learn the master schedule. You have to. That was the hardest part of transitioning into this job. I will be very honest with you. It was a nightmare. If I didn't have to ever create another middle school master schedule, I would be peachy about that. But I told him, I said, "John if someone called me." I said, "The thing that I am going to tell them is that his growth is that he has never developed a master schedule from the ground up." And so, this year, I will take sped designee second semester. I will take 504s, whatever, but, I said, this is going to move to your bin.

Even though Todd never directly called himself a mentor, he described his relationship to John in terms of a mentor's role in regard to professional development. During the

interview, he discussed how he had described the differences between the assistant

principal position and the principalship to John, his assistant principal.

"I know you can be the principal here. I know you could." I said, "But what you

are not prepared for yet and won't be until you get the job is that the chair is just

different. It's not bad; it's just a different thing. . . . as an assistant, you can say,

"Well, you need to talk to the principal about that." As the principal, "If it gets

past me, "We'll you're going to have to talk to, crap, someone down at district

about that." So, it's just a different frame.

When asked what he would like his legacy to be, he stated, "I hope development

of leaders. I have read a lot about leaders develop leaders." Taking a deep breath and

looking to the side he commented, "I can look back in fifteen or twenty years and say, I

had a positive hand in showing those people that leadership doesn't have to be

intimidating. You can be a leader. . . "

On concluding the interview, Todd walked me to the door and inquired as to

whether or not I needed directions from the school to my next interview. At the onset of

the interview, he wanted to know who else I was interviewing. I told him I could not

reveal any district or individual identity. He expressed interest in letting those he worked

with (superiors and teachers) read his transcribed interview when he received it for

review. I let him know that was his prerogative, but I would keep all aspects of our

interview confidential.

Belmount District – Carl Roberts

There are 4, 281 students on the campus of Belmount High School with a 28%

free and reduced lunch rate. The school was listed as "in need of improvement"

according to the state department of education and NCLB guidelines. The Belmount High School has the largest student population of the 10 schools visited. Five assistant principals were employed in the school's administration (3 men and 2 women).

Belmount high school is located in an open area surrounded by a neighborhood park and residential housing. I visited the school at 2:30 p.m. when students were going for the day. A long front oval driveway for bus transportation and a separate parking lot on the side graced the front entrance of Belmount High School. The campus appeared to have been built during three eras and covered the largest part of a square block. The buildings to the right sported traditional red brick classrooms with a flat roof. The tan building behind this portion of the school had an elevated roof. The newest part of the building had an elevated roof and glass entry with red brick office space to the left. All three of the high schools visited during the study had expansive glass entrances.

Entering the building, a hallway led into the school to your right and the office was to your left. The front office was enclosed with glass, but secretaries sat in front of a brick wall with a tall modern cabinet in front of them. As I came into the office, the secretary closest to the door formally greeted me. She instantly called the principal and let me know that he would be there shortly.

Carl Roberts came out of a semi-glassed hallway to my left and greeted me with a warm handshake and serious expression within minutes. He was dressed in a charcoal colored suit, tie and dress shirt. He wore his salt and pepper colored hair short and was clean shaven. I estimated him to be about 55 years of age due to his appearance, his reported job experience and having college age children. His tie matched the school

color, red. He led me to the first office off of the hall. Carl had a small desk in the front of the room and a large oval table that sat opposite his desk. He motioned me to the table which was totally void of any materials. I sat towards a window lined wall while he faced his desk.

Settling back in his chair, Carl appeared at ease and confident as he silently waited for me to pull out the consent form. As I began asking the preplanned interview questions, he fell easily into step with the process. Carl reported he has been the principal at Belmount High School for one year. Prior to accepting the principalship at Belmount, he was an assistant principal there for four years. Before coming to the Belmount district, Carl was a principal for 11 years in a neighboring district. He taught math for five years prior to going into administration. Carl stated, "Several people encouraged me to, 'Go for it.' So, that is how I ended in this seat." His Belmount High School predecessor led at the school for four years.

When Carl was asked what factors helped him to decide to apply for his first position as a principal, he stated,

> I really felt like I was ready for leadership at another level. I've always thought that I would be a principal, a building level principal, but frankly, I really enjoyed the assistant principalship because it was so close to students. My hesitancy always with going to the principalship was that I would get tied to an office and not be with students. . . . I was highly encouraged by many of the staff members here to take the leadership role. . . I knew the staff. . . I knew that I was

going to . . . be surrounded by really good people . . . and then, wanting to take it to the next step in my career, from that standpoint.

Carl revealed that his initial principal mentored him as a new assistant principal in another district in the state. He held the assistant principal position for seven years.

I was an assistant principal under him. He has been a great mentor. I've had lots of them, but he is probably the one that I consider, I will probably always consider my number one just because I was new in administration and you are on a very steep learning curve. . . He really helped me to learn the ropes of administration and how to manage a building and how to deal with people and all the things an administrator has to do.

Carl continues to keep in contact with his initial mentor by visiting on a monthly basis.

Other than his first mentor, Carl views his supportive work relationships as "collegial at this standpoint." He revealed,

Now, I almost consider myself one of the old guys. . . And, so when you get up in years, at some point, it isn't something that is defined, but at some point the table kind of turns and you become the person that people are asking advice from and those kinds of things . . . . I definitely still use a lot of people, but, they are more colleagues who are at my level, maybe principals at other schools or obviously there are people at our central office I respect highly that I lean on. I wouldn't say that I necessarily have a mentor/mentee relationship with them.

Although he was not an official mentor, Carl considers himself a mentor to his three

assistant principals. Upon discussing his assistant principals, a light of pride shown in his

expression although he attempted to keep his tone regulated throughout the interview.

> I have three assistant principals that are in two years or less as administrators. I
> also, have one assistant principal that this is his first administrative job at a high
> school and he is only in his second year here. . . . . I also, consider it, as a building
> principal, one of the greatest things that I do is to help foster growth in those
> assistant principals because in our district, the level of people that we hire,
> obviously you get hired as an assistant principal, then you obviously have the
> ability to be a building leader and so, I take it upon myself and am fairly
> intentional about making sure that I'm helping those people grow so that they can
> be building leaders.

> There are many benefits of mentoring and being mentored Carl explained,

> There are just so many things in this position that you run into. . . . Whether it is
> from a school management standpoint or a personnel standpoint. So, it is
> incredibly critical to stay plugged in with other people in collegial relationship, in
> mentor/mentee relationships because it is just such a massive job.

In addition, accessing other people's experience and expertise can be important. Carl also

sees the value in having emotional support. Pushing back from the table an inch and

frowning, he explained,

> When you move to the principalship, many times you can feel like you're on an
> island, because it creates a dynamic where sometimes your assistant principals are

all tight, but then the principal, you're at another level. So, depending on the size

of your organization, you can become isolated.

Carl commented in a resolute voice, "There are not a lot of people doing what I am

doing. Not many people principal a school that has almost 4,400 students."

Carl reported that he was encouraged by his predecessor and other people to apply

for the principal's position at Belmount. Further, he believes his supervisor "saw some

potential in me that I would be leading here or somewhere else. I definitely saw some

handing over of some responsibilities and things to get me those experiences to prepare

me for the role."

If he had not been encouraged to apply for the position, Carl stated that he most

likely would not have applied. "It was real important to me that the staff here was

supportive of me taking that position. If I would not have had that sense, I probably

wouldn't have applied. . . . . You want to know that the people here are behind you."

Carl held in a laugh and shook his head as he reflected on how he was interviewed

for his current position. "Mine was kind of a unique one. . . . I was actually in charge of

the interview committee to hire the person." District personnel came to Carl. "They spoke

to me be about the possibility. What my concerns were, those kinds of things." As a

result, Carl went through two meetings before being offered the principalship. The first

meeting was with the district personnel discussing the position and "then a meeting with

the superintendent."

When asked if the interview process had been intimidating, he replied without

hesitation,

This wasn't because it wasn't really a formal interview. This was not a formal interview process, the way it ended up. As I said, it was pretty unique in the way it transpired, so it was more of informal conversations so, it wasn't stressful.

He did not worry about whether or not he would receive the position. Adjusting in his seat, he grinned and confided, "I figure if it was the right fit and that was something the superintendent wanted me to do than I would do it. And, if the decision was made to go a different direction, I was okay with that."

Carl was familiar with the specific role responsibilities at Belmount High School prior to becoming the principal because he had assumed the responsibilities as the principal's designee.

The whole last year, I was here, I was considered kind of the principal's designee or what some people might call an associate principal even though that really wasn't my title. That's the way the structure worked, so I had a lot of dealings with the principal. Any time she was gone, I was in charge and in any meetings that she couldn't make, I was the designee to do those. So, I was a lot more involved maybe than people would be in other situations. And, then being an assistant principal here for four years, I knew the school well. I knew the school well. I knew the staff well and I knew procedures. I knew how things worked. So, it made the transition a lot easier. I didn't have that hard transition of learning so much that someone coming in from outside of the district has to do. . . . . There are just so many things that you take for granted that I didn't have to learn.

With "almost 300 certified teachers" it takes at least two or three years to become familiar with the faculty. Carl explained,

> Learning those teachers, learning how they need to be managed, you know how the dynamics within departments work and who has history and who doesn't . . . . Which of your teachers are struggling? Who are your teachers, who are great? All of those things, that when you come into a building like this, you are looking at a two to three years just in a learning process. So, I had a unique advantage there.

Further, he had the responsibility to evaluate 90 to 100 staff members per year as an assistant principal. This gave him the opportunity to acquaint himself with the faculty prior to accepting the responsibilities of principal. "I had been in their classroom several times; I saw their teaching; I knew the dynamics. I knew the department they worked in and kind of their performance and abilities."

Reflecting on his prior experience, he stated that the administrative process of talking about each faculty member every spring helped him the most. The high school's objective was to determine "How can we help grow these teachers?" Carl felt that he had the benefit of being privy to "more conversations because I was in that role as a principal's designee so there were more conversations about personnel." He stated,

> We know the most important thing is teacher quality. We're constantly talking about those things through evaluative efforts, selective efforts, doing walk-throughs, just doing any kind of observations, but we are also getting input from those department chairs about their people and how they are doing.

Carl told me he relied on his leadership team to engage the faculty with one another and help him further acquaint himself with the faculty since accepting the principal's position at Belmount.

> We've done a couple of initiatives over the last couple of years to really try to get to know faculty and try to initiate with them. . . Just try to push that whole vision of relationships because that is what we push for students and that is what we want for teachers. . . . We have done some things fairly intentional in being relational as a faculty.

Carl sat up straight and I could almost envision him at a press podium as he expressed his work to build relationships at the high school.

> We want people to want to work here obviously and we want this place to feel good for people. We want it to be positive. The work is hard and so, how well can we create working conditions that support teachers, that support not just the work, but appreciates them at another level. One initiative that we are doing this year is about appreciation in the work place. We have been intentional through the work of a book that is out there with our leadership, that our leadership has to be intentional with the people who are under them to show appreciation to them in different ways and not in just any way, but the way that they actually want to receive that appreciation.

Making people feel appreciated in the work force can be powerful in creating capacity and reducing turnover. "Research shows that that is the number one reason people like or

dislike their job. Most people that leave their job, it is because, 'I didn't feel appreciated,'" Carl stated.

As a new leader to the school, Carl felt fortunate that the school already had a "tradition of high academic achievement." When approaching the school's mission of student performance he stated,

> We are doing a lot of things well. We aren't going to change a lot. . . . We have tweaked some things for efficiency's sake, for what I would call fine tuning. . . . We have pretty much just tried to improve those things that we are already doing. We've tried to . . . get rid of those things that just might not be giving us a lot of results. . . . We are trying to push those things off.

Each year the leadership team examines the mission statement and decides if it is still valid and if the school is living up to the mission. Leaning to the side on the chair arm, he explained,

> We got away several years ago from the fancy mission statement that a lot of people put on a wall that usually always talks about creating global learners and technological. . . And, we really got down to this is what we're about and we honestly created those as a leadership team, as a collaborative group of about 25 or 30. We define the vision as what we want our end product to be? So, it wasn't something again that I was going to come in and feel like needed to be changed. I knew we had a good foundation there. I knew our mission was strong. Our vision was strong, so it is more about if you get good people in places. It's more about making sure that other things don't come in and distract. . . . Am I making sure

that I am protecting them from the things that can distract them from doing their best work?

Carl took a couple of seconds before he reported,

I don't think our mission has changed at all. Our mission, it's pretty simple. It is about relationships. Our mission is wrapped up in two things, relationships and creating relevant academic experiences. . . . We aren't trying to be complicated about it because that is how you become distracted and disjointed and not unified. I think our staff knows that.

His initial experiences as the assistant principal influenced his efforts on improving student academic performance. He confided,

One of the things that I had learned as an assistant principal was we are a high achieving school. . . . but what I'd seen in the data was we had kind of plateaued. That is what is hard for high achieving schools. . . . I saw this for a couple of years and decided that if we are going to get better, here is how we have to get better. We have to focus on an intervention standpoint of how we are going to reach this other 10 percent over here.

Carl looked away and pursed his lips before discussing how he addressed the issue of students being left behind academically. "It was a change, vision casting in helping staff see through a different lens, maybe is a way to say it? It's a tweak in focus and a tweak in what lens you are looking through." Last year a few teachers became "trail blazers" and were "knocking it out of the park." They had a few more teachers "come on this year and

understand it better and how it can be manageable for them; how to do it." In a large building, systematic changes do not occur quickly but are a process, he explained.

The chief resource that Carl used when he was confronted with specific leadership concerns is his "administrative team, our people at central office." He shifted in his chair and looked over my shoulder to where I had noticed a clock on the wall earlier without a change in expression.

I have great relationships with other area principals . . . I talk about a lot of things with them. . . . But for the most part . . . it pretty much comes down to your administrative team that is around you. We have great central office support. Those are all folks to lean on for those things.

The leadership resource that Carl reported using the most at Belmount High School was his administrative team. "I'm big on distributive leadership and I know that there is no way for one person to be the instructional leader of this school." Since he came to Belmount High School, the assistant principal's responsibilities have changed immensely. "We changed our structure a couple of years ago to where now our assistant principals are actually instructional leaders. . . . The assistant principals actually do instructional work. They are over departments, they are over grade levels." In addition to giving the assistant principals responsibility for teacher supervision and support, "We actually were able to identify or add a dean of students who deals with discipline and attendance. So, they're the ones in the daily operational dealings with kids behavior problems, discipline, all of that." Folding his hands onto the table, he stated, the change "has been the best thing that we have ever done because I don't have to do it at all."

He elaborated that the assistant principals are able to support and observe teachers in their specific areas of expertise. "I think that we have done a good job . . . over the years in creating a structure where they (teachers) do feel the support. Likewise, that supports me; I don't have to do it all."

Carl stated his focus on efficiency was due to the size of the high school. Each summer they go through to clarify and define what administrators', department chairs' and the leadership team members' role responsibilities are in order to avoid any duplication of teacher services.

> We make sure that one, we are not doubling work, but also that we understand real clearly what everyone's role and responsibilities are. We try to take care of that overlap and those things again because that costs you efficiency and effectiveness in the daily grind if you don't have those kinds of things laid out.

Carl alluded that communication was also a struggle due to the size of the high school. Approximately two years ago when he was the designee assistant principal, the administrative team began to look at how to make communication more efficient in the building.

> One thing is simplify things. . . . We have worked hard at that, to specify how to communicate things and through which channels, instead of trying to communicate everything through every channel. We've been intentional about that, but it has taken some time in this new structure, but our teachers are comfortable now in the second year so this is now in the third year that we've been in this structure or that we have known about it.

The resource that Carl would have liked to have had access to upon entering the job that would have enhanced his ability to direct school reform was "a data platform that can integrate and handle and manage student data from all the different places that we have it." He further stated,

I think anything that can bring information together because when you come in new and you're in this seat, You hear lots of little things and you are trying to sort out what's right and what's wrong and depending on who this person is that is sharing that with you. It is a lot of really broken pieces of information. So, I think from a leadership resources perspective, just data, user friendly data.

When asked about his future professional goals, Carl sat up in his chair and looked at me with an intent expression. "I will probably be a superintendent in a school district. . . . I am not ready for that yet, I still like the building too much." He revealed that his short term goal was the school's mission. "What I am about every day and passionate about is what our mission is. I want relationship; I want people to feel good about work and about the results we're getting and being appreciated in that sense."

When he mentioned accountability measures as a professional goal, Carl's shoulders relaxed and he stated,

I'm a big believer as a leader that we are going to do those two things and the test scores will take care of themselves. . . . The data we mention and talk about is more about the data that is teacher driven from students in their classes or a formative or summative that is in the classroom. So, we don't talk about the big tests. . . . We talk about what kind of data the teacher is getting in the classroom

based on the assessments that they are giving students. How are they responding to students? How is that changing?

As I asked if he planned to stay within the district, he grinned before replying,

Sure, I don't see why not. I've got the best. I've got to have one of the best jobs in the world, one of the biggest jobs around, but one of the best. It is a great situation and I've got great support. The superintendent, great support from the superintendent and central office, so.

He went on to elaborate that he and his wife also enjoyed living in the region. "This is an incredible quality of life. . . . I can't imagine leaving this area."

Carl sees the district's transition plan for his eventual replacement to be "a fairly traditional process of a search or a posting of a position, a search to get applicants and an interview process." He moved back in his chair and rested his hands on the arms as he continued, "Here we usually do interview teams, so there is usually representation from teacher leadership, central office, various people. Interview process and then at least a second interview of central office people, sometimes a third interview."

Discussing whether or not transitioning into the principalship from the assistant principal position within the district should be the preferred method of prior preparation, he stated,

With a school of this size, I am a firm believer that if you came in here cold not knowing Belmount High School, . . . if you hadn't been a large school principal before, I am thinking of a two to three year learning curve, a steep learning curve.

. . So, the benefit of if you had someone to bring in and, and train on the job or at least to be in a role where they see a lot of the things that they are going to be doing; get your hands wrapped around and your head wrapped around all the things that go on here. Absolutely, that is a difference maker and we talked about that back when this position was open. I remember the committee talking about that saying, "Boy, do we think we can go with somebody outside the district."

Carl did think bringing someone in from outside of the district was "ideal." He did not think districts could afford to do so though because they would have to pay the new principal to learn the position from scratch. "I was definitely the beneficiary of being in this building and obviously a huge benefit."

When asked if he had attended or had plans to attend the Master Principal Academy, Carl looked down and pursed his lips. The Academy was not one of his professional goals despite having been "encouraged to do it." He went on to explain, "Once I got my doctorate, I said, 'There will be no more education.'" He took in a deep breath and his jaw clenched as he frowned. "I am a learner. I am always learning. It is not that, but going through a program of some kind or another credential or another degree, I just said, 'That's not going to happen.' I got that in '05, I said, no more."

Fairview District - Sherry Taylor

Alread had 403 students enrolled and was 1 of 8 Title I schools in Fairview. Approximately 80% of the student population receives free or reduced lunch rates. Alread was listed as a school in need of improvement according to the state department of education. Alread has one assistant principal who was a woman.

Entering the red brick foyer of Alread Elementary, the office lies to my left and chairs were lined against the far wall facing the office. I announced my purpose in the building over an intercom speaker built into the wall next to the door. In response, a woman I could see through the glassed entrance of the door asked me to have a seat and the principal would be with me shortly. During my five minute wait in the foyer, a parent came in and discussed what documents she could use for verification of residency to enroll her daughter over the intercom with one of the clerks. The parent was not allowed into the office even after showing documents through the glass to the clerk from about 10 feet away. Shortly after the parent clad in pajama pants, t-shirt and bedroom slippers concluded her business, the door buzzed open and the staff member announced over the intercom that Sherry Taylor would see me now.

As I entered the office, Sherry stood in the hallway entrance to her office and waited for me to cross the short distance to her. Her face was solemn, and her tone was formal and congenial although her attire was casual (jeans and a semi-casual shirt). She wore her dark blonde hair cut short above her collar. I guessed her age to be approximately 46 years old based on her appearance and experience in education.

"Have a seat," she told me as I crossed the brief expanse to a table and chairs she stood beside. The large rectangle shaped office held stacks of papers on her desk in the back of the room and along a ledge that sat below a row of windows. Sitting down at the small table, we were almost knee to knee with each other. After signing the consent form I presented to her, she fumbled with the pen nervously as we began the interview.

Sherry relayed to me that she had been the principal at Alread Elementary School in the Fairview District for two years. Prior to taking on the position of principal at

Alread, Sherry "was an assistant principal at another school in the district for three years." She taught in the classroom for five years and functioned as a literacy coach for five years before going into administration. Reflecting on her teaching career in contrast to her current position, she lamented,

> I love to spend time in the classroom and working with teachers. Changing their instructional practices, which is what we administrators are supposed to be doing a lot of now, but all of the paper work, the budget, the discipline and those kinds of things sometimes get in the way.

When asked how she learned about her current position, Sherry gave me an overview of her educational preparation leading to her licensure as a building level principal. As I restated the same question again, she described how important her experiences as an assistant principal had been in preparing her for the principalship. Restating the question for a third time, I asked if her principal at her previous school had told her about her current position opening up. She replied without hesitation,

> Yes, this position came open, very quickly because the previous principal's husband got a job at another university. My principal told me about it and another principal friend told me about it right away that it was coming open.

Her predecessor led Alread for 8 years before leaving the school.

I asked Sherry what factors helped her to decide to apply for the principal's position. She leaned to the side of her chair and fretted on her lower lip. "Read that again." I read the question and she thought for a moment before stating,

> I felt like I was ready after my training as an assistant principal. I just felt like I was ready to go ahead and take that next step. I don't have any aspirations to do

anything otherwise than to be a principal. I don't have any aspirations to work at the district level, really, at this time. There's one position at the district level that I would like to hold, but other than that, I like being a principal. I like being with the kids. I like working with teachers. I like working with the parents it just was the natural next step.

When asked if she had someone she considered a mentor, Sherry immediately revealed, "Yes, several people, even now." One of her mentors she met while "going to grad school together for leadership, our licensing program and the other, I was her assistant principal and she became the principal of Addison Elementary." She scooted back into the chair and crossed her legs before explaining,

We were all new, three new administrators in one building in the same year. I had met her previously, she was a district employee. I met her as a district Title 1 employee coordinator and then she became the principal of Owen. That is where I really got to know her.

I asked Sherry what type of benefit she had experienced from having a mentor, and she responded,

It's really good just to have someone to call and go, "Well, crap". . . . Someone to call and go, "You know, I really messed this up. Do you have any idea of how I could fix this?". . . . One thing that a lot of principals told me before I took this job was that it's pretty lonely. You can't always go out and vent to the secretary and sometimes I can't even vent to my assistant principal. Just having someone to vent who's kind of in the same situation that you're in is important.

Sherry was encouraged to apply for her current position by one of her mentors, her friend from graduate school and another principal from a different building who called her and said, "I think this would be a good position for you." She further explained, "I am a child of poverty. So, my allegiance lies to schools that serve families of poverty. She knew that this would be a pretty good job for me."

When asked if she would have applied for the principalship without encouragement, she smiled and nodded before answering. "I would have because I was waiting. I had been an assistant principal for right at three and a half years because I took over as an assistant principal position in the middle of the year. I was ready; I was ready."

Sherry went through two interviews before being offered the principalship at Alread Elementary. The first interview was with a committee of approximately eight people who met at the district office. The committee consisted of teachers as well as other personnel. She recalled,

> That committee made recommendations for the top two people to the
> superintendent. I interviewed with the superintendent individually. It was just she
> and I after that. It pretty much was just a conversation that I had with her. She and
> I already knew each other and so it wasn't this formal thing. She knew a lot about
> my philosophies. I know a lot about hers, so it was really just a conversation.

She remembered not being intimidated by the interview. "It really wasn't too bad as opposed to some of the other interviews that I had been in for assistant principal in some of the other districts where all of the district administrators are just staring at you."

Tapping the pen against the desk, she confided that she was a bit nervous about whether or not she would be offered the position. "I felt like just from the hearsay about

who interviewed that I had a pretty good chance of getting it. But, yes, I was a little worried," she stated with a brief smile.

Sherry cited her prior experience as an assistant principal as how she became familiar with the specific role responsibilities at her current school prior to becoming the school's principal.

The opportunities that I had dealing with discipline as an assistant principal helped me. We have a high rate of students that have mental illnesses and that are served with mental health agencies, so that is a challenge, along with that comes the discipline issues. . . . I had not worked a lot with budgets, but I had sat beside the principal while she worked on them. I handled all the PD (professional development) things at Owen, so I knew the guidelines for that.

Sherry looked to the side as she reflected, "I was hired on like a Tuesday and started on a Wednesday." She stated that she should have been scared, "but, I didn't have time to be."

In an attempt to get to know as many of her staff as possible in the quickest amount of time, she told me "she sent out an email right away and introduced myself and asked people to come see me." She frowned and then began,

I told them, "You can make an appointment. I am going to be in the office this day if you would like to come by and see me." The one thing I knew was that I needed to talk to as many people as possible. Their leader had left kind of suddenly. I wanted to know, what are your fears? What are your worries? What do you hope will happen? What do you hope will not happen? . . . . I just tried to talk to as many people as possible and I kept those notes and every now and then, I will go back and look at those . . . .I just tried to talk to as many people as

possible, but I didn't really have a lot of time just to meet the staff as a whole before we got started.

When she accepted the position, she hadn't thought anything about the limited amount of time she had to prepare for the principalship. "I look back over it now, I think, oh, my gosh, that was terrible," she stated and laughed.

Sherry makes time to create opportunities to become acquainted with the faculty. "I take time to make those personal connections with them so that they know that I know them. I don't do nearly as good of a job as I would like to do with that, but I do try." She wanted them to know that she was "on their side and I feel their pain. It is hard. Teaching is a hard job."

Crossing her arms, Sherry explained it was difficult for her to decide if her approach to the school's mission of student performance initially had been the right one.

I look back now, I ask myself, "Did I handle that the right way? Was there something that I could have done differently?" . . . I was so very careful of and maybe too careful of . . . I didn't want to step on the feet of the previous administrator because she had a lot of connections here. . . . There were some things that I wanted to change and I wanted to change right away because they went against my philosophy. . . . I didn't want people to think that I was being disrespectful of the work that she had done here because she did do a lot of good work here. This is a tough school. . . . One of the major decisions that had to be made, it really did, but I think I would have done it in a different way.

She knew that the school was headed in a direction that went against her philosophy when she accepted the position. "I think, if I had to do it over again, I would tell those people, "Yes, I know, but let's give it a little bit of time. Let me observe first."

Smiling, Sherry explained that her vision for student academic success had changed since she came to the school.

Coming in, I was like, "Yes, all these students are poor, but they can learn and they can do this and they can do that." Which is all true, but one thing that I had to back up and say, "Yes, they can, but we have to get some other things in place first." Some of that is creating a school wide Positive Behavior System getting some of those things in place. Advocating for the school to have more resources because of the students that we serve need those to succeed. I needed to advocate for more mental health services. Just those kinds of things that you think you know, "I am going in and we are going to get these people together and we're going to start marching down this road to high expectations." Then you realize, "Whoa. We've got to get some other things in place before we can really tackle some of these academic things."

When I asked Sherry how her initial experiences as the school principal affected her efforts on improving student academic performance, she responded,

I think some of the things that I put into place, very general things like instruction that has a sense of urgency, bell to bell instruction with a sense of urgency, because our kids are so needy and there are so many gaps that every five minutes of instruction counts. . . . I think that is one of the biggest things that has really helped impact academics here is just saying, "Okay, yes, we like to do these fun

things, these feel good things, but the most important thing that we can do for these kids is to teach them to read.

One of her frustrations was the number of phone calls that she receives requesting assembly time with the students of Alread.

You know that is one of those things that they don't teach you in grad school, how to say no to this person that obviously wants to do something really good for your school, but you're like, "You don't understand, I have already had my one assembly this month." A lot of the traditional things that people have done in the past as school assemblies they just don't further instruction.

Sherry sat up in her chair and smiled when she shared she had enrolled in the Master Principal Academy. She told me,

I did that because as a teacher I went through the National Board process twice and I found that to be really good professional development. Well, when I was thinking about that as a young teacher, I thought, I don't feel like a Nationally Board Certified teacher, I shouldn't do that. When I applied for the Master Principal, I was like, "Well, I don't feel like a Master Principal, but . . . I need the professional development that is there to help these systems for change. So, I guess I would say, not only calling upon my mentors, but professional development and really being reflective, being a reflective practitioner.

Sherry attended the state required administrators' induction training as an assistant principal. She commented, "It was very helpful because I had another assistant principal for my mentor who had been an assistant principal a whole lot longer than me through that process." She stated that she wished she had been an assistant principal

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when she went back to school to get her master's because "I almost feel like you need to actually be experiencing some of the things as an assistant principal before you get more education about it so you will know how to apply it." She further commented that she would have liked the induction program to have gone on for two years instead of one with a mentor. "That first year, you don't even know what to ask," she stated.

Tightening her jaw, Sherry recalled as an assistant principal she often felt overwhelmed. The school was very needy with a lot of behavioral problems, "there was a lot of system work to be done."

> We (administrative staff) were so overwhelmed. I often said that it was like playing a gigantic game of Whack-A-Mole. You are just trying to make sure that everybody is safe and that you are making compliance issues. It would have been helpful for me to have had someone the second year.

The resources that Sherry uses now have changed over the period of time she has been leading Alread. She explained,

> The resources that I need and are accessing are deeper. . . . I really know how to handle the service stuff and even the middle level stuff, but how do I go deeper with my staff? How do I build a vision and a mission of the school and get everybody onboard? How do I access community, resources? How do I advocate effectively for my school? How do I get us on this path of being a school that is known for X, Y and Z or whatever it is that we want to be known for?

I commented that I had noticed the mission statement hanging up in the entry way as I entered the building. She confessed, "That was created previous to me and it is one of those things that for the first couple of years, I am not going to touch." Sherry bit at her

lower lip. "It had been on my plans to begin that this next semester. I am actually meeting with my leadership on Monday and we are going to start doing some leg work as far as meeting with the entire staff." The staff says the mission statement every day, but "we don't really realize what it means," she stated, moving back into her chair.

My message to the staff is going to be, "Here it is. Let's talk about it and let's talk about what we do with this every day. Let's talk about whether or not it is something that has evolved and that we want to change? Is this really what we want to be known for and if so, we have to make sure that we can communicate that through our behaviors?"

When asked what resources she would have liked to have had access to upon entering the job that would have enhanced her ability to direct reform, she answered confidently, "I would have liked to have access to that deeper level of systems changes because that is what I feel that I didn't have." A lot of the Master Principal Academy materials that she received this year would have been of great benefit to her early on during her first year as the principal. "I think that some of that material is needed immediately because . . . I have my book right over there, I go through it almost every day now," she commented as she nodded her head toward a full book case.

Sherry shared her current professional goal was to delegate responsibilities to her faculty more often.

I'm a big systems person, so, just learning to delegate through those systems more. I am not a control freak at all, but I think that part of my resistance to delegating things is, I think, "Well, that is my job. That is why I am getting paid."

I really try to protect people's time for them instead of going, "This is something that you can handle."

In addition, she wanted to complete all three phases of the Master Principal Academy.

I have friends that are in all different levels now that have been deemed Master Principals. That is something that I want to do. I just want to build this school as a lighthouse for the community. I want to get services here for the community. One of the things that we don't have here is a preschool so that is what we are working on. We don't have the funding for a preschool, so, we are working on that right now. I would like to get some services here for adult education because there are a lot of the people who need access to those services. We have those services in the district, but the parents don't have transportation.

Nodding her head in response, Sherry stated that she does plan on staying in the district.

But, when I can retire, I am retiring. I'm not going to be one of those forty year people. I have eleven more years and I plan on spending them right here unless something changes. Of course, you never know what's going to come up or what's going to happen, but my plan is to spend the next eleven years creating a community school that is fully functioning.

Even once she retires, she anticipates staying in the geographic area.

Sherry was not sure how the transition will be handled but she assumes "that it will be somewhat similar to how it happened this time as far as interviewing and things like that." She expressed, "I would hope that the new person wouldn't just have one day to prepare." She implied, she would have liked to have had more time with her

predecessor to prepare to lead the school. Setting her jaw, she stated, "I met one day for like two hours with Mrs. Bean before she walked out the door." Sherry felt she would have benefitted from having someone who could have told her, "This is what was going on. This was the culture. This is how things were done." Prior to Sherry accepting the principalship, Alread had never had an assistant principal to hand down building information. She recalled,

> We had to piece a lot of things together ourselves and sometimes we pieced them together wrong. We made false assumptions or we didn't come to the conclusion quite as fast as if we had, had an assistant principal and she had said, "Listen, this is what was happening." I would hope that there would be an assistant principal in place that could already be in training for the principal's position.

When discussing future plans and accountability, Sherry expressed her concern about her students being ready to take the new accountability assessments because they lacked computer literacy skills. "When are they going to get the technology instruction that they need to pass the PARCC (tests created by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers), all the while focusing on bell to bell instruction and finding additional time for literacy?" Shaking her head and lifting her eyebrows, she disclosed,

> Honestly, I can't really get too upset about it yet because we are all in the same boat. It is going to take a while. I think that it is going to be good when we get some of the initial kinks worked out of it. I would much rather the kids be tested with a real world application than things that don't make sense to them and don't matter. . . . I am a little worried about the technology skills.

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Fairview District – Don Gordon

Harrison Middle School had 403 students enrolled at the time of the interview. It was 1 of 4 middle schools in the district I visited. Although Harrison was located in an extremely nice part of Fairview, 57% of the students enrolled there received free or reduced lunch. Harrison Middle School was labeled a school in need of improvement according to the department of education despite being honored as being among the top achieving schools in the state during the 2013 and 2014 school years (Table 4). Don Gordon has one assistant principal. He was there prior to Don Gordon taking on the principal's position.

Harrison Middle School was located about 10 miles from downtown Fairview, sandwiched between agricultural fields on two sides and residential housing on the other two sides. As I approached the school, a red aluminum roof showed off the school's official color while a brick sign out front surrounded by pansies declared the school's name as well as upcoming events.

As I entered the partially glassed office, a woman greeted me and immediately walked down the hall to let Don Gordon know I had arrived. Within a few minutes, he walked into the foyer, a tall and slender man with short brown hair. He wore light grey slacks and a blue pin striped shirt with an open collar. It took him a moment to offer me his hand. He appeared a bit uncomfortable using short brisk movements and gestures.to welcome me to the building and lead me back to his office.

Don's office was a large rectangle with the smaller outside wall boasting a line of windows. He had a large, light colored wood desk facing the door and on the far side sat

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a round table surrounded by four chairs. He offered me a beverage and then motioned for me to sit down.

Once he had retrieved his cup of coffee, he took the spot facing the door and seemed to relax though he appeared eager to start the interview. After signing the consent form, the interview began with him telling me about his professional experience in education. Don has been the principal at Harrison Middle School for one year. His predecessor had opened the building and held the principalship at Harrison for 12 years. Prior to accepting his position at Harrison, Don was employed as an assistant middle school principal for a similarly sized school located in a rural area for three years. He taught 7th through 9th grade math for fourteen years before going into administration. Don had the least leadership experience of those interviewed in the study. He sat forward and shared how he had learned about the principal opening.

> I learned about it (principal position) through the grapevine that it was coming
> open, but then it was posted on the internet. But, I had no inside track and I don't
> even know if inside tracks exist. There is a myth that people think that there may
> be some, but I learned about the job officially through the internet, through the
> onsite, online job posting.

Sensing his defensiveness, I asked him if he had friends in the Fairview district that let him know about the upcoming position. He settled back into his chair and wrapped his hands around his coffee mug, then replied,

> I found out about the principal retiring, but the assistant had been here for
> multiple years and I assumed he was going to move into that position since I
> hadn't heard anything but great things about him. So, I discounted it because I

live right down the street and it's like the dream job. So, I put my feelings and

emotions about it away until it actually came open.

The factors that helped him decide to apply for a principal's positon were:

Grade level, middle school is a grade level that I am use to. High school jobs, I

don't think I would be employable for. I have never worked in a high school.

Experience is I think, key and so, the grade level was appropriate. I had gotten my

feet wet enough as an assistant.

Don also had a desire to work where his children attended school. "My children were

going to be attending there which was another bonus. I call it 'cheating time a little bit'

because you get to see your children throughout the day here and there."

When asked if he had someone he considered a professional mentor, he readily

replied, "I do. It's not been as strong as I would have liked because they are a principal

and they don't work here and we don't live anywhere close. We have to be very

intentional."

In addition, he has a close friend who had been a principal prior to coming to Fairview

that he considered a mentor. Don described their relationship to me.

He has been a bigger sounding board because he and I talk a lot more, because we

are friends and he has a lot more experience. He's been a building principal

before. He was an assistant then a principal and now he's an assistant because he

moved all over from the other side of the state and he had to get his foot in the

door. So, he's preparing again to go back into being a principal.

Taking a sip of coffee and then turning his attention to me, Don explained he had

met one of his mentors over fifteen years ago when he was teaching. "Then he became

my boss at one time because he was an assistant over me. And then, the other one mentor was someone that hired me."

> When asked if anyone encouraged him to apply for his position, he responded,
>
> My last boss in Shelbyville. She encouraged me although she didn't want to lose me because things were going well. I didn't think I was hitting it out of the park by any means but she was like, "You're, ready." She told me that I was ready to have my own building. Nothing really opened up.

As an assistant principal in Shelbyville, Don thought about "moving back into Fairview," as an assistant principal but he did not receive the job.

> Then the next year, this one came up. But, she encouraged me. I talked to her. I let her know my intentions. I let the superintendent know exactly my intentions. I'm a believer in letting them know because we are all big boys and big girls and I wasn't moving out there (Shelbyville).

Sitting forward in his chair, Don explained,

> The small towns around these big ones are very close knit. It is best if you live there and work there because you get the whole picture. . . . The school is the pride of the city and it makes everything work much, much smoother. To go out and kind of chip my way in and get into that over there was tough.

The main benefit of having a mentor was realizing "that I am not alone; that it happens to other people; don't overreact; this too shall pass," he explained as he picked up his coffee cup with both hands.

> So, it is not necessarily the comfort things, but also the rational and reality checks which have been good. And, then also, "You might want to do this as soon as you

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can. You might want to do this. You should have done this first." And, then that

was more from my friend not my ex-boss. He is more direct because our

relationship is much deeper. I ask him, "What should my next step be?" Strategy,

there hasn't been a real damage control thing so far, which is nice, though, it

could happen today.

Don tried to convey the isolation of the position.

There are only fourteen of us in the city that do what I do. It is empowering, but

it's also, an honor and responsibility. I have to remind myself that I am the right

person for this job. I did interview for a long time and they did check out

references.

When he was applying for the principal's position at Harrison, his mentors were

divided on their advice as to whether he should or should not apply for the position. His

boss from Shelbyville encouraged him, but his friend in the district did not. Sitting

straight in his chair, he recalled his friend's response.

He thought I was crazy. . . It was because it was my second application to this

district in the second year and if you apply too much and get looked over then you

get the stigma. . . . I don't know how true that is. As a hirer of teachers, yes, that

is a real thing. . . . My friend thought I was really taking a big professional risk. I

felt like I had to do it.

The interview for his current position consisted of two separate meetings. The

first was with a committee of approximately 10 people.

Everyone from assistant superintendents, one assistant superintendent, one

director of curriculum, a principal and the assistant principal who's currently here

was also on the hiring interview. I was very relieved whenever I saw him because I didn't know if he applied or not and I still went for it. When I saw him in there, I knew I had a chance at the job. There were also, three teachers from the building, a parent and that's it. Then the second (interview) happened after I got a call back within a couple of days that the superintendent would like to interview. It was just me and the superintendent. Then it was put on ice for 10 days. Probably the longest 10 days of my life.

He considered himself fortunate to have had the experienced assistant principal remain on staff. "Yeah, it's a game changer and he is phenomenal," he stated with a smile.

The interview process was not intimidating. Don confided, "I am rarely intimidated because there's just no reason for it. We all shop at Walmart. That's my philosophy."

When asked if he was worried that he would not receive the position, he explained worry was not the correct word for his experience. He was on vacation and yet,

It was only every other thought. Like, we went on a train ride in the mountains, it was only every other thought. White water rafting, horseback riding, it was only every other thought. It consumed conversation and it dominated silence because I couldn't do anything. It was debilitating waiting. I don't know if it is worry, but I don't know if it is anxious. Whatever you call it, it was all consuming waiting for the outcome because it was the last step professionally for me to go and then I am done. It was what I have worked for, for eighteen years.

Don credited his experience as an assistant principal in Shelbyville and his mentor in Fairview for familiarizing him with the specific role responsibilities of his current position as principal of Harrison.

> Administrative experience in another district just ripped the cover off my eyes. I was so sheltered as a teacher. They really have no idea of what goes on. Ten years ago, I said the phrase, "I can do his job tomorrow," talking about my boss. I was so far from the truth and so arrogant at that time. It was just foolish, just straight up foolish. The preparation of that three years of administration is priceless. Having a mentor administrator who I think is one of the best trainers of administrators that I've ever seen has been monumental.

He further reflected that it was beneficial to be able to get "real time" advice as well as have the relief of not having the responsibility for the building. "There's no way somebody can do this job without being an assistant first unless you are ready to kind of wait 3-5 years for them to get up to speed. . . . That was new to me."

Don reported that he did not have an opportunity to acquaint himself with the faculty prior to accepting the responsibilities of the principalship. He did not think it was an issue, however, because the superintendent had talked to them about what type of principal the school wanted. She gave Don a list of the faculty's responses. "I read that list obviously, but that's all I knew. I guess that is some acquaintance, but it wasn't any kind of real communication with them. . . . The staff loved that she did that." Don fell silent as he further considered my question. Setting his coffee cup aside, he told me the faculty had "validated" her choice all last year through their comments about the

transition being smooth. "'Smooth transition,' I heard that all year long. Smooth because I didn't change a thing, that's why," he stated with a hint of frustration in his voice.

That's why it was a smooth transition and it's still going to be smooth because he did a lot of good things. My goodness, he was good. This school was not in any trouble. . . . It couldn't have been any better to be honest with you, I don't think.

When asked what opportunities he had to further acquaint himself to the faculty since accepting the position as principal, he explained that he had been given a welcome party in July and had provided professional development for the faculty before school started. He stated,

They started learning my sense of humor, learning the speed at which I go which is different, the use of technology was different, and I really tried to not put expectations out there because it wasn't important at that time. They've got to buy into me before they will buy into anything else. I read the *Twenty-one Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* years before that. It was huge to look at some of the pitfalls there and then take action on those things.

Don recalled that his predecessor had come by with the superintendent and they had visited for about three hours before the building keys were handed to him. His assistant principal came over at the same time and visited "maybe an hour and a half and expressed his excitement. He said, "I look forward to working with you."" Don felt relieved when the assistant principal told him "his loyalty is towards me."

Don has approached the school's mission of student performance by trying to hire excellent teachers. He sees the teachers as the "gatekeepers" of the curriculum. He picked

up his empty coffee mug and stared at it for a moment; then taking a deep breath, he stated,

> We are teaching Common Core while we still strive to meet the benchmark goals. We had indicators that showed early on that there was no way that we were going to continue to achieve in math and we were already not hitting it. In English, we were going to be close. We still ended up hitting the English benchmark even though we were teaching something differently, but we didn't hit the math.

The school received "benchmark money" for the last two years for being one of the top 20% of the schools in the state. The district personnel discussed the school's performance with him in regard to not making adequate progress, but he did not believe that it was a serious reprimand. "The state department said nothing; there was no huge pressure. I would know about it."

The main change in Don's vision for student academic success since he came to the school has been, "It's not as important. . . . We focus on hope, relationships and academics, in that order." Don has changed the mission of the school this year. "We define hope here and this is our new mission for this building. It is different because we had an older mission that no one actually said." Moving forward in his chair, he smiled before he continued. "I constructed the mission without the faculty knowing that I was constructing it because I just wanted to watch them. What did they do? They did relationships the best. Relationships in the school provide hope." His goal was to teach the mission through a rotational basis during a classroom period each week. He explained,

It is my plan to rotate hope, relationships and academics on a three year rotation. This year, our goal is to promote hope in our advisory classes that we have next year. I am slowly forming a plan for that. Luckily, it is six months in advance which is great. Last year I didn't really know where I was about this time. We will focus on academics the third year. Also, by that time, Common Core will come on board and it'll be good timing for that as well.

Don's experiences as a classroom teacher have affected his efforts on improving student academic achievement.

You've got to be committed that the kids you teach are going to learn the material. Once you get over that hump, then you're on your way. If you still struggle with that, you've got a problem because then you'll let some kids slide.

He reported that he has "been all over the map. If they don't take charge of their learning then, I'm not failing them; they are failing themselves. Well, they are twelve years old; you can't allow a kid to fail."

When Don was confronted by specific leadership concerns, the resources he used the most was "other people."

I talk to other people, mentors, my assistants. I read books, contemplate, try not to overreact. I have the attitude that there is a solution, which is huge. Don't ignore the problem. I use a lot of the things that I hear and things that I garner from other people.

In order to use human resources to the fullest, he revealed, "You also have to be committed that you are not the smartest person in the room. If you think that you're the smartest person in the room, then you are in a room by yourself. "

The resource Don would have liked to have had access to upon entering the job that would have enhanced his ability to direct school reform was a monthly list of deadlines. "It would give me clarity. Also, leadership holds us accountable to those dates. That would have been great. We are still not there." Don went on to report that a friend of his had been working on a list that outlined all compliance requirements and dates. The idea for creating the document came out of the Master Principal Academy that he attended. However, Don stated, "I am not ready for it just yet. I am getting real close because stuff is just everywhere. You know, stuff is just everywhere." When discussing the benefits of a list of compliance dates for a year, he shared, "You lose quality when compliance becomes a hot item. Compliance should be just part of your normal routine."

Later in the interview, Don expressed that time management and organizational strategies were important to the functioning of his position. He continues to struggle with both of these issues and has read books on different organizational processes. The reason organization is crucial, "You have to be able to disengage and engage to . . . the new situation at hand with a clear conscience and . . . know that you are not going to forget anything else."

He stated that he enjoyed his job and he can put in a lot of hours before he realizes it. "I had no idea that you can work that much and enjoy it." He tries to prioritize his time. "Family is first. My service to God, my service to family, my service to job is the order that I operate in. That's kind of the way it works. I jeopardize that at times because of the long hours."

Don's professional goals for the future included improving in "meeting compliance issues." In addition, he confided, "I am continuing to work on relationships,

it is monumental. Working through the difficult things in our staff of differences in personalities and also problems that arise up and how they are handled whenever they come to me." Don has also set the goal to hire better staff.

I feel like last year's hiring was not a true calibration because we hired everybody on one year contracts. You're not going to get everybody who would normally apply if it is advertised as one year because no one is going to leave a job for just a one year job and risk losing their place. It's just not going to happen. You just are not going to get the up and comer, the person who's coming out of college and is just knocking it out of the park. . . . I got turned down three times last year in the summer all because of the one year and they were phenomenal.

Don sat up in his chair and inched toward me. "Fired me up," he stated with a firm set to his jaw. "Last year is an anomaly and it disappointed me."

When asked if he intended on staying with the district and in the geographic area, Don eagerly responded, "Yes, this is the best. . . . You are going to look far and wide before you find a better place to live."

When I asked Don how the transition would be handled during his eventual replacement, he had no idea. He then flipped my question and replied,

I guess the question originates from do I like how I was transferred myself. Would I replicate what the superintendent did to me? His process was for you to learn on your own because whatever he told me is his spin at twenty five years older than me. He didn't say all that, but that's the truth. It's a spin that you do. I didn't get hired because I was wanting to learn from the person who's the brilliant principal before me. I have a skill set that was perceived to be able to allow me to

be successful. . . . Hopefully, you don't hire the best from a bad lot. It's a practice that's not rewarding and sustainable. You will lose your building eventually that way.

On reflection and with a somber expression, he commented that as the retiring principal,

I think I would have checked in more if it had been helpful to the person. They almost were like, "I'm just going to stay away from the building." I'm like, "I'm not territorial." Now, 10 years ago, I was territorial, but now it doesn't matter, man. They're not coming after my job anymore. That little fight is over. Now, the fight is to continue to make the impact. I think I would go over more. I would communicate more. Reach out and say, "Ha, what are you finding out? What do you want to bounce off of me?" Because there are things that they know, but then also in the advice that I would give back, it would not be this is how I handled it.

He continued to state that he hopes to have more procedures in place by the time he leaves the building. He explained,

In the transition if things are going well which I hope they are when I leave, I don't want them to have to fix anything until Christmas. I want them to get to Thanksgiving and then their mind will start working because you're afraid to change.

Don believed that an experienced assistant principal is essential to the position. "I can't imagine trying to run a building if you are not getting along with your assistant or they're not doing their job. I can't even imagine it."

He expressed that having an assistant principal to whom the faculty responded well had been beneficial. Don discussed potentially staying in the building with the same assistant through to retirement and the need to mentor new leaders to take their place.

If we go out together, we have got to be committed to training leaders from within. We lost a couple last year. We were talking about it yesterday. We are still feeling the effects of one of the leaders leaving last year and he is now in administration. We've got to train leaders, and train leaders, and train leaders.

Fairview District - John Johnson

Fairview High School has 1,895 students enrolled for the 2014 year with 30% of the students receiving free and reduced lunch. The district has 9,421 students enrolled in thirteen schools. Fairview High School was considered to be in need of improvement according to the state department of education and NCLB guidelines (Table 4). This is the district's only high school. School administration includes five assistant principals (4 men and 1 woman).

Fairview High School sat on top of a hill across from the district administrative offices and a city park located off a main street running through the heart of Fairview. The front of the building consisted of two sections both reached over two stories in height and were surrounded by glass. One of the building sections was lit up with the high schools initials displayed. The other section had a small plastic sign which denoted the high school's administrative building. Entering the open foyer, I was surprised to see two women sitting in a large glass booth with small ticket windows that allowed an individual to slide things into them and speak to them through an intercom. They were very friendly

and polite as they asked for my driver's license to enter the building. I explained that I was late, my purse was in the car and I was visiting the principal. I was hoping that she might simply call him to get me. Instead, she put my name and birthdate into the computer and printed me off a badge. She then pointed me to a long flight of stairs to the second floor where the principal's office was located. The stairs appeared to be suspended in air and were surrounded by glass. Upon reaching the second floor, a woman set behind a large desk against the only visible wall and greeted me. She looked somewhat bored and did not appear to have any work to be done. She made a phone call and asked me to have a seat.

As I took a seat in one of the black vinyl and chrome chairs standing along the wall opposite the front desk, a woman dressed in a business casual pant suit came to meet me. She was cheerful and I believe she was the person I had been making arrangements through for the appointment. She led me down the glass lined hall to John Johnson's open door. He greeted me warmly and ushered me in through two offices to a conference room. The first office appeared to be a general office area, the second a personal work room and the third the conference area. You could not reach any of these areas, however, without going through the first office by his secretary. I wondered if the first room originally had been planned for a secretary to guard the principal's office.

A large smile formed on John Johnson's face as he extended his hand towards me and gave me a firm handshake. He stood tall against the doorway in a dark suit, white linen shirt and solid maroon tie, the school's color. He was clean shaven with a full head of white hair. Having lead me to the long conference table, John took off his coat and hung it on the chair behind him as if signaling he was ready to get down to work.

John told me he has been the principal at Fairview High School for five years. Prior to accepting the position he had unsuccessfully planned to retire for the last 15 years. Ten years prior to accepting his current position, he resigned as the Belmount High School principal with the intention to retire. Then he had the opportunity to work in the Governor's Office on an educational grant for a year. After that, he accepted a temporary position for a year as an assistant principal at newly opened high school. He then received a phone call from Fairview requesting that he apply for the high school principal's position. John taught social studies for four years before going into administration.

When asked what factors helped him decide to apply for a principal's position, he sat back in his chair and stated,

> They have been the same all along. Every principal's position that I have held, it really is about the ability to help students to be successful and help them in terms of developing a plan to be both college and career ready, to assist parents with their work with their children.

John explained that he had a mentor, "but I have been doing this for forty-five years, now." He continues to stay in contact with his mentor on an irregular basis, his first principal from another state.

Leaning forward on the table, he revealed,

> That is one of those things that I take great pride in is people that have worked for me and then gone on to be principals. I hope that everybody I hired, I hope that they want my job. I think that when someone wants your job, they are really going to put forth the effort to be successful.

John stated that mentors were great resources for information.

The benefit is somebody to call when there is a situation where it is a close call, and I try to get feedback on his experiences. I still call other principals now and say, "I've got this situation, how would you respond to that?" Most, I can do on my own, but even with forty-five years there are one or two you come across that you need further input on.

When I asked if he would have applied for the position without having received encouragement to do so, he responded, "I really haven't given that much thought other than it looked like a good opportunity and so I took advantage of it." John jokingly stated with a grin, "My wife and I were getting ready to buy a motor home and this came along and we opted for this rather than that."

A committee of twelve people interviewed him for the position "composed of central office personnel and faculty" from the high school. He had a second interview with the superintendent. John shared that the interviews were not intimidating "because of the years of experience"; however, he did prepare for the interview in order "to have any success at all."

John was not worried he would not receive the position, he told me, because "I realize that they're going to select the person that is the best fit for the campus and so, I didn't worry about it. I worried more about how I did during the interview." Reflecting on his performance, he frowned and stated, "You think after the interview is over about all of the things that you wished you had said. You wonder, how well did I really do?" Sitting back in his chair, he reiterated, "But, had I not been called, I would have been okay with that because they would have selected the right person for this position."

Discussing the success that he has had in his career, John revealed, "I am only as good as the people that I work with and those that I have worked with and I am nobody special. I just want to do the very best that I can."

Opportunities helped John familiarize himself with the responsibilities of leading Fairview High School:

Contact with individuals in terms of what some of the problems were here that needed to be addressed; looked on the website to try and get test information and data about the campus in terms of ethnicity, free and reduced lunch, special education populations; what their mission and agenda was; some of their recent accomplishments both in the academics, arts and the athletics. I tried to do my research before I went in for the interview.

Once in the position, "I began to meet with each one of the department chairs to find out where they are, where have they been and where do they want to go."

John cited his initial speech to the faculty as being an opportunity to acquaint himself with the staff. "I met with the faculty and shared with them: what they could expect from me and what I expect from them, what I expect from students and some lines we cannot cross," he stated in a resolute tone of voice. After that, John used, "Informal and formal observations in the classroom, personalization with faculty members, those two things" to further acquaint himself with the faculty. He stated that relationships were important.

Every person brings a little bit of luggage of some kind. . . . We have faculty members who have medical issues. More and more, I see them dealing with

parents who have medical issues and so to try and help them in any way we possibly can.

As a new leader to the school, John decided his approach to the school's mission of student performance by analyzing the student data.

Number one, let's look at the data and let's look at the history of that data. Where were they five years ago? What has changed about . . . the free and reduced population, the free lunch population, the reduced lunch population, the increase in minority population? So, you take all that data and you work with your department chairs specifically and the two major ones are language arts and math and try to determine what are we doing? What are we not doing? And, what do we need to do to help kids be successful?

John added in a flat tone of voice, the school's mission statement had been revised. "It has been rewritten by the leadership team to focus more on whether or not we are preparing kids to be college and career ready and to be involved in terms of civic oriented."

When asked how his vision for student academic success had changed since he came to the school, he sat forward in his chair and began discussing his ongoing battle with bridging the socioeconomic learning gap at Fairview High School. He vented,

This is a faculty that over the years, they have had the upper level, the advanced placement student who has been extremely successful, extremely successful. But, the gap between the free and reduced student and the high achieving student has not narrowed because it has been difficult because that free and reduced lunch population and the minority population is increased. That's been the biggest

challenge that I have had is to get them to understand that we can't continue to teach the same way we taught 10 years ago or five years ago. It is a different student today than it was. That's been the most challenging and I have not been as successful as I would like to be. It kind of haunts me a little bit that I have not met with that success.

Currently, John is preparing for the 9th graders in the district to move to the high school the following year. When asked what resources he used to address issues, he related how important delegating tasks into committees and collaboration were in his style of leadership. He stated,

> We have a transition committee that is led by one of the assistant principals that looks at a large number of topics. And then, we have a schedule committee because we can't continue on a seven period day here because of our facilities. So, we are working through the leadership team and a committee of teachers to look at the schedule for them to understand why we need to go to block schedule.

He reported that his staff was "more collaborative today than they were five years ago." There are approximately 16-20 members on his leadership team. The team collaborates with all areas in the building including arts, health and counseling.

> He nodded his head slightly as he reflected on some of the changes that he led.

> In the five years that I have been here, we now have a collaboration period that they did not have before. . . We've implemented small learning communities. We have been involved with a huge construction project that is not done and so

teachers have had to move at least once and some twice . . . when the last part is done it will be the third year.

When asked what resources he would have liked to have had access to upon entering the job that would have enhanced his ability to direct school reform, he noted without hesitation,

I wish there had been a better plan for vertical teaming, vertical instruction (curriculum alignment across grade levels). There was certainly horizontal but there has not been a great deal of collaboration between the junior high and the middle school and us. And, that has improved over the years because of district deciding that was in the best interest to do that.

John went on to state that instructional facilitators had been assigned to address the curriculum alignment concerns district wide and the high school campus had access to a full time English facilitator. However, he would like to see a second facilitator be employed at the school to address math.

John's favorite resources to stay informed of what is going in the field of education were the National Association of Secondary Principals Association's daily newsletter and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's conference.

John leaned on the arm of his chair and sighed when I asked him what his professional goals for the future held. He stated he wanted to finish up the construction on campus, complete the transition of the 9th graders over to the high school and narrow the achievement gap between the student populations. He remarked there was not a lot he

could do to further construction except for routing traffic which can be a challenge. In regard to transitioning the 9th graders over to the high school, he was relying on his committees. "We will develop the plan and then work the plan and try to get updates to that once a week. And, the third, reducing the gap, that is just ongoing with curriculum development and meeting with the departments."

His future plans are uncertain at this moment due to the demands of the position. "It is about 60-70 hours and at 68, it's not the mental side. It's just becoming more and more difficult for me to physically keep up," he stated without emotion. "To be very honest with you, I might come to work Monday, might not," he stated and laughed.

I will have to take a very close look at this in February because two of those three things will be met. One is that the construction will be complete and secondly, the transition will be in place and ready to go. And, I have thought many times that that would be a good break point. Someone new coming in, you know, can pick it up with the new ninth grade coming over, 30 to 35 new teachers coming over, rather than working another year or two and having to make that transition. I have really given it a lot of thought to this being the break point. If I decide to leave, it will be my decision not because somebody has asked me to leave.

John does plan on staying in Fairview when he leaves the district and retires.

When asked if he knew how the transition would be handled during his eventual replacement, he replied in a weary tone,

I can only guess. I can only hope that what they would do. I consider myself to be the luckiest principal that there ever was. I have had opportunities that just

nobody else has had. . . . . The opportunities that I've had are unmatchable and so, I want to make sure that I am fair to this district that has been good to me by being sure that they certainly have ample time to select someone to replace me which won't be that hard. But, I would hope that they would do a nationwide search so that they get the most highly qualified candidate in here that they can get. . . . I would certainly be honored if they asked for my input. I would be willing to give that to them and again, if the person they select during that transition wants information from me or wants to meet with me, I would certainly would be available to do that.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

School efforts to improve student academic performance have been the primary focus of education since the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001. A large number of resources have been used by a multitude of school reform measures without consistent results. Since reform measures require a continuous effort and principals are at the apex of any schoolwide transition, principal turnover and a lack of succession planning may be a contributing factor in why schools are not meeting accountability measures. Both businesses and not-for-profit organizations have recognized the need to prepare for leadership changes through succession planning. At this time, few studies have described the principal's experiences of succession.

The purpose of this study was to explore principal experiences of succession planning. The findings of this study discussed in Chapter 5 can be used to inform best practices in leadership policies that will support schools at the building level, principals as they work toward higher levels of student performance and districts as they prepare to hire new leaders. In addition, the findings should further educational research in the area of succession planning. Three primary research questions guided the study.

The first question examined the principals' experiences of moving through the processes of accepting the principalship, leading a school in a climate of accountability and preparation for their eventual replacement. Secondly, the study related the dynamics of Peters' model of succession planning (planning, sustaining and forecasting) to the experiences of the principals interviewed in the study. The third research question centered on what practices the principals found of benefit to them as they function as building leaders.

Chapter 4 presented the results of this study through creating a narrative organization of the study's data into specific categories of interest. Chapter 5 serves to provide insight and meaning into the data presented earlier. The discussion considers the literature on succession planning and how the current study fits into the existing research base. Recommendations for future education practices are considered as well as recommendations for future research based on the study analysis.

Principal Experiences

Analysis of the case studies revealed findings in the areas of school leadership retention, hiring practices, supportive relationships and school transitions. Nine of the 10 principals interviewed were recruited by someone associated with the district. Five of the participants held the position of assistant principal in the building when they were hired as the building principal. Two participants accepted a position as an assistant principal from another building within the district (Sherry Taylor and Carol Smith). Three participants came from outside the district to accept the principalship (Todd Lawson, Don Gordon and John Johnson). One of these participants had been employed with the district once before (Don Gordon). Three principals reported having predecessors with 5 years or

more experience.

Recent research showed that principals require a minimum of five years to implement reform efforts to increase student achievement (Fullan, 1991; McAdams, 1997; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Analyzing demographic data from the 10 principals surveyed, the range of years leading in the building was 1 to 6 years with a median of 2 and a mean of 2.4 years. Based on the principals' years of experience in their specific buildings, they all appeared to either be in the initial process of learning the school's mission or moving towards higher levels of academic performance through reform. The exception was Carol Smith who had completed five years at Holmes Middle School. The years of building leadership for the principals' predecessors ranged from 2 to 8 years with the median being 5.5 and a mean of 4.7. Table 2 (p. 67) shows the number of years principals led in the building and the number of years their predecessors led. Since they had five years' experience in their specific buildings prior to leaving, one might assume that four of the 10 predecessors could have achieved reform.

In Thomson's (2009) study, elementary school principals were found to stay in their position of leadership longer than high school principals. He further reported that principal turnover rates were lower for schools seen as academically successful and the socioeconomic status of the student body was high. All three of the schools studied in the Cane Valley District were Title I schools. For a school to be considered for Title I funding, they must show a minimum of 40% of their student population as being eligible for free or reduced rate lunches. There were no schools in the Belmount District that qualified for Title I funding. Alread and Harrison in the Fairview District qualified as Title I schools. Alread had the highest percent of free and reduced lunch rates for

students, 80%. In regard to the socioeconomic status and achievement rating of the districts studied, a high turnover rate for the principals interviewed would be expected; however, participants did not consider their building as struggling academically. When participants were asked if they planned to stay with the district, nine of the participants were not in the process of looking for another position; however, most of the principals had formulated a plan to move into a district level position or a university level position away from the principalship. Several other principals knew exactly how long they had until they would be eligible to retire (Carol Smith, Matt Turner, Sherry Taylor) and one who was working beyond the regular age of retirement (John Johnson).

Principal Retention

Finding 1 – Participants reported "overwhelming" job responsibilities that included long work days, changing accountability measures, a lack of support by the community and the district; however, principals did not report a desire to leave their positions prior to retirement or attaining a district level position despite several participants being highly aware of when they were going to retire or having planned an alternative career path.

Norton (2002) discussed the alarming rate of principal turnover in the United States and the negative impact on schools. Kennedy (2000) found principals were leaving the profession because of the ever growing demands placed on them by the job, the salary, the amount of time spent working and a lack of community and parent support. In his study, Lashway (2003) reported the job complexity, workload and lack of emotional support were key contributors to stress in principals. Principals normally responded to these challenges by putting in more hours on the job and working harder.

All 10 principals in this study commented on the excessive number of hours spent at work. Each principal listed different challenges and supports but all participants agreed that time to complete their work was a major challenge. Denver Jackson's largest concern was finding time for her family while maintaining long hours at work. She reflected,

The problem is always time. That is a huge piece and there is so much to do. I could work until 8 or 9 o'clock every night and I've tried. And of course, this is my fourth year, it is a little easier. I try to get out of here to spend time with my family, but I still take it home.

Carol Smith felt overwhelmed with an ever increasing list of job demands. She stated,

It takes more than any one person has to develop those around them and to keep all the balls in the air. It's just, someone has to call calf rope at some point, because we just keep adding, and adding, and adding and at some point it's just not feasible anymore. . . . All of those accountability pieces being so varied and so many make it almost impossible. . . . Somebody slap the floor, whatever you do because the wrestling is overwhelming. It is.

Long hours combined with extensive work responsibilities were acknowledged as factors that would eventually lead to fatigue, burnout and retirement. Todd Lawson, Olson Middle School principal and one of the younger principals interviewed, stated that he has days that he wonders how long he will be able to keep up the demanding pace and long work hours involved in the position.

None of the participants complained about salary, but several were considering their retirement date when it was ten years or more away (Denver Jackson, Carol Smith,

Matt Turner, Sherry Taylor, Don Gordon, John Johnson). Two middle school principals

voiced their frustration in regard to lack of parental support for the school (Carol Smith

and Don Gordon). Three of the principals mentioned being lonely or isolated (Carol

Smith, Carl Roberts, Sherry Taylor). Two principals mentioned that the position they

held few others understood the demands (Don Gordon, Carl Roberts).

Fairview's principal, John Johnson was an older man that enjoyed his position

and has 45 years of education experience. He anticipates retiring soon since he cannot

keep up with the 70 plus hour work week at the age of 68. He reported, the job had not

been intellectually overwhelming, but physically challenging for him to be able to work

the long hours without any breaks.

Alread Elementary principal, Sherry Taylor, finds her main stressor to be

developing the support resources for her students and the lack of parent support. She

finds her school counselor as a great resource, but has a difficult time providing social

services and counseling services to her students. She would like to hire a social worker

for the school as well as provide parent education classes. Sherry Taylor felt like no one

in the district really understood her school due to the large number of children in poverty

that she serves. Her school has the highest percentage of free and reduced lunches served

in the district as well as in this study.

District supports that principals in this study found helpful or thought would be

helpful included professional development, additional staffing resources, peer support,

district level support, parent volunteers and distributive leadership roles of assistant

principals and teachers.

A factor that may have lowered the attrition rate in my study was an expressed

desire to stay in the geographic location combined with higher than average salaries for the region. Over half of the participants reported that the life style in the area was paramount in making a decision to accept their position as a principal.

Mentoring Principals

Finding 2 – Principals reported benefits from a mentor relationship included learning their job responsibilities, good decision making and career advancement.

The use of the term mentoring has come to mean different things to different people and organizations. Peters (2011) defines mentoring as any relationship that benefits a person in performing their job better. When I asked participants about their mentor relationships they seemed to define a mentor as an individual with more experience who could provide job coaching. This was consistent with professional education organizations such as the National Association of Elementary and Secondary Principals and state teacher induction education programs. Nine of the principals in my study responded that they had a mentor. All 9 listed people who were or had been in positions to supervise them as mentors. Ed stated, "I wouldn't say that I had a mentor. I've tried to learn from all the people that I've worked with." Matt Turner, Danny Weaver and Don Gordon all reported that their mentor was a principal who had supervised them in another district. Denver Jackson, Carol Smith, Todd Lawson and Carl Roberts all had mentors who worked at the district level in supervisory roles to them. Sherry Taylor's mentor was her previous principal in a different building.

All principals stated directly or alluded to the importance of peer support and relationships in helping them perform their duties. Using Peters' (2011) definition of a mentor, an adviser, supervisor, confidant, coach, friend or teacher can all fall under the

category of mentor if they have helped the principal fulfil their job responsibilities. One of the values consistently reported by mentored principals was having a person to discuss confidential information with and to vent when they were upset. As noted earlier, four of the principals had mentors who were their current supervisors. Best practices in mentoring programs recommended a separation of roles between instructional coaches and administrators who evaluated teachers (Hall & Simeral, 2008). When these four principals confided in their supervisors, it was possible their comments were used to evaluate them or not be held in confidence. Zepeda, Bengston and Parylo (2012) in their study of school superintendents from four different districts found the largest district had a mentoring program. The mentors were retired principals who had an exemplary record in leading schools. The mentors did not evaluate the leaders. The purpose was to allow the new leaders to be able to openly discuss their challenges without reluctance.

Todd Lawson told the story of his acceptance of a position in another district. He texted his supervisor mentor immediately after making his decision while they were both in an administrative meeting. His mentor responded by texting all district administrators who attended the meeting immediately. Carol Smith, whose mentor was her supervisor, commented that she did not like to have a personal relationship with her teachers. "If I am going to be evaluating you, I feel like I need a certain amount of distance so there's a balance there." She later stated the main benefit to having a mentor was, "Having that person who I know that I can trust and whatever I say he's not going to hold it against me in a court of law is important."

Several principals relayed their fears in contacting the district office when an issue developed. Todd Lawson explained, "If it gets past me, 'Well you're going to have

to talk to, crap, someone down at district about that.' So, it's just a different frame." Don

Gordon reported, "You want to be 10 foot tall and bulletproof so that nothing fazes you."

Carl Roberts stated one of the main reasons that he wanted to stay in the Belmount

district was the exceptional support he received from the district level administration. The

difference between these individuals' responses to their district supervision and support

may be a reflection of the district's supervisory policies or it could be a function of the

experience participants have as an administrator. Those principals who stated the most

concern about being judged by the district office were principals in their first to third year

of experience with relatively few years' experience as an assistant principal. On the other

hand, the Belmount district appeared to allow their principals more freedom and support

as a general rule. Todd Lawson worked for Cane Valley before moving to Belmount. If

he had known how much more support and independence he would have had in his job,

he would have changed districts earlier. Don Gordon from Fairview confided that during

administrative meetings he believes,

> The only person who cares about the whole and the only one representing is me
>
> when I go out there in that room. Everybody else cares number one about their
>
> building and that makes it hard. . . . My assistant and I, we firmly believe that we
>
> must be the caretakers of what is best for Harrison Middle School because no one
>
> else is that concerned about it.

Three of the principals interviewed further commented that the job isolated them.

Carol Smith confided, "It is a lonely position." Sherry Taylor stated, "One thing that a lot

of principals told me before I took this job was that it's pretty lonely." Carl Roberts

reflected, "When you move to the principalship, many times you can feel like you're on

an island, because it creates a dynamic where sometimes your assistant principals are all

tight, but then the principal, you're at another level." It is interesting to note that Denver

Jackson and Danny Weaver, both elementary level principals, referred to their teachers as

their friends. Sherry Taylor did not express a close relationship with her teachers, but did

confide that she often has a difficult time delegating responsibilities because she felt like

others should not do her job. All three female elementary principals viewed themselves as

teachers despite the administrative title. Danny Weaver and Denver Jackson felt their

affiliation as a teacher helped them bond with their teaching staff.

     Matt Turner, Ed Freeman, Carol Smith and Todd Lawson reported they rely on

their assistant principals for support; either the assistants co-lead with them or they

trusted them to make schoolwide decisions. Don Gordon reported that his main confidant

was a peer who had been a principal before but was now an assistant principal in the

district. When Don Gordon sought out his peer mentor's opinion as to whether he should

apply for his current position or not, he recommended against it. There may be a conflict

of interest in their relationship as his friend aspires to become a principal.

     Hall and Simeral (2008) recommend a triangle of supportive relationships for

teachers. It included membership in a professional learning community of peers, an

instructional coach and the building administrator. Cane Valley and Belmount principals

all reported being part of a PLC that includes principals from their grade level only.

Assistant principals attended their own PLC that was described more as a training session

than a true PLC. Cane Valley principal Denver Jackson reported that she attends three

required PLC administrative meetings each week with the district administration;

however, the meetings may not follow the intent of a true PLC. Hall and Simeral (2008)

describe the PLC as allowing "every member of the school community to benefit from the expertise, strengths and experience of every other member." For a PLC to function, all parties need to be allowed equal participatory status.

The majority of the principals benefitted from fellow principal peer support within the district and through professional associations. Denver Jackson, Ed Freeman and Todd Lawson all used email to respond to support request among other principals. Denver Jackson stated,

We email a lot. I will get an email that a principal will send out to the entire principals' network that says, "Okay, what would you do in this case?" So, we can all grow and we always reply to all, so everybody sees it.

Figure 1 illustrates the triad relationship between building administrators, coaches(mentor) and professional learning communities (Hall & Simeral, 2008, p. 336).

Figure 1: Relationship Triangulation
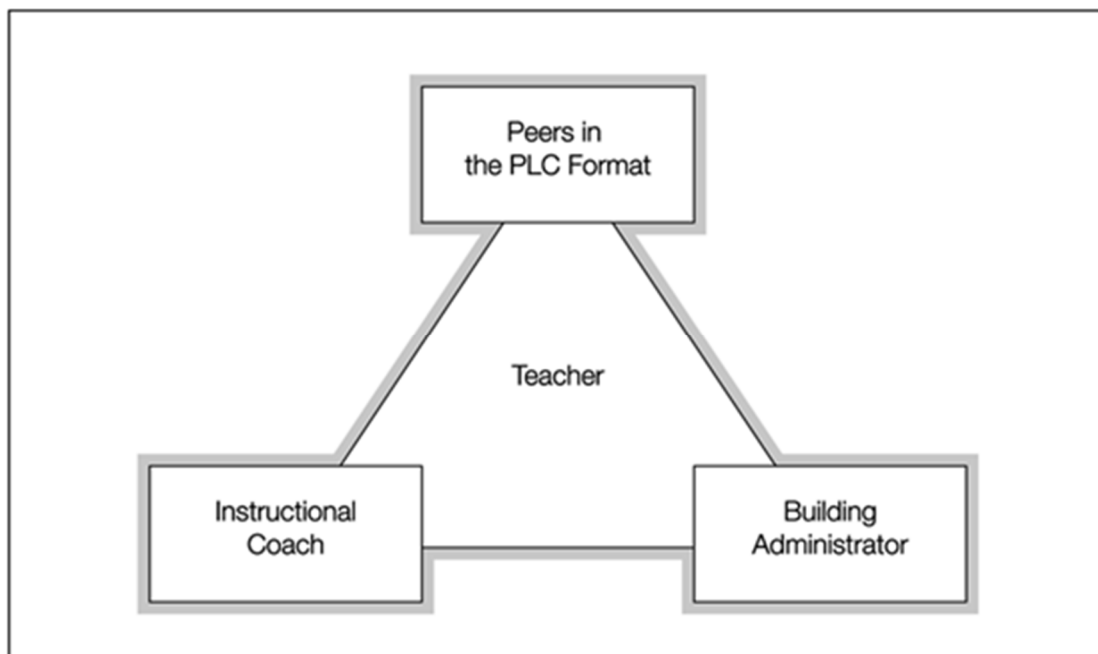
Though this format speaks to the support of teachers in education, it can be used to support administrators. This structure seemed to be at work in at least two of the three districts studied (Belmount and Cane Valley). Following the relationship triangulation model, the state required all new administrators to attend induction training for one year. The training included being assigned a mentor, formal instruction and a peer learning experience. The majority of the principals interviewed attended the principal's training. John Johnson and Matt Turner were the exception. They had been administrators for several years when the training became available. Matt Turner helped create the program through collaboration with the state department of education and the professional administrators' association.

Three out of the attendees out of the 6 who mentioned the program in the interview felt their assigned mentor was beneficial to them (Carol Smith, Danny Weaver, Todd Lawson). Todd Lawson recalled that his mentor had been his principal but due to differences in philosophies they did not get along well.

"She was my statewide mentor, but she was my mentor in title and that is about as respectful I can say it. . . . Mentors are the people you naturally move towards."

When Danny Weaver was asked about her state assigned mentor relationship, she stated, "I never met with her at all." She went on to explain,

> First of all, the mentor that I had when I first started was a first year principal so that probably wasn't the best mentor to get. . . . I'm just thinking that she was so overwhelmed with her job that she didn't have time to meet with me.

Sherry Taylor felt the experienced assistant principal assigned as her mentor helped her learn new duties. Sherry Taylor did not retain the assistant principal as her mentor,

however, past the first year. Denver Jackson reported that it forced her and her principal/mentor to make time to talk.

The topic of the state's voluntary Master Principal Academy (Leadership Academy) continued to be discussed as an example of quality professional development. The program was a three year program. In the second year, the academy assigned the attendees a mentor. Todd Lawson reported that he was in his third year of the program and he benefited from talking to all the people that he considered his mentors.

Carol Smith reported that she has attended all three years of the Leadership Academy. During the time she attended, participants were allowed to choose their own mentor. Although her mentor was in her district, he was a peer without any supervisory power over her. From the cases in this study, it would seem the Principal Academy has provided useful mentor support for principals in their second year of the program.

Principals as Mentors

Finding 3 – Principals acknowledged mentoring their assistant principals as being their responsibility.

Training the next generation of leadership in an organization has been central to the concept of succession planning. Mentoring of building level leadership by a principal has been a strategy used to train the next potential principal and distribute knowledge throughout the building of procedures and culture, as well as a means to reduce the overwhelming workload principals carry.

Six of the 10 principals in the study reported that they were mentoring their assistant principal(s). All six hoped an assistant principal from their building would be the next principal when they left their position. Five of the six further stated that

distributing leadership to the teaching faculty was important in the functioning of the school as well as in developing their capabilities. All of the principals complained about the excessive hours the position required. Those who reported actively mentoring their assistant principal(s) expressed less frustration with their workload than their counterparts.

When looking at active mentoring trends across grade levels, all three elementary principals did not mention training their assistants. Denver Jackson anticipated her assistant would be leading as a principal in another building in the near future. "Our current assistant principal is so strong. I see him going to another building before I leave. You get comfortable, but I think he will be highly encouraged."

In contrast, all three high school principals mentioned mentoring their assistant principals as a crucial job responsibility. All but one of the middle school principals acknowledged their roles in mentoring their assistant principals. Further, all six discussed the benefits of distributive leadership. The high school principals acknowledged repeatedly that they could not do their jobs alone. This could be explained by the size of the buildings that the principals lead; however, most of the middle schools have very similar student population sizes as the elementary. Another possible explanation could be the years experienced in administration. The data from this study do not bear this conclusion, though. Denver Jackson who did not mention mentoring in her interview has more experience than Todd Lawson who felt he had a responsibility to mentor everyone in his building and gave examples of coaching his assistant principal on how to become a principal within the system. The high school principals had the most experience in the study. It could be argued that the principal of a high school with a student population of

over 2,000 would be similar in nature to a district superintendent. Using the same logic, superintendents could not function if they tried to manage all their district buildings. The experience and professional development at the middle school and high school level may differ from the elementary. Elementary schools traditionally are smaller and have focused on meeting the whole child's needs (emotional and developmental) where the middle school and high school have focused on career readiness.

John Johnson was the oldest high school principal in the study and also had the most experience. He was proud of all the people he had mentored during his career that have received administrative certification and accepted a job as a principal.

Matt Turner, the Cane Valley High School principal, described his relationship with his assistant principals as one of a mentor. They came to him with all their questions and he did his best to guide them. Carl Roberts from Belmount High School stated,

> As a building principal, one of the greatest things that I do is to help foster growth
>
> in those assistant principals because in our district, the level of people that we
>
> hire. Obviously you get hired as an assistant principal, then you obviously have
>
> the ability to be a building leader and so, I take it upon myself and am fairly
>
> intentional about making sure that I'm helping those people grow so that they can
>
> be building leaders.

Hiring Practices

Finding 4 – Districts were reported to have an in-district preference for hiring principals who had been "tapped" and/or sponsored to apply for their positions.

Myung, Loeb and Horng (2011) reported districts informally developed educators and recruited them for specific administrative positions. The researchers refer to this

recruitment process as tapping. All but one of the principals interviewed reported they were actively recruited for the position. Don Gordon was the only principal who did not have a sponsor recommend he apply. Don Gordon previously taught for the district and left to accept an assistant principal position in a nearby rural district. His current in-district peer mentor recommended that he should not apply because he had applied for a similar position the year before, and he might be labeled as desperate. Danny Weaver was recruited by the assistant principal who had never worked with her, but met her at a social function. All the other participants, however, were recruited by the leaving principal or a superintendent. Ed Freeman, Carl Roberts and John Johnson, applied for the position after the application window had been closed having been encouraged to apply. Ed Freeman stated that,

> I didn't apply because I assumed they didn't need me in the position. In the world that I grew up in, in small schools, when an opening happened at the administrative level, the superintendent had an idea of who he wanted. . . . And, I was like, "I figured if you all wanted me, you'd call me. Isn't that the way it works?"

John Johnson had just finished working on a one year education grant at the Governor's Office and planned to retire when he received a phone call from Fairview district administration that compelled him to apply for the principalship at Fairview high School.

Carl Roberts had been an assistant principal at Belmount High School and was appointed to head the hiring committee there despite having been the principal's designee the year before. Upon conclusion of reviewing the candidates sent to the district office by

the committee, the superintendent discussed the position with Carl Roberts. The superintendent wanted to know why he had not applied. After their conversation, he applied and was hired.

These findings are in agreement with a previous study where three out of four principals were promoted within a district and encouraged to pursue an administrative career path (Lortie, 2009). Lortie (2009) study found sponsorship could reflect a selection bias towards the individual's ethnic group or a gender preference. Although male principals outnumbered female principals in all three districts 3 to 1, there did not appear to be a sponsorship bias in regard to gender. In fact, three of the four women had male assistant principals. Alread (Sherry Taylor) was the exception with one female assistant principal. The four women in the study, however, were all in the lower grades. Three women led in elementary and one in middle school. Six of the 20 assistant principals were females. There were no gender trends between principals and assistant principals. Interesting to note was the principal of the school with the smallest ethnic population and the lowest free and reduced lunch rate was the only ethnic minority represented in the study (Danny Weaver).

Pitcher, Chreim and Kisfalvi (2000) reported that when companies view themselves as being successful, hiring within the company was more likely. Further, the company was more likely to hire someone with similar skill sets as their predecessor. Although none of the districts had any type of formal succession plan, 9 of the 10 principals expressed either a personal preference for hiring within the district or a belief that the district preferred hiring from within its employee pool.

Belmount High School principal, Carl Roberts discussed the hiring committees

concerns about hiring outside the district.

"Boy, do we think we can go with somebody outside the district?" Carl Roberts recalled the Belmount High School hiring committee's concern.

I think that is ideal (out of district hiring). I'm not sure many schools are in a position to do that from a standpoint that not many people are willing to pay a salary so that somebody can do that; but I was definitely the beneficiary of being in this building and obviously a huge benefit.

Ed Freeman, principal of King Junior High shared similar sentiments although he originally transferred into the district. He went from an assistant superintendent's position in a small district to a position in Belmount as a technology director.

They did a nationwide search. They placed ads in all the publications, nationwide search. And, both times they've hired people that were already in Belmount. So, when they had this position open, they posted it statewide. I don't think it was posted nationwide, but then they ended up moving me. So, I just think that it is easier to hire and pick good people, especially if you know them, you see them work every day, you know what they are capable of.

Don Gordon stated that if anyone wanted to get into administration in Fairview, they would first need to teach there and then become an administrator because of the "steep learning curve" involved in the bureaucratic structure of the organization.

When Danny Weaver applied to several positions within the district, she found that it "depended on what that person was looking for. If they wanted someone who had a different viewpoint than they typically see, than you had a really good shot." However, if they were happy with the schools performance, their point of view was that they needed

to "stay homegrown."

Fulmer and Conger (2004) found businesses that placed a significant emphasis and investment in professional development for their employees viewed hiring from outside as a failure. If these findings can be extrapolated to the education field, then the professional development focus of these districts, along with their pride in academic success, may further explain the tendency to hire from within. All three of the districts studied have human resource departments with assistant superintendents in grade level curriculum that focus energy on professional development. All participants viewed their student academic performance as excellent regardless of their NCLB benchmark status; although all but one school (Rosewood) was on the state's list of schools needing to improve their academic performance (Table 4). Their attitude largely stemmed from being recipients of a cash reward and honored for being in the top 20% of the state's schools (Table 4). Further, the state is implementing different NCLB measures next year therefore, the sanctions will not apply to them in 2016.

Eight of the 10 participants reported their current district interview for employment was not intimidating. This may have largely been due to having been encouraged to apply for the position. Ed Freeman's statement that he was not worried because they had approached him was a mirrored theme throughout the interviews. Several principals revealed that they learned a lot about the job responsibilities during the actual interview. Todd Lawson noticed that the human resources director was taking copious notes during his interview. After he was hired, the human resources director approached him about some of his interview answers. Todd Lawson believed that the human resources director had taken notes in order to begin "building capacity" in him as

well as planning for Todd Lawson's professional development needs.

Danny Weaver, Todd Lawson, Don Gordon and Carol Smith reflected on feeling intimidated in past interviews that were held outside of their current district. Todd Lawson principal at Olson Middle School in the Belmount district recalled a Cane Valley interview. "It was three people in a room. Very cold feeling. Very just, they'd made their decision feeling, you know." Danny Weaver remembered her Belmount interview, like so many successful participants did as being more of a conversation: "They smiled when you came in. Where, I've been in some interview where they just kind of looked like it was some kind of Russian Inquisition."

Another variable in the hiring process was learning about the job opening. Although all districts post their positions, districts do not post all positions and often the postings may not be published anywhere but the school's website. Further, the posting may be placed on the website for less than a week. Sherry Taylor reported that she learned about her current position through her principal. "This position came open, very quickly because the previous principal's husband got a job at another university. My principal told me about it and another principal friend told me about it right away -- that it was coming open."

Myung, Loeb and Horng (2011) found that districts that sponsored candidates for specific jobs in education did not acknowledge any type of succession management plan. They proposed the reason a formal plan had not been put into place could be due to the clash between egalitarian ideas and sponsored hiring practices. I speculated that stakeholder pressures could be involved as well. The school district may not want to acknowledge to the school board or the community that all candidates did not have an

equal opportunity to compete for the position for fear of disapproval.

Succession Planning

Finding 5 – Principals did not report the use of a formal succession plan nor was any artifact based evidence found that would support the use of a formal written plan.

Hargreaves and Fink (2006) reported six succession practices as being successful: (1) long before the loss of a leader, a successor should be considered, (2) succession plans should be part of the annual school planning process, (3) the responsibility for succession plans should be distributed to keep leaders from choosing clones of themselves, (4) the plans should reflect the specific needs of the school, (5) succession plans should be easy to interpret and accessible to stakeholders (6) plans should include specific leadership traits. In this study, no participants acknowledged their district as having any formal written succession plan. Searching the internet for districts' employment policies, as well as an analysis of the schools' annual improvement plans prior to the study's interviews, I did not find anything that would be considered a succession plan. These findings are in agreement with those of Hargreaves' (2005) related study. Annual school plans were found to delineate professional development needs and were linked to Individual Growth Plans that could support succession at the school level. In only one case was stakeholder involvement encouraged in replacing an outgoing administrator. In preparation for hiring the new principal at Harrison Middle School, the superintendent surveyed the faculty for the traits the next principal should have to best serve their school. This was the only reported case using faculty input to create a plan that reflected the specific school's needs.

The study did find evidence though of informal planning which occurred at the

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district administrative level through sponsorship in conjunction with the principal's awareness of their responsibility to train the next generation of leaders. Principal conviction to leadership training or mentoring appeared to be different, however, depending on the building level of the principal.

The data revealed that a lack of communication in regard to the succession practices of the several districts led to qualified applicants not responding to principalship openings until they were tapped. Ed Freeman believed that if the district wanted him in a position, they would inform him. He stated that in the two smaller districts that he had worked in that was the informal policy. Carl Roberts did not apply for the position of principal for an undisclosed reason and after interviewees did not meet the committee's expectations, he was convinced by the district to apply. In addition, 6 of the principals responded that they would not have applied for their position if they had not been encouraged to and two were not sure. The most consistent succession strategy (6 out of 10 participants) reported by the participants in the study was to train their replacements (Matt Turner, Carl Roberts, John Johnson, Carol Smith, Ed Freeman, Todd Lawson).

Peters' Dynamics of Succession Planning

Finding 6 – My study found Peters' (2011) elements of succession planning (planning, forecasting and sustaining) are beneficial in describing the succession process of the principals interviewed in the study.

Although leadership succession planning has been examined in research, it has not been considered a fluid, dynamic process. Rather, the focus of most research was on one element of a much larger process. Peters (2011) delineated the succession experience into three elements: forecasting, sustaining and planning. The main goal of succession

planning is to create a sustainable school environment by using proactive planning and

support throughout the life cycle of leadership. Forecasting involves preparing the

organization for the upcoming changes brought on by a leadership change. This includes

professional development that teaches skills needed in the future, job assignments and

mentoring. Forecasting develops leadership capacity throughout the school. Sustaining

actions are the supports a district provides that help the current leader be successful in the

position for as long as possible. Supports can be professional development, mentoring,

and resources needed to run the school as well as the degree of autonomy given to the

leader. Planning involves the actual hiring process and support required going into the

position that allows the leader to learn their job responsibilities. The organization needs

to examine what the school's mission and goals are to determine what leadership skills

will benefit the school. This process involves carefully examining the leaders in the

district that are in training. If there are not potential candidates then this would be a good

time to reassess professional development needs and potentially look towards an outside

hire.

Planning

Using Peters' (2011) model and description of planning, principals who were

"tapped" were analyzed to determine whether or not it was a result of the district having

predetermined the leadership requirements needed to perpetuate success in the school. All

10 principals expressed that they believed their schools were academically successful

under their leadership and had been successful prior to their accepting the principalship.

In the case of John Johnson, Sherry Taylor, Carl Roberts, Todd Lawson, Danny Weaver

and Denver Jackson, the district or the leaving principal may have looked at their

leadership skills and made a decision that they would be a good candidate for the principalship position. John Johnson of Fairview High School received a call from the district administration asking him to apply for the position. He expressed that he had examined the student performance prior to making a decision to apply. He knew that Fairview had a gap in student performance that needed to be addressed. He reported going into the interview prepared to discuss the student achievement data. John Johnson further stated he had discussed the Fairview High School's performance and specific areas of concern with "individuals" from the district. When asked about his professional goals, he listed improving the performance gap between student subgroups as a goal that he felt he still needed to achieve. One of his difficulties in attaining his goal was that the teachers were resistant to changing their outlook on teaching and defining success as all of the students being successful. It would seem from John Johnson's account that the district hired him with the intent that he would lower the achievement gap and that he was well aware of the district's expectation.

Principals shared their faith in the district that they would hire the right person for an opening. John Johnson had confidence that the district could choose the leader with the skill set needed to lead Fairview High School. Sherry Taylor recalled her mentor telling her, "I think this would be a good position for you." It was unknown whether or not the principal who tapped her in the district had recommended and discussed Sherry Taylor with the district administration prior to encouraging her to apply though. Regardless of the hiring strategies used, principals agreed their practices were sound.

Carl Roberts at Belmount High School was tapped by his district administration and asked why he did not apply for the position. He had been the building designee for

the year before. Having decided not to apply, he headed the hiring committee for the building. He recalled discussing with the committee whether or not they could afford to hire someone from outside the district due to the large amount of information the incoming principal would be required to learn in order to steer the school. He believed it was best to hire from within because it would take too long for someone from outside the building to learn the school's procedures, know the faculty and lead the school efficiently. Carl Roberts had an ongoing, running dialogue with the district office.

In accordance with John Johnson's sentiments, Carl Roberts had faith that the district would make the right choice. "I figure if it was the right fit, and that was something the superintendent wanted me to do than I would do it. And, if the decision was made to go a different direction, I was okay with that."

Conversely, Todd Lawson was recruited by the outgoing principal to apply for his position at Olson Middle School. He originally sought her out to discuss a potential position as an assistant principal in the building that she soon would be opening soon. He recalled that she had replied to his inquiry stating, "You need to interview for my job." I said, "No, I don't need to do that. I need to learn the culture of the district. I need to learn the people." Peters (2011) asserted, "Most principals pay little to no role in the selection of their successors or in the transition process." Todd Lawson did not believe the district would ask him for his recommendation for hiring his replacement, but he did anticipate the district coming to him for a reference for his assistant principal when he applied for a principal position. He revealed,

> I know that I would need to be respectful to the process. When the superintendent comes to me and says, "All right, talk to me about John. What are the highlights?

What are the lowlights? What are the glows and grows, you know. I could be able

to tell him those kinds of things.

In addition, Todd Lawson expressed his trust that the district would use the manpower in

the district for each school's benefit.

Ed Freeman was recruited by the district and also reported faith in the district to

find the person who was the best fit for the position. Danny Weaver discussed her initial

recruitment by the leaving assistant principal, but did not reveal if anyone talked to her

about the principalship. She did anticipate being asked what type of leader should be her

replacement. "I know that my previous principal was very influential in saying, 'Danny

would be perfect. . . .' I would think that you would have that input." Danny Weaver felt

like she was a good fit for the position.

Denver Jackson felt she was the best fit for the principal position at Rosewood

Elementary where she worked as the assistant principal. She did not confide that anyone

had encouraged her to apply for the assistant principal's position. However, she reported

being tapped for the Rosewood principal position as well as currently being encouraged

to acquire her district level administrative license. This would support the belief that

succession of district personnel has been discussed and a plan may exist for an

individual(s) replacement. She further stated, "I think they'll be changing district

leadership before I leave." She also expected that her assistant principal would be asked

to lead a building soon.

Data from the six tapped principals pointed to informal planning for succession

with a consideration for the specific leadership needs of the school. In addition, principals

do have some input into the hiring of their replacement. Another support for informal

planning for specific building needs having taken place within the district was the

evaluation of district or school mission statements and vision statements. Principals in

Fairview and Cane Valley reported the district required each building to review the

district's created mission in order to focus future plans. Belmount district encouraged its

schools to review not only the district's mission, but to create their own building mission.

The emphasis on mission building could be evidence that all three districts use their

district missions when making hiring decisions. Belmount, however, could be argued to

be the most likely to create a building specific plan since it encouraged a building

specific mission statement.

Although few participants described what was said at their job interviews, a

number of them expressed that they were the best fit for the job or that the district would

choose the person who was the best fit. From this, it could be inferred that the position's

specific responsibilities and challenges were discussed. If this was the case, the interview

would be considered part of the planning process as the district reviewed the building's

mission, special needs and created interview questions that would allow them to make an

informed decision.

Peters (2011) reported that 2 weeks to 2 months had been cited as an appropriate

timetable for instructing a new incoming principal by their predecessor. The 10 principals

interviewed had varying opportunities to familiarize themselves with the duties of the

position. Denver Jackson, Matt Turner, Danny Weaver and Carl Roberts all held the

position of assistant principal in the buildings they now lead. They all used the assistant

principal's position as a learning experience leading to the principalship. Todd Lawson

had the advantage of working alongside the outgoing principal without pay for six

months prior to accepting the principalship. Carol Smith spent two weeks training with the outgoing principal at Holmes Middle School. Sherry Taylor and Don Gordon visited with their predecessors a few hours before accepting the keys to the building. Ed Freeman was employed in district and had the opportunity to familiarize himself with the building indirectly. John Johnson used the summer months to learn his position through interactions with the assistant principals and department chairs. Don Gordon relied on his assistant principal for building information.

Another strategy in learning the job's expectations may be the usage of district mentors. Although no districts were reported to assign mentors to new administrators, 6 of the 10 participants had a mentor in their district to advise them. All of the principals mentioned that peer administrators were an active source of information and support.

Sustaining

Peters (2011) defined the sustaining component of succession planning as "a process of preparing for leadership succession in the midst of effective leadership." (p. 67) The benefits of sustaining actions lie in the district's ability to actively support principals and "continuity" within the school. The action of sustaining includes building "leadership capacity" throughout the school. Although Peters (2011) never addressed school culture directly, she did assert that "a paradigm of democratic and distributed leadership" was a requirement for sustainable schools. Further, sustainable leadership "develops rather than depletes human and material resources." (p. 69) Any activity that supported leadership or the leader was viewed as sustaining. Mentoring has been shown to be a key factor in sustaining leadership as well as professional development, various physical resources and district support.

All but one principal in the study considered themselves to have a mentor relationship. The one principal who did not, Ed Freeman, harvested ideas and advice from numerous people through different arenas and did not look to a person or a few people to provide him with support. He acknowledged his assistant principals as his main resource when he experienced any type of dilemma. All nine of the principals who reported having mentors believed the relationship supported them in their leadership practice. The most frequently cited benefit was of moral support when they needed a confidant. The second most frequently cited benefit was for advice on unique situations. John Johnson stated that although he rarely relied on his mentor after over 45 years in education, there still were times he would call him when new situations arose.

Peer support and PLCs were also reported by the principals as being beneficial leadership tools. Both Cane Valley and Belmount districts actively organized PLCs for the leaders by building level for their district. All seven participants from these districts found both the information derived from group sharing to be of help as well as having a safe environment to ask questions. Don Gordon, the principal with the least amount of experience responded that he talked to "other people, mentors, my assistants." Fairview principals did not mention their membership in a PLC, however, John Johnson, Fairview High School's principal did disclose the district had organized PLCs for the faculty at the high school.

Attending book studies and professional development workshops were further acknowledged by participants as being useful in their leadership role. Four of the participants (Denver Jackson, Todd Lawson, Don Gordon, Ed Freeman) cited specific workshops the district had recently sent them to provide them with the information

necessary to carry out new programs in their school. A continuing theme throughout the interviews was the benefits deriving from the Master Principals Academy. Whether the participant was currently attending, had attended or simply heard about the program, they acknowledged the program's professional development as a powerful resource.

Three principals cited book studies that had proven beneficial in program support (Denver Jackson, Don Gordon and Ed Freeman). Denver Jackson stated, "Our district does leadership book studies. So, this past year we used the *Learning from Lincoln* book and the *Maxwell's 360 Leader* book." Other resources that principals found to be of benefit in sustaining their leadership were financial resources to purchase needed equipment, hire additional personnel and provide mental health services. Community stakeholders were also discussed as a resource. The principal of Butcher Elementary, Danny Weaver, reported that learning who her parent resources were had benefited her in providing for the school. Danny Weaver's school parents provided volunteer time, expertise and various donations. In contrast, Don Gordon expressed frustration at not being able to engage the school parents at Harrison Middle School activities. "But, to really have a sit down talk with all the shareholders hasn't happened. I have room to grow there." He revealed that a colleague advised him to send out a parent newsletter. Don Gordon explained his lack of parent support by stating, "I think that they just want things to operate smoothly and to know that we aren't crazy and to know that we care and to admit mistakes when we make them."

Forecasting

Peters (2011) described forecasting as taking action to prepare for future leadership demands in the school. Professional development, job assignments and

mentoring are a few of the investments districts can make in preparing an in-house pool of applicants to replace leadership. When schools do not take actions to prepare a next generation of leaders, leadership discontinuity will be certain. Discontinuity in leadership can be used as an intentional measure to change the dynamics of the school as a whole. Danny Weaver echoed this viewpoint when she discussed seeking employment as an administrator coming in from out of state. She found that if the districts were not happy with the previous principal's performance, she had a chance at being selected. If they were happy with the principal who was exiting the position, they would prefer to go "homegrown." From analyzing the interviews from the 10 participants, the study found when possible all three districts prefer to hire from within. Eight of the 10 principals interviewed had been employed by the district prior to accepting the principalship. John Johnson and Todd Lawson were the two exceptions.

Participants reported having prior experience in the district saved valuable time in learning the system and allowed a principal to focus on running the building. Efficiency was discussed by several principals as being of prime importance. Carl Roberts, principal of the Belmount High School, mentioned the need to create as efficient an organizational structure as possible three times over the course of his interview. Don Gordon discussed at great length his need to become organized as well as his thoughts on how a principal should go about doing so.

Mentoring as discussed in the prior section was examined by Peters (2011) in detail as an example of forecasting. She recognized, however, that mentoring can be used in forecasting and sustaining depending on the principal's career needs (Peters, 2011). By analyzing the chunks of data through categorizing them according to the three elements

of succession planning, I found 617 data chunks that could be categorized within Peters'

model. Three hundred and thirty six chunks of data pertained to sustaining the

principalship, 149 pertained to forecasting and 132 to planning. Thirty-two data chunks

were found to fit into two categories. No chunks of data were found to fit all three

categories. Upon analyzing the data that did not fit into a category, I found these typically

were discussions of programming specifics. Although programs were considered

sustaining, if the participant discussed a program at length without mention of how it

related to their experiences, the data were not placed into a chunked category. The fact

that mutual chunks existed within the data shows the dynamic nature of the model.

Although Peters (2011) mentioned distributive leadership as a prerequisite of

sustainability as well as the use of the school's mission, she did not mention school

culture or climate as being a factor in the succession plan. One of the chief themes carried

through the interviews was how safe principals felt in different situations within the

district. This was a function of culture or climate and an important consideration in how

sustainable leadership will be within a district. There are districts that do not use a

distributive leadership model but rather a hierarchy system. These schools can function in

their community with positive results in regard to student achievement. Further, the

district would still benefit from succession planning regardless of the leadership trends

within the district.

<div align="center">Beneficial Succession Practices</div>

Finding 7 – Principals found specific supports of value during their different

career cycles. These supports could be categorized as relationships, resources and cultural

climate.

The third research question looked at what types of succession planning experiences were of benefit to the principals in the study. Previous research linked principal retention to teacher turnover rates, academic progress and cultural reform. Further, it has been found that leaders require a minimum of five years to implement any large scale organizational change (Fullan, 2009; Fuller, Terry, & Young, 2008). To further explore principal succession, I analyzed the 10 participating principals' interviews, observations and artifacts for data showing what they found helpful in their position as principal. I analyzed how relationships, culture and specific resources play a part in supporting a principal.

Through an examination of interview content I found that principals clearly recognized human resources as essential to performing their job. Nine out of 10 stated that relationships were important in the functioning of the school as well as being their support as a leader. John Johnson delegated responsibilities in the large Fairview High School into committees. He depended on a large number of committee groups to keep him informed and to help in the actual planning of everything from curriculum to bus scheduling. In addition, his committees are designed to use feedback from various factions of the faculty. Although he readily admitted that he does not know all the teachers in the building, he did state that he cannot function on his own. When asked what he felt made him a good leader, John Johnson related, "I am only as good as the people that I work with and those that I have worked with and I am nobody special." He continued, saying that one of the major changes since he took on the principalship was a change in the use of collaboration. "In the five years that I have been here, we now have a collaboration period that they did not have before in addition to their planning period."

Carl Roberts also emphasized relationships as key to his ability to lead. "It is incredibly critical to stay plugged in with other people. . ." Don Gordon, principal for Harrison Middle School, expressed that at the top of his list of things he needed to work on in his building were relationships. Todd Lawson emphasized in teacher interviews, "We are building this building on three non-negotiables. The first is relationships." Relationships combining to form school culture were indirectly referred to throughout the interviews by all the participants.

Learning the Job

Interviewing for the principalship was reported as being an opportunity to begin learning about the school through preparation for the interview as well as the process of meeting with district personnel. John Johnson, Ed Freeman and Todd Lawson discussed their preparation of interviewing material containing their educational philosophy and how they would address specific challenges in the building they based on their knowledge of the school. Participants learned about the school's challenges and strengths by reviewing publically available data bases of student academic achievement as well as by discussing the building with people in the district. All three reported that by creating a presentation, they were able to better direct the interview toward topics they wished to discuss. "I try to flip it around where I am selling more . . . I am playing offense more than defense," Ed Freeman confided. Information about the needs of the building, stakeholders and the culture was often shared with the applicant. This can form as a first level of professional development as well as an opportunity for the district administration to evaluate future professional development needs of the new principal. Todd Lawson explained that the director of human resources in Belmount took copious notes during his

last interview and then after he was hired, further discussed the issues.

All of the participants had been employed as assistant principals prior to becoming principals; all commented how important the experience had been in preparing them to become principals. Most of the principals had been assistant principals in their district prior to accepting the principalship even if they had been a principal previously in another district. Those principals who had not been an assistant principal in the district they lead in (Don Gordon, Todd Lawson and John Johnson) conveyed the challenges involved in becoming familiar with the organization and creating important relationships.

Principals who created time to discuss and teach specific skills to the participants were recognized for having helped teach them to lead. Eight of the 10 principals lauded their past principals for spending quality time with them. All of the principals cited their first supervising principal they had as an assistant principal as a mentor. A common theme of the participants was how important it was that leaders train up-and-coming assistant principals. Ed Freeman expressed his disapproval of his assistant principal's previous principal; despite being an assistant for 10 years, he had not shown her how to complete a budget. He further stated how fortunate he was to have the high quality assistant principals that were employed at King Junior High. Carl Roberts felt it was his duty to prepare all five of his assistants to take on a future principalship position. Todd Lawson emphasized that the faculty in his building should be moving into leadership positions and not remaining in the same job for their entire career unless they were the exception.

Though a unique situation, two of the participants (Don Gordon and Todd Lawson) shared that having an assistant principal with several years' experience in the

building where they led proved beneficial. Don Gordon and Todd Lawson were the two of the three principals in the study that had not been assistant principals in the district where they were employed. John Johnson may have found it an asset having experienced assistant principals, but due to his numerous years of experience may not have seen it as important as he might have earlier in his career. Don Gordon and Todd Lawson both were first time principals. Todd Lawson indirectly acknowledged his assistant principal by stating that if his district were to ask him to step down on the ladder and become an assistant principal temporarily he would do so for an inexperienced principal. Don Gordon described his fortune to have an experienced assistant principal, "It's a game changer and he is phenomenal."

Leading the School

All participants in the study reported leaning on their first mentor/principal to learn the job initially and later on for specific concerns or issues. As the participants developed their leadership skills, they sought out peer principals as resources. Other relationship based resources included the buildings' faculty and parents.

As discussed previously, PLCs, electronic communities, book studies and informal friendships were all resources principals used to gather information on how to best deal with the unique issues in their building. After 45 years in education, John Johnson still maintained his mentor and peer relationships for those times when issues came up that he had not seen before.

Assistant principals and teacher leaders were seen by several participants as being helpful in a distributive leadership model by increasing the leadership capacity in the building. Carol Smith repeatedly stated that the more people she had working on a

challenge the better the results. All three high school principals readily recognized the need to delegate responsibility to successfully lead large schools. Carl Roberts pointed to the restructuring of the use of the high school assistant principals as facilitating his being able to meet the demands of the position. Belmount High School used their assistant principals for teacher supervision and leadership over department chairs. The assistant principals were not responsible for discipline; a dean handled all disciplinary issues. Another certified principal's assistant handled all social issues. This left four assistant principals to complete classroom observations and work with curriculum issues in their teaching specialty areas.

Time spent getting to know the culture and expectations of the building appeared to be important in insuring a smooth transition into leading the building. Carol Smith told me that since she had not been in the building--although she was in the district prior to accepting her position as the principal, she was not familiar with how the building worked together as a group. She stated, "You come in expecting what norms are and what will happen and then they don't." One of her goals was to make sure that she does not leave the next incoming principal in the same position. "I got here and I expected that and I tried to just pick up and go with it and it was not there on its own." She explained that she did not want to change a lot of things. She wanted the opportunity to learn the building and the faculty for the first year. All of the principals either directly expressed or alluded that they did not want to make a lot of changes in the first year that they accepted their positions. Those participants who chose to work on a mission, chose to do so after their first year of leading unless they had been in an assistant principal's position in the building prior to becoming the principal. Don Gordon expressed his gratitude to his

predecessor that he did not have to change anything in the building until after Thanksgiving. It gave him a chance to learn the building. It was his wish to have even more policies and procedures in place that will allow his replacement the same luxury. Most of the principals expressed that their buildings were performing well; therefore, they did not want to change anything the first year that they led. Ed Freeman at King Junior High recalled that a number of the faculty transferred away from the school when his predecessor moved. He stated,

> You had the goers and the stayers and the friction that comes with that. So, I just kept it between the ditches and built relationships. . . . it turned out to be great because I just kept it between the ditches. I didn't change anything.

Matt Turner used a similar analogy when discussing his leadership role at Cane Valley High School, he just maintained the leadership and did not "let the train fall off the tracks was all we were trying to do." Carl Roberts explained, "My philosophy was more we are doing a lot of things well. We aren't going to change a lot. We have changed very little since I have been in this role."

Two principals reported having spent time learning building procedures with their predecessor prior to accepting the principalship. In the case of Todd Lawson, his mentor trained him for six months prior to turning over the building to him. Both principals found time with their predecessors as helpful in learning their new role. When asked what kind of things Denver Jackson would do to create a smooth transition for an incoming principal, she stated that she would make herself available for consultation and "share my experiences that I had when I came in." Don Gordon related similar feelings. He would check in on his replacement and offer assistance. In the case of Todd Lawson, his

predecessor allowed him to keep the building assistant principal rather than taking him with her to the new school in the district to preserve the buildings culture. He stated that the assistant principal was the "culture king."

All of the principals agreed district support was an important factor in sustaining their efforts to lead. With the current focus on the governmental accountability requirments, it was not surprising that all of the participants mentioned student test data and their status. Only 1 of the 10 principals led a school considered as achieving by the goals of NCLB. Five principals' schools received accolades for being in the top 10 to 20 percent of the state's benchmark test scores. These five schools had been honored at the same level for 2013 and 2014 (Table 4). Denver Jackson confessed there had been a lot of pressure for her school to become an achieving school when she was hired three years prior, thus this became the focus of her initial improvement efforts. None of the other principals referenced feeling pressured by their district to increase their test scores. Don Gordon related that he had been called down to the district office to discuss how he was addressing the gaps in achievement, but he did not feel that there were any real repercussions from the school not making sufficient academic progress by the federal guidelines because they had received an academic award from the state. He believed the funds created through the state's award helped to soften the district's stance on academic performance. None of the principals had focused on test scores except for Fairview High School principal, John Johnson. Though principals did not state their district's stance on test scores helped them to concentrate on leading the school, it was implied. Several principals discussed academic performance in regard to benchmark testing having not been of concern for them (Don Gordon, Todd Lawson, Ed Freeman and Matt Turner).

Ed Freeman used this reprieve from testing pressure to focus his teachers on academic performance as defined by the building. He maintained that the current plans to adopt a new curriculum model in the fall may not go into place due to political pressures. He predicted his teachers would not be stressed if the state changed curriculum with a minimum of notice because they have concentrated on best teaching practices. Carol Smith stated she felt challenged by the ever changing accountability measures. She used a lot of her time trying to design the best curriculum delivery for her building in order to stay ahead of trends. Her goal was to help prevent high levels of stress on her teachers caused by unrealistic expectations. Denver Jackson and Carol Smith worked in the same district, Cane Valley, and although both are successful in meeting academic challenges, they continued to center their leadership on preparing for changing testing standards. Fairview and Belmount both provided instructional leadership support to specific buildings to preplan curriculum taking into account the political trends. All of the principals with schools honored at the state level that did not make adequate progress in their test scores by federal standards expressed their frustration at having to explain to stakeholders that they were honored by the state, but admonished by the federal government (Table 4).

Principals reported ferreting out numerous resources to meet the challenge of leading a building toward an often changing definition of academic success. Half of the principals reported that a major change in moving from the assistant principal position to the principalship was having to search for information. Though professional development was seen as a support provided by the district, often it was left up to the principal to determine the specific type of development the individuals needed. On a district level, the

majority of participants reported leadership development that applied to all principals was offered on a regular basis and was beneficial. These resources were in the form of workshop attendance, district presentations or PLC book studies.

Organization as it related to the job's responsibilities was reported as a chief challenge for principals due to the varied demands, unpredictable schedule of duties and the unavailability of compliance requirements. Delegation of authority along with distributive leadership was reported to help principals meet the varied demands and unpredictable schedules they faced. Several of the principals reported that a compliance list of demands with computer resource links was in the process of being created by an assistant principal in the Cane Valley district. Carol Smith, Danny Weaver, Ed Freeman, Todd Lawson, Sherry Taylor and Don Gordon all expressed a need for a state compliance list with due dates. It appeared from the study's interviews that often compliance dates were not met simply because principals were unaware that anyone needed a report or when it was due. Carl Roberts explained that anything that can synthesize and communicate information for a new principal was valuable.

Conclusions

A major finding of the study was that no principals were reported to be actively pursuing employment elsewhere. However, the majority of the principals interviewed mentioned retirement plans and expressed an interest in an alternative position in education at the district level or a university setting. In addition, they identified long work hours, ambiguity in accountability measures, lack of support by the community and the district were all considered job related stressors. These findings corroborate Duke's (1988) and Lashway's (2003) findings that principals contemplating a change in positions

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reported feeling overwhelmed but continued to experience satisfaction in their work. Principals in my study reported that living and working in the area combined with other enhancements made working in their districts a good choice for them. A conclusion to be drawn from these findings was principals encountered substantial stressors in their position (long work hours and accountability measures) that could be diminished through various support systems (personnel, personal incentives, district expectations, professional development, mentoring and community partnerships).

The second major finding was that all of the principals found mentor/sponsorship relationships helped them learn their job responsibilities and make sound decisions, as well as advanced their career through political networking. Principals in the study reported mentor relationships that included peers, past supervisors and current supervisors for support. A conclusion that could be drawn from this finding was that mentorship relationships are essential in insuring principal success.

A further finding was the majority of the principals in the study expressed part of their job responsibilities were to actively train new leaders. In addition, all of the principals in the study had been assistant principals. Most of the principals had been assistant principals in the building they now lead. This concurs with Myung, Loeb and Horng (2011) findings that schools informally develop and recruit for administrative positions. However, my study found a difference in the emphasis placed on mentoring the next group of leaders according to grade level. Elementary principals expressed less interest in training their assistant principals to be district leaders than did the high school or middle school principals. The main conclusion derived from these finding is principals actively train assistant principals the leadership skills necessary to the principalship at the

middle and high school level. Therefore, the assistant principal position can be used as a training arena for future principals.

All of the districts in the study viewed themselves as being academically successful based on interviews and website analysis. Many cited their ranking among the state's schools as a measure of success. All of the principals except two discounted the NCLB measures. Pitcher, Chreim and Kisfalvi (2000) found that when organizations considered themselves successful they were more likely to hire from within the organization. This study found that most of the principals were in-district hires. All but two principals (John Johnson and Todd Lawson) had been employed by the district previously. John Johnson had unique qualifications that set him apart from the other participants. He had the most experience and had held a statewide education position prior to accepting his position at the high school. Hiring from outside of the district was considered risky and a poor practice by all but John Johnson. These findings support the conclusion that districts who view themselves as successful are more likely to hire principals from within the district rather than outside the district.

A formal succession plan was not demonstrated to be a part of any of the principals' experiences or the districts' policies; however, informal elements of a plan were reported by the participants. My study found participants had been informally recruited for their positions as principals and assistant principals. If the district level administration considered the needs of the building and actively trained as well as recruited for replacement leadership in the district, elements of an informal succession plan were in place. Due to the participants' reluctance to discuss their sponsors influence and conversations with the district level personnel, it was not known whether all three

elements of a succession plan had been put into place in any of the specific situations. A conclusion was drawn, however, that one, two or all three of the elements of succession planning (planning, forecasting, sustaining) were used by the districts to hire and train on an informal basis.

Usefulness of Peters' (2011) Model

Peters' (2011) theory helped to explain and define the succession process in my study. Analysis of the interviews revealed that principals focused on the sustaining element of succession planning. This was not surprising since sustaining supports are what help the principal function on a daily basis as well as allow their school to be defined as successful. Prior to creating the questions to be used for this study, I analyzed my questions for their representativeness of Peters' model. The questions leaned heavily on the sustaining and forecasting portions of the model with less emphasis on planning. If an additional study were to be conducted using district level participants, I believed the planning component would be more pervasive in the interviews. Labeling the chunks of Peters' categorized data showed the fluid nature of the model. Though chunks were largely identifiable into one of the three categories (planning, sustaining or forecasting), others fit into two categories. As stated in Peters (2011), mentoring was found to be both a tool for sustaining principals and forecasting. Professional development further can be classified as sustaining or forecasting depending on whether the information was used immediately to perform their job or was in preparation for another position.

Though lightly covered in Peters' (2011) succession planning model, culture or climate was not directly identified as an influence on the planning process. She reported a distributive leadership model was required to accomplish a succession plan. It could be

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argued that all leaders distribute some responsibilities and power. Green (2010) discussed distributive leadership as a leadership style that actively collaborates with any segment of the organization that has direct involvement with the issue in question. The size and the culture of the organization will influence how decisions are made and the degree leadership can be distributed throughout the organization (Harris, 2005). Succession plans are useful for all organizations regardless of their culture or leadership style. Therefore, the culture of the organization should not be a determining factor of whether or not a succession plan should be created. Rothwell (2005) gives examples of companies with largely differing cultures varying from highly bureaucratic to collectivist that all address succession planning. One of the chief advantages to mentoring found in the study was learning cultural norms. A number of the participants expressed frustration, however, that they did not understand how hiring decisions were made or how the application process functioned for in district hiring. Several principals failed to apply for positions they wanted because they believed they should be invited to apply. No written document or informal transmission of the process the districts used appeared to be in place. Therefore, I judged Peters' (2011) elements of succession planning (planning, forecasting and sustaining) to be useful to describe the succession process of the principals interviewed in the study with the exception of including the culture and climate of their environment. The conclusion was made that Peters' (2011) model could be used to create educational succession plans; however the school's culture and climate's effects need to be taken into consideration.

Implications for Future Practice

Implications of the findings for future practice can be categorized as recommended district supports that would contribute to the effectiveness of principal leadership, recommended changes in human resource planning that would include a formal succession plan as well as recommendations for future research.

Recommendations for Principal Support Systems

The study points to the value of multiple principal supports including various mentoring relationships, personnel resources and professional development resources in preparing future leaders and supporting current principals. PLCs and peer mentoring were reported by the participants to be important supports in meeting the demands of an often overwhelming position. Strong assistant principals were found to be substantial support. Districts need to support principals by:

1. Providing time and access to mentor relationships through PLCs, peer collaboration time and seasoned principals. All of the participants stated the value of relationships combined with the frustration of not having enough time for everything.

2. Providing professional development that is designed to meet the specific communicated needs of the principal. Professional development can be useful in daily operations as well as leading would be valuable to principals. Confidential surveys of principals and building faculty would provide information needed in planning for professional development of leadership. Surveys and demographic data can be used to point to weaknesses in leadership as well as strengths.

3. Hiring additional personnel to be trained in administrative duties to support the principal in working fewer hours per week. The use of co-principals (hiring two

principals to lead one building), multiple assistant principals, instructional facilitators and additional stipends to reward teacher leadership would help provide adequate building personnel. This would require the district to restructure employment titles and wages as well as cultural expectations.

4. Development of district wide leadership academies used as a supportive element. In the study academies were reported to create a consistent source of reform information to the school districts throughout the state. Two of the principals in the study compared the state's academy to obtaining an advanced degree. Care should be used in utilizing academies for professional development that they do not become a substitute for completing advanced degrees. Further, academy attendance could create clone schools statewide. Leaders need to be able to analyze the specific needs of their school and work from various perceptual vantage points to implement creative solutions rather than one-size-fits-all prescribed cures.

5. Providing concrete compliance expectations placed in writing for every principal further enhancing principal performance. Compliance issues need to be able to be worked into the daily routine of the school when time permits rather than on an emergency basis. Having a schedule of all upcoming data report requirements for the state and district would permit principals to complete paper based tasks during work hours that were not conflicting with meeting critical student needs.

6. Providing instructional facilitator staff to determine current trends in accountability and plan for shifts in curriculum that assist the principal in making informed decisions in an efficient and timely fashion. Accountability measures were discussed by all principals. Further, shared blame for building academic scores would

help reduce the pressure and frustration principals report.

Recommendations for Succession Planning

I recommended that schools create transparent succession plans that allow all stakeholders an opportunity to understand the processes used in developing, retaining and transitioning leadership in the district. Though some aspects of succession planning were shown in the study to be functioning in the districts, the lack of transparency in an informal plan leads to confusion and inefficiency. I would expect that the change from informal planning to formal planning would be a politically sensitive area for schools; therefore districts are advised to elicit the help of an administrative professional organization to create guidelines for succession planning and publicize them. Another avenue of support would be state required succession plans made accessible to the public as an accountability measure.

Although Peters (2011) and most succession planning research focused on hiring from within the district, the opportunity to build on the district's diversity of knowledge also needs to be considered. Leadership from outside the district allowed for different perspectives on education issues as well as new skill sets. Though the outside hired leader may need to be trained in the culture of the district and building, this should not be the sole consideration in whether or not to hire from within. The current practice of using the assistant principal position as training for the principalship should equalize the argument for limiting hiring to within district. Therefore, districts should consider outside hires equally at the assistant principal or at the co-principal level of organization even if the district has labeled the school as successful to increase leadership diversity.

Recommendations for Future Studies

My first recommendation for future studies is an extension of this study to contrast the experiences of district level administration of succession planning events in the Fairview, Belmount and Cane Valley districts. It would also be helpful to know their opinions of whether a formal succession plan would be beneficial. Further, what do they perceive as being the political ramifications of having a transparent succession plan? It would be advantageous to understand their concerns about creating a formal document.

Secondly, it would be valuable to further Peters' (2011) model of succession planning by addressing how culture functions within the system as well as how different components interact with one another. A more complete explanation of distributive leadership and its function would help in understanding the nuances involved in creating a succession plan.

Lastly, a longitudinal study addressing the turnover of the principals in this study and changes in their use of resources as well as their career goals would help further this study's conclusion on the usefulness of principal supports. Knowledge of the long term experiences of principals and how they develop as leaders could also help further best practices in meeting the support needs of building level leaders.

Personal Reflections

As I interviewed the participants in this study, I became increasingly aware of how dependent struggling new leaders in education were upon their colleagues. Not only was it imperative that an aspiring leader find a sponsor to be seriously considered for a principal position, they were also dependent on those already indoctrinated into the system to learn the basic responsibilities of their job. A principal from an adjoining state

informally shared with me that she had learned her job by going around her office and reading all of the sticky notes attached to the wall then asking her mentor what they meant. The first year of being a principal seemed to consist of a rite of initiation. If a principal could not find the support they needed to perform their duties, then they would not succeed. This indoctrination and lack of concrete resources may be one of the reasons districts tried not to hire outside of their district.

Although I understand the rationale behind in district hiring, I believe these districts are excluding a large number of talented educators from employment. The districts studied felt a principal with over 10 years of experience would not be able to lead without having first completed several years of training as an assistant principal within the district he wishes to lead. Districts failed to recognize that although they did not train the principal, another district has invested in the new hire. The new leader from outside the district would bring in diverse information and experiences thus increasing the district's knowledge base. Another diversity limiting trend showed a district leadership bias in gender. Only 7 out of 20 assistant principals were females. Carol Smith discussed how difficult her first year of leadership had been because of the gender stereotypes held by the school faculty. I would assume that if her hiring interview had been with a faculty committee from the school, she would not have received an offer from the district.

Further, with an in-house hiring system in place, it would be even more crucial for an educator to be aware of the district succession planning strategies. When hiring policies are kept secret from most potential applicants, considerable numbers in the hiring pool are excluded. This wastes manpower resources as a whole across the public

education system as well as exhausts man-hours interviewing and going through paperwork that is not pertinent to the process. A district that does not use a succession plan cannot state without reservation that the highest qualified person was selected for the leadership position. Because this is the case, these districts are not providing students with the best education possible. It is my recommendation that leadership academies as well as university programs that prepare new principals be forthright in explaining the tenuous nature of being a principal as well as the need for formal policies. The issue was not necessarily with districts opting to hire from within, but in failing to create a transparent succession policy.

The study also found that female principals expressed their experiences in becoming a leader differently than the males. None of the females expressed having always aspired to be a leader. Three of the females stated that they slowly changed their views of themselves to be a leader through teaching experiences. The majority of the men stated that they had been a leader as a child and two principals aspired to be a principal at an early age. Despite the obvious growth of women in the work force it appears the leadership role of being a principal is seen as a male dominated field. Carol Smith's interview revealed similar findings. Her faculty expressed fear that she could not lead because of her feminine characteristics. I recommend districts create policies to reduce gender discrimination, as well as create professional development opportunities which allow school employees to understand male and female stereotypes and their impact on limiting future leadership opportunities for women in the district.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: Leadership Succession Case Study

INVESTIGATOR: Farla Steele, Doctoral Candidate, Oklahoma State University

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this study is to explore principals' experiences of succession practices. This study will provide insight on how the type, nature and scope of the succession plan put into place is perceived by principals. A researcher will conduct case studies in three to four separate districts.

PROCEDURES:

You will participate in an interview of about 1 hour during an uninterrupted portion of the day. Interviews will be audio taped for accuracy. I will take notes and may ask you follow-up questions through a phone call or email correspondence no later than a week from the initial interview. I will also request that you look over your transcribed interview for accuracy.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION:

There are no known risks associated with this study that are greater than those you would normally encounter during a normal day. You may also choose to stop the interview at any time.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION:

You may benefit from the questioning process of the interview by acquiring beneficial knowledge through reflection on your professional needs and practices within the school district. Upon

request, you will be sent a copy of the study's results once it is completed. Having gone through the research process with me, you may acquire an appreciation for the research process and findings. Once completed, the research could help guide your district in best practices in the area of succession planning.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

All information gathered about you and the school will be kept completely confidential. Transcripts, audio files and documents will be identified by pseudonyms rather than actual names. All information (transcripts, audio files and documents) will be kept secure. Consent forms will be kept in a locked safe in a separate and secure storage space. Audio files will be coded to analyze your interview. Audio files will be stored on thumb drives and locked in a file cabinet. Artifacts will be scanned with all identifying information removed. This information will be saved as long as it is scientifically useful for a maximum of three years after publication of the results. Results from this study may be presented at professional meetings or in publications. You and your school will not be identified by name when the information is used in any form or format. Results will be presented as a whole. It is possible, however, that the consent process and data collection may be observed by the research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

CONTACTS:

You may contact the researcher at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study: **Farla Steele**, Doctoral Candidate, 16778 Summer Rain Road, Fayetteville, Arkansas, 72701 (918) 671-4197 or farla@okstate.edu. You may also contact Dr. Bernita Krumm, Dissertation Advisor, 310 Willard Hall, OSU, (405) 744-9445 and Dr. **Hugh Crethar**, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, OSU, (405) 744-3377 or **irb@okstate.edu** with any questions concerning participant's rights.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS:

Your participation is voluntary, there is no penalty for refusal to participate and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time, without penalty.

CONSENT DOCUMENTATION:

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

_____   _____

Signature of participant   Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

_____   _____

Signature of Researcher   Date

LIST OF PSEUDONYMS

1. Todd	23. Sheila	1. Freeman
2. Terri	24. Marsha	2. Turner
3. Pat	25. Kelly	3. Brown
4. Robin	26. Nicole	4. Johnson
5. Chris	27. Kim	5. Smith
6. Bill	28. Beth	6. Tuttle
7. Harold	29. Amy	7. Taylor
8. Don	30. Kathy	8. McDonald
9. Matt	31. Linda	9. Silver
10. Luke	32. Cheryl	10. Burns
11. John	33. Holly	11. Gray
12. Barry	34. Sherry	12. Gordon
13. Larry	35. Jenny	13. Bagget
14. Darrin	36. Sandra	14. Lewis
15. Ed	37. Lynn	15. Lazenby
16. Carl	38. Morgan	16. Jackson
17. Gilbert	39. Carol	17. Weaver
18. Zach	40. Katrina	18. Reynolds
19. Denver		19. Lawson
20. Danny		20. Rogers
21. Mary		21. Roberts
22. Ann		22. Strauss

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear (principal):

My name is Farla Steele and I am a doctoral candidate through Oklahoma State University. I am researching principals' experiences in their leadership role. Despite a plethora of research on increased student performance, school achievement continues to be unpredictable. A principal's role is known to be paramount. This study will explore how various types of support impact principals' professional experiences. My hope is that this information will lead to best practices in developing beneficial human resource policies in regard to succession practices such as professional development, mentoring and hiring practices for principals.

I would like to interview you for this project. The interview will last approximately 1 hour. To help facilitate your participation, I would be happy to meet at a time, date and location of your convenience. Your identity, location and school district will be kept confidential. No specific information gleaned from the interview will be attributed to you by name nor will you be identified as a participant in the research report. Participation in the study is voluntary and there is no compensation for participation. At any time, you are free to withdraw from the study. Your consent of use of the information derived from the interview can also be withdrawn at any time. You are welcome to skip any question or questions that you wish to during the interview. Further, your name will not appear in any documents that represent this study.

If you have any questions about your participation in the study or the study's results, you may request additional information from: Farla Steele, 16778 Summer Rain Road, Fayetteville, AR 72701, (918) 671-4197 or Dr. Bernita Krumm, 310 Willard Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-9445. Questions in regard to your rights as a research volunteer can be addressed by Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Please respond to me via email at farla@okstate.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Farla Steele
Ed.D. Candidate at Oklahoma State University

APPPENDIX D

SURVEY AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic Questions

1. How many years have you been a principal in this school?

2. Prior to accepting your current position, where were you employed and in what capacity?

3. How many years were you employed there?

4. How long did you teach prior to taking on a principal's position?

5. How did you learn about your current position?

Interview Questions

1. What factors helped you decide to apply for a principal's position?

2. Do you have or have you had someone you consider your professional mentor?

   a. How did you meet your mentor?

   b. What type of benefit have you experienced from having a mentor?

3. Did anyone encourage you to apply for your position?

   a. Would you consider this person a mentor?

   b. Would you have applied for the position without encouragement?

4. How were you interviewed for your current position?

   a. Was the interview process intimidating?

   b. How many interviews did you go through?

   c. Were you worried that you would not receive the position?

5. What opportunities did you have to become familiar with the specific role responsibilities at your current school prior to becoming the school's principal?

6. What opportunities did you have to acquaint yourself with the faculty prior to accepting the responsibilities of the principal?

7. What opportunities have helped you further acquaint yourself with the faculty since accepting the position as the principal?

8. As a new leader to the school, how did you decide on your approach to the school's mission of student performance?

9. How has your vision for student academic success changed since you came to the school?

10. How did your initial experiences as the school principal or as a school leader affect your efforts on improving student academic performance?

11. When confronted with specific leadership concerns, what resources do you use to address the issue?

12. How have the leadership resources that you use now changed over the period of time you have been leading the school?

13. What resources would you have liked to have had access to upon entering the job that would have enhanced your ability to direct school reform?

14. What are your professional goals for the future?
    a. Do you anticipate staying within the district?
    b. Do you anticipate staying within this geographic area?

15. Do you know how the transition will be handled during your eventual replacement?

SAMPLE RECRUITMENT DISTRICT EMAIL

Dear (district representative or superintendent) :

My name is Farla Steele and I am a doctoral student through Oklahoma State University. I am researching principals' experiences of professional support in their leadership role for my dissertation. Despite a plethora of research on increased student performance, school reform continues to be unpredictable. A principal's role is known to be paramount in the reform process. This study will explore how various types of support impact the principals' professional experiences. My hope is that this information will lead to best practices in developing beneficial human resource policies in regard to succession practices such as professional development, mentoring and hiring practices for principals

With your permission, I would like to interview three of the district of _____'s principals for this project. I need to interview a principal from the high school, a middle school and an elementary school. They can be your choice; otherwise, I can solicit volunteers individually. The interview will last approximately 1 hour. To help facilitate their participation, I would be happy to meet at a time, date and location of their convenience. The principal's identity, location and school district will be kept confidential. No specific information gleaned from the interview will be attributed to the district by name, nor will any individual be identified as a participant in the research report. Participation in the study is voluntary and there is no compensation for participation. At any time, they are free to withdraw from the study as individuals. Consent of use of the information derived from the interview can also be withdrawn at any time.

I anticipate scheduling the interviews in October/November of 2014 with data summaries available to you by the spring of 2015.

Your help will be greatly appreciated as well as a milestone towards my doctorate.

If you have any questions about participation in the study or the study's results, feel free to contact me or my advisor, Dr. Bernita Krumm, 310 Willard Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-9445. Questions in regard to participant rights as a research volunteer can be addressed by Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Please respond to me via email at farla@okstate.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Farla Steele
Ed.D. Studies at Oklahoma State University
16778 Summer Rain Road
Fayetteville, AR 72701
(918) 671-4197

APPENDIX F

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Thursday, October 16, 2014

IRB Application No   ED14153

Proposal Title: Principal Experiences of Succession

Reviewed and   Exempt
Processed as:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved   Protocol Expires: 10/15/2017

Principal
Investigator(s):

Farla Gay Steele   Bernita Krumm
16778 Summer Rain Rd   310 Willard
Fayetteville, AR 72701   Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☐ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Hugh Crethar, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Farla Gay Steele

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: PRINCIPAL EXPERIENCES OF SUCCESSION

Major Field: Educational Leadership Studies

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in School Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2015.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Psychology at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December, in 1982.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Sociology at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, in 1980.

Experience:

Lincoln High School, Counselor/Teacher, 2011- 2014
Remington Elementary, Tulsa Public Schools, Counselor, 2003-2011
Jenks Alternative/Jenks West Elementary, Counselor 2002-2003
Jenks West Elementary, Kindergarten Assistant, 2001-2002
Tulsa Community College, Adjunct Instructor, 1991-2001
OK Department of Human Services, Counselor, 1985-1988

Professional Memberships:

Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators
National Association of Elementary Principals
Arkansas Association of Middle Level Education
National Association of Secondary School Principals
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)