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High School Principals Who Stay: Stability in a Time of Change

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HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS WHO STAY: STABILITY IN A

TIME OF CHANGE

by

Patricia A. Luebke

A Dissertation Submitted in

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ABSTRACT

HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS WHO STAY: STABILITY IN A TIME OF CHANGE

by

Patricia A. Luebke

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013
Under the Supervision of Professor Gail Schneider

This qualitative study explored the institutional factors, personal characteristics, and work-related relationships of high school principals that led to their longer than usual tenure in their positions. Data were gathered from interviews with ten high school principals who had served in their positions for a range of 8 to 23 years, much longer than many high school principals today.

Four major themes emerged from the data: relationships, balance, fit and change. Within the theme of relationships, relationships with the faculty and staff, district office and superintendent, school board, parents and community, and students were explored. Collaboration and trust were identified as sub-themes within this theme. The theme of balance included balancing the demands of the job, balancing the job and family life and responses to managing the multiple demands of work and home life. Fit included fit with the district and community and the fit of compensation for their work. The theme of change included subthemes of continuous improvement, instructional leadership, cultural changes, sustainability of change, socioeconomic factors and student achievement.

The study found that the decision to remain in one position for an extended period of time was influenced by a number of factors, including positive relationships with students, faculty and staff and their superintendents. The principals also enjoy the ability

to initiate and carry out change efforts with direction for the goals provided from the district and the autonomy to develop and implement the approach to the change with their faculty and staff. Personally, these principals were positive, focused, goal-oriented individuals who distribute leadership among the staff and put student learning at the forefront of all they do in their buildings. They enjoy complexity and change and they cite a concern with losing their edge and focus on improvement as something they worry about.

DEDICATION

To my husband, Kenneth Robinson
whose love, support and patience made this journey possible.

To my children, Andre, Katie, Tracy, and Vicki
from whom I have learned more than one could imagine.

And to my parents, Roy and Rose Luebke
whose value of education and support for their
daughters set the foundation for me to follow this path.

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I would have never reached this point in my journey at this time in my life without the support, encouragement and patience of so many people. They need to be acknowledged for the parts they've played along the way.

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Dr. Gail Schneider, who encouraged me to return to the university and served as my dissertation chair, provided ongoing support, ongoing nudging, valuable feedback throughout the process and helped me believe in myself.

My colleagues at Alverno College also deserve a thank you for their ongoing optimism, support, encouragement, understanding and presence during this process. I draw strength and inspiration from my colleagues and feel so fortunate to be able to work with them every day.

The participants in this study who took time from their busy schedules to talk with me deserve a thank you as well. I learned so much from them and continue to marvel at the work they do on behalf of the students and families they serve.

Chapter One

Background of the Study

Principals are the heart of everything that happens in schools. While classroom instruction is the center of student achievement, principals are the guiding force behind what happens in classrooms. Today both scholarly research and popular media reinforce the importance of the school principal in the success of a school and its students. (Leithwood, Seashore Lewis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). At the same time that the importance of the principal in the success of a school is being recognized and studied, the challenges that principals face seem to increase every year. These challenges include changes not only in their school environments but also in the expectations that their superintendents, school boards, parents and the public have for them as administrators. Diverse student bodies, political pressure to get better results, staff concerns about change at the school, district and state level, parental expectations for their children's education and tightening budgets are all factors that directly impact the work and life of the principal. Principals focus an increasing amount of their work on improving the academic achievement of all students through, teacher development and instructional leadership.

At the same time that the expectations for principals as instructional leaders are increasing, there is growing concern that the retention of principals, especially at the secondary level, is posing a problem for many school districts. While the departure of an ineffective principal may be an appropriate remedy for a school, constant change in the leadership ranks limits a school's ability to undertake and implement substantive change (Hawthorne-Clay, 2010). Recent studies have examined the retention rate and movement

of principals in Texas, Missouri, North Carolina, New York, and Illinois (Fuller &

Young, 2009; Baker, Punswick & Belt, 2010; Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Guarino,

Ghosh-Dastidar & Brown, 2006; Battle & Gruber, 2010; Weinstein, Jacobowitz, Ely,

Landon & Schwartz, 2009; Ringel, Gates, Chung, Brown & Ghosh-Dastidar, 2004). All

raised concern about the turnover in principals, especially in high school principals,

where the rate of principal movement is greater than at the K-8 level.

Locally, in the Milwaukee Public Schools at the beginning of the 2009 school

year, 20% of the elementary principals in the district were new to their jobs, while 58 of

the principals had three years of experience or less, representing about one-third of the

principals in the district (Borsuk, 2009). In 2011, 52 new principals were added to the

district, again about one-third of the total members of the principal corps (Richards,

2011). At the high school level, at least 7 of the 12 traditional comprehensive high

schools in the district started the school year with new principals in 2011. Recent staffing

projections for the 2013-14 school year reflect the anticipated resignations or retirements

of at least 30 administrators including principals, continuing the trend in turnover of the

administrative ranks (Richards, 2013).

Literature reviewed reinforces the need for strong principals to lead change and

adequate time with a principal leader in place to implement change. With principals

serving for short periods of time in their positions, the ability of school personnel to

develop and carry out meaningful change is in question.

Change literature confirms the belief that substantive change takes time. The

amount of time that it takes to institutionalize change is reported to range from five to ten

years (Fullan, 1991, Kotter, 1995, Sergiovanni, 1994), yet recent research on principal

movement indicates that many high school principals leave their position within five years from their initial appointment. In one study, researchers found that "just over 50% of newly hired high school principals stay for three years and less than 30% stay for five years" (Fuller and Young, 2009).   In addition to the movement of principals of their own decision making, or the routine movement often seen in larger districts, requirements of the No Child Left Behind legislation mandate that principals of some schools deemed failing be replaced as part of the district's commitment to turning these schools around. This is mandated without regard of the nature of the problem in the school, how much progress has been made during the tenure of the principal, or other factors that influence whether or not schools meet the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) targets established by the government.

Statement of the Problem

To address their concerns raised by the turnover of administrators, especially school-based principals, in many school districts school boards and superintendents across the country are reviewing their systems of hiring principals and designing new systems to recruit and train principals. In Chicago the recruitment and retention of principals is at the core of Mayor Rahm Emanuel's education agenda, where a new five million dollar grant focuses on principals' training and compensation so that the Chicago Public School has "the highest caliber for our principals", according to Emanuel (Hood, 2011). Across the country, school districts are also developing new evaluation instruments designed to ensure principal quality. Organizations such as New Leaders for New Schools have as their mission the development of quality principals for urban schools. In Cleveland, the school district started a leadership academy in order to

improve the caliber of its principal candidates and address its principal turnover rates of 25 percent (Gates et al., 2006). Today it is difficult to read an educational journal or news account without coming across an article about the importance of principals and about the school district efforts to ensure that their schools are led by the best. It is clear that recruitment and retention of quality principals is a priority for school districts across the country.

Research reinforces that principals are key figures to strong schools, and to a school's quest to change and improve the achievement of students. If substantive change takes time, it seems clear that the consistent presence of a strong principal leader over time is critical in meeting the expectations to help schools improve. This is especially important in high schools, where principal turnover is more frequent than at other levels in K-12 education (Fuller & Young, 2009). School districts must pay attention and take actions to recruit and, more importantly, retain quality high school principals.

Significance of the Study

Recent literature on principal mobility has focused on study of data sets from states to track the movement of principals across the state. While some patterns of movement have been identified in states from these studies, they do little to examine the reasons underlying the movement. They do not present the perspective of the individual principal. Little research exists that examines what influences a high school principal to remain in the same school for a long time. Slater (2011), in an international study of principal leadership recommends, "Future research in educational administration should address the lives of principals expressed in their own voices". This study examined high school principals who are bucking the trend identified in the large scale studies and are

remaining in their positions for at least five years. This study identified institutional and individual factors that support the retention of high school principals using the voices of the high school principals. The study adds to the field of literature on principal retention from the perspective and words of the principals themselves. As school districts need to find ways to attract and retain talented leaders in their high schools, this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of the people who lead their high schools over time.

Contributions and Limitations of Past Research

The bulk of the literature on principal longevity focuses on principals who leave their positions in a relatively short period of time after their initial appointment to a position. While the research conducted to this point is instructive as a starting point for studying job tenure of high schools principals, it does not go beyond the beginning stages of the work that needs to be done. Statewide studies in Missouri, Illinois, New York and Texas examine the administrative data sets in those states to identify trends for principal tenure. These studies are predominantly quantitative. They address the numbers and demographic data of principals who stay or change jobs, but do not delve into the reasons behind the decisions that are made. They do not examine institutional factors or personal characteristics that influence the decision making of individuals who serve as principals. In order to more deeply understand why some principals decide to stay in stressful situations, qualitative studies are needed using the voices of principals.

There are some qualitative studies, usually doctoral dissertations, that examine the reasons principals choose to leave their positions (Long, 2000), however, there are few that examine the career principal who chooses to remain as principal in the same school

for a long period of time. This is an area of the research that is open for study, especially given the changing landscape of the principalship and the need for strong instructional leaders.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study is that its results apply only to the people interviewed; they cannot be generalized to the larger population of high school principals. In addition, since this study examined high school principals with five or more years of experience in their current position, the number of participants who met the criteria of the purposeful sample was small. Since women and members of minority groups are underrepresented in the population of high school principals in Wisconsin in general, identifying women and members of minority groups as potential study participants was a difficult task. Of the 52 potential participants in the study, only one was a member of a minority group and two were females. None of these candidates participated in the interviews; therefore, the sample did not represent diversity in gender or race/ethnicity as the researcher had hoped it would. The study would be stronger if it had included the voices of high school principals who were members of underrepresented groups.

Another potential limitation of the study was the possible bias of the researcher. As a former school administrator and high school principal, this researcher was aware throughout the procedures of this possible bias and worked diligently to overcome it as five of the ten participants were former peers of the researcher.

Overview of the Study

To understand why principals remain in challenging positions for long periods of time from the perspective of the individual principal, this qualitative study employed a

descriptive narrative methodology. Narrative inquiry was chosen as the method for this study because it focuses on the sharing of stories of the lives of the participants. As Marshall and Rossman (1995) state, "In narrative inquiry, people's individual life stories are the focus. This method assumes that people live "storied lives' and seeks to collect data to describe those lives" (p. 86).

In order to gain insight into the lived experiences of high school principals, in-depth interviews were conducted to explore the factors and characteristics of both institutions and individuals that support the principal in his/her commitment to remain in the position for a long period of time. The sample of principals to participate in interviews was purposefully chosen from the group of active high school principals in the midwest who have served in their position for at least five years. The researcher used the purposeful sampling process in order to represent a variety of school and individual characteristics in the sample group.

Summary

Chapter 1 presented the background of the study, the significance of the study, and perceived limitations that may exist. In the next chapter a review of the literature relevant to the issue of principal leadership and school improvement is presented. Specifically, this chapter examines the literature on the evolving role of the secondary school principal, principal leadership, leadership and school change, principal mobility and attrition, and principal longevity and retention. Chapter 3 describes the design of the study and its methodology. Chapter 4 introduces the ten research participants, while Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter 6 presents an analysis of the findings along with a discussion of the results, including its limitations, its

significance, implications for school districts, superintendents and other administrators, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

"If you know of an effective school without an effective principal, call me collect." This quote, (Lezotte, as cited by Cotton, 2003, p. 74), sums up the importance of the principal in the life of a school. Principals hold great influence, both directly and indirectly, over school culture, staff morale, parent satisfaction, and student achievement. With the consistent presence of a strong principal, students learn, school cultures thrive, faculty and staff morale is high and parents are satisfied. Without this presence, making these things happen is difficult, if not impossible. Given the importance of the principal in a school, it seems apparent that hiring the best possible candidates and retaining them in their positions is a goal of school districts across the country, yet recent research reveals that principals, particularly high school principals, do not remain in their positions long enough to undertake and implement the kinds of change that are expected of principals today.

The Evolving Role of the Secondary School Principal

The leadership role of the school principal, particularly the high school principal, has changed in many ways over the past forty years. Until the school improvement movement in the 1970s began to examine the effectiveness of school operation practices, the principal was generally expected to manage the day-to-day operations of the school while the district office provided direction and many times, mandates, for what was to occur within the schools of the district. The high school principal's role was to manage student discipline, supervise teachers, and implement the directives of the district administration. A new role emerged for principals in the 1970s as federally sponsored and funded programs for special populations, including bilingual education and education

for students with disabilities were established along with federal funding for curriculum

development with emphasis on mathematics and science education. The implementation

of these programs required the involvement and work of building principals along with

their central office colleagues (Hallinger, 1992). According to Hallinger, "By the mid-

1970s, relatively few American principals could avoid the responsibilities that came with

programme and curriculum management" (p. 1). This was the time in educational history

that principals began to be viewed as potential change agents in schools.

The concept of principal as instructional leader in effective schools was cemented

during the 1980s, when the term instructional leader began to be used when describing

the role of the principal. What was missing at that time was a clear and consistent view

of what that term meant in practice. What does it take for a principal to be an effective

instructional leader? Hallinger (1992) ventured "The problem of school leadership was

framed by policy makers in terms of inadequate principal expertise in curriculum and

instruction. Principals lacked knowledge and skills; staff development centres designed

for school leaders would provide the missing expertise" (p. 3). Hallinger also stated that

the role of the principal is complex and made up of competing demands, only one of

which involves curriculum and instructional leadership, requiring change in the

institution as well:

    Even when principals are armed with a more powerful knowledge base,

    significant adaptations must occur in the workplace before we can expect to see

    persisting changes in administrative practice…even as the instructional leadership

    image became firmly entrenched in professional rhetoric, changes in

    administrative practices were less evident… There is, however, little evidence that

American school districts adapted to support the principals' assumption of the instructional leadership role. (p. 3)

As school change efforts moved into the 1990s and 2000s, expectations for the principalship evolved yet again. It was not enough for principals to be instructional leaders in their schools. They were now expected to undertake efforts to transform their schools (Leithwood, 1992), shifting their emphasis to the development of strong cultures and setting the stage for distributed leadership in the school. Leithwood's vision for effective school leadership included participative decision making and "a radically different form of power that is 'consensual' and 'facilitative' in nature – a form of power manifested *through* other people, not over other people" (p. 9). He stated, "At the reins of today's new schools will be not one but many leaders who believe in creating the conditions that enable staffs to find their own directions" (p. 8). As the concept of distributing leadership in schools emerged, efforts were made to expand the range of people who had leadership roles in schools (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008; Hallinger & Heck, 2009; Kennedy, Deuel, Nelson & Slavit, 2011). Attempts at distributed leadership were manifested in changing structures, primarily the development of school councils, including parents, teachers, and sometimes students in the leadership of schools (Hallinger, 1992).

Looking to the future, Gerald Tirozzi (2001), then executive director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, discussed the changing landscape of education and how these changes affected the role and vision of the principal. Specifically, he discussed several factors identified in a document from the National

Association of Secondary School Principals that describes areas in which principals need

"new skills and a new mindset", including

- The makeup of the school-age population

- Transcience in the school population

- New building construction

- An aging population

- Technology and virtual learning

- Testing

- Staff requirements

- Resource allocation

- The changing nature of adolescents

To meet the needs implicit in these themes, Turozzi reinforced the focus on

leadership that principals today must demonstrate:

The principal's role must shift from a focus on management and administration to

a focus on leadership and vision – on facilitating the teaching and learning

process…a commitment to leadership helps principals helps principals adapt to

significantly changing circumstances,. It defines what the future should look like,

aligns staff members with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen.

(p. 438)

One thing that seems certain about the role of the principal is that it is always

changing, becoming more complex and demanding as both internal and external forces

place increasing expectations on American schools and those who lead them (Hull, 2012;

Lattuca, 2012). As Tirozzi (2001) stated, "The principals of tomorrow's schools must be

instructional leaders who possess the requisite skills, capacities, and commitment to lead

the accountability parade, not follow" (p. 438).

Principal Leadership

The importance of the principal leader in schools has been the subject of research

from many perspectives over the years. As schools are expected to be more and more

accountable for student achievement, the relationship of principal leadership and student

achievement has received attention in the literature (Leithwood, Seashore Louis,

Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2003) reviewed seventy

studies as part of their meta-analysis of research on the effect of leadership on student

achievement, finding that "there is, in fact, a substantial relationship between leadership

and student achievement" (p. 3). They identified twenty-one specific leadership

responsibilities that they found have significant correlation with student achievement,

including culture, order, discipline, resources, visibility, relationship, communication,

change agency, working from strong beliefs and ideals, and innovation. Cotton (2003)

reviewed 81 research articles from the previous twenty years, and identified practices of

principals that affect student learning and achievement. They included 26 specific

principal behaviors that seem to fall into five categories: a) clear focus on student

learning, which includes vision, clear learning goals, and high expectations for all

students; b) interactions and relationships, including communication with all constituents,

visibility and accessibility; c) culture, which encompasses shared leadership and decision

making, collaboration, support for risk taking and continuous improvement; d)

instruction, including observation and feedback to teachers and e) accountability,

including student progress monitoring and the use of student data for program improvement (p. ix-x).

Some studies focused on factors within the school organization rather than the behaviors of principals in their examination of the role of the principal in effective schools. In a study of successful principals in New York, Teske and Schneider (1999) argued that "autonomy and strong leadership are essential ingredients to high performance" (p. 5). They found that "consistency of leadership is important" in the quest for meaningful and substantive change in schools, citing Hess who argued that 'frequent leadership turnover disrupts administrative support and increases the emphasis on initiating rather than executing reform' (p.26). Their recommendations included four characteristics present in the schools in which the long-term successful principals worked:

- Controlling staff hiring and development practices is critical to creating an effective community

- Experience matters. All these principals had considerable time in the system.

- A coherent educational mission throughout all grades in the school helps mobilize the staff and the school community, though which theme if selected may matter less.

- High expectations for students, not just in rhetoric, but also in practice, was common to every principal and they all expected everyone in the school community to live up to high standards and enforce those high expectations. (p.5)

The authors of this study recommended that school systems "act to reward successful principals more…The rewards can include salary increases…But rewards must also include greater autonomy to make the job more interesting and rewarding. Autonomy is probably most important in the selection and retention of staff. Successful principals should also be given greater flexibility in the use of their school budget" (p. 25). A 2004 Wallace Foundation study examined how leadership influences student learning, reviewing available evidence on five research questions, including "What effects does successful leadership have on student learning?" (p. 4). Their review of the evidence concluded that "Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (p. 5).

While the impact of principal leadership on student achievement is an important component of the principalship, principal leadership is also present in other areas of school life. Building on the work of Sergiovanni, Portin (2004) decribes seven functions of leadership found in all schools:

Seven Core Functions of Leadership in School

Function	Action
Instructional Leadership	Ensuring quality of instruction, modeling teaching practices, supervising curriculum, and ensuring quality of teaching resources.
Cultural Leadership	Tending to the symbolic resources of the school (its traditions, climate and history).
Managerial Leadership	Overseeing the operations of the school (its budget, schedule, facilities, safety and security, and transportation).

Human Resources Leadership	Recruiting, hiring, firing, inducting, and mentoring teachers and administrators; developing leadership capacity and professional development opportunities.
Strategic Leadership	Promoting vision mission, and goals – and developing a means to reach them.
External Development Leadership	Representing the school in the community, developing capital, tending to public relations, recruiting students, buffering and mediating external interests, and advocating for the school's interests.
Micropolitical Leadership	Buffering and mediating internal interests while maximizing resources (financial and human). (p. 17)

Researchers have examined the relationship between principal leadership behaviors and school climate/culture (Fullan, 1992; Fullan, 2003; Halawah, 2007; Wallace Foundation, 2012; Deal & Peterson, 1990; Griffith, 1999) and overall school performance and improvement (Clark, Martorell & Rockoff, 2009; Elmore, 2000). No matter what the focus of the research, there is widespread agreement in the literature that the principal is a key factor in all that happens in schools. Principals matter.

Leadership and School Change

Change is the universal buzzword in schools today. Educational administrators seek to improve student achievement and behavior, increase the instructional repertoire of teachers, and increase the capacity of school staff to positively address the challenges facing them, challenges that include student mobility, diverse populations of learners, and political pressure to constantly improve outcomes for students. What is missing in the education of school administrators is a clearly defined description of what needs to be done to successfully address the increasing demands placed on schools.

Fullan (2001) offers a framework by which change can be implemented in schools, identifying five components of leadership that he finds "represent independent but mutually reinforcing forces for positive change":

- Moral Purpose, defined as acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers, and society as a whole

- Understanding the change process, a process that is complex and elusive.

- Relationship Building

- Knowledge Creation and Sharing

- Coherence Making (p. 3)

While many researchers study leadership and change, the subject remains open to debate and practitioners do not have a clear model to follow to achieve the kinds of change they are being asked to undertake. While there is no universal model available that applies to all schools in all environments, several factors relating to the principal's role in school change appear frequently in the literature. First, there is agreement that principals are key players in efforts to improve their buildings (Protheroe, 2005; Boyd, 1992); Fink & Brayman, 2006; Leithwood, 1992; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2008; Hargreaves & Fink, 2004; Hull, 2012). Second, while there are various views on the role of principal longevity in school improvement efforts, evidence exists that experience in the principal position is related to positive school improvement work (Griffith, 1999; Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). Third, several studies that go so far as to state that frequent principal turnover has negative effects on a school's efforts to improve (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004; Beteille, Kalogrides & Loeb, 2011; Hull, 2012). Along with the notion that principals are key players in the school change process, researchers have also identified

specific areas of leadership practice that are significant in its success. a) principals must work with others to create a sense of urgency in the need for change; b) it is clear that relationships matter. Principals must bring people together to create and implement change in their schools. c) time is a variable in the change process; d) sustaining change must be the end result if we want schools to improve (Kotter, 1995; Fullan, 2001; Boyd, 1992; Borgemenke, Blanton, Kirkland & Woody, 2011-12).

Creating a sense of urgency has been identified as the first and most critical step in the change process (Kotter, 1995 & 2008). Kotter (2008) further states "When the urgency challenge is not handled well, even very capable people and resource-rich organizations can suffer greatly. When the challenge is handled well, even those who face formidable obstacles can produce results we all want for our careers, employers, and nations (p. vii).

Relational leadership is viewed by many as a key skill principals need to exhibit to successfully implement change in their schools (Teske and Schneider, 1999). Citing Goleman (2002), Reeves (2006) reached the conclusion that relational skills have a significantly larger impact on organizational performance as analytical skills do. Hoerr (2005) introduced the topic of school leadership with a discussion of relationships:

> Good leaders change organizations; great leaders change people.   People are at the heart of any organization, particularly a school   and it is only through changing people—nurturing and challenging them, helping them grow and develop, creating a culture in which they all learn—that an organization can flourish. *Leadership is about relationships.* (p.7)

Fullan (2001) found that:

> the single factor common to every successful change initiative is that
> *relationships* improve. If relationships improve, things get better. If they remain
> the same or get worse, ground is lost. Thus leaders must be consummate
> relationship builders with diverse people and groups—especially with people
> different from themselves. (p. 5)

Several authors address the issue of the need for allowing adequate time for
change (Boyd, 1992; Protheroe, 2005; Kotter, 1995). Boyd (1992) states, "Many change
efforts fail simply because not enough was invested in them in terms of time", and cites
Beer, Eisenstat and Spector in reiterating that 'the payoffs that result from persistence
over a long period of time as opposed to quick fixes' is what is needed (p. 1).
Protheroe (2005) avers that in the change process:

> While the ideal approach is one that supports gradual and continuous
> improvement, the process in many schools over the past few years has been far
> from gradual. Accountability pressures and ambitious goals have placed both
> districts and schools in positions requiring rapid and often significant change (p.
> 54)…For change to be successful, participants must remain committed as initial
> problems are worked through and improvement begins. (p. 55)

According to Kotter (1995):

The most general lesson to be learned from the more successful cases is that the
change process goes through a series of phases that, in total, usually requires a
considerable length of time. Skipping steps creates only the illusion of speed and
never produces a satisfying result. (p. 59)

Hargreaves and Fink (2004) suggest the development of sustainable leadership as "a key force leading to meaningful, long-term change", going "beyond temporary gains in achievement scores to create lasting meaningful improvements in learning" (p. 9) and introduce the idea that leadership secession planning in school must be part of the planning from the day a principal is appointed to the position. Recognizing the negative effect that staff turnover has on the sustainability of change efforts, Moffett (2000) cites a 1977 RAND Corporation study that found "principal and staff turnover was one of the most significant factors associated with abandoning newly implemented changes" (p. 36). It seems evident that if schools are to undertake and implement positive change efforts, having a stable principal as part of the process is required throughout the process. Fuller (2009) comments, "Nobody is staying long enough to make connections or shepherd a reform through" (p. 2). School districts have an interest in sustainable reform; they also have a need to retain the leadership personnel to lead the change process.

Principal Mobility and Attrition

The study of principal mobility presents a growing interest in educational research. Data from recent studies suggest that "only about half of beginning principals remain in the same job five years later, and that many leave the principalship altogether when they go" (Viadero, 2009, p. 1). Several recent studies have examined the movement of principals in Texas, Missouri, North Carolina, New York, and Illinois (Fuller & Young, 2009; Gates, Guarino, Santibanez, Brown, Ghosh-Dastidar & Chung, 2004; Baker, Punswick & Belt, 2010; Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton & Ikemoto, 2012; Weinstein, Jacobowitz, Ely, Landon & Schwartz, 2009; Ringel, Gates, Chung, Brown, Ghosh-Dastidar, 2004). The mobility of high school principals is an area open for

additional study, especially when viewed in the context of the growing and continual demand for school improvement in all America's schools.

Fuller and Young (2009) studied the retention rates of newly hired principals in Texas from 1996 through 2008. Their findings reinforced the critical role of the principal in the school improvement process and the tenure necessary to effect change, stating "A small but growing body of evidence suggests that school leaders play a pivotal role in the school improvement process. Further, the evidence suggests that "principals must remain in a school for a number of consecutive years to fully impact a school" (p. 3). The authors report seven major findings from this study:

- Principal tenure and retention rates vary dramatically across school levels, with elementary schools having the longest tenure and greatest retention rates and high schools having the shortest tenure and lowest retention rates.

- High school retention rates are strikingly low for all schools—just over 50% of newly hired principals stay for three years and less than 30% stay for five years.

- Principal retention rates are heavily influenced by the level of student achievement in the principal's first year of employment, with principals in the lowest achieving schools having the shortest tenure and lowest retention rates and the high achieving schools having the longest tenure and highest retention rates.

- The percentage of economically disadvantaged students in a school also has a strong influence on principal tenure and retention rates, with

principals in high-poverty schools having shorter tenure and lower
retention rates than principals in low poverty schools.

- Principal retention is somewhat lower in schools in rural and small town districts and somewhat higher in suburban districts whose students tend to be White and not economically disadvantaged.

- The personal characteristics of principals such as age, race, and gender appear to have only a small impact on principal retention rates.

- Certification test results appear to have little impact on principal retention rates. (p. 17)

The authors also identify four primary factors that they believe are related to the overall issue of principal turnover: a) accountability pressure; b) complexity and intensity of the job; c) lack of support from the central office; and d) compensation.

In the mid-2000s, The RAND Corporation conducted large scale analyses of state data in Illinois, New York and North Carolina, examining the career moves of principals in those states. In Illinois, Ringel et al. (2004) found that "principals in schools with a larger proportion of minority students were more likely to change schools within the public school system and to leave the principalship but remain in the system", (p. xvi), suggesting that "schools having higher proportions of minority students may have a harder time retaining principals" (p. xvi). The authors, however, found that what their study did not tell them about school administrators was most illustrative for them – the issue of administrative quality. They continue on to provide recommendations for future data collection that could address this issue, including the use of administrative personnel data in conjunction with student and school achievement data, and developing systematic

information on the characteristics of school administrators that matter for student learning.

In North Carolina Gates et al. (2004) identified similar school characteristics to those found in Texas and Illinois that appeared to play an important role in predicting the movement of principals from their positions. These included the racial makeup of the student body, the race/ethnic background of the principals and students in the school, school size and the level of the school. Specifically, it was found that the percent of the student body that is non-White is positively related to principal movement, while principal movement is negatively related if the principal is of the same race/ethnic group as the plurality of the student body. Principals in smaller schools in this study were significantly more likely to change positions than those in larger schools. Finally, this study found that principals in middle schools and high schools were more likely to change positions than those in elementary schools. In both states studied in this research, high school principals were nearly twice as likely to change positions as principals in elementary schools.

Baker et al. (2010) examined leadership stability and the movement of principals in Missouri, identifying three major goals for their research:

- characterize the distribution of principals across Missouri schools.
- characterize principal leadership stability and exit behavior in Missouri schools.
- evaluate school and individual factors associated with leadership stability and exit behavior. (p. 531)

They also identified factors that they believed most likely to predict mobility among principals: a) relative compensation, b) personal characteristics, c) job characteristics, and d) work environment characteristics. The researchers' analysis of the data from their study indicated that in Missouri "approximately half of the principals are no longer principals in the state after about 5 years and nearly 75% have made at least one move to another school. Overall, there appears to be relative instability in the principalship…" (Baker et al., 2010, p. 551). The findings seem to be in line with the findings in the Texas study. Of the factors examined, Baker et.al found that certain student population characteristics, specifically with a concentration of Black students, increases the likelihood of principal movement, while principal's relative salary appears to be a significant factor in principal retention.

In a study of first year principals in six urban school districts, Burkhauser et al. (2012) examined the retention and survival of first year principals as part of a larger study on the experiences of first year urban principals. Their findings suggested "many new principals leave their schools after one or two years on the job" (p. xii), with 11.8 percent of the principals leaving within the first year, and another 10.7 percent leaving within the second year. The researchers identified a link between student achievement and the likelihood of the principal leaving, finding that new principals are more likely to leave when they are placed in schools that are below AYP targets and/or test scores decline during their first year.

In addition to the recent large scale studies that examined principal movement based on statewide data bases, several recent doctoral studies focused on smaller scale qualitative studies that examined the subject through the eyes of principals who have

moved to new positions, looking at the factors that influenced their decision to leave.

Tennille (2008) identified factors that influenced the principals studied to leave their

positions: a) the school board, b) the superintendent, c) the district, d) politics, and e) the

change process. Principals in this study described being hired to effect change in their

schools and receiving the support of the superintendent, school board and district office

until the change process hit a bump. According to the author

> The consensus was that principals who go in and address the many issues that
> schools face, soon wear out their welcome. The thoughts on how long that took
> ranged from three to five years. These principals were continually analyzing their
> priorities and values and making decisions about how and what to compromise.
> They ultimately reached a point where they felt that they could no longer
> accommodate the demands of others while continuing to compromise their beliefs
> and values for the sake of school change. (p. 141)

Evans (2011) used a case study format to study reasons why principals in urban

school districts stayed or left, and identified three areas that influenced principals'

decisions to stay or leave: a) mandated programs, b) staffing issues, including hiring, and

c) relationships with the district. For the principals who left, the most difficult of these

factors was a perceived lack of support from the district that left them feeling isolated,

disempowered and disenfranchised. Long (2000) studied secondary principals who had

been in their positions for at least one, but no more than three years before leaving of

their own volition. Factors that were cited as influencing a principal's decision to leave

in this study included parent aggression toward administrators, working in isolation,

general working conditions, clerical support, a disconnect from the previous perception

of the position, time constraints (including time away from family), stress, and compensation. Similar themes were reported by Johnson (2005) in a study of principals who voluntarily left the principalship. While the participants in this study reported that they missed their individual relationships with staff members, the fast pace and the authority they held in their positions, they also reported that they did not miss the issues within the staff culture, the workload, the bureaucracy (including the central office, union contracts and lawsuits), student discipline and irate parents.

Principal Longevity & Retention

Little research has been conducted on the area of administrative longevity, especially the longevity of principals. Research interests have focused more on identifying why principals leave positions rather than identifying factors that may support successful principals remaining in stressful positions long enough to effect positive change in the building. There is evidence in the research that reinforces the idea that experience in the principalship positively affects the principal's ability to successfully lead his/her school (Teske & Schneider, 1999; Hull, 2012). There also exists evidence in the literature that substantive and lasting change requires sufficient time to take hold, often described as five to seven years (Kotter, 1995). While high school principals often remain in their positions for less than five years, Papa (2007), in his study on the policy aspects of principal retention, reinforced the importance of longevity in the principalship stating, "… policy initiatives aimed at increasing the effectiveness of schools must consider ways by which schools can attract and retain highly qualified principals" (p. 269).

Several authors conclude that the job of the high school principal is too big for one person to handle and changes need to occur to encourage individuals to remain in these positions (Muffs & Schmitz, 1999; Fuller & Young, 2009; Grubb & Flessa, 2006). Walker (2010) sums up this perception, stating "Clearly, the role of the principal continues to expand and new responsibilities are added; however few are deleted….The principal cannot do the job alone. Principals cannot execute the job single handedly; they rely on the contributions of others" (p. 222). The recommendations that emerge from these studies revolve include considering reconstructing the role of the principal to a focus on instructional leadership, using others to focus on the non-instructional tasks, job sharing and dividing administrative tasks between two individuals with different skill sets, experimenting with an administrative team with individuals focused on one grade level in a high school, curriculum development, and overall leadership, including all instructional leadership. Gray (2001) proposed a mandatory principal internship in administrator preparation programs as a way to better prepare aspiring administrators for the challenges they will face on the job.

Slater (2011) reviewed literature on educational administration, supporting the argument that school leadership matters, and suggested ways in which to retain effective leaders in our schools. He cites Pont, Nusche and Moorman in a study of leadership in 21 countries in which the authors identified four areas of education administration policy that they believe need to be reviewed for change. These areas include redefining school leadership "to grant higher levels of autonomy with support to improve student learning" (p. 220), distributing school leadership across the organization, providing continuous professional development for school principals to carry out their responsibilities, and

developing "effective, transparent and consistent procedures", along with the availability of "attractive salaries, professional organizations and opportunities for career development" (p. 220). The Institute of Educational Leadership Task Force on the Principalship (2000) identified three critical challenges in the principalship that they found need to be addressed to retain the principals needed in today's schools, suggesting strategies by which these challenges could be approached:

- filling the pipeline with effective school leaders, including
    - supporting recruitment and retention
    - improving preparation programs, including raising entry and exit standards for candidates, and connecting preparation programs to the realities of the position
    - exploring alternative pathways to the principals for promising candidates from non-traditional backgrounds
- supporting the profession, including
    - emphasizing leadership practices that support student learning
    - improving ongoing training
    - increasing compensation
- guaranteeing quality and results
    - evaluating principals more effectively and more frequently
    - finding fair ways to hold principals accountable for leadership for student learning
    - developing stronger data gathering systems so principals have the data they need to inform their leadership

Summary

Recent research cements the significance of the principal in the successful operation and continuous improvement of schools. Principal leadership encompasses a wide variety of tasks and roles, including those of instructional leader, leader of student achievement in their buildings, change agent, and builder of culture. Principals today are expected to carry out these roles while also tending to building management, budgets and other managerial tasks that at one time were the primary focus of the job. As a result, some research has suggested that the role is too big for one person and have offered suggestions for modification of the traditional role of principal.

Principal mobility and attrition have been addressed in the research through primarily quantitative studies that have examined the leaving behaviors of school principals and identified institutional and personal factors that are related to principal attrition and mobility. There is a void in the literature when it comes to the area of administrative longevity and retention.

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Chapter Three

Design and Methodology

Purpose of the Study

Most studies regarding principal tenure have focused on using large-scale state data sets to track the movement of principals in order to identify characteristics of schools and principals that are related to principal movement. These studies, while a necessary first step, do not provide an in-depth look at the individual principal and the forces that influence him/her to remain in high profile, high stress positions. This descriptive narrative qualitative study examined the perceptions of high school principals who remained in their positions for at least five years.

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences and factors, both institutional and personal that influence principals to remain in their positions for a longer period of time than is commonly seen in high schools today. The following questions were explored the study:

(a) What institutional factors are present that contribute to lengthy tenure for a high school principal?

(b) What personal characteristics are present in high school principals with lengthy tenure in their positions?

(c) How do principals with lengthy tenure view their relationships with staff, parents, students, the district office, the community, other administrators and the school board?

Research Design

A qualitative research methodology was employed to address the research questions. Since this study sought to investigate why principals remain in challenging positions for relatively long periods of time, a qualitative design was the appropriate research design choice. Creswell (2007) stated:

> We conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be explored. This exploration is needed, in turn, because of a need to study a group or population, identify variables that can then be measured, or hear silenced voices. These are all good reasons to explore a problem rather than to use predetermined information from the literature or rely on results from other research studies. We also conduct qualitative research because we need a *complex* detailed understanding of the issue. This detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature. (p. 39)

To understand why principals remain in challenging positions for long periods of time, this study employed a descriptive narrative approach, utilizing in-depth interviewing as the primary source of data collection.   Clandinin and Huber (2010) define narrative inquiry as "the study of experience understood narratively. It is a way of thinking about, and studying, experience" (p. 436). According to Creswell (2008), narrative researchers "describe in detail the setting or context in which the participant experiences the central phenomenon" (p. 522). Wiebe (2009) further defines narrative inquiry as "a methodological approach that investigates narrative and/or employs

narrative to present a view of phenomena" (p.4). In a broad sense, the term narrative may be used to refer to a number of things, including: a) any spoken or written presentation, b) content organized in a story form, c) a particular kind of data, or d) a form of research reporting that is distinct from the more conventional argumentation forms conventionally used in research reports (Wiebe, 2009). Marshall and Rossman (2006), assert "The method assumes people construct their realities through narrating their stories. The researcher explores a story told by a participant and records that story" (p. 117).

Some research has been conducted on principal mobility, principal attrition and principal "leaving" behavior. The majority of this research is quantitative, often using large state-wide data sets to examine behavior. These studies do not delve into the reasons that principals move from one position to another or seek to understand the perspective of the principals in those moves. The information in these studies is important and forms a basis for further study as Creswell (2007) states:

> We use qualitative research to follow up quantitative research and help explain the mechanisms or linkages in causal theories or models. These theories provide a general picture of trends, associations and relationships, but they do not tell us about why people responded as they did, the context in which they responded, and their deeper thoughts and behaviors that governed their responses. (p.40)

This study expanded on existing quantitative studies that have examined principal movement, delving into the reasons principals are choosing to stay in their positions, the factors that influenced their decision, and their thoughts and perspectives about what factors contribute to their decision.

Methods

According to Pearson (2000), "Qualitative research typically involves two basic types of data collection methods: In-depth interviews and participant observation" (p. 42). This researcher used a semi-structured interview process that focused on using open-ended questions as the primary means of data collection for the study. Seidman (2006) defines the purpose of in-depth interviewing:

> The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to 'evaluate' as the term is usually used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9).

He describes an interviewing process in which "…interviewers use, primarily, open-ended questions. Their major task is to build upon and explore their participants' responses to those questions. The goal is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study" (p. 15). Taylor and Bogdan (1984) differentiate between the processes of general and "in-depth" interviewing:

> *By in-depth qualitative interviewing we mean repeated face-to-face encounters* between the researcher and informants directed toward understanding *informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words.* The in-depth interview is modeled after a conversation between equals rather than a formal question-and-answer exchange. (p. 77)

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe the aim of the qualitative research interview: "The qualitative interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific

explanations" (p. 1). They introduce their text with a description of the power of the interview:

> Through conversations we get to know other people, learn about their experiences, feelings, attitudes, and the world they live in. In an interview conversation, the researcher asks about, and listens to, what people themselves tell about their lived world. The interviewer listens to their dreams, fears, and hopes; hears their views and opinions in their own words; and learns about their school and work situation, their family and social life (p. xvii).

Schuman (1982), as cited in Siedman (2006) provide the basis of a structure for conducting interviews that uses a series of three interviews in the data collection process. According to Seidman, each of the three interviews serves a specific purpose: the first to set the context of the participant's experience by reviewing past experiences, the second to allow participants to reconstruct details of their present experiences within this context, and the third to have participants describe the meaning of their experience with the phenomenon. He also allows for exceptions to the three-interview process "as long as a structure is maintained that allows participants to reconstruct and reflect upon their experiences within the context of their lives…" (p. 21). This researcher chose to follow a compressed two-interview process, and to allow for follow-up interviews, telephone calls or e-mail discussions if additional information or clarification was needed. Recognizing the busy year-round schedules of high school principals, a concern was that some might be reluctant or unable to commit the time for three interviews as a condition of participation in the study. By requesting two interviews rather than three, the researcher believed that more principals in the relatively small participant pool might be

willing to participate in the study. The first interview consisted of an approximate hour-long interview during which the context and details of the participants' past and present experiences were explored. The second hour-long interview consisted of describing the meaning of the participants' experience within the established context. Interview guides for both the first and second interview are found in Appendix A of this document.

Selection of Participants

The researcher employed a homogenous sampling technique to identify participants for the study. "In homogenous sampling, the researcher purposefully samples individuals or sites based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics. To use this procedure, you need to identify the characteristics and find individuals or sites that possess it" (Creswell, 2008, p. 216). In this case, the first characteristic identifying the sample was that the participant had been a high school principal in their school for five or more years. Along with homogenous sampling, the study employed criterion sampling to identify potential participants. Miles and Huberman (1994) use the term criterion sampling to define a sampling strategy in which all cases meet some criterion (p. 28). In this case, potential participants for this study were high school principals in the southeastern part of a Midwestern state serving as principals of high schools within the area served by the Regional Education Agency (REA), had served in their current position for at least five years as of the end of the 2011-12 school year, and who returned to the position for the 2012-13 school year.

The geographical area of the state served by the REA encompasses five counties that include school districts that are considered urban, suburban and rural. The urban school districts are located in cities with populations of at least 75,000. For the purposes

of this study, each of these areas outlying the city is referred to as a tier. Some suburban

high schools are within the same county in which the largest urban district is located.

These are referred to as first tier suburbs. Other suburban school high schools are located

in another county but participate in a city-suburban student transfer program designed to

increase school integration and are referred to as second tier suburbs. Still other high

schools are located outside of the urban county and do not participate in the city-suburban

transfer program. These are considered third tier suburbs. The REA also includes

several schools that are located outside the boundaries of the third tier suburbs and

include two smaller cities. These are referred to as located in the fourth tier. Details of

the distribution of high schools and principals within the tiers of the REA are found in

Figure 3.1.

Outlying School Districts, 4 districts, 7 high schools, 0 participants

Third Tier Suburban School Districts: 9 districts, 10 high schools, 4 participants

Second tier Suburban School Districts: 6 districts, 8 high schools, 1 participant

First Tier Suburban School Districts: 14 districts, 18 high schools, 5 participants

City School District 11 high schools, 0 participants

Figure 3.1. School Districts, High Schools and Study Participants within the REA

Figure 3.1. School Districts, High Schools and Study Participants within the REA

High schools included in this study were considered traditional comprehensive 9-12 public schools. Charter schools, alternative schools or programs or specialty schools that have been created from or within comprehensive high schools were not included in the study.

High school principals within the REA region were selected for this study for the following reasons. First, since many of the districts in the REA are considered urban districts, are first tier suburbs, or are participating in a city-suburban student transfer program, there was possibility that the principals in these schools share many similar experiences. Second, including the schools in the REA that did not participate in the city-suburban intra-district desegregation transfer program provided an opportunity to include principals in the study whose school demographics and challenges may have been somewhat different than those who participated in the program. Finally, the REA sponsored several projects in which most, if not all, of the REA school districts participated; therefore, there was a possibility that many of the districts were involved in similar initiatives and that the high school principals may have shared experiences through these projects. Using the high schools in the REA as the source of principals for the interviews allowed a research sample that included principals who shared the experience of being a long-term high school principal, while also providing for variation in their individual day-to-day experiences and challenges.

A state data base of school administrators was used to determine the number of eligible principals. After sorting this information, 52 high school principals in the 34 school districts with comprehensive high schools serving grades 9-12 were identified in the REA's service area. The state organized administrator data based on the number of

years an administrator had been in his/her current district but did not identify how long an

administrator had served in his/her current position. The researcher therefore used the

state department of public instruction's published administrator data set to identify

principals who had served in their current school district for at least five years as of the

second semester of the 2011/12 school year. Each high school was then contacted

individually to follow up on this data, to determine that the principal remained as

principal of that school, and had served in that position for a minimum of five years.

Results of this telephone contact on principal longevity indicated that 14 of the 52 high

school principals in the REA schools had been in their positions for at least five years

(27%). The participant pool included 13 white males and 1white female. The researcher

sent each of the principals who met the longevity criterion a letter explaining the study

and requesting their participation, followed by a telephone call one week later to explain

the study, answer questions, and secure an interview time. Principals were asked to

choose the time and place of the interviews. All principals but one chose to conduct the

interviews in their offices in the high school; the other chose to conduct his interview at

the district office. All but one also chose to interview during school hours; the other

chose to conduct his interview after most students and staff left the building. The initial

interview date, time and location were confirmed via email. Of the fourteen principals

who met the criteria for the study, ten agreed to participate. Two potential participants,

both white males, did not respond to the inquiry, one, the only eligible female in the pool,

declined without stating a reason, and one had retired and moved out of the state. During

the fall of 2012, the researcher conducted twenty interviews with the ten participants.

Five of the participants in the study were principals of tier one suburban schools, one was

a principal of a tier two suburban school high school, and four were principals of tier three suburban high schools. Selection of a group of participants who shared the experience of being experienced high school principals from a demographically diverse group of schools was done to increase the likelihood that factors identified related to principal longevity were factors that influenced high school principals regardless of the size, location or demographic makeup of the school. The demographic make-up of the high schools included in the study is found in Table 3.1.

Through the analysis of the interview data, the researcher identified themes and sub-themes that were part of the common experience of being a long term high school principal, no matter the school demographics, location or makeup of the school. A summary of demographic information of the ten principals participating in the study is found in Table 3.2.

		LOCATION *all suburban	SCHOOL SIZE	SWD*	EcD	AI	A	B	H	W	TWO or MORE	ELL
Brad	2011-12	1st tier	600	15	37	<1/1	9	49	6	30	6	5
	2001-02		*600*	*8*	*4*	*1*	*3*	*23*	*4*	*70*	*NA*	*2*
Dennis	2011-12	1ST tier	1200	11	22	1/1	4	16	4	72	3	1
	2001-02		*1200*	*7*	*3*	*1*	*3*	*9*	*3*	*84*	*NA*	*1*
Ed	2011-12	3RD tier	800	12	15	<1	2	2	4	90	2	1
	2001-02		*800*	*7*	*1*	*0*	*1*	*1*	*1*	*97*	*NA*	*0*
Frank	2011-12	3RD tier	1400	14	17	<1	1	1	4	93	1	<1
	2001-02		*1500*	*12*	*1*	*<1*	*1*	*<1*	*1*	*98*	*NA*	*<1*
Jason	2011-12	1ST tier	800	10	48	2	1	6	17	74	<1	6
	2001-02		*900*	*17*	*19*	*1*	*6*	*5*	*6*	*82*	*NA*	*3*
Justin	2011-12	3RD tier	2300	8	7	<1	1	1	2	95	1	<1
	2001-02		*2000*	*7*	*0*	*<1*	*<1*	*<1*	*1*	*99*	*NA*	*<1*
Paul	2011-12	3RD tier	800	6	12	<1	4	1	4	87	3	<1
	2001-02		*600*	*11*	*4*	*1*	*2*	*1*	*2*	*94*	*NA*	*<1*
Sam	2011-12	1ST tier	900	11	24	<1	5	<1	9	82	1	5
	2001-02		*800*	*12*	*6*	*<1*	*4*	*<1*	*4*	*88*	*NA*	*1*
Scott	2011-12	2ND tier	1300	10	13	0	9	5	3	81	1	2
	2001-02		*1300*	*10*	*4*	*<1*	*6*	*5*	*2*	*88*	*NA*	*1*
Tom	2011-12	1ST tier	1000	4	3	<1	5/	12	3	78	2	1
	2001-02		*900*	*7*	*0*	*<1*	*3*	*11*	*4*	*82*	*NA*	*1*

SWD = Students with Disabilities   EcD= Economic Disadvantage   ELL=English Language Learners
AI = American Indian   A=Asian   B=Black   H=Hispanic   W=White
*Historical information for Students with Disabilities reported for the 2002/03 school year. All others reflect data from 2001/02

Data reported on the Department of Public Instruction website
Table 3.1 Research Participant School Demographic Data

NAME	AGE	YEARS IN POSITION	YEARS as ADMIN	RESIDES IN SCHOOL DISTRICT Y/N	TOTAL COMPENSATION (salary & benefits)
Brad	50	9	16	N	$140,000
Dennis	44	7	14	Y	$152,000
Ed	48	9	14	N	$154,000
Frank	43	12	10	Y	$158,000
Jason	39	7	9	N	$142,000
Justin	52	20	25	Y	$153,000
Paul	49	16	20	Y	$169,000
Sam	45	7	14	N	$141,000
Scott	54	9	12	N	$135,000
Tom	54	14	18	N	$170,000

Table 3.2 Research Participants
NOTE: Gender and age are not individually delineated -- all participants are white males

Data Collection Procedures

The primary means of data collection for this study was the interview, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument for data collection. Miles and Huberman (1994) offered insight into the role of the researcher as the primary instrument in qualitative research:

> In qualitative research, issues of instrumentation validity and reliability ride largely on the skills of the researcher. Essentially a *person*—more or less fallibly—is observing, interviewing and recording, while modifying the observation, interviewing, and recording devices from one field trip to the next. (p. 38)

Taylor and Bogdan (1984) described the significance of the interviewer in qualitative interviewing, "Far from being a robotlike data collector, *the interviewer, not an interview schedule or protocol, is the research tool.* The role entails not merely obtaining answers, but learning what questions to ask and how to ask them" (p. 77). Since the researcher plays an integral role as the instrument of qualitative interviewing, the background and expertise of the interviewer is critical in the process. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the characteristics of an effective qualitative researcher:

- some familiarity with the phenomenon and the setting under study

- strong conceptual interests

- a multidisciplinary approach, as opposed to a narrow grounding or focus in a single discipline

- good "investigative" skills, including doggedness, the ability to draw people out, and the ability to ward off premature closure (p. 38)

Marshall and Rossman (2006) remind researchers that "Narrative inquiry requires a great deal of openness and trust between participant and researcher…" (p. 118).   The initial interview consisted of open ended questions that allowed the participant to explain and create the context for the interview and for their experience as a high school principal. Since the establishment of trust with the participant was critical to the interview process, establishing trust was a key function of the first interview. The researcher had previously known 5 of the 10 participants in the study, as they had served together as high school principals in area schools; she had never met the others prior to their interviews. While there was familiarity with some of the participants, the interview protocol was followed during all interviews, as the researcher was intent on gaining the perspectives of all the participants.

Credibility was pursued through a member checking process in which participants received copies of the transcripts of their interviews to review. Creswell (2008) describes member checking as "a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account" (p.267). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), "The member check, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholder groups from whom the data were originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). As part of the member checking process, all interviews were audio-recorded using an iPad voice recorder with an additional digital recorder used for backup and transcribed

following each interview. All data were stored in a locked cabinet and password protected on the electronic devices used. Interviews were transcribed immediately following the interview; first interviews were transcribed before second interviews were conducted. There was an approximate two-week time period between interviews. This timing allowed participants time to reflect on the first interview and prepare for the second. The timing of the second interview was designed to be in close enough proximity to the first interview to allow for a smooth transition to this more reflective second interview.

Once all interviews were transcribed, the researcher used a coding process to identify initial themes and sub-themes from the interview data. Themes and sub-themes were shared with participants via email to provide them the opportunity to review the initial coding and themes with a request to provide feedback to the researcher. The researcher concluded that trust and credibility had been established by three events. First, the principals responded to the request to participate in the study quickly, scheduling interviews and scheduling the second interview immediately at the end of the first. Second, 5 principals stated directly that they felt the questions asked were good or that they valued the experience of participating because it gave them the opportunity to reflect on their practice. Third, all participants received transcripts of their interviews and a draft of initial themes via email and were asked to review them and provide feedback. Three responded to the email. Those that responded offered feedback and validated the initial themes identified by the researcher. No changes to the documents were requested.

Confidentiality was maintained in all aspects of the study. The researcher used a confidential transcription service for all interview transcriptions. Participants were

assigned pseudonyms and their district and school names were changed. To the greatest

extent possible, school demographic information was explained in terms that did not

point to any specific district or school. Notes and transcripts were kept in a locked file

and/or password protected computer file throughout the research process. After the study

is published, audiotapes, transcripts and field notes will be securely retained in a locked

file cabinet for three years, following university guidelines.

Data Analysis

Marshall and Rossman (1995) describe data analysis as "the process of bringing

order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data" (p. 111). They go on to say

that "Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships

among categories of data..." In order to bring order, structure and meaning to collected

data, Marshall and Rossman (1995) delineate five modes of analytic procedures:

1. Organizing the data

2. Generating categories, themes, and patterns

3. Testing the emergent hypotheses against the data

4. Searching for alternative explanations of the data, and

5. Writing the report

Data collected from the interviews, both written transcripts and audio recordings of the

interviews were reviewed multiple times in order to generate codes, fcategories, themes

and patterns that emerged from the interviews. In addition, the researcher maintained a

log containing field notes throughout the process. These notes included impressions from

the interviews, themes that seemed to emerge during the process and thoughts about

additional information that might be collected. This assisted in her understanding of the

context of the interviews, checking for accuracy, and reflecting on the role of researcher as instrument to maintain awareness of potential bias in the data analysis process. A computer-based program, Atlas ti, was utilized in this process to assist in developing themes and patterns, in conjunction with careful multiple readings, repeated listening of the interviews, and hand coding of sub-themes once the initial themes were identified.

Bias of the Researcher

As a former high school principal and long-time school administrator, the researcher brought deep familiarity and strong conceptual interest to the subject of study, along with a belief in the in-depth interviewing process as a means to share the experiences of those in the field. However, this familiarity also raised an area of concern relating to the possible bias of the researcher. Having served for 3 years as a former high school principal in a school in the same athletic conference with some of the participants in the study, the researcher recognized the potential for bias in her interactions and interpretations, but also recognized the strength that this background and familiarity brought to the study. She remained cognizant of the potential for bias and strived to limit it so that the perceptions and words of the participants defined the study.

While recognizing that researcher bias is always present, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out that narrative inquiry does not require a strict division between researcher and participant in the process stating, "…narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit…"(p. 20). Clandinin and Huber (2010) recognizing the interrelationship between the researcher and participants,

stated: "Narrative inquiry is a process of entering into the lives in the midst of each participant's and each inquirer's life", concluding, "Narrative inquirers cannot subtract themselves from the inquiry relationship" (p. 4). The researcher appreciated the interrelationships involved in this type of research, and took steps to maintain awareness of the purpose of the research – to examine the research questions through the eyes of the participants and to tell their stories in their own words.

Guidance to the researcher for limiting researcher bias can be found in the work of phenomenologists. Schmitt (as cited in Moustakas, 1994) writes about the power of a concept, the Epoche (the freedom from suppositions) process, as one way of addressing potential bias stating:

The researcher … engages in disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated (known as the Epoche process) in order to launch the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience and professional studies—to be completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated. (p. 22)

While past experience with the subject of the research is a quality that Miles and Huberman (1994) define as a strength in a qualitative researcher, Moustakas (1994) warns that we set aside our suppositions about what we may find. "In the Epoche, we set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things" (p. 85). By recognizing both the benefit that previous experience as a high school principal brought to the interviews in this study and understanding that the intent of the study is to share the

experiences of high school principals from their perspective and in their words, this researcher made a strong and ongoing commitment to limit bias in the study through careful reading and listening to the words of the participants and maintaining an open mind throughout the process.

Reciprocity

Creswell (2007) defines reciprocity as a field issue that "addresses the need for the participants in the study to receive something in return for their willingness to be observed and provide information" (p. 243). As Marshall and Rossman (2006) note, "Qualitative studies intrude into settings as people adjust to the researcher's presence. People may be giving their time to be interviewed or to help the researcher understand group norms; the researcher should plan to reciprocate" (p. 81). Wax (1971) as cited in Patton (1980) views reciprocity as a critical issue of access issue in qualitative research:

> Mutual respect and cooperation are dependent on the emergence of an exchange relationship in which the observer obtains data and the people being observed find something that makes their cooperation worthwhile, whether that something is feelings of importance from being observed, feedback that helps them understand their world better, pleasure from interactions with the observer, or assistance in the activities going on in the observational setting. (p. 172)

Recognizing that participation in the study may have presented an intrusion on the life of the high school principal, the researcher offered participants an opportunity to have a block of time to discuss their practice and experiences, something that three shared they appreciated greatly since they did not routinely take the time to do so. In addition, she sought information from participants during the conversations to determine if there were

other ways that reciprocity could be reinforced. Sharing the report, offering insights learned from the study, providing the opportunity to reflect on their practice, and offering an ear to discuss challenges are some ways in which reciprocity was established and developed with the participants in the study. Unsolicited comments about the experience reinforced the researcher's conclusion that the benefit of participation was reciprocal, one that assisted those interviewed as well as the researcher. This conclusion was supported when one participant concluded his second interview by saying, "I appreciate you giving me the time to reflect because we don't always do that, and I know you're working on something, but I feel like you've given me a gift by asking great questions…it made me think a lot" (Brad, personal communication, November 29, 2012).

Summary

A descriptive narrative inquiry was chosen for this study because narrative inquiry provides an opportunity to "describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people's lives, and write narratives of individual experiences" (Creswell, 2008, p. 512). In this study, the lives of long term high school principals provided insight into the factors that influence their decisions to remain in challenging positions while most others leave. The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that affect the tenure of high school principals. Specifically, the study sought to identify institutional and personal factors that contribute to high school principals remaining in their positions for a longer time than is commonly seen today.

Fourteen high school principals in the Regional Services Agency of a Midwestern state were identified as meeting the criteria of serving in their current position for at least five years. Ten of the identified principals agreed to participate in the study. Each of the

principals participated in two one-hour in-depth interviews as the primary source of data

for the study. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and all transcripts were

loaded into Atlas ti, a computer assisted qualitative software program that assisted in the

analysis of qualitative data. The interviews were coded, leading to the preliminary

identification and analysis of a series of themes and related sub themes. Following this

identification, the interview transcripts were re-read and re-listened to so that all potential

themes and sub-themes were identified.

      Chapter Four introduces the individual research participants.

Chapter Four

The Participants

Ten high school principals who have served in their current positions for more than five years participated in this study. The participants included principals of comprehensive high schools in the southeastern part of a Midwestern serving in schools with varying demographic profiles. Five were principals in school districts located within the most populous area of the state, in a county that includes a large urban school district and a number of first ring suburbs to the city. One was principal in a school district located in a county adjacent to the first tier of schools that participates in a student transfer program designed to increase school integration. Four were principals in school districts located in counties not contiguous with the urban county that do not participate in the student integration transfer program but are located within the part of the state served by the area educational services agency. All participants were married white males who range from 39 to 54 years old. Most had children at home. They had served as high school principal in the same building for at least five years, with a range of 8 to 23 years of service at the time of their participation in the study. Their total years of employment as an administrator ranged from 11 to 23 years. Four of the participants lived in the district in which they work. Of the six who did not live in the same community in which they work, three commuted a relatively long distance to their schools. This chapter introduces each of the principals and describes the schools in which they worked along with the journey that led them to their current position.

Brad

Brad was the principal of a suburban high school located in a first-tier suburb in an urban area, one that is unique in the area in its demographic makeup. Along with the

community, the demographic profile of the school had changed significantly over the past

ten years, with students of color representing seventy percent of the school's total

population in the 2011/12 school year compared to thirty percent of the population in the

2001/02 school year. Within the student population, the percentage of students

considered economically disadvantaged had risen from 4% to 37% during the same time,

while the percentage of students with disabilities had risen from 8% to 15%. The

principal of this high school, Brad, served in the position for the past nine years, growing

with the school through its demographic changes. With a total of 16 years of

administrative experience in his background, Brad served in both public and parochial

schools in administrative positions, two years as an assistant principal and fourteen years

as principal. While he lived with his wife and children within a 20 minute drive to the

school, he did not live in the community in which the school is located.

　　　　While Brad was considered an experienced administrator, education was a second

career for him, coming after six years working in private business management. While

he worked in the private business sector, Brad attended college as a post baccalaureate

student, earning both a master's degree and his certification as a teacher, continuing on to

receive another master's degree in administration. After teaching in a private high school

for five years, he came to the realization that his experience as a teacher coupled with the

skill set he developed in business added up to the skills to becoming an effective

administrator. In reflecting on his move to administration Brad stated:

　　　　I have two siblings that teach that I am sure are better teachers than I ever [could

　　　　be]. I didn't feel inadequate as a teacher but it just felt like my own skills, my own

　　　　gifts would probably be better served helping to work on systems and

restructuring and looking at knocking down obstacles systemically and
organizationally that can inhibit really good teaching happenings and kids
learning. It was a good and then kind of a natural progression for me too. I felt
like I needed to teach for a long enough period of time and I felt like five years is
a legitimate tenure in the classroom.

The move to an administrative position provided a stark comparison to Brad's
teaching job in the center of a large city. He described this as a good move for him and
that the experience in this district provided a "sort of rhythm of getting back into
administration after five years in the classroom". After serving as an assistant principal
in this district for two years, Brad was approached about principalship of a parochial high
school in a nearby area. While this position was not part of his career planning at the
time, the diversity of the school appealed to him, he applied for and was hired for the job
and served in this role for six years. In looking back at his time at this school, Brad
reflected:

> It was a labor of love…. It was engaging and it was everything. Like I said, the
> only thing that was hard for me there, honesty, was just the fiscal uncertainty and
> part of the nature of the beast is losing really good teachers when they could no
> longer afford to work for the lower salaries and very much lower benefits…
> Having been in public school I would affirm and try to help people reposition if
> they needed to go to a public school. Nobody likes losing people. It was part of
> the gig.

After six years as the principal of the private high school, Brad made the move to
the position in which he served at the time of the interview. He pointed to three factors

that led to his change of position at that time: first, the personal fiscal challenge related to compensation in the private school; second, a lack of connection to a larger entity in which could network and grow, and third, as a father of three children who would attend the school at which he was principal, he had concerns about the dual role of father and principal in the same school, something that he identified as a major factor. He stated:

> I drew the conclusion pretty early when my oldest daughter became a sixth grader that I don't want to do the dad-principal thing. I admire the people that can make it work and it works for some people. I just didn't want to go there for a variety of reasons. I wanted my kids to have their own school, and me have my job and not try to have that dual relationship.

Discussing the reasons he came to the district he served, Brad reflected on his background and how it led him there:

> … I was doing self-reflection over the weekend as I was turning 50, which I probably don't do enough of but those tutoring days back at an inner city high school in 1981. I grew up in a virtually all white town in central Wisconsin, paper mills, and dairy farms. It was a highly impactful experience for me to sit across from an African-American kid and sitting over a geometry book, that part was incidental, the more fundamental part was learning what that human being's life was like for him in the central city growing up as a minority and poverty and the whole thing. That made an impression on me that never left…I wanted to be a part of closing the gap and being able to look at somebody and say whether they have brown eyes or blue eyes that shouldn't determine the level of expectation and

opportunity. Why here? When I got here, our school was 42% minority.

We are now 70% and stewarding that change is really important to me not

that it's my job to control it or define it necessarily but to be in a position

of stewardship of expecting and trying to deliver quality outcomes for

every child. Even as the culture and the make-up of the community are

changing so significantly, it's engaging more.

Dennis

The high school of which Dennis was principal is also located in a first tier

suburban school district abutting the largest city in the state. The school consistently

performs well on mandated state test and offers a college prep curriculum to its students.

As with other schools in the major metropolitan area, the demographic profile of the

school has changed over the past ten years. In the 2011/12 school year, non-white

students accounted for 28% of the student body, compared to 16 % enrolled ten years

prior in the 2001/02 school year. The school population today includes 22% of the

students considered economically disadvantaged compared to 3% in 2001/02. Eleven per

cent of the student body has been identified as having a disability compared to 7% ten

years ago. While students at the school continue to perform above state averages on

standardized tests, school officials are aware of and working to reduce achievement gaps

between majority students and those of color, with disabilities and/or living in poverty.

Dennis was 44 years old, married to a teacher in a different school district and has

two children, one who attended the high school where he was principal and one in middle

school who will be attending the school next year. After serving as an associate principal

at the school for six years, he was appointed principal of the school, a position he has

held for seven years. Dennis lived in the community for a number of years prior to coming to work there. As he described the motivation for his application to the associate principal position, he said

> Well I started here in August of 2000 as an associate principal, and I lived
> here in 19 years of my 20 years of my marriage now. When this position
> came open I had just completed my first year as administrator in another
> district. I really didn't want to apply but my wife said you need to apply
> because it's in our community. It is right here. She was concerned about
> the 45 minute drive and what that would mean with the young children so
> I applied to the last minute and was able to get hired in August starting
> here.

Dennis' road to becoming an administrator began in the school in which he was teaching when he was tapped to help out when an administrator was out of the office. As he recalls,

> They, for whatever reason, felt that I had some ability in that area. I don't think
> anybody else wanted to go out and monitor the parking lot…in the dead of
> winter checking parking passes, so, silly me, "Yeah, I'll be an administrator and
> go out and check in 400 cars. Check and make sure in the dead of winter." It
> gradually started out where I came down [to the office] on my free hour and did
> a little discipline, helped the little attendance, did the parking lots, supervised the
> events and gradually it turned in to an opportunity to be an administrator. One
> day the principal there came to me…and said that one of the associate principals
> took a job as head principal in another school district, and my interview was,

"Do you want to work in the main office and be the administrator for the year?"

By that point I had started my administrative classes in graduate school. I was

about halfway through. In a matter of two minutes I went from being a social

studies teacher to being an administrator with the interview in the foyer of the

high school.

Following one year in the administrative position in this district, Dennis accepted

the position in his current school and has remained here since. When reflecting on the

challenges he faced in moving from associate principal to principal in the same building,

he cites managing the building budget as the biggest challenge for a number of reasons:

I think the piece that threw me for the largest loop was controlling the

building budget. I don't know if there is a graduate class that prepares

people for managing the $400,000-budget for a building. The other

mistake that I made was I threw away the budget binder when I cleaned

out [the previous principal's] office, so I didn't have anything to work

from as to what it all looked like. Maybe that was my zealousness in

getting this position to go through and go, "I don't need this, this, this,

this," and I threw out something I desperately needed. In retrospect, it

made me work a lot harder at it because I had to go through it very

methodically, but I wasn't ready for budget.

While acknowledging the challenge of budget development and management,

Dennis also credited his experience as associate principal in the building and what he

learned as assisting in his transition to the position when he stated:

I think that coming into it I had a good idea of the staff and what our school is like. I had a good idea of managing the building following [the previous principal] and what he instilled in me and how he essentially raised me as an administrator.

Change is a big part of the principalship in this school, district and community, something that occurs in various domains, as Dennis shared:

I think it's changed greatly in the time since I've gotten here in 2000. We've had a couple of superintendent changes in that timeframe and with that comes different visions for what is going to happen. One of the changes I mentioned before is really as administrators the expectation that we are going to be instructional leaders and what that looks like in a classroom. I also think that our demographics are changing, specifically our resident demographics. I just glanced at school accountability report card. Twenty-eight percent of our student population here is a minority population. What has changed within that percentage of population is a majority of that population are resident students.

Dennis continued:

Where people in our community used to maybe believe wrongly that all students of color were either part of a transfer program and not resident students, the reality that we're trying to sell to the community and inform them of is that a majority of our students of color are resident students. We have a change in demographic in within our community. We have boundary changes. We've had different schools that have started charter schools, STEM schools – different

things that have happened in there. The community is constantly changed and it

does have an impact. It does show up in schools.

Ed

Ed was the principal of a high school located just outside the county in which the

city is located. The community can be described as a once rural community that has

grown into a third tier suburb in the area. The demographic profile of the school has

changed somewhat over the past ten years, but not to the extent of those within the

county that includes the large urban school district. The student body at the school

remains predominantly White, with 90% of the students identified as White during the

2011/12 school year. This compares to 97% during the 2001/02 school year. Twelve

percent of the student population is identified as having a disability, compared with seven

percent ten years ago, while 15% of the student body is considered to be economically

disadvantaged compared with 1% ten years ago.

Ed, 48, was married with two children and did not live in the community in which

the school is located. He was the principal at the school for eight years, having served

previously in administrative positions in other school districts for seven years. He

recalled that the initial leg of his journey into administration started with dissatisfaction

with a teaching position:

> I was in a teaching position that I was unsatisfied with some of the things that
>
> were being done in that school, and I started looking to get out of that school
>
> because I needed to do something else. I am a social studies, history-certified
>
> teacher. I was looking for a position…to get out of the building, and I found the
>
> dean of students position. I took that position and became an administrator as a

dean of students and from that point continued—found that I liked it, and I kept

going forward in my position. I knew the importance of having somebody in the

building who could make sure the building was under control. I wanted that

experience again, so I looked for that experience and a position opened I felt I was

appropriate for and I applied.

After serving as a dean of students for three years while completing his master's

degree in administration in this position, Ed was hired as an assistant principal in a large

suburban school district, a position in which he continued to deal with student attendance

and discipline, but also expanded his administrative responsibility to include teacher

evaluation and curriculum work. In this school he worked with the new principal's

vision to change the school, a vision in which he was given a large role in implementing.

This experience led him to seek a position as principal of a high school. As Ed recalled

After four years of being an assistant, I kind of wanted to run my own show.

There's a point I think where the principal makes the decisions. It's the principal's

job; it's the job that makes decisions. The principal makes decisions. There are

times you want to be the person making the decisions. If I've got to go down with

a decision, I want it to be one I make and not one somebody else makes. So I

looked for a principal position at that time and applied at a couple of places, and I

was fortunate enough to get the job here and I have been here ever since.

 Ed's move to another new community posed a challenge he had not expected, the

challenge of being the only person in the district administrative team with experience at

the high school level in a school district with only one high school. This was very

different than his last school district, with three high schools and a number of colleagues with experience at the high school level. He recalled

> When I took over, after I had 15 minutes in my job, I had 15 minutes longer as high school principal than anybody in my district. No one in my district had been a high school principal ever in their history. So that was different. There was nobody here with that experience; there was no one here to really rely on what you do as a principal. I relied back in my experience as an assistant principal; I contacted my colleagues who were principals in other buildings. The one thing I found exceptionally important is the importance of visibility and how I had get myself out in front of people so that the people know who I was. Two or three weeks into the job, two or three weeks into the school year, we had a homecoming parade. Traditionally in our town, the principal walks in the front of the homecoming parade. I'm walking down the street and people were looking at me like, "Who is this guy? Who's that?" I was like, "Okay…" I figured I had to go out and get known, and so I did. I attended things here so parents would know me here. I attended games, concerts, plays, banquets and things that were important there. I got involved with some groups in the community so that they could see and know who I am. We just had homecoming. It's been nine years, and there's nobody who doesn't know who I am in the community. That was one of the things that I really saw as being important.

The community in which Ed's school was located experienced significant growth during the nine years he served as principal, bringing change to the school as well. In describing the community, he said:

> Where we are here…when I came nine years ago…none of the shopping
> centers were there, the hospital was not there. That whole complex down
> there was not there…The downtown of town was an old rundown
> downtown. It has been revitalized into a kind of a nice little area that
> they're working on trying to get people to go to. There's a beautiful—
> wonderful things down there that just didn't exist when I came. This high
> school was in the boonies. We were out in the fields. But right now we're
> in the middle of a community. This community has shifted from being a
> small town near a big city to being a suburb. We're a bedroom community
> for the most part at this point. People don't work here; they live here.
> That's changed.

He continued on to discuss how the changes in the community have affected the high school:

> To some degree we've seen a slight shift in our demographics in that we
> started seeing with the creation of business here that isn't high paying,
> we've seen a little bit of an increase in minority population, a little bit of
> an increase in our economically disadvantaged population. We've seen
> also as we become more suburban, we have a more affluent group as well.
> The diversity is up there. We're on a roller coaster of enrollment. When I
> started we were about 703 kids. We got up to about 890 kids, and we're on

our way back down to 730…so that's changed what's going on. We are a
comprehensive high school. It has always been a comprehensive high
school, we're very proud of that fact, but we're at the point where we're
struggling to be able to keep that way.

Frank

The high school where Frank, 43, served as principal had a demographic profile
similar to Ed's. It, too, was located in the major metropolitan area just outside the county
in which the city was located. This community can be described as a community once
considered to be a small town that has grown into a third tier suburb in the metropolitan
area. The demographic profile of the school changed somewhat over the past ten years,
but not to the extent of those within the county that includes the large urban school
district. The student body remains predominantly White, with 93% of the students
identified as White during the 2011/12 school year. This compared to 98% during the
2001/02 school year. Fourteen percent of the student population is identified as having a
disability, compared with 12% ten years ago and 17% of the student body is considered
to be economically disadvantaged compared with 1% ten years ago.

Frank was the high school principal in this community for 10 years, having served
as an assistant principal in another state for two years before that. Like Ed, this was
Frank's first principalship, but Frank's journey to this position took a more circuitous
route. A graduate of the seminary, Frank's first job in education was as a fifth grade
teacher in a private school in a major metropolitan city in another state. Deciding not to
pursue teacher certification, Frank studied and received a master's degree in theology
with an emphasis on pastoral counseling and went to work at a homeless shelter working

with individuals battling addiction. After moving to another state, he was employed as a

pubic mental health professional which led him to pursue a career in high school

counseling. He recounted:

> I went back and got my license to do so [become certified as a school
>
> counselor]…and got hired by the school where I interned. I don't know, I was on
>
> the job maybe a month and the principal came in my office and he said to me, "I
>
> just know things and you're going to be an administrator. You need to go get your
>
> license because we're going to have some jobs opened around here. Boy, you
>
> should be doing this." I went home and told my wife I'm going back to school
>
> again which thrilled her to death.

> Frank continued:

> I did, and two years after I started as a high school football coach and school
>
> counselor at that school, I was the assistant principal at a high school. I stayed
>
> there for two years. We had just had a baby and my wife and I decided we needed
>
> to be closer to grandmas, grandpas. My wife said, "Well, if we're going to move,
>
> why don't you look for principal's job, see if we can do it." I had quite an
>
> experience interviewing and got offers for a couple of jobs and took this one. It is
>
> a really a pretty exciting one. I was only an assistant principal for two years and
>
> only a counselor for two years and only a fifth grade teacher for one. I also taught
>
> while I was a counselor. I had a part-time teaching load with that. I have enough
>
> teaching experience I thought to really be effective in the role. I think I just like
>
> the work from the beginning.

Like many other schools in the area, Frank's community and school have undergone significant change during the time he held his position. As he reflected on the adjustment to his first principalship in a new state he said:

… [in my previous district] the culture was very different there, very transient, not so interested. I ran the school from a distance, if you will, from public interest, like we were sort of isolated because people move in and out of the area all the time so that the staff, I was hiring 22 teachers a year, and [came] to this place that had this long history and five generations of my family went to that high school; a real strong community sense. There were four high schools in my previous district. There was one here. We were on the spotlight. My previous high school performed pretty well. At the time I came here, we weren't. We were broke and not passing referendums and people were ticked at us and I couldn't get my feet on the ground…It just was an odd start and nobody sent the upfront caveat that things weren't so great when I was interviewing.

He addressed the changes in the district as he described an administrative team that developed and flourished out of crisis:

...our community was in a very different place back then. I mean we've grown considerably as a community and sort of mellowed and become more active and interested in a healthy way in the last ten years. I think a lot of that has to do with a bunch of us that all came in to start fresh 10 years ago, a new superintendent, a new high school principal. Almost all the other principals in the district have changed in those 10 years. We built some new schools. We've passed some referendums. A new mayor and a new city economic developer, a new

administrator for the city, all those kinds of leaders have sort of shifted with me, and we've all become friends and really built working relationships. I do think we've created a place where people have moved to with kids. I mean people would have moved here anyway, but I think we became family destination place because of the efforts of lots of people who were sort of new to the community that made that conscious effort to have families move here. My first year here, we didn't pass a referendum to build new schools. We were in this 1919 building across the street and it was in terrible disrepair. We had two grade levels there and educationally, we knew it wasn't healthy. We were really stagnant over there. The superintendent at the end of my first year had only been in my building once. I don't imagine being a brand new high school principal of the school, 1,500 kids, and the superintendent literally was in the building one time. He tapped out, left, had an interesting path.

After this superintendent left, the position was filled by an experienced administrator who worked in the district. The new superintendent learned of a significant financial issue in the district after accepting the position, an issue the school board was not yet aware of. Frank described how this crisis bonded the new administrative team. He recalled:

… stood up, gave the back-to-school speech, and called a meeting in the library with the school board and told them, and we have to rebuild that. The superintendent and I and the business manager and the director of instruction, and we've all been here now together doing this for eight years. Frankly, we've deliberately had conversations about building our capacity within the community.

We passed a referendum. One of the largest at the time in the state right after we

had just bankrupted the district and not pass a referendum. It took us three years

and we were passing the biggest referendum in the state's history. We built two

new middle schools. We built a new theater and we built a new gym here in the

district. We built public education foundation. We have made more partnerships

with businesses and universities. What's changed has been a real capacity built on

the backs of really good people who work hard and who make relationships. By

the way, our fund balance today is about 20 percent of our operating budget.

We've built a real capacity even financial capacity within this district.

Jason

At age 39, Jason was the youngest among the principals interviewed, having

served as the principal of his high school for the past seven years. This was his first

principalship, having previously served for two years as assistant principal at the same

school. Jason led a school located within the county that includes the large urban school

district and is considered a first tier suburb to the city. As with other first tier suburban

schools, Jason's school experienced large demographic changes during the past ten years,

including his nine years working in the school. In the 2011/12 school year, non-white

students accounted for 26% of the student body, compared to 18 % enrolled ten years

prior in the 2001/02 school year. The school population in 2011/12 included 48% of the

student population considered economically disadvantaged compared to 19% in 2001/02.

The change in the population of students with disabilities reflected a decrease in the

students with individual educations plans, comprising 10% of the student body in

2011/12 compared to 17% in 2001/02.

While Jason acknowledged some interest in administration from the time he began teaching, a growing family spurred him into action in pursuing the coursework and degree needed to become a principal. As he recalled:

I was teaching high school English…and the second or third year I was doing that I realized I had to renew my license and thought long and hard. I was a father of one child and my wife decided when she was pregnant that she was going to quit work. I said, "Okay, can I spend a bunch of money on six credits," which at the time was a bunch of money with one income teaching high school English, "or should I put that money in something that's going to be more of an investment long term?" I had some interest here or there in doing some things right away when I started teaching. I got into some supervisory type of things. It wasn't necessarily principal work; it was more maybe associate principal type of work or dean of students stuff. So that was it. I decided to get my degree, I got my degree...It was part financial, yet I'm still doing it. I really enjoy what I'm doing, so I think there were a lot of good reasons as to why I got in it…I taught for almost 10 years. I started sending out some resumes, had some job interviews the summer before I took the job here, a couple of offers but they just weren't the right fit. Sent out an app[lication] here the next summer and sure enough, they didn't have anyone else good enough so they hired me.

Jason served as assistant principal for two years prior to his appointment to his current position. And even though he was principal of the same school in which he served as assistant principal, the promotion came with unexpected adjustments.

Relationships with students and mentoring the new assistant principal were among the areas he described as presenting challenges:

I would say the biggest adjustment though from being an AP would be that student contact. I still every day try to—if I'm not out in the halls or in classrooms with kids, I feel like I'm not even doing my job. I know there's a million other things that we have to do, but it really does weigh on me. I set goals, try to achieve them, as far as classroom contact and just being out in hallways and those types of things. I'm becoming comfortable though, with understanding that's just how it is and that you can't get away from doing certain things that will pull you away from doing that. I would say another adjustment would have been not necessarily trying to do the job for the person who came in and replaced me, but letting her maybe experience by fire a little bit…a lot of times I could foresee things that would come her way and I would try to maybe thwart that a little bit. Maybe if anything, pulling myself out—I liked the position I had, it [the move to the new position] was a little different than what I thought it might be.

Along with the adjustment to the principalship, Jason identified changing demographics of the community and the school as challenging during his tenure in the position. He described the changes he has seen in the nine years he has served in the position:

Just in the nine years I've been here, there is no question that the clientele has changed. The manufacturing population has dramatically decreased. I'll tell people often, I think the school for many, many years was filled with kids who

would work hard. I would go so far as say they would come in, sit down, shut up,

work hard, do exactly as they are told and everything was peaches and cream.

Now, not so much. We have a lot of students coming to us from other districts.

Not that that's all bad, but there's no question that the vast majority of kids that

coming to us are leaving their other schools because they've had issues there.

More often than not, behavioral issues there…There is no question that the

biggest change there has been the clientele. We are now a Title I high school, we

have in the mid-fifties reported free and reduced. It's probably 10 % higher.

Justin

Justin was among the senior participants in this study, with 20 years as principal

of his school and 25 years as a school administrator. His high school was located in a

third tier suburb in the REA. Like other third tier suburban schools, this school

experienced some change in school population during the past ten years, but not to the

extent seen in the schools located in the first tier of suburbs. The non-white population at

the school was 5% in the 2011/12 school year compared to 2% in 2001/02, and the

population of students identified with disabilities was 8%, compared to 7% ten years ago.

The largest change in the student population was in students experiencing economic

disadvantages; in 2011/12 7% of the student population was considered to be

economically disadvantaged. This compared to no students reported as economically

disadvantaged in 2001/02.

Justin came from a family of educators and knew he always wanted to be an

educator.   The move to the principalship, however, required prompting from others,

beginning while he was still a high school student. He remembered

I knew I always wanted to be an educator…just felt that it was something that I enjoyed doing…and it was the family vocation really. My mother was a teacher. An uncle of mine, who I was very close to, was a teacher. A number of aunts and uncles were teachers; it was a kind of a family vocation. …the reason that kind of prompted me was one of my high school teachers, actually when I was I senior, suggested that I go and become an administrator. He knew I was going to be an educator and going to teach but he said, he told me in my senior year, he said, "You know, you should really consider going into administration, I think you have the leadership skills that it would take to be not only a teacher but a principal as well…I would come back over Christmas [vacation from college] and workout with the wrestling team and he reiterated a couple of times in my freshman and sophomore year of college that, "You might want to consider that as something, keep that in mind. Maybe take a class or two now that will help set you up for that" and so anyway it's always been in the back of my head. Started teaching and shortly, within two years, I thought I want to go get my master's degree right away, I don't want to wait, so I got my master's degree. I really had no thought at that time how soon I would go after an administrative position but I thought I just want to get the degree put it up, get my credits up, get my master's and then get paid more…

Upon completing his master's degree in administration, Justin sought and was hired as an assistant principal in a rural district in a part of the state distant from friends and families. He served there for one year when an opportunity arose to return home. He recounted:

I worked there for just one year as an assistant principal and had a lot of friends

and family back in another area, so I wanted to get back to the area. I started

applying for jobs in the area and with the one year experience under your belt it

gives you a lot more opportunities, it gives you a lot more interviews. I had four

interviews and two job offers and I took the job offer in an area school district and

so I was an associate principal…for four years at the high school. Then after four

years there, I thought I'd been an associate principal for five years now, I'm ready

to at least start looking into the principalship and start considering that next step

up and the job here opened up. I applied for, interviewed and got the job and that

was 20 years ago…

Justin's move from assistant principal to building principal came with new

responsibilities and new relationships with faculty and staff. He noted that the change in

relationships with faculty and staff was the biggest adjustment he faced moving into his

new position. He also sought out and found support from others outside the school to

shepherd him through the transition:

It's lonely at the top. That was probably the biggest adjustment that I had to come

up with, get used to. That as an associate principal, you have another associate

principal you can talk to, you have the principal to go to as a buffer zone on issues

and even the staff. There is a different kind of connection between the principal

and the staff and the associate principal and the staff. There is a little bit more of

a stand-offishness from the principal…as an associate principal, I socialized with

the staff. I don't socialize with the staff now as principal. That the buck stops

here was again…was a bit of a tough side…My uncle who was a teacher, he was

also a principal, an associate principal who became principal. when I became an associate principal, He was…older than I was and…for many situations, I called him all the time. "What do you think about this, what do you think about that" and he gave me a lot of good feedback that was very helpful and I could lay my weaknesses out and not share that with my boss. Nobody wants to say, "I'm struggling with this" to your boss because that makes your boss focus on that perhaps. I had a person I could go do that to, for getting really solid advice on how to deal with those situations.

While the demographic makeup of the community and student body has not seen significant change during Justin's tenure, the school itself has. Like other schools in the third ring suburbs, Justin's school experienced an increase in enrollment, from 2000 students in 2001/02 to 2300 students in 2011/12. In addition to the increase in student population, Justin also noted that the role of the principal has "changed dramatically", and he states:

Sure, when I first came on, my role specifically was…at that time my role was specifically observing of teachers and disciplining…kids and attendance, dealing with attendance. There was no opportunity for what you would call leadership or coming up with creative ideas and getting staff to implement them. …I was chasing around like a chicken with my head cut off… At first that's what I was doing and then after two years I was able to convince a superintendent that we needed associate principals and we were able to work that in and hire associate principals…which then certainly relieved us of some that chasing around. When I think back to those days…my contract was like an associate principal contract, I

had like a 228 contract, so I was supposed to work two or three weeks after the

teachers get done and then two weeks before, I was supposed to have eight weeks

off in the summer and that first summer I had nine days off. Because we did all

of our hiring in the summer and so I was involved in all of that extensively and so

I didn't get any time off for summer because there was just so much to get done

and I was having to do a lot. Hiring the associates relieved some pressure and

gave us the opportunity to be more creative and become more educational leaders

and look at data and look at things and say, "Okay, where do we want to take this

organization" be more of a visionary…Go from here to there.

Paul

Unique among participants, Paul was the only principal in the study who spent his

entire career in education in the district in which he was employed at the time of the

study. At 49, Paul was not among the oldest of the participants but had been principal of

his school for 16 years, placing him among the group of principals interviewed as one of

the most senior relative to time in position. Paul's school was located in a third ring

suburb within the REA, a district similar to other third ring suburbs as it evolved from a

small town/rural community to one considered to be more suburban during the years Paul

had been there. Like other third ring suburbs, the school and community have seen some

change in demographic makeup, although not to the extent reported in first and second

ring suburbs in the area. Like other third ring suburban schools, Paul's school has

experienced an increase in enrollment, from 600 students in 2001/02 to 800 students in

2011/12, a 25% increase. Non-white students represented 13% of the student body, up

from 6% in 2001/02. Students reported to be socioeconomically disadvantaged made up

12% of the school population compared to 4% ten years ago, while 6% of students had a disability and received special education services, down from 11% of the population in 2001/02.

Paul's journey to his principalship occurred totally within the district in which he is currently employed. He reflected on the circumstances that led to his administrative path:

I think it was two things. It was one, a belief that I could have a significant impact on the culture and climate and the operational goings on of a high school or middle school at that point. I felt like I could have a positive impact in that role, but I think it was more being pushed in that direction... I really had two building principals who I was answering to, and both of those guys pushed me in that direction…back when I came here this building was a middle school and a high school combined. I was working as a seventh grade and a ninth grade teacher. The middle school principal at the time did not have an associate principal. He was also the high school athletic director. He had a big job too. When he would leave and go to conferences and be gone or whatever, he would always ask me to come and fill in the middle school office. In my high school role there was a semester where the high school principal got bumped into the superintendent's role. The AP [associate principal] got bumped into the principal's role, so they needed somebody to take an associate principal's role for a semester. I had been in the classroom for four or five years, then came and did the AP role for a semester and then went back into the

classroom. Then the AP role officially opened here, and I threw my hat into the ring. It was really a combination of feeling like I had some skill sets that might be beneficial to the school as a whole and being guided in that direction by a couple of mentors… I went through the interview process and was the lead candidate, and was offered the job. Sixteen years later, here we are.

While Paul recalled the mentorship and support he received from both of his principals along with his familiarity with the school as a teacher and associate principal provided a positive experience for his growth into administration, he acknowledged that moving into the principal's position came with some major adjustment, and recognition of the responsibility that came with the promotion:

I had been groomed for this position formally and kind of informally. I was ready for the move, but you're never ready for the move until you sit in that chair, you know that. I don't care how much time you have under your belt as an associate principal. When you are responsible for everything, it changes the whole dynamic. I can remember – and this goes back to my associate principal days – but being at an event and looking around and going, "Geez, I'm really responsible for everything that goes on here." The big difference being an AP is that there is always somebody who is above you that things can get kicked to, or you have to go, "I don't have to worry about that teacher's problem because that's the principal's job."… I think that's the biggest difference, in that you are just responsible for everything. It's your climate. It's your culture. It's your ACT performance. It all comes back to sit in your lap. That's the primary difference.

When you are an AP, it's about attendance and discipline and minor things. When you are a teacher, it's about your little classroom role. But when it's your building it's way bigger in scope, as you well know.

During the 26 years that Paul worked in the district, the community and school experienced economic and physical growth. At the time Paul came to the district as a teacher, the district was experiencing declining enrollment and the middle and high school were merged in one building. At that time, Paul recalled, academic expectations for students were low compared to today's expectations. He stated:

It was all really about what some folks would call that Wrigley Field effect. It felt really nice. People liked really being here, but the fans didn't care if you won or lost. As long as there was no major fires, things were totally fine. What happened was, as the economy started to change in the late '80's and the '90's all of the lake homes started to be brought by…wealthier people who had their eye on, "This is a lake property. I'm going to tear down that cottage and build a million-dollar house there." We started to get more and more white-collar folks here, and along with that then the board of education started to change. You got people coming out here because they liked the tranquility of being out in the suburbs, but they also wanted what [high performing school districts in the area] others had relative to academic performance. You started to see some changes on the board of education and along with that, boy, the community has just really transitioned from a blue-collar dominated to a white-collar dominated community. The growth out here has just been phenomenal…The culture has changed dramatically, and I think the biggest changes were precipitated from the board of

education. Ironically we had a couple of members on the board that had twins.
Their kids were getting totally different experiences, depending on the classroom
teacher that they had in third grade or in fourth grade, which really led to
curriculum revisions in terms of tightening down what we're teaching in third
grade in classroom teacher A's class better be the same that we're teaching in
classroom teacher B's class.

Sam

Sam, 45, spent his entire administrative career in his current school district, as
high school assistant principal, middle school principal and high school principal, a
position he held for 12 years. A first ring suburb, Sam's community and school
experienced some demographic change over the past decade, but not as much as other
first ring suburbs in the study. The enrollment of the school increased slightly during the
past decade, from 800 to 900 students, with non-White students comprising 18% of the
population in 2011/12 compared to 12% in 2001/02. Students with disabilities accounted
for 11% of the population compared to 12% ten years ago, while students reported as
economically disadvantaged increased from 6% of the student body ten years ago to 24%
of the population in 2011/12.

Sam came to his current school district from a large city school district in the area.
After participating in a leadership development program in the city school district he
described himself as "fired up to be an administrator". When the program experienced
some difficulties and the anticipated positions did not emerge, he sought opportunities in
surrounding school districts. At the same time, one of the surrounding districts was
seeking to fill an associate principal position and contacted the university at which Sam

had studied to seek recommendations for candidates. A match was made and Sam was offered the position as high school associate principal. From there, Sam shared his road to the high school principalship:

> Two years as the Associate Principal and I think made a lot of…positive change within the role, and then since all my teaching jobs…were middle school, when the middle school principal retired I applied for his job. I was not placed, I applied for his job and interviewed for it and then got the job at the middle school. And then consequently when [the high school principal] retired I interviewed for that and then got the job back up here. … I like the middle school a lot but I had a taste of the high school those first two years…I actually enjoyed the high school age students… I really enjoyed the whole piece of moving them from high school into a secondary opportunity or – even just all the fun that goes around with the high school with the sports and the drama, the theater and all that sort of thing; just stuff that you can't normally get out of the middle school experience. This is the flagship of the community so it's kind of a nice piece. You're able to really build something that the whole community is proud of.

For Sam, the biggest adjustment from middle school principal to principal to high school principal centered on the areas of curriculum and instruction. He recognized that his middle school principalship in the same district provided a knowledge base that eased the transition somewhat. He also was reconnected with the prior middle school associate principal who had moved to the high school. He explained:

> The adjustments I think were…getting reused to the instructional piece of it because it was so different from what I was used to when I taught plus

supervising middle school instruction for all those years. So the jump back into, all the way from 9th grade English to AP Physics, just kind of getting back in there and feeling, like, I could make an impact in some way across all those [content areas]. I think that was the biggest piece. What was easy about it was that…my Associate Principal, my Dean of Students from the middle school…had moved up as the Associate Principal here, so I was rejoining him. He was not only a very good friend but someone that I mentored [during] my time there, so I got to rejoin him and we hired a new Athletic Director out of the middle school building who was a teacher there, and so we had this very comfortable team coming up here. I knew all of the kids that were here that went through the middle school, so that piece was good. I had the relationships with the parents and everything so there was a lot of good stuff working for me in that situation too. I definitely say the instructional piece and also just the sheer size and calendar…you really have to be a lot more organized and more strategic on where you're going to have your impact too.

With seven years as principal of the same high school, Sam experienced change not only in the school but in the community. Yet he noted that support for the schools in this community has not changed at all. He stated

The community has always been really solid; high expectations community. They're really proud of their schools and so it's a great place. They're not ambivalent towards the schools; they're really involved with it so that's always a great piece. The community has become more diverse in all the different ways. Not so much ethnically [here], a little bit, but more socio-economically and all the

things that they're getting after and the accountability report card with gaps and things…That's a good thing because it was pretty homogenous when I first got here to the point of being kind of weird. So I mean the community has changed that way but there's always – the thing that is really great about working here is, not only that I have the same superintendent the whole time I was here which is doubly rare but there was always, always huge positive support from the community and their expectations are kind of what pushed you to do the things that you do. That never changed, what changed I think was the diversity of the community and also the huge turnover in staff. So we've done a lot of…hiring and mentoring of the new teachers which I'm really proud of because we've got some great teachers. We figured it out the other day that from when I left as the associate principal back in 2001…, only 20% of the staff that was here then is still here.

Scott

At 54, Scott was one of the oldest participants in the study, and with 12 years as the high school principal in his current position, in the mid-range of experience among administrators in the sample. As principal of a school in a second ring suburb in the REA, he has observed change in the community during his tenure. While the size of the school remained stable at about 1300 students, the composition of the student body has changed somewhat. As reported in 2011/12 the non-White population increased from 12% to 19% over a ten year period. Students with disabilities represented 10% of the population, the same percentage reported in 2001/02. The population of students

reported as economically disadvantaged increased; in 2011/12, these students accounted for 13% of the student body compared to 4% in 2001/02.

Scott came to school administration after 20 years of teaching. His interest in administration grew out of the experience in serving as the department chair in an urban high school. He described his move to the suburbs as stemming from the city schools' residency requirement rather than a desire to work in the suburbs:

I was English Department Chairman the last couple of years there. I really enjoyed a leadership role. I really enjoyed the fact that we could really pursue radical change in the system without much resistance. It was exciting. The opportunity came to teach at [a suburban school] and I was under a lot of pressure at the home front to pursue other job options because of the residency rule. So, I went over to [my current district]. My first year there actually I was pretty frustrated because they were so mired in the status quo because the kids were being successful. I was there five years and I think after my second year there…I went back. I went to get my administrator's license. I don't think I would've thought of being an administrator in [my previous district] just because of the myriad of problems you deal with as administrator…would've dissuaded me but being [here],,,,well maybe being an administrator wouldn't be so bad. So, I got my administrator's license and got a job [in another district]. I was there for one year as an AP [assistant principal]... People who I knew from [the school where I taught] called me and said there's an opening in the district…I applied and I was associate principal here for two years and a quarter. My predecessor resigned a

quarter into the…school year so I took over in November…as interim and was made as a permanent replacement in March…

Moving into the principalship within the building under the circumstances Scott found brought both challenges and rewards. He found that much of his work centered on developing trust with a faculty and staff who were reluctant to do so because of their experiences with a prior administrator. He did this against a backdrop of tension between the building staff and the district office

> The nature of how I became principal was inherently challenging because my predecessor resigned the first week in November of the school year and… there were some issues relative to a lack of trust. He had served only for one year, one full year prior and then a quarter. I think that he created a culture of mistrust. I think he came in and was more like a bull in a china shop…"Why are we doing things this way. This is stupid." And you know the people here have had some degree of success and take pride in what they do. You can't do that…I took over and that first year was just really just to try to get people to have trust in the administration again because we can't get any movement forward if people don't trust in the leadership in the building. That was our first year… I know that I was a very well-respected teacher in the district and that gave me credibility with the staff that I otherwise wouldn't have had…the first year was getting that trust…There were a lot of big things politically that had nothing to do with the instruction really. Then, against that backdrop, we started working on common assessments and tried to move the building along that way, converting some of our advanced classes to AP classes with some resistance…from the teaching staff.

They didn't want to go to AP. Those were some of the struggles early in my

principalship.

Scott continued to discuss the situation he encountered in entering his first

principalship:

I mean it was a mess in terms of the culture because my predecessor…was a great

guy to work with in terms of the office but in terms of some of the things he said

to staff and drew lines in the sand all the time. There was a real incredible lack of

trust between the teachers and the administration. That's what I mean by the mess

and that's what my associate principal at the time…that was the challenge that

[he] and I had to really deal with was that trying to forge those relationships with

people again so that everything we did wasn't viewed, suspected as…Well, and

frankly I think that the senior leadership at the time, I don't think I was their guy

but I think they realized over the course of the school year that the staff would

really rebel if they didn't put me in place as the principal because I had that trust.

I don't think that would've been their number one choice but I don't think they

had any option quite frankly.

Along with the challenges faced in the building principalship, Scott also found

things in the district changing, posing additional challenges. He identified staffing

changes at the district office as an area in which change at the district level had an effect

on his work as a building principal:

Well, when I started here in 1996, we had a very well-staffed central

administration and they were curricular experts in different disciplines. There

was… an English Language Arts Specialist. Being an English teacher, I

remember [her] coming in to my class a couple times my first year teaching and then talking to me about differentiation. There was a counterpart she had who was in math and one of science and one…in business. So, you have these curricular experts and you had the Director of Curriculum Instruction… and Director of Assessment. I think the year I left [to take the assistant principal position out of the district] and I only left for a year, they eliminated all these curricular area experts as a cost saving. They started viewing paring down the central administration staff as cost savings opportunity. It wasn't part of a strategic plan. When I came on board, were pretty light in terms of administration. We're even lighter still now. It wasn't any part of a strategic plan. And so, there were all these changes in the early part of the century that I think decimated our central administration. I think combined with the decimation of the district office staff…we were kind of rudderless because our superintendent, very successful superintendent, very political animal, was more interested in getting referendums passed or getting people onboard with the process in closing [an elementary] school. He depended upon his instructional leaders to really forge that instructional vision.

Tom

Tom was one of two principals in the study who served as the head principal in another building before coming to his current position. Prior to this school, Tom served as high school principal in another community for 4 years. This is the community in which he continued to reside when he moved to his present position, a position in which he has served for 18 years. Like Scott, he taught for many years before going into

administration. Scott's school was a high achieving high school located in a first ring suburb. Like other first ring suburban high schools in the area, the overall enrollment in the school decreased slightly over the last decade. The school enrollment was 900 students compared to 1000 ten years prior. This school experienced fewer demographic shifts than other schools in the study. Non-White students made up 22% of the student body compared to 18% ten years ago. The percentage of students with disabilities decreased from 7% to 4% of the population; students reported as economically disadvantaged increased from 0% to 3% of the population. Demographically, this school has not changed a great deal in the past decade.

A long-time teacher, Tom's motivation for pursuing administrative credentials and an administrative position arose from his desire to support teachers. He explained:

My number one point of interest was to afford teachers a greater degree of support.
I taught for 15 years and, for I suppose a variety of reasons, there wasn't a lot of
stability in terms of the leadership at my high school and that grew increasingly
frustrating over time. I think that certainly was a leading factor in terms of
compelling me to first go and get my certification and then ultimately make the
plunge into the administrative work.

The move to Tom's current position was not one that he planned or even anticipated. He remembered making this decision after the school year had ended:

Well I was just wrapping up my fourth year at [my previous] high school,
and wasn't at all looking to go elsewhere. After a principal here who had
an extraordinarily long tenure, I think more than 20 years – they then had
a principal who was here I think five years, and then another principal who
was here just two years. All of a sudden what had been a very stable

situation had become unsettling to the community. I think they had gotten

a little more desperate, if you will, to try to find somebody who would be

a better fit. The superintendent at the time called me, literally out of the

blue and I was intrigued. I didn't know a lot about the district. I knew

some, in fact the long time principal here…was one of my teachers in my

administrative certification program. I knew of him, I knew of the

computer sciences teacher here, who was also one of my teachers as I

earned my master's degree in computer science... I had a few connections

and thought what the heck, can't hurt to talk, have the conversation. I

think we probably did that initially and then I was more intrigued by the

possibility and went ahead and submitted the application.   Then I made

the very difficult decision to pull up stakes because it was late. It was after

the school year had ended, and I had to be released from my contract. It

was a surprise to me, obviously it was a surprise to everyone else, no one

saw it coming. Yet I had to pull the plug. We got through that, but I was,

felt pretty confident that this would work out well and thankfully my

premonitions were correct.

Tom recalled that the transition to this position was aided greatly by the supports

that the superintendent and central office administration provided him in making the

move over the summer:

I was really blessed with some great transitional supports. [The superintendent]

again was very committed to making sure this worked well, so he laid out a very

comprehensive transition plan for me that made it kind of easy to just follow. My

associate principal had only been here one year but he was absolutely fantastic so right out of the gate I had a very, very capable associate to work with, who then became our director of curriculum instruction…so that was very helpful. Honestly it was probably one of the less demanding years here because I simply had to… I think everybody understands you're not in a position necessarily to make all sorts of changes and solve all sorts of problems, so it was much more of a year to get to know folks and get connected and make hopefully some positive first impressions and engender some confidence in the various constituencies. That played out fairly well, I don't recall any major challenges in that first year. It was much more about just transitioning from one district to another. Discovering that in a lot of ways, was probably a better fit for me.

In the years following Tom's appointment, the district experienced significant personnel changes at the district office. The superintendent who hired him retired, the high school associate principal became the curriculum director, the director of special services and human resources became a superintendent in another district and the previous curriculum director took that position. He remembered "all of a sudden we had this incredibly powerful central office team in terms of getting after the kind of things you would love to get after if you were really into advancing student learning". Principal positions changed over in that same period. Within a very short time, Tom was one of the more experienced administrators in the district. He recalled the growth that came with the shift in personnel:

> … it's like the whole team got remade and all of a sudden I wasn't the newbie – it was kind of crazy. Within a few years I was on the upper half of experience for the district. We created the focus plan and it was very big picture, and then

collaboratively went about deciding on how we might best act on that. I mean the district had presented some interests, but we were given a tremendous amount of latitude to figure out how we would act on that, and came up with three pivotal commitments around nurturing student engagement, collaboration and quality feedback. It eventually came up with some definitive action steps around those things – a revised homework policy, the last really big thing that we got out of it was a revised grading policy which was a tremendous undertaking. Slowly the culture within the district, as far as I could see, changed to become much more student centered, much more collaborative. I mean, amazing difference there. Collaborative in its broadest sense of instead of separate schools going about their business as best they see fit, or as best serves their particular interests we're looking at this much more broadly and going about it across the district and then try to bring that home within our building.

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

Ten high school principals participated in the study. They served schools in the southeastern area of a Midwestern state, and came to their principalship from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. The demographic make-up of the schools they served varied. Some participants had little teaching experience prior to entering administration, others taught for many years before pursuing their administrative credentials. Two of the ten came to their positions from a principal's position in another district; for others, their current position was their first principalship.   Chapter Five describes the findings of the study and describe key themes and sub-themes identified.

CHAPTER FIVE

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Ten high school principals with more than five years tenure in their current

positions participated in two hour-long interviews to share their perceptions of the

institutional and personal factors that have supported their remaining in their positions for

a longer tenure than most others in the same position. Specifically, the research questions

addressed in this study were:

1) What institutional factors are present that contribute to lengthy tenure for a

high school principal?

2) What personal characteristics are present in high school principals with lengthy

tenure in their positions?

3) How do principals with lengthy tenure view their relationships with staff,

parents, students, the district office, the community, other administrators and the

school board?

The participants in the study were introduced in Chapter Four. This chapter

presents the data gathered from the interviews and describes four major themes and sub-

themes that emerged from the data. Major themes identified were: (a) relationships, (b)

balance, (c) fit, and (d) change. The theme of relationships included relationships with

the district and superintendent, faculty and staff, parents and students. Also within this

theme, collaboration and trust were identified as important in the principals' tenure. The

theme of balance included balancing job expectations and tasks, balancing family and job

time, tending to personal health, and developing strategies for balance. The theme of fit

referred to the match that the principal felt with the school district and the community

and included sub-themes of fit with the district and the community and fit of

compensation for their positions. The theme of change included the increased complexity of the high school principalship, continuous improvement, instructional leadership, changing culture in their schools, the ongoing quest to increase student achievement, and socioeconomic factors in their communities and districts.

Theme One: Relationships

Relationships were cited by all participants in the study as a primary factor in their decisions to remain in their positions or seek another. The strength of many of their relationships was mentioned when asked why they stay; the tenuous nature of other relationships was mentioned as a factor that could influence them to leave. In addition, their relationships as mentors to assistant principals and other staff members along with building capacity within their buildings for continuous improvement through collaborative efforts were identified as important factors in their own career decisions.

Tom shared his thoughts on the importance of relationships in an email following the interviews:

> With regard to the themes that have emerged from your principal interviews, it certainly strikes me as fitting that relationships are at the top of the list. I can't imagine a principal being effective and, consequently sticking around for an extended period of time, if he or she was not accomplished in this area, especially with students, parents and staff. Establishing positive working relationships builds trust that, in turn, provides an essential foundation for improvement focused change. It also allows for distributed leadership that makes a seemingly impossible job doable. I am daily grateful for the high quality work my associates

and teacher leaders do, knowing that without their help I would be in a world of
hurt.

Relationships with Faculty and Staff

While principals interviewed acknowledged that maintaining professional and
positive relationships with the many groups they interact with was important to their
success in their positions, most identified relationships with their faculty and staff within
their buildings as critical to their ability to lead, especially when they are leading for
change in curriculum and instruction or faculty performance.

Jason described the positive relationships with teachers that have allowed him to
successfully assist teachers who need improvement:

The building relationships I have with the vast majority of my faculty are very,

very good….Are there some uncomfortable relationships? Sure. I have about a

handful of people right now that are on plans of improvement. I probably have

two or three more that should be. Even of those five that I have on plans for

improvement right now, my relationship with two or three of them is very, very

good. They understand. I have actually had a couple of them say, "This has

probably been a long time coming."

 Tom found that his ability to hire staff and the support that he received from the
district office allowed him to maintain ongoing positive relationships with the faculty
over the years:

Since I've had the opportunity to hire most of the folks that I work with now and I

would say have had a pretty good success rate on that front, that's made a big

difference. I've had really outstanding administrative support within the building

for many years now, so that's been huge… absent that, I don't know if I would still be doing this. The staff and faculty are very committed, dedicated.

For Sam the ongoing focus and teamwork focused on student achievement and learning among the faculty, staff and administration provided the basis for positive movement in the academic program:

Like I said, it's not an antagonistic relationship here. We're lucky with that, not only [with] our union but the types of people that we hire. It's really the backbone of this school knowing that the kids are being given high quality experiences in the classroom and the parents are being communicated to well out of the classrooms. It's just huge. … our expectation here is that one or two people on your staff every year are under…intensive supervision… The staff piece is probably one of the biggest … I don't know what's bigger than that as far as the energy to stay and be part of here…I hear from other principals and I see they're openly fighting with their science department. It's like, "What? What do you mean you're fighting with your science department?" It's just not part of what happens here. I don't mean, don't get me wrong, I know there's grousing going on about certain things, but as far as being able to work together and get that positive response as far as let's explore this together, that's in place, which is great.

Frank, too, maintained relationships with faculty and staff that centered on the academic focus of the school and its impact on students and student learning. He acknowledged that this approach did not always lead to popularity:

We've had our moments; it's been tough some times. I've certainly made decisions of which they didn't approve. I've made some that they didn't like but understood, made some that they were thrilled to death about. What's sort of fantastic about that relationship with the building staff is the decisions that I make that stick with them the longest are never the ones that they like the most. I have to keep some of those more popular decisions that I made…to pull out when I need them, because they've forgotten them. If I did this job to gain a popularity contest, get principal of the year, I wouldn't make it very long, because this place would be a mess. I can't please everybody.

Some principals saw their long tenure and its effect on building relationships as a positive factor in their positions, but also as one that posed challenges. Dennis shared the challenges that come with prior relationships, and friendships he has with some staff members:

What I have learned is that there are going to be instances that come up with almost everybody where you have to be able to separate and understand…that supervisor-employee line… I know, there are people here who don't agree with everything that I decide or do… you know, if everybody had to like me for me to stay here, I probably would have left 10 years ago. I think that we have a very, very good staff, and we may disagree professionally about some things … but…the piece that's important is understanding why we're here. I think that sometimes having stronger relationships with some rather than others can make situations as they come up a little difficult. One of our…teachers and I went to high school together. So, I've known him from way back, and I wasn't part of his

initial hiring team here, but now we're looking at [a new position]…he will apply for that position when we post it …if he doesn't get that position, will that have an impact on our relationship? Probably. You would hope it wouldn't, but most likely, it will, so, sometimes I think you have to make sure you set the stage for that.

Ed also described the dilemma that his tenure in the building posed to his ongoing relationships with faculty and staff members:

… there's a catch 22 on my longevity and how I deal with my staff. I've hired a number of them, so they're people I wanted in their positions because I've been here for so long. I have made my bones with them, for the most part. I don't have to prove myself anymore as a leader. They get that. Those roles are defined. I know where to go to get the skinny from what's going on in the staff very quickly now, compared to when I [was first hired]… The downside is I've developed relationships with them, these people, and friendships, and collegial relationships. It makes sometimes encouraging change more difficult. It takes time. I mean, I have to take time too to make sure I talk to everybody, even though I know I don't have to talk to everybody…I've got good people that I've hired, I've got people who understand what to expect because I've been around long enough that you can figure out what I expect. The downside is I have to go back and constantly make sure I'm dealing with things and making sure I'm not getting my personal like or dislike for a person affect what's going on in a classroom or in a situation or with an idea.

Paul believed that respect and likeability are both possible for a principal, but also that getting to this point required attention and work. He described his beliefs about establishing and maintaining quality relationships with staff members:

It's…important to have quality relationships with your staff and I believe you can be respected and still be liked. I think that those can go hand in hand but you have to work at that. There are people who you just naturally get along with…but I can't imagine working in a building…where people didn't want you there. I'm always amazed by principals who can do that—who can be in a building where they're not supported by their board or their superintendent or worse yet by their faculty. I can't imagine trying to lead a group of people and always being uncomfortable in front of them. I think it's really important to have quality relationships but I do think that the way that you establish that is to have open, honest communication about what are the expectations and then what are you thinking relative to their performance about that expectation.

The relationships they have with faculty and staff members were identified by principals in this study as an important factor that has contributed to their lengthy tenure in their positions. Relationships with others, including the district office and superintendent also play an important role in their decisions to remain in their positions.

Relationships with the District Office and Superintendent

Principals in this study talked openly about their relationships with the district office, especially with the superintendent. Several identified this relationship as a major factor in their decisions to remain or leave their positions. For some, the loss of the superintendent with whom they had a strong and positive relationship had spurred them

to begin thinking about changing positions; for others, a new superintendent brought a change in the district that renewed their focus and energy for their work.

Ed has worked with the same superintendent during his entire time on the job. He pondered his future should this superintendent decide to retire:

If [the superintendent] leaves, what happens there? That will happen and to some degree that's the same thing with the board. If they leave, that would be an impact. So I mean… that would have an influence on whether I stay or go. There are people I'm going to work with, and their choices they're making as far as sticking around. Right now they've made the choice to stay. If they were to make the choice to leave, I would probably more actively look at lateral moves.

Jason, too, wondered what he would do should his superintendent move to another position. While he stated that he had a strong relationship with the superintendent, he described his relationship with other district office personnel as sometimes frustrating, especially when he saw issues that should be addressed by the administrative team as a whole:

I really like working with [the superintendent]. He and I have a great relationship; however that came about, but do I get frustrated…I had a conversation with him yesterday about something and I hung up the phone and I said, "Just listen to what I am saying. Just let me do this. It will be fine." I get a little frustrated with a couple other members of the district office and he knows that…he and I talk very well about that kind of stuff, but there are other ones that the relationship is very, very good. But, is it a deal breaker? To a certain extent, I

think in my position, in this district, if I had a not so consistent and good

relationship with [the superintendent], it probably would be.

For Justin, a change in superintendents from the time he was hired, a restructuring

of the district office and the relationship that he developed with the superintendent over

the years were named as factors in his tenure. He, too, has thought about what he would

do if his superintendent leaves:

It's awesome right now. It wasn't before with the old superintendent.

…now, it's awesome. I have a great superintendent. He's awesome. We've

restructured recently and I shared that with you… [our curriculum director] has

really found her niche. This is really the niche for her, and she's doing a great job

with it so I enjoy working with her, always get along and realize I agree on

things…we don't agree on certain things but it's okay. We respect each other.

She is awesome. We work really well together. I will say this, if [the

superintendent] goes … he and I are the same age and he's got many

opportunities out the private sector. He's been offered some very nice

opportunities that will still be kind of in education. With Act 10 going on and

everything else, if he goes and he leaves at 55, and I'm just going to be … I have

no other way of being, but blunt, I am always blunt. I see some of the new

superintendents out there. I'm not impressed.

Frank described the administrative team as a group who grew together over the

years and served as the support system that kept him moving forward in his position:

I think a lot of that has to do with a bunch of us that all came in to start fresh 10

years ago, a new superintendent, a new high school principal. Almost all the other

principals in the district have changed in those 10 years…Yeah. She [the

superintendent] and I are partners in crime. She is my professional friend, my

personal friend, my boss when she needs to be, my support when I need her to be.

I think I'm 10 years in this business mostly because of her and my relationship

with her and the relationship I have with the people at Central Office who support

the work that I do. We're a unique bunch of people and we get crazy ideas once in

a while.

Paul reported that his relationships with superintendents have been strong and

positive throughout his many years in the district. He, too, commented on how a change

in this relationship could lead him to seek other options:

I think with the superintendents it's hugely important. It's great to have a good

relationship with everybody because everybody has something that you need

whether it's the director of curriculum, whether it's the business manager or the

assistant superintendent for business services or the superintendent. All of those

people have an impact on how smoothly your life goes, whether you want it to be

or not. I like to have good relationships with everybody just because that's how

I'm wired but you have to tend to those kinds of things. My belief is that if you

treat people well, almost everybody's going to treat your well. …I've been

fortunate to have really good superintendents to work for and if I ever get one that

comes in who we don't see eye to eye, I'll have a really hard time staying in a

position because it's hard now when things are going really well to be fighting

with people, with your kids or your staff or your AP or folks in district office.

Part of it is my belief is that you were hired because of how you think and what

your beliefs are and what your values are. If those are counter to what your

school board is wanting, again, I'll go back to it. I don't know how people can

work for people who, they don't like or who have different views, so it would be

the same for all the groups.

Along with faculty and staff, principals identified relationships with the

administrative team, including the district office staff and superintendent as other

important relationships in their tenure on the job. Relationships with the school board

were cited as having an impact on principals' view of their likelihood to remain in their

current positions as well.

Relationships with the School Board

The amount and type of interaction that principals in the study had with

their school boards varied by district and was sometimes related to the kind of

relationship that the superintendent had established with the board, especially

when board members had students attending the high school.

Tom reported his relationship with the board and the support of his

superintendent in working with the board as factors that have contributed to his

longevity in the district:

> … I appreciate our school board overall, ever since I've gotten here. I think
>
> they've been a very level-headed body, a group that's focused on the right things.
>
> Certainly individual board members over time have particular points of concern
>
> that may relate oftentimes to particular staff in the high school. That goes back to
>
> that just being a challenge… I have to give our new superintendent credit for
>
> taking that [a challenging board member] on in a very kind and considerate way.

It's gotten better. Of course that parent's last child is now a senior, so that may have something to do with it too. It's just the way she is. Overall, I cannot complain. That's been another factor that's certainly influenced my longevity here. I hear the horror stories in neighboring districts and rare is the [athletic] conference principals' meeting that I don't walk away counting my lucky stars that we don't have some of the crazy things going on.

Sam, too, reported an active and overall positive relationship with the board and a superintendent who viewed board relationships as a primary task of the superintendent:

[The previous superintendent] stood between the school board and the district. …they were his boss and they need to make the decisions, but he did not allow them to micromanage nor did they…want to micromanage. We haven't had that issue much, but he really … he and some central office staff, for example if there is one board member that wants to get into every nook and cranny of the financials, that was between them and the business manager…our relationship with the school board is really done through the school board meetings. A lot of it is report based. We report everything. We have a high expectation for principal involvement in board meetings. I have…four to six…10 to 30 page reports every year to update them on how… a program is doing, with the student achievement reports, building security. They review everything and so that's where they're updated on all that stuff. Then when we see them out, especially here, when there's an event, I have all the school board members coming. They're all here so we see them all the time, but then it's in a role of just them celebrating and being part of those activities, and it's not part of business because

we spend the time doing that at the board meetings. It's a positive relationship…I have some examples where…it can blur. The board members have been extremely professional in those situations and so that's been good. For example, as a general story let's say there's a board member that was really concerned about something that was happening at the high school…and they just wouldn't let it go. [The superintendent] would schedule a walk through with the principal and himself and the board member and so we'd walk through. He wouldn't put us alone in that case so we'd walk around and we'd go look at what the person is talking about or have a conversation and so he would do a lot of things. He would ask for…so we'd get him information and he would deal with it. If a school member walked through your front door and thought that they had run of the school he would want to know right away. I've always appreciated that. Not that we have anything to hide from the school board but all, but he really respected that operationally we were in charge and he and the principals were in charge of the learning and to the best of our abilities our job is to communicate with the school board members.

Principals reported that their relationships with the school board sometimes changed as a result of the change of a superintendent. While most reported a positive relationship with their boards, they also mentioned that a change in school boards could pose a scenario in which they might seek employment in another district or position.

Ed stated that the political aspects of schooling, including the relationship with the school board, were a serious concern related to his longevity. He discussed the effects of the polarized political situation in the state on the district, including the effects

of Act 10, a law that significantly changed the landscape of school operations in the state. Ed finds that elected bodies were beginning to make decisions he felt should be made by educators:

> That is a serious concern that I have right now as to my longevity in this position. We have a long-time board member who is retiring, a long-time board member who has been in a couple of terms who I anticipate is not going to seek re-election. I am significantly concerned on what that change does to our board. I have seen a significant change in how our board treats me, how our board treats other administrators, how our board treats teachers in the last three years…We were a collaborative district. We are not a collaborative district anymore. The board is making decisions and the board thinks it knows better. I get that they're elected and I get that that's what they're paid to do. But…I think education professionals need to be put in charge of education, and if you don't like results, then get rid of the education professionals. I don't think the board should be making the educational decisions and telling the administrators to work at them, and then not like the results…So if there's a changeover in the board as there could very well be …Depending upon who is elected to replace them, that would put a majority of the board, for the first time, in a direction that I think is directly opposed to what I'm doing. If that changeover changes, where [the board] is telling you this is what your grading system is going to do, I'm uncomfortable. I would look for a position that didn't feel that way… I'd find someplace else to work.

For Justin, a new superintendent's approach with the school board about the participation of administrators in school board meetings was a positive factor in his principalship:

I love the school board. It hasn't always been the case. There had been some … there had been a couple of [difficult] members over the past, but there has been some evolution there. I think a big part and the reason why I love the school board, I think thinks highly of me is because of [the superintendent], because he portrays us differently than [our previous superintendent] did. He puts us in front of the board. We used to sit in the back seats with everybody else at the board meetings. He brought a table …we are in a separate table right up in front and then we make presentations….If I talked once every three or four board meetings in the past, I don't even remember. If I talked twice a year board meetings in the past, that would be about it. Now, at pretty much every board meeting, I have something to contribute, something to say, which then the board sees.

For some principals, the sometimes competing priorities of student needs and interests and the needs and interests of the district's taxpayers posed a point of contention with the school board, and sometimes the principal. Frank related how he interacted with the school board, maintaining that the needs of the students should be front and center on their minds:

I bark all the time and say 'School districts weren't set up for taxpayers; school districts were set up for kids. That's the whole notion here folks, and you're all worried about how much money we're spending. I get that it's got to be worried about but not to the exclusivity of everything else. We argue sometimes…it's

interesting there is one school board member that tells me I regularly scold them.

I never feel that way because they've always supported [me], they listen, but I can

get a preachy way about me. I can step up in front of the board and say 'Come on,

what are we talking about here?' When board members say things like 'Why do

we need a new ESL teacher? Why don't those kids just learn to speak English?'

and you have to say 'They will, that's why we're giving them a teacher.' If we

don't give them a teacher how do they learn to do math, if we don't give them a

teacher how do they learn social studies, or writing or English or whatever. You

just said that so that the whole public was listening. Sometimes if I'm scoldy it's

good for them. Once in a while they're scoldy back. They love to harp on why

aren't my test scores what they should be and I'll step in toe to toe with them any

time.

Along with tending relationships with the building faculty and staff, the district's

administrative team and the school board, principals in the study also discussed their

relationships with those they served in their positions, including parents, community

members and the students in their schools and how these relationships affected their

longevity in their positions.

Relationships with Parents, Community and Students

While their approaches to working with parents were very different from each

other, principals in this study reported positive relationships with both parents and their

overall community. Some described great support from the community and parents for

their schools and districts with a few individual challenges and speculated that this would

be true in many places. Principals who lived in the community reported a different

relationship that came along with living among their students and parents, and four

principals felt that relationships with parents posed challenges for them, especially when

the expectations that the parents had for the school differed than those of the principal or

district.

Jason felt his relationship with parents was positive and did not pose a major issue

when he thought about his tenure in his job:

> I don't think it is as big of an issue. I think inherently all parents want the same
>
> thing. They want what is best for their kids. I don't care where you are…you're
>
> going to run into different issues with parents. My relationship with parents in the
>
> district has always been very good. Again, there might be some few little bumps,
>
> but that's been good, very good.

> Tom described strong community support for the schools:

> In general, also a big positive. There's tremendous support for nearly everything
>
> that we do. Individual parents over time … And I don't think that would be
>
> different anywhere, it certainly wasn't in my prior school. There might be
>
> different issues, but I can't believe that there's a school district where there
>
> wouldn't be some parents that were having an overbearing effect on the
>
> principals, teachers, whoever.

> Sam discussed the nature of communication as part of the relationship with the

greater community in a small school district where the single high school was the focal

point of the district and the community:

> This is the bubble, they call it. Being the only high school in town and the school
>
> district is pretty much the centerpiece of the town. How we go, the community

goes a lot of ways. Excuse me, we do a lot of over communicating. I have a

weekly newsletter that goes out to the whole community or the whole school

community. Our website is one of the best ones around I think. We spend a lot of

time trying to communicate with the community. Then when we have issues like

with the school climate this year we bring the community in to help us. You get

the good side with that, but then you also get the bad side because the people that

are negative just to be negative they're a lot louder in a community like this

because… everyone's right here. This is the thing. This is the place. I will say

95% of our parent contacts are positive. I don't spend a lot of time in my position

fending off unreasonable or angry parents....In the community…we get a lot of

alumni coming back, a lot of the parents still stay engaged because they want to

come to the plays, they want to come to the games, we're lucky that way.

Dennis reflected about the challenges that came along with living in the

community he served as principal, how he has addressed those challenges, and how this

aspect of his job has not affected his tenure in the position:

You know, living in the community and being here, I think I have a pretty good

sense about who they are, and you start to realize that in the end, they only want

what is best for their children, and we may disagree about how to get there. I

don't think after living in the community here 20 years that there's anything that's

going to make me want to get up and leave. There are moments that I will scratch

my head and walk away very, very frustrated … and necessarily want to sit down

and talk with them afterwards…. you set some boundaries for people. And you

figure out and you learn a lot about individuals and how you have to act, and

how… sometimes you have to smile and grin and bear it, and deal with a lot … of people questioning or, you know, potentially just making your job a little bit harder. Living in the community, I've become more and more aware of how I carry myself around other people. And, you almost have to get out of town once in a while …There are parents that are going to agree with some of the things I do. There are parents that are definitely not going to agree. That's true almost anywhere.

Frank also lived in the community in which he worked, and described this as a positive factor in his relationship with parents and the community, even when he directly challenged existing practices when he took deliberate steps to distance parents from school operations:

I'm just being honest…I moved all of the parents largely out of the operation of this school. We used to be site-based managed, we had a site council and a PTO and parents in and out of here volunteering quite a bit. We disbanded the PTO, I disbanded the site council, I stopped meeting with the parent groups, I don't hold coffees or any of that kind of stuff. Parents sign in, they wear a visitor's badge if they come to the school. Parents have found ways to be incredibly useful to this school as a result, because their brains aren't engaged by 'How do I manipulate the system to serve my kid?' any longer. Because no parent…sorry I'm one too, I don't generally walk into my child's school and think about how can I make sure the kids here get a better education, I think about how can I make sure my kid's getting a better education. My job is to look out for kids, theirs isn't; theirs is to look out for their kids and their interest. So we have a [band support] program

that's all parent run, we have a Drama [parent group] that's all parent run, we

have a booster club that's all parent run; it's focused to what their kid is most

interested in and they are out of my business…Oh, they run prom…I have a

wonderful relationship with the parents in this community but I'm one of them.

Nobody has a problem with when I make a decision I communicate it, and if

they've got questions they call me and they know they can. I say to parents all the

time 'My door is open and my phone is open, call me'. I don't have parent issues.

For Scott, who also works in a community of parents who expect to be

involved in their children's school, nurturing relationships with parents in the

community was critical to his tenure in his position:

It's really important to have their support for this is a very active community.

Sometimes some of them are too involved, the helicopter parent. We've got a

squadron. By the same token that support, for volunteers and for doing stuff for

the teachers, the parent-teacher conferences, they're here with water and snacks,

wheel around the cart. Most of them want the kids to do well, and most of them

aren't helicopter parents, and if you call home, you will get results. They are

concerned without being overbearing…it's important to have your key parents

who you can call on if you need someone for committee or just to be that voice of

reason. Somebody who is respected with the parent community, so it's important

to keep that good relationship with the PTO or have these principal chats; I've got

my moms, getting the word spread about something they're going to do it, and

they're going to do it in a way I can't. It's important to foster those relationships.

While Brad recognized that perspective was critical in how relationships with parents are carried out, he admitted that there were times when he became frustrated by parents who sometimes expected their students to achieve at high levels without putting forth the necessary effort:

I would always like it to be better. It's interesting. My assistant principal…Just superb. She sees it as much better here than her years in [her previous school district]. My reference point is [a private school], and I truly tried to avoid a judgmental thing …there's a temptation. When you meet with parents that just don't seem to really invest or want to reinforce our expectation for kids it's maddening. I think the most frustrating meetings I have here…the ones that frustrated me the most are parents that want to argue or talk their kids down from expecting to be challenged and pushed…. Parents with low expectation and/or low priority; you're buying your kid a cell phone and you put them on birth control pills, it's like "I'm just going to [take the]… path of least resistance," and then you're ticked off at age 17 that they're not disciplined, have no self-control, and aren't prepared for college.

Principals in this study identified work with and for students as the core of the work that they did. They valued the time they were able to spend with students, the focus it brought to their work, and lamented what they viewed as an increasing distance from students as their tenure increased.

Scott viewed students as at the forefront of his decision making when considering the impact of decisions he made on the students, "What's good for

kids – that should always be the litmus test for everything you do; is this good for kids."

> Brad reflected on his relationship with students as he's grown older:
>
> It gets more distant, how busy you are with curriculum, restructuring and transforming schools, our campus renovation project...I think it's inevitable for almost all principals over time, you gradually have a little more distance from student contact. It's not a night and day thing, it's a matter of degree. As you get older you know that that the kids view you differently because you're not a 35-year-old principal, you're a 50-year-old principal, and it's not good or bad, but it's just different. Still, I really do treasure, I really do value moments when you have teaching moments with kids, and as a principal it's often on the life choices and behavioral and the big-picture decision-making issues. Sometimes it involves tears, sometimes it involves the police, sometimes it involves a really happy … getting a scholarship and nobody in my family ever did, but there's less contact, but I can say that I still really value. I feel good on days when I drive home and I've had a meaningful connection with a young person.

For Dennis, his longevity and residence in the district provided a unique vantage point of students, since he has known many of the students in the school for many years growing up with his son. He spoke about the relationship that he has had with students over the years and how it is reinforced at times he may not expect:

> … it's interesting to look at this…class where my son is …and know these kids from when they were so little. And see how each of them has changed and to have

the opportunity to see them grow up, and also with their parents as well. We have

great kids. It's probably one of the most consistent things we have, are the

greatness of our kids and the daily laughs, cries, hugs, whatever …that they can

provide and seeing them achieve, and seeing them overcome adversity… I mean,

they're kids. You expect that they're going to make mistakes, so …you can't

really get up in arms and say, "Oh my gosh, our community's going to heck. Our

kids are horrible." They're just kids. They're supposed to learn. We're supposed

to help them learn, and redirect some behavior. There are a couple that are highly

frustrating. You know, that are super slow burning rockets, not even close to

getting off the launch pad. But…it's interesting to…years later…see somebody

that you had, maybe had some tough situations with …and to have them come up

out of nowhere …and still remember who you are …and say, "Thank you," or

whatever it is, and understanding that we can get past a difficult time, and then

move on and still be okay… I look up at all those pictures and come up with a

couple up there.   Oh, I spent more time with some of them than my own. By far.

When I… look at any of those, there are some kids up there who I certainly put

more time in helping them get through high school than my own … You know,

some have navigated the waters really easily. Others need a little more push.

Frank described his relationship with students as primary to his tenure in the

position, describing himself as a "kid's principal":

In this place I know the kids, the kids know me and I don't pull punches with

them. So they haven't been picking up their garbage down in the cafeteria, and

we have this popular area to eat and it has high tables and high chairs and the kids

that are upper classmen they eat out there and they don't pick up their garbage. So I told the head custodian today 'Take the chairs away' so the kids come to lunch and nobody's got a chair. I come in to the cafeteria area by this balcony and I've just got this big old smile on my face. I'm looking down and I'm coming down the steps and I'm smiling at everybody and they all go 'Aaaagh'. And I said 'What?' and they said 'You had the chairs taken away didn't you?' and I say 'Why would I do that? Because somebody's not picking up their garbage?' and I said 'It makes sense to me, does it make sense to you guys?' and they say 'Yeah, but it wasn't us!' I said 'I know it wasn't me either but those chairs sure did disappear didn't they?' 'So what's next, I suppose you'll take the tables away?' and I said 'Yup, and have you in the freshman cafeteria' 'Okay, okay, we get it…I bet you I don't have to spend a week with those chairs gone and we won't have a problem anymore. Meanwhile the first thing I did when I took them away was walk right in the middle of them and say 'Here I am, go ahead'.

He goes on to describe why he finds this approach successful:

Rule number one in the administration; show up. Because if I wasn't there they could all do the [complaining] all over the place, now they know what the story is, it is clear. I could be a superintendent I suppose, I'm not going to do it; at least I'm not going to do it right now, because I don't want to give them up. That plays a huge role on why I'm here every day. I love the staff here, I think they do fantastic work, they work their tails off and I'd buy them all a beer if I could. I see how hard they work and how much they care. I don't show up every day for them, I'm happy to help them, I'm happy to work with them until they don't do

something for kids and then I'm the first one to turn on them. My christening to this place was take care of the kids, not take care of the teachers. I'm a kid's principal not a teacher's principal.

As with Frank, Justin placed students at the core of his work in the building and described the time that students are in school as the best time of the year for him:

I love the students and that's what makes me run. That's what … I remember when my… principal and I was an associate principal…the first year he said, "Do you realize that you are a different person in the summer… at the beginning of the school year of the second year, he said, "You know, I see this enthusiasm. That's great enthusiasm coming out of you."… I thrive on the students… I love being around students; that's why I'm coaching my daughter's club volleyball team, starting a club volleyball team and it's not just for her, but it's for this group of girls. I've always liked being around and helping and working with young people. It's just something that from the time when I taught swimming lessons when I was in high school, I just knew that this was what I wanted to do. I wanted to be around young people and help people. That's where I get my energy from and I know there are some adults that don't like walking through the halls. I can't be any of that. I enjoy more, getting bumped around the halls with all the kids and just interacting with the kids.

Principals in this study cited relationships with a number of groups as a critical factor in their lengthy tenure in their positions. They valued and respected the relationships they've developed with their faculty and staff, the district's administrative team, the school board, parents, community and students. Within the relationships

they've developed with faculty, staff and administrative colleagues, they also identified

collaboration and trust as two factors that influenced their decisions about remaining in

their positions.

Collaboration

The presence of a collaborative culture in the school district emerged as an

institutional factor that contributed to the principals' decisions to remain in their current

positions. Principals in this study reported that their districts were committed to

developing collaborative cultures between and among administrators, teachers and staff.

The positive relationships that have formed through these collaborative cultures were

important factors in their decisions to remain in their jobs for longer periods of time than

most high school principals today.   They cited collaboration with the district's

administrative team and teachers in their building as primary to their decisions to remain.

Tom discussed the movement of his district and his school toward a collaborative

culture and how this movement provided a positive environment in which to move

forward within his school:

> Slowly the culture within the district, as far as I could see, changed to become
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> much more student centered, much more collaborative. I mean, amazing
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> difference there. Collaborative in its broadest sense of instead of separate schools
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> going about their business as best they see fit, or as best serves their particular
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> interests. We're looking at this much more broadly and going about it across the
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> district and then try to bring that home within our building. We had the same sorts
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> of divisions departmentally here and had to break down those walls. We had some
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> pretty harsh divisions within departments. There were folks quite frankly that

weren't capable of working collaboratively. A lot of dynamics at play but it was really gratifying to be a part of that whole movement and then to have the lengthy tenure [of the superintendent and curriculum director]… and the building level administration being fairly constant throughout that time. It did, as the research suggests and I totally agree with that. Five years at least to kind of really make a difference and sustain it. We had that and then some to really make a difference. Even though certain folks have left, there were a number of positive changes that did become institutionalized, so we benefit from that now as we begin to focus on the revised focus plan…

The interactions and relationships between members of the administrative team played a large part in the lives of high school principals and their career decisions. When discussing their district's administrative team, principals were quick to point out that their work with other building administrators was as important to them as their interactions with the district office administrative team. The ability to collaborate with other administrators across the district provided support and encouragement to principals.

For Ed, loss of some of key relationships was a factor that would lead him to consider seeking a new position:

One of the things that concerns me, and maybe I didn't touch on it [before]…is if others left. We have a really good middle school principal who I work very closely with on a number of issues. I know how close he got to leaving, and I think he should have left. He thinks he should have left now, he didn't then. If he were to leave, how he would be replaced would have a real impact on me

because… he's doing a great job, and he is a great resource to me and to our teams of kids. A change there could go poorly.

Jason also stated that his relationships with administrative colleagues were important and wished that collaboration around district issues would occur more frequently with the entire administrative team:

The vast majority of it is good. I just wish we were getting [together more]… for instance; we have a double-digit district-wide [special education] population. Why we aren't as administrators getting together more often and talking about how we are actually working with those kids, I don't know. We are not data driven enough between buildings and district office yet. We need to be. Let's go. Come on. If I am going to go back and push on my special ed staff to do things differently, I need to know exactly how that is perceived here. Is there a direction here? If we say we're inclusive, what does that really mean? Are we really doing it?

For some administrators, collaboration around issues of professional development for the administrative staff provided significant value for them in their personal and professional growth.

Tom stated:

Well a lot of my professional development is done from the administrative group. As [other administrative team members] are really much bigger readers than I am of the latest and greatest literature, they have been great about sharing things in ways that I can consume them without spending an inordinate amount of time. That's probably influenced me professionally more than anything else. We've just

spent two days in a…mentoring workshop. There's phenomenal professional

development around that. I've done six credits of coaching certification…so most

recently that's been some of the more formal things that I've done. A lot of it is

driven by what we're currently contemplating in conjunction with our work as a

district.

Paul, too, found that professional development embedded in the collaboration of

the administrative team provided value to his growth, as well as that of the organization

as a whole, and spoke of support for his development from the people around him as

"very encouraging":

> ...We do book studies as an administrative team, you're encouraged to present and
>
> go to conferences. There is a constant sharing of articles that go back and forth.
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> Having everybody on one campus here is really a blessing for us, because we
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> work so closely together. Now we'll have an administrative team [meeting]
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> tomorrow and we have it every week, so we're together every week for 2 ½ hours
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> on an administrative team. There is a lot of professional growth that goes on just
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> from those meetings. It's organization. That comes from the top, as well as it
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> comes from the bottom. There are always people who are looking to do things
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> better and differently.

Teacher leadership and collaboration were evident in the districts in which these

principals worked. While most of the work that teacher leaders did was centered on the

improvement of instruction for students, some principals identified unanticipated growth

for others as a by-product of this work.

Dennis described leadership team work that led to fundamental changes in the ways in which teachers worked with each other and with administrators to improve instruction:

We also brought in professional learning communities probably about six years ago now. As a way to have our teachers really work with each other and build a sense of how to help kids answer those big four questions and drive to become about the learning and not the teaching. That has fundamentally changed the Wednesday release [for professional development], has really changed what our teachers are doing in the classroom to push for common assessments, both formative and summative, and getting to speak that language and getting people to understand that they may have to re-teach because kids don't understand. The mindset that just because I've taught geometry for 30 years, you know geometry really, really well, but the kids sitting in the desk are learning it for the first time so I think that's a change.

Frank spoke of how teacher leadership and innovation have contributed to his own professional growth as well:

One of the things that's really cool about an academic environment is a lot of times my professional growth is driven by people around here. These guys become good at doing flipped classrooms or Google Apps or whatever. I have to go learn. They have driven me to places I don't know about. I mean I don't know. I wasn't a Twitter fan and the staff here was saying to me, "We need to use Twitter to communicate to kids and kids didn't even know they needed to use Twitter to communicate with one another. Teachers saw the possibility of it and

they set it up and all of a sudden, every kid in this building cares less about their Facebook account. They are more interested in their Twitter account. We send out all our announcements that way. We send out everything that way. I mean it's gotten to be the mode of conversation or the way of communicating. They [teachers] drive my professional growth a lot because they're doing things I don't know about or talk about or think about… Then they're kind enough to invite me in once in a while to be part of their learning.

Sam attributed the collaborative culture in the district and the large leadership role that teachers and other faculty members and administrators played to preventing issues with parents that would otherwise come his way:

The APs do a great job of that [intervening with parents]. My guidance counselors do a wonderful job of that. The great people in their classroom are communicating back with parents and not letting it fester, giving other people a heads up so as the issue might progress through the ranks everyone is kind of aware of it and so when it gets there you know how to deal with it. That's not gaming a parent. That's more of just providing good service I think. People would be surprised probably how much of that gets to me because my staff does a really nice job, and I set that expectation of don't kick it up to me. Deal with it. You could ask me for advice and things like that but give them an answer. Most of them appreciate that because they like to be professionals also and know that what they say is going to be supported so I think that's really created a nice situation where parents are getting really good service.

Teacher leadership and the leadership of their assistant/associate principals were cited by principals as benefits in working in their current positions. They offered examples of how the leadership provided by their teachers and associates allowed them to pursue additional education, take on new duties in the district, or prevent difficult situations with parents.

Frank stated that the ability to work with a talented team over time provided the base for leadership development in the high school, leadership that is shared across the district:

> We've got it pretty magical right now. The middle school principal is one of my former assistant principals and we're very close. His assistant principal was my assistant principal here; the principal at one of the elementary schools was my assistant principal. And the assistant principal at one of the other middle schools is one of my former teachers. We've grown a lot of really powerful leaders here in this building. That plays a big role.

Brad discussed his role in mentoring associate principals over the years and how he had been able to pursue additional education because of the work of his current associate principal.

> …I've have a lot of really positive folks I've worked with and I've now worked with or I have been supervised too eight, nine, ten assistant principals. The woman that I have worked with these past three years here is just tremendous and just gutsy…brings so much to the position. The fact that we are from different backgrounds and different ethnicities and all that kind of stuff is a nice bonus. I don't think it's accidental that in her second year here last year I was able to give

some time and attention to working in a cohort. Of course, I brought so much back to my role and improved my focus on looking at data more effectively; looking at organizational patterns and it's good for the organization… I'm getting ideas and reflection from other practicing administrators that I'm bringing right back on Monday morning.

Brad also shared how the work that he did in mentoring and supporting professionals in his building formed the base for leaders ready to step in when he decides to leave his position:

I guess when it comes right down, it's that growth … the personal growth thing and the readiness of people around you, there's something you should do too. I was able to have my assistant principal at [my previous school] who was a dear friend of mine, assume the role when I left, that's a cool thing. He did a couple things differently than I did, and that's how it should be, but fundamentally with the same values…I have an exceptional assistant here and when my time is done and if it was the right thing in her decision making to step in I'd be thrilled. …one of the things that I always enjoy in this profession is you like seeing kids grow; you like seeing teachers grow, and part of the process you see leaders grow too. There are at least three people right now who … actually…four that I can think of directly that I'm trying to support in their growth as leaders. The readiness factor on their parts, it makes me think about, "It's okay to let go and do something different, because this person is ready to roll"

Paul spoke with pride about his work with the associate principal, a person who brought another perspective to the leadership team in the school:

…and my AP [assistant principal] is really good. Even though you think you're

really alike, if I'm off base she'll say, "I don't think we should go there." She

was a teacher who we moved into the dean of students role, who we moved into

an AP role, so this is her third year as an AP but wise beyond her years and it's

good for me to work with a female. She has different connections with people in

the building that I don't have. I'm a former coach and a jock and those kinds of

things. She is in many ways the same way, but she also has different connections

with different people in the building that makes folks feel comfortable going to

her. I get to know the kinds of ins and outs of some groups of teachers that I

might not have known with other people in that position.

Trust

Trust was cited by many principals interviewed as a critical aspect of relationships

that supported their tenure in the district. They spoke of trust with and from the district

office, trust within their buildings and trust with parents and community members as

areas of focus. When speaking of trust with and from the district office, principals felt

most supported in when the district office provided direction to the building principal and

school but also extended autonomy to the principal and building to carry out the direction

of the district in the manner that the building staff deemed most appropriate.

Principals found direction most helpful in academic areas, where the district

needed to have a central focus; they valued autonomy in the ability to hire faculty and

staff members for their schools.

Direction. In his ninth year in his position, Scott was working with a new

superintendent, a superintendent who eliminated the uncertainty about direction and

expectations that he felt with the prior superintendent, energized him to move forward in the building and brought confidence to his work.   He related this new energy to welcomed direction from the district office:

That's [my relationship with the district office] changed so much. It's really exciting right now; so far I'm really enjoying my work with [the superintendent and assistant superintendent of instruction]. It's just so starkly different than it's been, and…I've been in the district long enough… [The previous superintendent] was always a hard one to peg…I don't want to say … it's not that I didn't feel supported from him, because I did, but I was never quite sure of exactly how he stood on things, and so far with [the new superintendent, it's very clear. He's explicit. [The previous superintendent] was more, if I called him, he would be like …calling him was like talking to Carl Rogers, and I said this explicitly to [the new superintendent] last February when he got hired. He said, "What do you need from me?" I said, "If I call you because I want your opinion, I want your opinion, please don't go all Carl Rogers on me, I just want to know what you think." For me, I have such a degree of comfort level this year than I've had the previous years, because the leadership style is one that works for me. That's what I want. Just tell me what you want… I think the senior leadership in the District has a profound impact on how we operate, because if you're not sure where your bosses stand on something, and they don't make it clear even if you ask them, you're walking on eggshells, and you've got that uncertainty in terms of your actions, that's the stuff that keeps you awake at night. I don't feel that uncertainty this year.

Dennis credited the school board in his district for providing more explicit and consistent direction to the district in the form of achievement goals that affected the manner in which he led his school in a positive way:

At a school board level one of the positive changes has been a consistent set of goals. …in those first, five or six years that I was here, the goal set forward by the school board or upper administration tended to change year to year. For the past couple of years the district goals have related to the same four things…to the ACT, participation in AP or upper level advanced courses, growth on MAP testing and proficiency levels on WKCE. Those achievement measures have been set our job along the way has been to continually advance towards them. They're set at what I would think a high bar. If you need 26 for the ACT, that's a high bar – stretch goals. We don't have to get there in a year but we have to continue to make progress. One of the positive things I think from school board level is that those goals haven't changed… Our goals along the way have been the same. The action steps underneath might focus more in literacy, differentiation or whatever it might be, but our end target is the same.

Jason felt that more direction from the district related to academic goals for the school would be helpful to him in his role in working with staff members to set goals. On the other hand, he also recognized that along with expectations and direction came responsibility for meeting the goals and the possibility of employment instability if goals are not met:

I am a person who likes that. …I would prefer to be in an environment where they are saying, "You need to be here. You need to be there." I guess maybe a little

naively again, I say that I would prefer that, but then if I went to someplace like that or we had expectations and we weren't meeting them, that means we either got to cut the mustard or they're looking at somebody else to come in and lead… I think a lot of us could say if we are not doing our job they should find somebody else, but when it comes to paying grocery bills and all of that kind of stuff for your kids and family, it's a little different. Maybe a little naively, I enjoy that. I like that challenge. It really gives us a…tangible goal for staff members so they don't feel like, "What are we actually doing here? Is everybody on board with this?"

Autonomy. Principals interviewed described a high level of autonomy in their administrative tasks, especially in the hiring of staff. They viewed the hiring of staff as one of the most important things they did, and one in which they took great pride. Several principals recounted how autonomy in hiring staff members was not automatic, and discussed how the culture of the relationship between the district office and the buildings had to change before that occurred. Others were given this autonomy from the beginning of their tenure.

Because Paul served in his position for over 20 years, he had been afforded the opportunity to hire most of the faculty in his building. He found that being able to hire the people he felt best matched with the goals of the building has given him the ability to delegate some of his responsibilities, sharing leadership at the same time:

I'm probably…in the top ten percent in terms of most experienced. In the building, there are only probably four maybe five teachers that I didn't hire… You hire people basically who think like you, I mean you know how it is when you're

sitting in an interview. You're listening for certain things and if you don't hear

that you go, "Oh, I wonder if I can get that out of this person," if you really like

them, so the more people who are like minded …the more you're…willing to

delegate.

Sam, who had hired at least 65% of the teachers in his building, discussed the

impact that hiring of staff members has had on his building, appreciating the autonomy

that he and his building team have been afforded in the hiring process:

…I'm really proud of the hiring that we've done. I spent a lot of time screening

and coming up with the right people to put in place, and I would say that I'm

really proud of, and I think I have a good eye for bringing the right people in. It's

not hard to attract people… We usually get a pretty good list of people in our

human resource department, [and are able to] hire the best person not the cheapest

person…I have that going for me… I would say we've had about a 90% success

rate of someone where they just were a star right away. Then when they weren't

stars usually they're one and done with us. …What happens is the interview team

does its thing, and we push forward a number one candidate and then one or two

who we could live with. That's not saying, "Oh, I really don't want to hire them

but we could live with them." It's more of, "We'd be good with this person."

Then I personally do all the reference checks, and then I make a recommendation

to the superintendent. That's how it worked with [the previous superintendent],

but he never let it die at that. He would [interview each candidate], ask pretty

nontraditional questions and just get to know them. I would say 95% of the time

he thought we did a really nice job. There were a couple of people that he just

didn't like, they said something wrong or they … and he just said, "Go back, this

isn't good enough," and I appreciated that too at the time. I do get, for the most

part, final authority. This year we got a new person now, but I got full authority

and I've hired … since we hired late summer we hired our new AP and then we

hired the new social studies teacher, and I've had full authority…

Tom recognized that the autonomy entrusted in him to hire faculty members came

with the responsibility for follow-up action should the hire prove not to be what was

anticipated:

I would say [I have] essentially complete autonomy [to hire staff]. The district

office influence has been to continually remind building level administrators of

the importance to hire folks that we are going to happily embrace for many years.

If we fall short of that, then [we need to] to try to intervene from a supervision

and evaluation standpoint sooner [rather] than later. [I've] been well-schooled,

influenced on that front and work harder than ever to try to find the right people,

knowing that the success of the operation rests largely with them.

Justin explained how the district changed dramatically in its approach to hiring

from the time he was first appointed principal, how it evolved from a district in which

the high school principal had no part in the hiring of faculty members to one in which he

had almost complete autonomy in the process:

I can remember having conversations with administrative staff when I first came

here and I think about it now, I was somewhat brazen and naïve when I'm

engaging with the superintendent and the curriculum director over who we should

hire and I'm really pounding my hand on the table…they were hiring somebody

because they went to this school and their parents are in this community versus hiring somebody because they could be a good asset to our school. It was totally like I couldn't understand why we would be hiring this person; the other person by all good counts was going to be a better teacher and this was going to be a bad teacher but I was totally overruled…Back then, I got to sit on the interviews but the curriculum director did most of the hiring and superintendent sat in on every interview…The principals didn't do interviews it was the curriculum director and superintendent who did the interviews and the principal didn't have any involvement. Before I came in, before I got here, I was told here's your staff, here are the new teachers. Then when…I came in, we kind of pushed to say we want to be [involved in hiring]…the person who was the superintendent had been the principal and thought that he should've been involved in the interviews when he was [principal], so he said fine, I think the principals need to be involved in this. Now it's my role now, it's the principal…the curriculum director has very minimal roles in the interview process. We bring in one or two candidates after we've done everything else and then we ask for their blessing more than anything else. We pretty much make the decision or at least narrow it down to those two candidates and then we involve that group but it's ultimately my decision. They give me their input but it is ultimately my decision where that was not the case back, like I said, 20, years ago.

Justin viewed the autonomy afforded him in the hiring process as beneficial to the school and its academic program:

I believe it's because we really put a lot of time and effort into it and don't do the good old boys network anymore. …how we do it now is much more extensive; we get people involved we do a lot of other things. We have them come in and teach a lesson for us and…so we get a real sense of what they can do. I think we are bringing in much higher quality [of teacher] and that has had an impact on student performance.

As principals valued the trust afforded them by their superintendents and other district office personnel, they also appreciated that trust was an important factor within their buildings. Teachers must be trusted to implement the identified curriculum, and the principal must be trusted to be open and honest with the faculty regarding expectations and follow-up.

Paul stated:

If they can't trust what's coming out of your mouth, whether it's good, bad or indifferent, I just think you're sunk. You just have to let people know what's on your mind and it doesn't always, it should never be in a negative or a condescending way. It can just be, "Here's what I'm seeing. What are you thinking or what are you seeing?" So I think the relationship piece with your staff is really important.

Brad shared that he viewed trust as a reciprocal relationship, one that if broken would give him reason to seek another position quickly:

I fundamentally like to trust the people are doing what they should do, and I think they trust me for the most part of it…integrity is always … I can live with almost with any other criticism; I can't live with the idea that would ever compromise my

integrity or sell somebody a bill of goods. If I had felt like I was at a point where I lost my faculty and staff I'd have to move on quickly.

Tom shared that the district's expectations for the building leadership in making changes in the instructional program include autonomy in determining how much and how fast new initiatives or changes in practice would be implemented at the building level. He credited the ability to customize the implementation phase with the success of the implementation of the goal setting work of the professional learning community model (PLC) in the district and the initiation of work to examine the school's grading policy. In turn, he provided the departments and teams in the building with the autonomy to carry out the work, discovering that having autonomy for instructionally based goals increased collaboration among faculty and led to work on more substantive issues:

…we did embrace the idea of having smart goals and it gave us…an initial framework for articulating improvement goals that would work in support of the focus plan. Yeah, it gave us a fair amount of latitude, at both building and further, at team or department levels. We went about that, and really the bigger… In retrospect what we learned is more important than the goals themselves, was learning to work collaboratively. …We went easy on; we weren't like saying we've got to do this…We left it open-ended, and that gave people choice and a lot of them really probably chose some safe goals in a lot of instances, but nobody had the option of not being part of that process. Everybody had to account for reporting. I would bring in all of team leaders to the board, so there was a fair amount of accountability with that and eventually almost everybody got on board with that. That was a really positive development, then once that was established,

then we started taking on more difficult things like grading policies and that sort

of thing. Even though that was a tumultuous experience, there was enough

stability and strength in the foundation…The Director of Instruction was good

about not insisting that we adopt every single point of best practice. When, nearly

if not all of your teachers including your very best performers, are adamant about

a certain thing even though the research may suggest that that's not necessarily

the best way. We weren't going to push all… I wouldn't say it's perfect but I

would say we did clean up a lot of things...

Theme Two: Balance

The need for balance within the work environment and between work and family

was cited as a never-ending struggle for the principals in the study, although those with

the most seniority in their positions reported a reduced concern about this at this point in

their careers as they developed strategies to address the ongoing issue. Balance between

the managerial and instructional expectations of the high school principalship emerged as

one area of focus; balance between work and family was another.

Balancing the Demands of the Job

On the job, principals identified balancing the many facets of the job as a primary

issue in their work. Specifically, they grappled with how to manage the building

effectively while identifying and focusing on things they believed to be one of their most

important roles, instructional leadership. Brad expressed the sentiments of most of the

participants:

I think it would be a pretty common answer…staying the core academic process.

That includes time to be in classrooms, time to have meaningful meetings with

teachers, and time to monitor and use assessment data and stay in that cycle of

how are kids performing, what am I seeing in the classrooms, what am I hearing

in faculty meetings and how can we keep improving the academic product?

Dennis shared Brad's belief about the core mission of academic progress when he

discussed the multiple facets of the position while trying to focus on the critical ones:

There always seems to be a new initiative and that gets added on, and we don't

ever seem to have anything complete or it gets taken off, so, bringing those

forward and then trying to keep people understanding what we're doing and

happy about being here and thinking about the enormous nature of all the things

we're trying to do. Keeping people's morale up, getting things into place, making

sure the emphasis remains on student learning and not necessarily the additional

workload, and trying to always go back to why we're doing things…

Balancing the Job and Family Life

Principals in the study reported that their attempt to find balance between work

and family was an ongoing work in progress for them, especially related to the number of

activities that occur in high schools.

Dennis' comments reflected those of other participants:

…very easily you could get wrapped up and do this job and neglect other parts of

your life right away. The other piece is outside, just trying to have some sort of

balance. The most challenging piece is understanding that you still have to allow

time for family, or for friends, or … seeing your kids, doing stuff with your kids,

not always being away from home at night. Realistically, four and five nights I

could always go to a school event somewhere. And then trying to find the

balance with that. I could come in on Saturdays and work all day Saturday. I could slip in on Sunday and work all day Sunday, and still probably never, ever be where I want to be. So trying to figure out where to draw that line is a challenge as well.

Brad shared:

…you recognize that there's a cost to every choice and the cost sometimes is in relationships and personal wellness, and I turned 50 last month and you're…really touched by just people acknowledging that, and people I haven't seen in forever. I don't like whining about being an educator, and I don't like it when we do that as a profession because there's a lot of tough professions, but…it is a hard position to manage your time…and on any given day if you had enough hours you could meet with every faculty member and still not finish the business you want to finish and answer all their questions. You can meet with every parent in your school, and still have unresolved concerns or ideas, and then the people in your personal life that matter to you, whether it's your children growing up or parents aging. That part of being a principal and the nights and the school events that you want to be at, but you also know you're making tradeoffs with your personal life.

Scott expressed that he found a paradox in the expectations put on high school principals relative to family and work:

People have an unrealistic expectation of what principals should do, and where he should be, or she should be. We survey a lot in this district and … I remember seeing a piece of feedback from last year's parents' survey, "The principal is not as involved as at the middle school. [The middle school principal] was at every

concert." I'm like, "That's because at the middle school they only have four

concerts, and I could do that in a term/ doesn't homecoming, and [the middle

school] kids can't drive, and you know, it's insane. I'm virtually at every home

football game, I missed one this year. I've missed one home football game in 11

years…. My step daughter is graduating from college this winter, but I've got to

be at a concert that night. There's this paradox in that people want their principal

to be a family man or lady, because if you're a family person you can empathize

with them, you've had kids, and it's made a huge difference. I have a son in grad

school and a son in college and having shepherded them through high school,

gave me insights into what these parents were talking about, so it was helpful.

There's the paradox, they want you to be a family person, but they don't want you

to spend any time with your family, because they always want you to be paying

attention to their kids, and so yeah, did I miss concerts and games for my own

kids over the years because I was at concerts and games here watching other

people's kids. I think it's unrealistic, and I think that's one of the things that lead

to turnover as well. In terms of my family, I got divorced a few years ago, the job

was not the reason why I got divorced, but the job helped create the environment

in which things degenerated to the point where the marriage ended. I've been

married … I'm a little more protective of my time than I used to be. …I'm more

jealous of my time with my loved ones than I was seven or eight years ago,

because then it was, "I've got to go … I've got to do this, I've got to do that," and

now I'm more like, "You know what, I'm not going to be at every event….We

split up the basketball games, we split up the football games, we are usually all at

homecoming and prom, and that's sort of thing. …people notice it, if you're not

there. As I said, it's this paradox, they want you to be a family man, but they

don't want you to spend any time with your family.

Personal Health

Principals also noted that the requirements of the high school principalship had an

effect on their personal health and well-being, and shared their struggle to maintain both

their professional responsibilities and their health:

Ed pointed out the month of May as a time that he could not find a way around

neglecting his own health:

I know that in the month of May, I am not going to be home much. I'm not going

to be able to take care of my body physically the way I ought to. I do not get to

the health club as often as I should in May. I do not eat as well as I should in

May. I do not … I mean, I know that it's going to be a pain in the butt of a month

because of the number of commitments I have outside of normal hours…normal

hours for me. In May normal hours tends to be some place between 6:30 a.m. and

10:00 p.m.…

For some principals, long tenure on the job came with reflection about their own

health and its relationship to their work. For Brad, the death of a colleague's spouse and

his own father's health issues caused him to think about the time demands of the position:

The wellness thing has been tough, I've tried to recommit to that this year, and

much more than I have in probably, at least seven or eight years, so again the only

regrets I think involve just the regrets that we have … about mortality, in general.

I'm investing my time and energy here, I am less able to give time and energy to

other things, whether that's my own wellness, my family, friends and associates from over the years, I was horrified to find out last month that my first boss…six months after he lost his wife …It's those kind of things, where all of a sudden, oh yeah, my kid is moving on in life, or my dad isn't going to be here much longer, or maybe won't be, and then you feel yourself in that pace and that frenetic high school life reality, because right now I've got the National Honor Society tonight, we have the Board Meeting Tuesday night, Saturday morning is a district visioning session. There's usually three chunks a week that are above and beyond normal work hours.

Responses to Managing the Job

Participants in the study reported that they utilized various strategies for addressing the time commitments that were part of the high school principalship. Many of the men in the study deliberately adjusted their schedules to attend to family and children. Frank shared his typical schedule:

I do spend a lot of time at my job, but it's not gross, I'm not doing 80-hour weeks. Most weeks I do 60, I show up here at 6:30 in the morning but I'll leave today by 3:30 to get my kids off the bus. If I don't get all the paper work done here today I'll be back at 8:00 and I'll stay until 10:30 and do another two and half hours at night when I can do my work better. That is manageable, we have dinner together, I run to all the practices, I never miss a robotics meet; I'm part of everything. I have two assistant principals that don't have any children and one who's an empty-nester. I look at them a lot and say 'I'm running, you're dealing' and they know it. When his [the empty-nester's] kids were here and growing up I

did it and he ran. When, if they stay here, they have children and they need to I'll

do it, do you know what I mean? We split things up pretty evenly. I don't hit

every concert and I don't hit every basketball game and don't hit every tennis

match, it's just not going to happen but I hit a lot of that stuff. Frankly, it's a big

part of our life. It is a bit monastic I suppose, in a way.

Sam also adjusted his daily schedule, often arriving at work by 4:30 a.m.

to allow him time with a family that included children in high school:

First of all, I don't think that I have done a good job of balancing. I don't know if

anybody could ever say that they've done a good job of balancing because I don't

know if it's possible. You can't spend enough time at your school and you can't

spend enough time at home so where's the balance? The way that I made it work

is… my kids come to a lot of stuff, especially when they were younger and not

involved in their own stuff, but they're at the high school. I'd just bring them

through a lot. I was kind of killing two birds with one stone. I'd go home and

pick them up and bring them back for stuff so that's a great way to do it. The

time piece is just overwhelming. I've chosen to make the switch to coming in

early. When everyone's sleeping, that's when I've had to make the decision to be

here so I can get out at a reasonable time to have more family dinners and that

sort of thing…I needed to start coming in ungodly early so I could make it home

for dinner.

For Paul, living in the district and having his children attend school there

was essential to balancing work and his family:

Oh, boy. I don't know how you could be a high school principal without having

the kids in the district where you work because my deal is that you have to be visible and you have to be supportive of your kids but not at the expense of your own kids and so my kids were with me and are with me all of the time for stuff. I couldn't imagine having to go to a Tuesday night basketball game where my kids were playing in another city or where they were on another team, so from a time aspect that the time required of a high school principalship can't be underemphasized. It's an incredible amount of time. There's very little off-season in this job…. From a time perspective, you have to find time in your day where no one else is here because that's the only time you ever get any uninterrupted time. So for me that 6:00 a.m. to 6:45 time is the time where I can get about three hours' worth of work done where I'm not getting interrupted but the time is tough and the family piece is tough. When I'm done, I don't want people to say, "He was a really good high school principal but he was a crappy dad," or, "He was a good dad but he was a crappy high school principal." You got to find that balance and the only way to find that balance is to be able to include your kids because if you are a high school principal, that's your community…My family has grown up in this building, just like I have…

While some principals adjusted their schedules to early arrivals and returning after dinner, others consciously cut back their presence at some school events in their attempt to bring balance to their lives.

Justin shared:

I will say this, I'm more realistic about what I can do and I don't think of myself as superman anymore…. I used to probably; I used to spend more time here.

There would not be anything at this school, that I didn't come for, because I was single back then and didn't have a family. I lived here, so there was a JV volleyball game I'd be here, if there was a gymnastics meet I'd be here, a band concert I'd be here and I'd be here for everything. People, parents would say do you live here... I've become more realistic in that. Realizing that I have a family now, I have children, they may need me too, I have a wife who needs me, I need to spend some time [with them]… there needs to be balance in the life. That's something where my expectations have changed… not that I just don't come to everything anymore but I come to one of everything. I make sure that I'm at a soccer game, that I get to at least one field hockey game, I get to one girls' lacrosse game, I get to the band concert, I get to the choir concert. I don't get to every one of them but I get to at least one of everything, so I make an appearance at everything. I live fairly close, so I might have an evening walkthrough where I'll bring my son over here, he's eight years old and we'll just come over and there's three different sports going on… so we'll just come in and spend an hour and spend 15 minutes at each one of those things, so at least I'm making an appearance and I kind of get a sense of what's going on. People can see me and know that I'm available if they need to talk to me, where in the past I would just be here for all of those things. I had to make a priority for a family and it was a situation where my wife and I really it just kind of happened. I was just in the same mode as spending lots of hours here and she was a teacher, taught here, that's how we met and so she understands to some extent but she kind of laid it on

the line that, "You know Justin, you need to have to devote some time to the family too, you just can't be [at work]…"

Like Justin, Ed recognized that he needed to develop ways to attend to the needs of his family by cutting back on his attendance at some school related activities:

I can feel myself needing to cut back on some of the demands of high school. I have not felt that I have cut back to the point where I'm compromising what I'm doing. I think that… I could have gotten a lot of the visibility I was getting, a lot of the connections I was making, and still cut down on the number of times I was there…I also get that at some point, that's going to come in, because my son does not go [to school] here. He is in high school… When [my children] are in fifth grade and there's not much going on, who cares. But when they're in high school, there is one high school graduation…I want to be at his thing. These kids I like, but [for my son's graduation]…we change our graduation [here] if that's what happens.

Theme Three: Fit

The term fit was used in this study to describe the match between the priorities and culture of the school district with the talents, skills, interests and abilities of the principals.

With the District and Community

Principals in this study described how they felt that the fit between them, their school district, especially its educational mission, and the community, a fit that has developed over time in the role, compelled them to remain in their current positions, even though other opportunities arose. Tom shared:

I guess the only thing I would add is that when I entertained the possibility of

coming here I certainly wasn't sure of making the switch. The more I learned

about the district, the more I thought it would be a good fit. That's always been a

strong point of consideration for me and really something we hit hard on

whenever we're bringing somebody else into the organization, that whole notion

of it being a good fit. I really do think that it's played out to be a good fit for me.

That's also had, I think, a significant influence on how I've conducted myself in

this role, trying to be a good steward, so to speak, of the district's interests. If you

don't necessarily buy into everything the district stands for, that obviously can be

a difficult thing. I don't know that you could keep doing it and be true to yourself.

That's never been a point of struggle for me, so I think that that's been a

significant factor. Just having your own personal, professional interests well

aligned with the organizational interests. Then it's not a struggle to muster up the

motivation to get after it. You're naturally inclined to do it because of that

alignment.

Dennis described how the match between the community, his family and

the district influenced his retention in the position:

I really love the community. I think that [the] high school is an amazing school.

In my head, there's probably only a few other positions in the metro area that I

would apply for…And even then, some of those have come open and I've opted

not to at that point leave. So, I don't think I'm done here yet. I really like this

community. And I've grown to appreciate what the high school means in the

community.… I look at the things our teachers are trying to do, the things they are

getting from students, the things we've achieved, the things we struggled at …and I still want to be a part of that. There are great things that are happening here every day, and I look at what our kids are doing outside after they leave high school, and being able to say, "I might've had something to do with that." "I" as a school. It's pretty cool. I just … I have a connection with the community. Even before, you know, I didn't move here because I wanted to work here. We moved here maybe by accident but learned to appreciate it and wouldn't want to go anywhere else.

For some of the principals, the concept of fit was closely related to living in the community with their families and children. Justin described how his family's connections to the community have grown along with his growth in the position:

Here at [the school] there are some personal issues to it. My kids go to school in the feeder schools, my wife teaches here for one of the feeder schools; she taught here prior to that. From a personal level, that is certainly there. Now, this has become my baby so I love this place. This is the place that I came to when I was 33 years old, and it's changed dramatically…and I would like to think…it has rubbed off on me and me – I have rubbed off on it. I love this place. I love this school. I love this district and at this point in time, I couldn't see going someplace else to be a principal at someplace else. I just couldn't do that. As I'm getting older …the light is certainly brighter at the end of the tunnel, it gets brighter every year…I could be retiring in two and a half years…I think about that and think, "Boy, I have to give up my keys and not be a part of this anymore." I

met my wife here, when my children were born…the first place I came…from the hospital right here to share my pictures with the staff… My children will go to school here. I've hired… 95% of the staff that's here. I think about, What's my legacy?…What are they going to say about me when I walk out the door? What are the teachers are going to say 10 years after I leave?

Paul, who has worked in the same district for his entire career, also cited his connections and those of his family to the community as a factor in his fit with the position and his tenure:

I'll go back to that community. This is my home now. I've been here for 26 years from a little kid to a full grown adult in a teacher role to a principal role. It's been fun to see it from start to what it is right now. I'd be hard pressed to turn it over to somebody else right now and say this is now your baby. I think when my kids go through, or my seventh grader is done, then I'll feel a little bit more like there's some closure to it but…I'm not going to let that go, so it's that feeling of community. For me it's a real comfortable place for me to be at. I'm well respected in the community and it's not easy but it's a whole lot easier because I've been here for a long time because I know how things are going to work. I know what to expect. I've got good people to work with. That's a huge piece. There are certain people that you can't wait to see every day because you just, they're your friends. Even though you're their boss or you're their co-worker. There are people you want to see every day. If you've come to a place where you didn't like the kids or you didn't like the people or the community wasn't supporting you, I can't imagine doing this job.

Compensation

Part of a principal's decisions to remain in the position related to their salary requirements and their feeling that they received fair compensation for the work they did. Principals in this study received salary and benefit packages that ranged from total compensation of $135,000 to $170,000.While principals cited compensation as an important issue, all stated that they felt they were fairly compensated for their positions, and none cited this factor as one that would lead them to consider moving elsewhere. However, principals also reported that they kept an eye on high school principal salaries in other schools in their athletic conferences for compensation comparisons.

Dennis attributed trust in the superintendent as one reason for his satisfaction with his compensation. For him, compensation was only a part of the picture when it came to his overall tenure in the district:

I feel, and my wife might disagree with this, I feel I'm compensated well for what I do.   We just got our last contracts recently, and I know what I'm making now, but I don't know, I don't remember what I was making for the two years prior …because I've never really focused much on that. Maybe if I looked in my head historically as to where I was when I started in this district and to where I am now, I make a lot more money than I did when started as an associate principal. Will you ever get paid everything you feel you are worth? No.   If you know that and are okay with that, that's fine. If I want to get paid more than what I'm making here, then I have to look to move and go somewhere else. I don't know what … but with that then you have to look also big picture. It's more than just that rate of pay. What is the community like? What are the challenges of that

school? A lot of factors go into that …but I have faith that the superintendent

sees what I'm doing …and that I'm going to be compensated fairly for that. If it

ever gets to point where I don't feel that or messages are being sent through that

…you figure it out.

While Jason trusted that his superintendent advocated for his compensation, he

also shared that he kept an eye on principal salaries in other high schools in his athletic

conference, primarily because of concern over how others might perceive his

performance, his school or his district rather than the amount of compensation itself:

> Does it bother me when I look at my colleagues? Yes…I definitely have learned
>
> through life that the more you make the more you spend, so I am not looking at it
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> as all of a sudden I'll be able to buy a new car or whatever, that kind of stuff. I
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> have three kids. They are going to suck it up no matter what I make. Does it
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> bother me? Yeah. I really do believe that there are too many people out there that
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> look at that and say a couple of things. "Well, he doesn't work in a good place.
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> Maybe he isn't doing as good of a job as somebody else is doing," that kind of
>
> thing. Does it weigh on me from time to time? I have had very good discussions
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> with [the superintendent] about it. I think he does what he best can with the
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> board, but I don't necessarily know if it will be a deal breaker. I guess I would be
>
> stupid to say that I have been here for nine years and I have consistently been
>
> significantly lower than any of my colleagues. There may be a time when that
>
> comes up.

Ed, too, used comparisons with other principals in the area when evaluating his

compensation, concluding that his compensation was fair for the work that he did:

It's kind of important. Compensation is important, and I think I'm fairly compensated for my position. I cannot complain about that…I might have some concerns about some of the way things are done, but I'm fairly compensated. I am compensated in line with my peers…and so I'm okay with that. …I am compensated better than some superintendents. I use the conference…When I started, I was making on the bottom end, and I've moved up, partially because everybody else is turning over more than once. I'm comfortable with where I'm at…for many years I was on the bottom of the conference…from experience wise, I'm not making the most. I mean, nowhere near. Fourth or fifth in the conference, but I'm fairly compensated. But…I do use that as a reference to where I'm at.

Paul also felt that he was fairly compensated, but pointed out that high school principals in general were not compensated for the value that they brought to the organization:

Well, per hour none of us are getting rich …but in this field I feel like I'm fairly compensated. My bosses have always been good to me and the board has always been good to me in terms of taking a look at those comparables, so from an education perspective in terms of what other high school principals are making, I feel very good about what I'm being compensated. Now when I take a look and see what college football coach or whoever else is making, we're not compensated anywhere near the value that we're worth, so that's a double edged sword. I feel within the realm of education, we're paid fairly. If you were to compare it to

another ...We're CEOs. To other CEO jobs, we're grossly underpaid but I was in education. That's what I chose to do.

Some principals noted that overall compensation has decreased over the past few years, due to either loss of previously promised retirement benefits, additional contributions to health insurance premiums and pension plans or additional duties that they've been assigned without compensation.

For Scott, this reduction came in the form of loss of benefits and additional time that he put in to do his job. He shared that even if he were to retire from his current school district, he wanted and needed to continue to work:

> Compensation is important. Per hour I probably make less than I did as a teacher, I'm certain I do, but if I retire next year…I can't afford to stop working, and I'm too young, I don't want to stop working. … I can still contribute and I want to, but the compensations are important, and I'll be honest, that's greatly diminished compared to what it was six months ago, in terms of retirement in this district…. that's hundreds of thousands of dollars change, just in terms of that on the medical. It's a brave new world, the public education in the state…

Brad also stated that increasing responsibilities and roles without additional compensation was becoming the norm in his district. Yet he, too, felt that he was fairly compensated in his position:

> I don't have major complaints, I think I'm compensated fairly … the comment is that the ever increasing duties and expectations in our current area rarely come with any additional stipend or money, or allocation. I have four legitimate hats now, equally sized. The other duties as assigned, the nature of it is interesting.

Most of us in the state took about a 7 percent step back with the [legislative] changes…and most people had to kick in more for insurance. If I want to whine about it, maybe I should do something else, is my attitude. When I hear people in our profession that whine…well, if you think it's so easy somewhere else, go do it. The compensation is very much on my mind in terms the high school principalship and other roles in education. I've heard … most people reflect to me, including people that I work with very closely, that the most demanding role outside of superintendent in the district is high school principal.

Tom cited the increased salary and benefits that he could not earn if he stayed in teaching as a reason that he initially went into administration. After serving as principal in another district for several years, one of the attractions of moving to his current district was the increase in salary and benefits that came with it, something he could not have earned in his previous district. Even so, he too reported an overall loss in compensation over the years:

One of the big attractions to me coming here was a significant increase in compensation…When I became an administrator I certainly didn't have the expectation of being paid top dollar. I was coming into it with zero experience. Once I had proven myself, I also came to realize that there wasn't any readily available means for advancing my salary. Within a few years it became apparent that I was … if I wasn't the lowest paid principal in the…metro area, I was close to the bottom. That was quite a predicament, and there really wasn't an opportunity or many opportunities to rectify that situation without taking money from somebody else. When the call came from this district to consider becoming

the principal here, certainly the opportunity to make a significant advancement in salary was an attractive piece. I went from one of the lowest paid to one of the highest paid and have kind of been there. Once you kind of settle in at a place then you just kind of move along. That was fine. Then more recently people in general aren't going anywhere, so I've actually gone backwards. All things considered, I feel very fortunate. I'm not complaining or feeling like I'm getting screwed. I'm close enough to the end to … I really feel for people who are nowhere near to the end, and I can appreciate their questioning of how long they can afford to stay. Yeah, that was a huge factor early on and then by coming here that pretty much took care of it.

Theme Four: Change

Principals in the study identified an ongoing expectation for change as a challenge in their positions. While many of those interviewed relished change, they also recognized the challenge that the ongoing expectation for change presented.

Jason identified effectively implementing change in his building as a major challenge, and discovered a connection to faculty members with long term ties to the school and community:

…we were really starting to implement change, we were really pushing people…we took our staff roster and we went through the staff and…said to ourselves, 'Who's on board and who's not,' just our perceptions. When we got done with that, overwhelmingly the people who weren't on board were graduates of [this] high school."…They get a little upset because kids aren't as into the school as maybe they were when they went here…In that respect, I think we've

made some headway. Some staff members have really started to speak up and say, "Look, it's not the same. Look, we have to work with some of these kids differently. We just do."

Student Achievement

Student achievement issues posed an area in which there was an expectation for change for these principals, regardless of the overall achievement level of their school. For some, the challenge was in raising achievement on large-scale standardized test to compete with surrounding schools and districts; for others, the challenge was in continuing to raise achievement in schools that consistently outperformed those around them. All felt the expectation that student achievement improve, regardless of the overall performance of the school.

Sam stated that the challenge of student achievement in his job was a big part of his work and represented a positive challenge for him:

I think it's a big part of the work. … it's how we've always treated standardized tests which is through the curriculum, so I think you look at it from more of a holistic view of are we aligned to the common core, is the stuff that we're doing worthwhile in the classroom, is there any common sense stuff we can do to prepare for those assessments because that's what we're being measured on now so there's certainly a piece of the work. It's a part of the work for sure because we have…to make sure we take care of that; otherwise it will just be mandated on us later if we don't. As far as me staying and going, I see that as a positive challenge because even though you hate to say you're trying to get the test scores to be better… wrapped into that is are we teaching the right stuff, are we teaching

it the right way, can we reach certain kids in a better way? Those are all great

offshoots of that conversation so it doesn't cause me to think about leaving the

tradition or the profession at all.

For Jason, issues around student achievement were identified as a significant part

of the work he did. He also wondered about the relationship of the expectation for

student achievement and his own tenure:

On a scale of 1 to 10, easily a 10. How much does that play in to whether I would

stay here or not?... I am waiting, very bluntly. If the expectation is X and we are

not achieving X, and I personally believe we are not achieving X because of some

factor I can't control, let's say the demographics or I can't execute a plan of

improvement quickly enough to see some people leave, then I would be nervous.

Does it play a huge role? Absolutely. My office is covered in data and how kids

are doing. Every three or four weeks, we are hammering that out and who is

doing what and where are they…just in the time I've here been, we've been

taking a lot more time and effort and scrutiny with regard to things like WKCE

results, AP results, ACT results…I definitely see a change there… We've made a

big push with things like learning targets and assessments, and you see some of

that change.

While Ed, too, spent a great deal of time on issues of student achievement, he did

not view this issue as one that influenced his tenure in the position:

I think test scores are one measure of achievement. I don't think they're the only

thing we can look at when we look at a school. I think that we … we've spent too

much time not looking at them or dismissing them as test scores in the past, so

they're a big part of what I do… we need in education to have some markers that we can utilize to see how we're doing, and they need to be as comparable as we can make them across schools in our district, across buildings… so I like that part. In my role, one of our missions right now is creating common assessments where we have…markers within our classrooms. … I need to stay up on top of that and figure out how we're going to get to WKCE testing week this week, so it fits well with what we're doing.

Dennis discussed expectations for teachers and administrators for student achievement as different from when he first entered the field, affecting the focus of his work with his staff. While expectations have changed, he felt they have changed for the better:

I think that more and more what is being expected of teachers and of administrators is a proof that you're having a positive impact on student achievement…more so than ever I think the responsibility about leading and increasing student achievement is part of my daily challenge. It's not just about managing the facility …and running an organized building. … I'll continue to work to improve student achievement. Ultimately, if that impacts my ability to remain, will be what comes down from above…I mean, the reality that this is a part of my job is appropriate…that's why we're here is to push that student achievement. … Because now, in the future, everybody's going to be on that same playing field with that same report card, and you're going to be able to see and compare and…it is about the kids. It probably always has been …but

everybody had different measures, and now that we all have the same measure, we all understand that we have to achieve more.

Justin also reported student achievement as a "huge part of what I've done." However, he reported his involvement as more from an organizational rather than instructional perspective, even though he has instituted changes to curriculum and delivery of instruction based on analysis of test data:

> …I would say that that has been a huge part of what I've done. I've been usually involved with that. Not so much in the curricular standpoint, but more from organizational standpoint, more from developing a system. When we first started this, we did it much differently. I look at it … for instance we shut school down for two days and we did WKCE testing. The sophomores come in for the mornings, the rest of the kids stay home…. Those kinds of changes to make this more effective for the kids make it an environment that makes… better chance of doing well. From that perspective… the one thing that I would say I have been involved in driving is we have looked at some of the data for some of our scoring on the testing, and we made some changes over our curriculum and our content delivery based upon we were doing poorly in this certain area on that test. I've been involved with that because I love data. I've been involved with that kind of stuff.

Brad strongly supported increased accountability for student achievement for his district, school, and himself. Citing increased student mobility, he spoke of the importance of viewing student achievement issues not only within his building but also outside the boundaries of his own district:

…there will be never a perfect accountability system, and I'm less bothered now because I think the state with the report card system is moving in the right direction. Taking a more holistic view of, where did you start and how far did you move them… It has been a bit of crime for decades to say that we are always going to put all these district scores up and here's the affluent suburb over here versus … [the city] and everybody else tries to line up in between and the realtors are the ones ultimately who like the scores the most. I think the move toward the more holistic report card is a really healthy move, and I'm not necessarily always patient with what comes out of [the capitol] and what goes on in Department of Public Instruction, I'll admit that. With an audience of one here, I readily admit…that I think this is impressive movement, and the alternative to whining about test scores … again, how else in a democracy do we try to ensure that we are delivering some consistency of education? We still have some real inconsistency in our 11th and 12th grade writing curriculum; it can be very course and teacher-dependent. We have to stop that. We have really strengthened the prior levels, but you should not have a dramatically different experience if you get Mr. Johnson versus Miss Smith for your junior literature class…If a kid moves from [one city to another], there should be some benchmarks, and expectations, because we are chartered through the state legislature as public school districts, and school boards are empowered legally under the auspices of the State Legislature…The idea that we should have no accountability, I think, is ludicrous.

Continuous Improvement

The need for continuous improvement in their work and schools was a common and welcome challenge for these principals. And the need for continuous improvement was not limited to the school. These principals also identified the need to ensure that they also focused on their own improvement in their roles, a task that some identified as more difficult the longer they remained in the same position.

Ed shared his struggle with his need to continue to improve professionally in order to move his building forward:

> I think the biggest challenge I face right now is to continually improve. To continue to look to not rely on my experience, but to find other information than what I am used to. I think I've done the job, I've done it for a lot of time… and that experience serves me well. I anticipate what's going to happen in a conversation. I anticipate what's happening in a situation, and I think I have to be more conscious of making sure I'm appreciating the situation completely and making sure I'm… staying current with what's going on in other places…If I look at the nine years, I think I stagnated towards the middle, at some point, where… I had kind of gotten the push that I needed and I relied too much on my past success to try to get the next thing done rather than really work hard on that next thing. That's changed.

Justin described a similar need to push himself to continue to improve in a school that already produced a high level of student achievement:

Getting [another responsibility] is really nice for me because it's allowed me to do

different things. I will say to some point, here…it's been somewhat stale for me,

because you do it for 17 years and you got it down pretty well, and if you look at

the success of our students there's not a whole lot more that we're going to do.

They're 95% more advanced and proficient in reading and all things of that

nature. Obviously there's still room to grow, but it's hard to grow very much

when you're that right already [at the top]...

Frank shared a strong opinion that change and improvement were why he is in the

position he's in:

I think the address is the same since I came here, but that's about it. I'm okay

with change for now. Who knows 20 years down the road after I've built

something I'm really proud of and the test scores are much higher if I'll ever want

to change a darn thing, or if I'll have the energy to think so. For now if I'm not

nimble in my work, if I'm not flexible in my ability to look at a problem and say

it 'aint working, we've got to do something else, I'd fire me.

Paul also identified "maintaining that edge to want to continuously improve and

do things in a systematic orderly fashion" as a challenge at this point in his career. While

Paul described himself as being "wired" for change, he still wondered how he will

respond to some of the new ways of teaching and learning that are emerging in his

district:

I'm a firm believer that education is a "what have you done for me lately"

business, because every year is a different year with a different group of kids. I

believe that I've got enough poker chips stacked up in my corner that I could

probably coast and do some things for a few years and [the superintendent] would

leave me alone and the board would leave me alone, but I'm not wired that way,

I'm always wired, Is there a better way to skin the cat? Can we do something a

little bit different that's going to make incremental change that probably we can

do things better?…I think right now because I've done it for so long [my

challenge] is maintaining that edge to want to continuously improve and do things

in a systematic, orderly fashion. I think that it's easy when you've been on a roll

and things are going well, just kind of have that urge to sit back and let things

flow, so I think that's probably been the greatest challenge is how do you stay

motivated and energized when things are going well and you don't have people

nipping at your heels to do something different…Having said that, technology is

really forcing our hand in terms of making change, maybe more quickly than at

any time before. I think of the personalized learning push that's going on, and the

different competitors we now have for our kids in terms of their education.

Things are going to have to change. We can't have the same model that we've

got. I'll be curious to see how I'm able to adapt to all of that as we move through

here…

Scott described his focus on self-improvement as centered on the question of what

is authentic and significant improvement in his building:

In terms of goals for myself, I think to concentrate more now on the real

improvement pieces rather than the superficial stuff that people always

expect…My expectation in myself now more is to make sure that we really talk

about stuff that's going to improve instruction, delivery of instruction and not get

mired in that superficial thing. You get a group of the teachers together and you let one person introduce some nonsensical thing like cellphones and for the next hour, people will talk about cellphones and the hour will have passed and there will be nothing about improvement of instruction. I think that is not unique to this school… I think that's any school. I think that's human nature and I think it's probably true in any business that people love to talk about trivial things that they can make rules for because it's easier than looking at what's going to improve the function of our entity. That's the challenge. That's for me to maintain that focus on real improvement.

In addition to the emphasis on continuous improvement and growth in their own professional practice, principals also discussed how the expectation for continuous improvement was present in their schools and districts.

Tom noted that although his district boasted some of the highest standardized test scores in the area, there was an ongoing expectation for change and improvement.

I think that one of the mantras, ongoing mantras of the district here is that we never rest on our laurels. I think there has been a ready willingness … I shouldn't say that. When I came, there certainly wasn't. The district I think has always had the interest of continuous improvement. When I came there were staff that were completely resistant to that idea and were much more of the mentality "if it ain't broke, then don't fix it." That's really fallen by the wayside. I think now that again is part of the culture, that we should always be looking for ways to improve no matter how much success we may experience. It's not that folks don't have that inclination, it's more of a matter of do folks have the strength and the energy

to continue down that path? That's the bigger challenge now…you always have to monitor the extent to which you have your foot on the accelerator, and right now I'm in slowdown mode because I really feel like staff are feeling less capable of carrying the load…I think a lot of times you don't necessarily think that this latest idea that seems great and worth pursuing is going to be problematic, but it's potentially the straw that's going to break the camel's back. Our math department of late is just ready to collapse. I have a number of perfectionist personalities there…so you can be to some extent a victim of your own improvement, continuous improvement mentality. It's hard to manage that in today's climate.

Paul described the direction he would like to take his school as part of the continuous improvement work he was engaged in:

I'd like for us to take that next step as a school. I think we've been hovering in that really good range and I'd like for us to take that next step but I don't know if we'll ever get there. As you know, part of it is the clientele that you serve…but it would be nice to just take that next jump. We're at that 23.8 to 24.2 range of ACTs. It'd be cool to get to that 25 spot, but I can remember my varsity football coach asking me a couple years, "So then if we get to a 25 composite on the ACT are we done then and are you satisfied?" and I said, "Well, let me ask you this. If you get a state championship are you done? Is that it? You want just the one?" I think the tendency is to be greedy but that's really it is what can you do to take those little incremental steps to the top and that's going to be nothing significant…It was cool this year to have the highest ACT in school history but that lasts for 15 minutes and then you're on to something else…What motivates

me and what encourages me is just that it feels like it's a little better today than it was yesterday.

Instructional Leadership

The shift toward being first and foremost an instructional leader in their schools was also identified as an ongoing but welcome challenge for the principals, especially as they faced the ongoing challenge of identifying and concentrating on which of their multiple roles wais most important.

Dennis identified the emphasis placed on the expectations for instructional leadership expected in the principals and associate principals in his district:

> In recent years we've had a change to being an instructional leader more so than just managing the building. That is an area where I continue to have to grow – that was a challenge…I think that the biggest change in expectations has been in the role of instructional leadership where building level principals and associate principals still have the responsibility for the management tasks, student discipline, teacher evaluation, meetings, clubs – all the day to day things. The piece that has grown greatly is helping teachers become better teachers, recognizing good teaching, helping to increase the learning of students. It is now classified as instructional leadership, and that is probably the largest part. The biggest expectation I feel is growing the staff as teacher leaders and their teaching influence in the learning. Really, it's a change towards learning being the focus in the classroom and flipping that responsibility on the teachers.

For Scott, instructional leadership came with making and keeping a commitment for the administrative team to be in every teacher's classroom at least once during a term.

This was a change of practice for the building's administrative team, one they took seriously:

> We made a commitment and this is one of the areas that was green [meeting the standard] on our nine-week update, is administrative team; we will be in every teacher's class every term. For at least a walkthrough. Every teacher who teaches a class in this building, if they only teach one class a day; I was in their classroom anywhere from 5 to 10 minutes, first term, outside any evaluation process, just to be out there. …it's one thing to say, "We'll be more visible this year," it's another thing to say, "We'll be in every classroom every term, and we are going to report out statistically how close we are to making that goal.

Justin recalled how much his role has evolved in the 20 years he's been in his position, shifting from that of disciplinarian and teacher evaluator to one of instructional leader. However, he expressed concern that external political forces were diminishing the role of local school boards, superintendents and principals to determine the direction in which they're leading:

> It's clearly as changed over the years because it evolved a lot in 20 years that I've been here. I remember when I first came here, I virtually just did discipline. That's what my job was. Discipline and teacher evaluation and that was it. When I first came here, we weren't sitting on the interviews, we weren't doing anything with curriculum and we didn't even do budgets. I didn't do budgets when I was first here…a business manager for the high school…he did the budgets. Basically, I was told, "Here is your money for office of the principal. This is what you get for supplies and everything else." That was it. We're much more

involved with that now…It was very strange for me because I come from…a

school …where I was more involved in the interview process, I was more

involved in the budget process as an associate principal than I was here as a

principal and just because of the set up - that part has evolved dramatically.

The role of going from a manager to a leader has changed quite frankly to

the better, I think it is better. I am frightful of what's happening through the Act

10…they are taking some of the autonomy away. It's hard to be a leader when

you're not really leading the way … you're leading the way and someone is

telling you to lead. It's not like more being leaders anymore. It's like in the past,

we've been … [the superintendent] has been like the general, and we've been the

colonels. We're now moving down to the captains or the lieutenant range.

You've got the governor of who is the general, you've got the DPI who's the

colonel, you've got superintendents and curriculum colonels are the majors and

the captains and then you have the principals who are either the captains or the

lieutenants. We're not able to learn … when we're told how to lead.

Cultural Change

Principals in the study shared that because of the length of their tenure in

their positions, they had been able to lead what they termed cultural change in

their buildings, many times significant change that resulted in programs and

practices that put student learning at the forefront of the work of the building's

faculty. They concurred that making this type of change took time, and that they

would not have been able to do so in their first few years on the job.

Tom described a major change in building culture, from teacher-centered to student-centered during the time he was principal:

I think having been here long enough to make what I would call some second-order change, some cultural change. We've done some positive structural changes that I don't want to downplay, because I do think they've added value to our operation. I'm very pleased with the learning center program that we've developed through the years since I've been here. That, I think, affords struggling students a far greater degree of support than they had when I came. I think even bigger than that, when I came the focus of the school was what I would describe more so as a teacher centered focus. Now I would say it's a much more student centered focus. The fact is a large percentage of the staff that exists today didn't exist when I came. I really had the opportunity to hire folks that would fit the desired culture, becoming more student centered, becoming more collaborative in our approach. Team oriented, not individual teacher focused, has been a significant shift. The meeting I was just in, that was affirmed in terms of how much more together we are on curriculum, on instruction, on assessment. We kind of take it for granted now, but it surely was not always the case.

For Scott, an increasingly diverse student population was the impetus for examining and changing the culture in a building that for many years had served primarily middle to upper class White students and families:

I think the culture is much different than it was toward African-American kids a decade ago here, and I'm proud of that. Our largest minority group is Asian…they have a profound impact on the school in terms of scheduling, in

terms of the courses we offer, in terms of youth options, so our…largest minority

group is Asian and they're incredibly high-achieving. Then we've got a relatively

small number of African-American students who continue to lag behind the rest.

That's part of it. I think another part is … I challenged the staff about six years

ago, on their first day back, and we started a program that year, UPS partnered

with us. We brought in executives of color from UPS, they would come and

bring lunch, and they would meet with our minority kids, and any other kids and

any other kids who wanted to [discuss], "What do you need to be successful?"

One of the teachers started a group called Connects, with the idea, of trying to

make the kids feel more connected to the school. We don't even track that data

anymore, but within a year we had a much higher percentage of our African-

American kids participating in co-curriculars and sports than we had prior to those

efforts, and so I think a large part was just raising people's consciousness…

Ed related cultural changes in his building to significant efforts over the first four

years early in his career there to improving student behavior and providing consistency in

expectations and follow-through. For him, the change in culture took at least four years

to work through and permeated not only the academic day, but the co-curricular and

athletic events as well:

The culture of our building has shifted in two ways. Our student behavior is

exceptionally improved. I can tell that it's improved by detentions, by fights, by

suspensions, by expulsions, by problems that I'm faced to deal with. I know

coming in I was dealing with misbehavior and games. I was dealing with alcohol

use before or prior to games. I was dealing with issues at school. I was dealing

with fights in the cafeteria. I was dealing with inappropriate language all the time. Sitting in really contentious IEPs. That doesn't exist [now]. …we set very specific expectations and we held kids to them. We got a reputation for being present. We got a reputation for working for what was best for kids, and we also … and I think initial resistance, it's going to be awful if we do it this way. Kids don't know that it was awful. …we had just some profane cheering at sporting events. We just didn't tolerate … we kicked kids out of the game. Over time, we had two things happen. One, we were consistent in that expectation of our student body. They got that if you got kicked out twice, you weren't coming back. We saw success in some of our athletics that kids really wanted to be in those things. So that spiraled together very nicely and that changed and then the nice thing about school, and difficult thing about school, is you roll over 25 percent of your population in a year. You make it … you work hard at it for four years and you've got a whole group of kids that don't know any other way of it occurring. …well, it took us three, four years … two, three years to really get a difference, because freshman were just going to follow along, they really don't know what's going on. We made a big change in what's happening. Now…we've had no problems with that to the point that…it's not even an issue I have to worry about. Because you know, you work hard on it and it moves away. That cultural change.

Jason shared that he was most proud of "creating more of an academic environment with my staff", helping them work with students who had different needs than students in previous years. For him this represented a change to a more academic culture in his building:

Honestly, I think the thing I am most proud of is creating more of an academic environment with my staff. My predecessor would have said to you, 'I love everything about being a high school principal but the academics.' She would talk about that and she loved the You rah, rah, the assemblies and the dances, the games, all of that kind of stuff, but when it came to academics she truthfully said, 'It's not what I'm in it for. It's not my forte.' I came in and kind of a bull in the china shop, made sure that everybody understood that that's going to be the focus and the other stuff is secondary. For the most part, you can definitely see people are more concerned, in a good way, about what they're doing in classrooms. There definitely was some push back, i.e., "Now you're concerned about what I am doing in my classroom? Now you're going to… now lessons plans this and assessments that? You actually read lesson plans and you actually look at final exams, why do you care?" …I would definitely say there is much more of an academic atmosphere in the building, in that respect. I think we, "we" meaning myself and the two associate principals I've worked with, are making definite headway with people along the lines of these kids are different and they need to be treated differently in a manner that is effective for them as students, not necessarily always holding to this sanctity of the school.

Socioeconomic Factors in the School and Community

Principals participating in this study worked in schools with varying socioeconomic factors present in the school and community. Some worked in schools in which as few as 3% of the student body received free or reduced lunch; others were in schools in which students who were economically disadvantaged represented 48% of the

school population. Regardless of the socioeconomic status of the student body, many

principals reported challenges that arose from that status. For some it led them to

consider leaving their position.

For Dennis, changing demographics in the community and school posed issues of

access to a variety of courses for all students:

> You know, I think we have a hard time getting an accurate grip on where we are
>
> economically in our community. More and more students are getting some level
>
> of assistance free and reduced lunch. There are still a lot of families that have a
>
> great deal of pride; so, I don't think we have an accurate view on where our
>
> students and their families are. There's been some pretty tough economic times
>
> lately, but, so, I don't see that, you know, it's what our community is. It's
>
> everywhere, and I don't see that as being a challenge necessarily. Regardless of
>
> what is going on financially, I think our students when supported can come here
>
> and learn. There has been poverty all around for as long as, probably all the back
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> to where I was in school. It is our largest group. They tend to be performing
>
> better than students with disabilities or minority populations. Because I think that
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> what we're finding is that families may have economic troubles, but it's more
>
> widespread. It can hit almost anybody. Because of a changing job market,
>
> because of just the economy, so, some of our …some people that normally you
>
> would think wouldn't have financial problems, it does. More so than ever it's a
>
> hidden group, I think. The socioeconomic piece is a hidden group where it's hard
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> … you'd be hard pressed to walk around and say which four out of 10 kids are
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> getting free or reduced. Or have some level of poverty, or need some level of

assistance, or fee waivers or whatever it is …it's not a guaranteed indicator that their academic performance is going to be lower. It just means that there are some other challenges that they have outside of school. I think it's just probably one of those. I think from time to time there are challenges from a school-based fee type of thing where we want to give students an opportunity to be in all that they want. And there are some courses that have course fees that go along with them…trying to find a way to still support those is a bit of a challenge fiscally for a school. We have money for students to support them through that…

While Frank stated that he rarely thought about socioeconomic factors in his principalship, he too arranged for students who presented needs to have them taken care of:

On any given day I don't even know that it comes into my consciousness. I don't spend a lot of time thinking about 'Is this a rich kid or a poor kid? Is this an advantaged kid or a disadvantaged kid?' unless they don't have something that they need and then we just do it. I don't care if it's a rich community or a poor community, in fact this one is both, that doesn't play a large role for me.

For some principals, the socioeconomic status of the community and therefore the families in the school, posed significant issues. Most often this emerged in interactions with parents.

For Justin, this posed enough of an issue for him to consider leaving the position he loved:

That quite frankly sometimes is something that would have been tempting for me to leave. I didn't grow up in this kind of school. I went to a real school.   … my

mom didn't work and my dad was a blue collar person. It's hard when you have kids who come from privilege and families that come from privilege. When they snap their fingers they expect that you're going to jump and do exactly as they say…I'm clearly involved with that a lot because it ends up coming on my doorstep a lot. The teachers will deal with it and then kick it up to me or the parent will kick it or take it to the next level ... although quite frankly often times they go right over my head and go straight to the superintendent. …There are nice, big half billion dollar houses out here…we've evolved from a rural to suburban setting, a fairly wealthy suburban community. …The money is nice and there are nice facilities, nice equipment and things of that nature where other schools don't [have them]. The expectation from all these parents, they have an expectation that they can call you at home any time and you're there for them. That you're their employee, we pay your salary therefore when I call you should answer because that's expectation they have in their workplace. They are the boss and they might be calling one of their employees at seven o'clock at night for something and they expect them to be there for them. I understand that. That is a problem and that is one that quite frankly has certainly crossed my mind to go someplace else because …that's not me. It's harder for me to relate to some of that sometimes.

Ed, too, identified parental demands and expectations for him as elevated in his district, a change from some of the other districts he worked in. He attributed this to the changing socioeconomic picture in his district:

I've worked in a lot of different schools. …I've worked in private schools in small towns, private schools in suburban communities, high schools in poor areas of the state ...I've found kids are kids. I mean, I really didn't have significant differences in the students I was dealing with in those buildings as far as interpersonal relationships…the parent issues I have here are different than the parent issues I had in [my other districts]. I am finding that some parents are more demanding now as to what their expectation. … I would group the parents that annoy me into one socio-economic group. Into an "I'm better than you" type group because they're of a socioeconomic or political position that they might take… So that that has given me pause, thinking maybe a different location might be something to consider. It's a minority of parents, so it kind of depends on the day. But yeah, there's certainly an aspect of that in what I'm doing. I think it is… it's the parents that I find exasperating are the parents of what would be an upper and middle class…parent who has an attitude to what they're trying to do…sometimes… I think another fresh face saying the same things I'm saying might not be a problem for them.

Scott viewed the impact of community socioeconomics on his role as high school principal as a complicated issue, one that made accomplishing some things easier and served as a challenge in other areas:

That's a very complicated question. The socio-economics of the community have a profound impact….in some regards it makes the job easier on a day-to-day level, because the vast majority of kids here understand that they need to do well in school if they want to maintain the standard of living to which they've become

accustomed. With that said, we've been a Title I school for the last three years...

…Last year I think 12.9 percent of our kids qualified for free lunch, so the

demographics are changing. That's more than double what it was a decade ago,

so the demographics, especially this side of town because we don't have own

growth, are changing. We have more [students enrolled in] Special Ed, we have

more poverty, we have more English Language learners on this side of town.

That's going to have a profound effect in terms of … to maintain the image of

[the school] that exists in the people within the community's eyes, as the older of

the two high schools. I think we are going to have to run faster sometimes than

our counterparts…to maintain the same speed, because there's that demographic

shift. I think there's a challenge that started and it's going to continue to loom; it's

not going to decrease on this side of town, it will probably spread to that side of

town eventually as well. Plus if the economy improves profoundly, but the socio-

economics of this community permeate almost everything. The fact that we are

going to have a baseball diamond next year and instead of playing at the park

we'll play here is made possible because an anonymous parent donated a-quarter-

of-a-million dollars to make it happen. That doesn't happen everywhere, but it

happens here…the high-end here is really high, and people on the high-end of the

socio-economic spectrum have expectations in terms of how they'll be treated and

how they'll be listened to, and that has an impact on everything we do politically.

Brad connected the changing socioeconomic nature of the school population to

the need to adjust the instructional program in the school in both basic academic literacy

and social skills:

I think we're now a bit north of 40 percent free and reduced lunch qualifiers. We tend to get under-reporting at the high school level, because as kids hit 16, 17, 18 they don't necessarily want to broadcast, or their home situations aren't very stable, and so they're not as likely to fill out that form. It's increased our need for behavioral intervention… It's part of the reason why we think we've committed to character education initiative, we are teaching manners again…We do pretty aggressive harassment, sexual abuse, sexual violence prevention training at the ninth grade and earlier now, and not that any community is free of that, but certainly the more challenge and/or dysfunctional some kids' home experiences are the less likely they are to maybe understand appropriate boundaries and all that kind of good stuff. I think there's a strong correlation between socio-economic challenges and the amount of reading, and the amount of prior vocabulary kids have. Again, the focus on literacy has been a huge move for us because it really forces us to break down what really has the kids attained before they got here. In high schools we haven't been very good at doing that over the years, I don't think. I personally, it took me a while to figure it out, I regret that I didn't dial into that earlier. I wish that I had figured out by 2005 or '06, instead of 2008, that we've got the handle around literacy, but in doing that fundamental literacy diagnosis and intervention you're in touch with what the kids have been lacking and those are often highly correlated to the same kinds of effects that kids have when they grow up in poverty, or at least instability.

Summary

This chapter presented four major themes and 17 sub-themes that emerged from interviews with ten high school principals in the southeastern region of a Midwestern state who have served in their positions for at least five years. These themes and sub-themes, presented using the words of the principals, helped to provide answers to the research questions centering on factors, both institutional and personal, that supported these principals' tenure in their positions. The four major themes identified through the interviews were relationships, balance, fit, and change.

The first theme, relationships, centered on how the principals have developed relationships with faculty and staff, district office personnel, the school board, parents, community, and students and how these relationships affected their continued work in their districts. Within the broad theme of relationships, collaboration and trust emerged as critical factors in the ongoing work of the principals and included direction and autonomy from the district office, and mentoring teachers, teacher leaders and assistant/associate principals.

The second theme, balance, revealed how challenging attaining balance in the high school principalship is for all these principals. Several stated that they found this a never ending quest and that they will never be able to adequately balance the competing demands of work and family. Within the theme of balance, challenges were identified in juggling the multiple expectations of the job, balancing the needs of their job roles and their family needs, maintaining their own personal health, and responses to managing the time requirements of the position. Principals shared the strategies they have developed to attain some type of balance, including some that work only for them.

Fit, the third theme, referred to the match that the principal felt with the school district and the community. It also included the principals' perception of the fit of their current compensation with their needs and the requirements of the position. For the principals in this study, all shared that they found the fit with the district and community to be good, and all felt they were fairly compensated for the work they do.

Change, the fourth theme, was identified by all principals in the study as an ongoing factor in their positions. No matter the demographic differences in their districts, principals in this study shared a number of common challenges related to change during their interviews. While the specific challenges identified within each category were varied, each of the principals identified change as a challenge. Common challenges related to change identified were: (a) student achievement, (b) the quest for continuous improvement, (c) the shift for principals from serving as a manager to being the instructional leader in the school, (d) changing the culture of the school, and (e) socioeconomic factors in the school and community.

Chapter Six will present key findings from the study, discussion of the findings and implications and recommendations for practice and future research.

Chapter Six

Key Findings, Discussion and Recommendations

This chapter is organized in seven sections. The first section provides an overview of the study and the second summarizes the findings. The third revisits the primary research questions posed by the study and presents the key findings. The fourth section presents a discussion of the findings, and the fifth discusses the limitations of the study. The sixth section discusses the implications for practice for school districts, superintendents, institutions of higher education and principals, while the seventh section identifies areas for potential additional research.

Overview of the Study

Research in the area of educational administration confirms that there is no question that the leadership of school principals is essential to the successful operation of schools (Protheroe, 2005; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, 1992, Boyd, 1992, Hargreaves & Fink, 2004; Hull, 2012). Principals are responsible for ensuring that their schools are orderly, safe and have a clear focus to support student learning. They are also responsible for increasing student achievement, supporting and enhancing teacher performance, keeping parents satisfied with their children's education, and carrying out the directives of the school district and board. They are expected to do this in an environment in which funding for schools is decreasing in many places, where political agendas for education at the state and local levels seem to direct their work rather than the professional knowledge and skill of the educators charged with carrying them out. These forces affect all principals, but none more so than high school principals, whose schools are often the center of the community. It is no wonder that recent research has found that high school principals are leaving their positions after short

amounts of time on the job (Fuller & Young, 2009). Recent studies have found that only about half of newly hired high school principals remained in their positions after five years (Burkhauer et al, 2012; Fuller & Young, 2009; Gates, Ringel et al, 2006; Gates, Guarino et al, 2004; Ringel et al, 2004; RAND, 2004, Weinstein et al, 2009). Yet there are some high school principals who successfully remain in their positions for long periods of time. Why do some principals remain in the positions for long periods of time while many others leave after only a few years in their positions? What institutional and personal and institutional characteristics support these principals in their longevity? What can we learn from the experience of these principals that will help other principals, school districts and superintendents retain principals to lead their high schools? These were the primary questions addressed in this study.

The impetus for this study came from an article I read while a high school principal, describing how the majority of high school principals in Texas left their positions after a short time on the job. This led me to reflect on the turnover in principals in our school's athletic conference and wonder about the situation in our geographic area of the state. While our athletic conference included several schools with long-term principals, I wondered if this was true in other schools in our region and whether there were any common characteristics or factors that influenced high school principals to remain in their positions. I wondered why in a career where mobility is the norm, they chose to stay. The existing research identified factors that correlated with principals' leaving behavior; it did not address why they stayed.

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors, both institutional and personal, that contributed to the longevity of high school principals in their positions for

longer periods of time than is generally seen today. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1) What institutional factors are present that contribute to lengthy tenure for a high school principal?

2) What personal characteristics are present in high school principals with lengthy tenure in their positions?

3) How do principals with lengthy tenure view their relationships with staff, parents, students, the district office, the community, other administrators and the school board?

Criteria for inclusion in the study required that a principal had served in the current position for at least five years. The participants interviewed for this study served from 8 to 23 years in their positions, much longer than more than many high school principals today. For eight of the principals, the position in which they served during the study was their first principalship; two led one other building prior to coming to the school they served during the study. Participation in the study was limited to principals of traditional four-year, comprehensive public high schools; principals of private and parochial, charter, or alternative schools were not included in the study. Out of 14 public high school principals in the region who met the criteria for the study, ten agreed to participate in the study and formed the sample population.

Interview protocols were based upon issues and factors located in the research on the mobility of high school principals. While most literature focused on factors that led to principals, especially high school principals, leaving their positions, the same factors that cause principals to leave could be viewed conversely when seeking answers to why

principals stay. Interview questions were worded neutrally so that the responses clearly represented the voice of the participants.

This study extends previous research regarding the tenure of principals, primarily research that examined the large scale data sets from several states and centered on factors that led principals to leave their positions after relatively short periods of time. This qualitative study adds to the research on principal tenure by focusing on the lives of the principals, sharing the experiences of high school principals who have remained in their positions for long periods of time, and identifying the factors and circumstances that have supported them in doing so.

Summary of Themes and Sub-themes

While the principals in the study lead schools that have varying demographic profiles, including racial and ethnic composition, percentage of students with disabilities, and percentage of students considered economically disadvantaged, several themes emerged across districts as important to the longevity of these principals in their current positions. Following two hour-long interviews with ten high school principals representing comprehensive high schools in a Regional Education Agency in a Midwestern state, 4 major themes and 17 related sub-themes emerged from the data. The four major themes are represented in Figure 6.1; the major themes with subthemes are found in Figure 6.2.
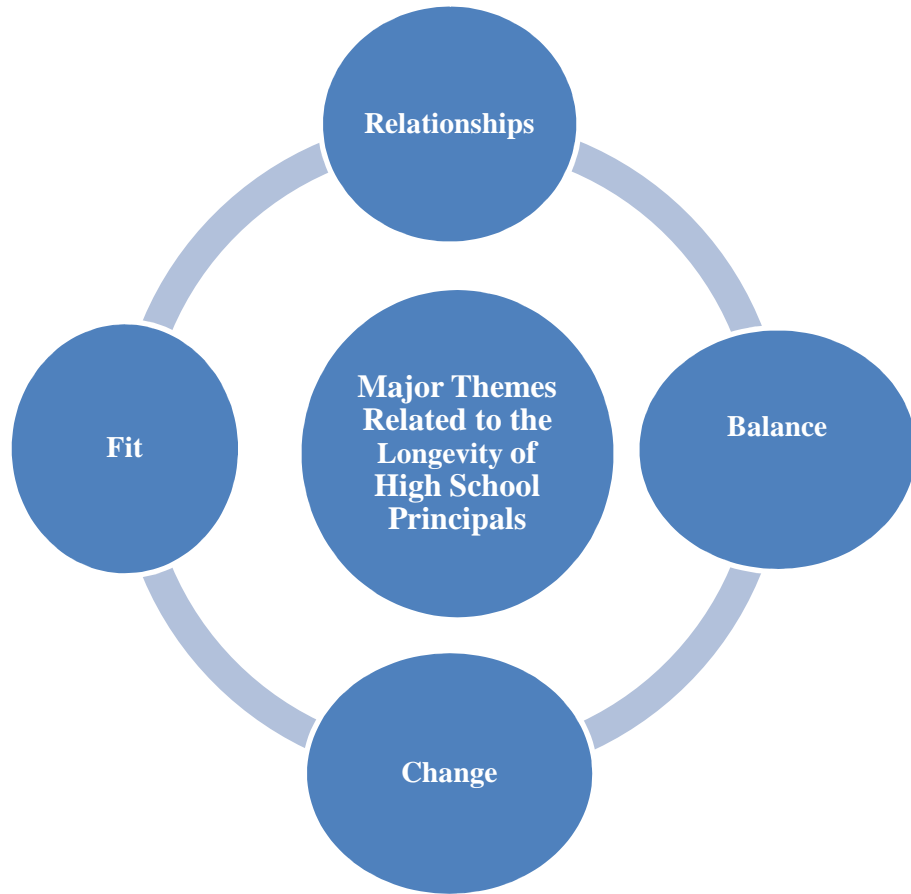
Figure 6.1 Major themes

Theme One Relationships	Theme Two Balance	Theme Three Fit	Theme Four Change
With faculty and staff	Balancing the demands of the job	With the school district and within the community	Continuous improvement
With the district administrative team	Balancing job and family life	Compensation	Instructional leadership
With the school board	Personal health		Changing culture
With parents, community and students	Responses to balancing the requirements of the high school principalship		Student achievement
Collaboration			Socioeconomic factors
Trust			

Figure 6.2 Themes with Sub-themes

Key Findings

Analysis of the data from the interviews identified both institutional and personal factors that affected the longevity of the principals in their roles as high school principals. Institutional factors included having a clear mission for the district in place, maintaining high expectations for all students, autonomy for the principal in hiring and developing staff members, support for innovation and change, and fair compensation. Personal characteristics identified were moral purpose, an optimistic attitude, impatience with the status quo, viewing themselves as a facilitator of teaching and learning, and belief and action in distributing leadership.

Institutional Factors Affecting Principal Longevity

School districts and superintendents play an important role in a district's ability to attract and retain high school principals. Principals in this study shared a number of characteristics present in their districts that are supported by research in the area of principal retention. These characteristics included the presence of a coherent education mission in the district, high expectations for students across the district and within the school, the ability to hire and discipline staff, the responsibility for teacher development, and ongoing support and accountability for innovation and change from the school board and superintendent (Teske and Schneider, 1999). In addition, principals described their districts as ones in which the balance between the direction given them and the autonomy to carry out the direction were in balance. They felt that the district provided them the direction to carry out the educational mission of the district and the autonomy to do so in a manner that made the most sense for their faculty and their schools. For some, this balance of direction and autonomy was present in the district culture at the time of hire;

for others, it has developed over a number of years on the job, sometimes through a change in the school board or superintendent.

Clear mission for the district. The presence of a clearly defined and communicated educational mission in a school district has been identified as another critical aspect of successful schools (Teske & Schneider, 1999). The principals in this study agreed that having a clear vision and mission in a school district was important and most participants cited a clear vision and mission as present in their districts. Those who identified a clear mission in their district felt that it provided a framework that they could use in their buildings to set expectations for staff members and students and follow through with the training and support necessary to fulfill the mission. They also felt that a district-wide mission was important to connect the schools in the district and provide cohesion in staff development. Several principals shared that the work the administrative team has undertaken to fulfill the mission in their districts occured across schools at different levels, improving both results for students and teamwork and collaboration among administrators.

High expectations for students. High expectations for student achievement have been noted as a one of the practices of principals that positively affects student learning and achievement (Cotton, 2003, Leithwood, Seashore Lewis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). All principals in the study referenced increased expectations for student achievement in their districts. For most, the impetus for the increased expectation came from a core belief they personally held. These principals found their personal belief supported by increased scrutiny from the state and the expectations of the parents and community, the school board, and the superintendent.

Of the five participants working in first ring suburbs, two reported that the impetus for higher student achievement came primarily from them rather than from external sources. These were districts with the highest percent of students considered economically disadvantaged, and among the higher percentages of students with disabilities and members of minority groups. They both expressed the wish that there were more of an effort from parents and community to increase the academic expectations for students in their schools and found that fighting low expectations was an ongoing struggle. For one, the struggle was not just with the parents and community, but also with some long-term teachers who were having difficulty with the changing population.

The four principals in third tier suburbs, areas that have experienced a shift from being more small town or rural school districts to more suburban districts with the development of more upper end housing, shared that while they enjoyed a great deal of parent and community support for increased standards, some tension existed between the expectations from those who live in the original towns and villages and those who inhabit the new high-end subdivisions. According to these principals, those whose families have come through the system were more likely to support the work of the school district and its expectations for students, while the newcomers were more likely to question and challenge the status quo and apply pressure for a shift to higher expectations and opportunities for their children.

Almost all principals cited the achievement of groups of students who have disabilities or are members of a minority group as a concern in their buildings. Several referred to the achievement gap as their biggest concern about student achievement,

especially the gap between students of different racial groups. At least one, however, wondered about the will of the district to tackle this issue given the fact that the number of students included was small, and that the majority students in the district and school consistently performed well above state averages on achievement tests.

While all principals in this study work in districts in which high expectations for students is the norm, it must be noted that all of the principals led suburban schools. Even though these schools have all experienced some increased socioeconomic and racial diversity in their student populations, none face the types of challenges that confront urban schools with much higher rates of poverty.

Autonomy to hire and develop staff. The ability of principals to control staff hiring and development practices has been cited in several studies (Teske and Schneider, 1999; Slater, 2011; Portin, 2004) as a critical element in the development of successful schools. According to Teske and Schneider, "This allows teachers to develop professionally and frees the principal from many of the time-consuming tasks of dealing with staff who do not or cannot work together" (p.23). Principals in this study all indicated that they had been afforded a great deal of latitude in hiring faculty and staff for their buildings. They cited the number of faculty and staff members they have been able to hire during their years on the job and how significant of a benefit this has been in the development of the school culture that they desired. When asked of what they were most proud, the quality of the staff that they have put together through their hiring efforts was cited more than any other accomplishment.

Along with hiring staff members, principals in this study viewed teacher development as an area in which they maintained primarily responsibility. The principals

in this group shared their respect for teachers and the work they do, recognizing that the best teacher development they have seen is the work the teachers do with each other. They viewed their role as facilitating resources so teachers could have the time needed to work together and providing direction for the academic program so that it was aligned to the district's expectation. This included working with the district office to coordinate efforts and implementing district initiatives while maintaining a high level of sensitivity to how much the teaching staff could handle at once. All principals in the study shared the development of teacher leadership as a growing movement in their schools. They discussed how they have purposefully carved out time and resources to support the work of curriculum design that is done by teachers, and how they have worked together to effectively utilize student data to improve instruction.

Support and accountability for innovation and change. All principals interviewed discussed the changes that have occurred in their schools since they came to their current positions. For some, structural changes, such as changing the schedule for students along with the number of courses taught by teachers, were mentioned as substantive changes in their schools. For others, change in the way they went about their jobs, including a strong emphasis on instructional leadership, was a significant change for them in their role. Also mentioned was the increased amount of and use of student achievement data for both accountability and goal setting purposes. Technology was mentioned as a major innovative tool in the work of the principals, with some principals questioning if the rapid and widespread growth of technology is always a good thing. Several principals felt the pressure to expand the use of technology in their school due to its significant presence in the elementary and middle school. Some wondered if change

for change's sake was the expectation relative to technology and questioned if it always provided the best benefit for the students.

What was universally important to these principals was that they were held accountable for the changes that were expected by the school board and the superintendent, that they were being held accountable for things that they held direct influence over, and that they received support for moving forward with change when it generated apprehension for staff members or parents and community members. Overall, the principals interviewed indicated that they were being held more accountable for the right things and that they did receive the support needed to move forward with a change effort confident that would be successful.

Fair compensation. Park and Word (2012), in a study of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation of public and nonprofit managers, reviewed research in this area, finding

Research has consistently demonstrated that…public sector employees are less likely to be interested in extrinsic rewards and more likely to value intrinsic rewards… Public employees tend to be more affectively committed (i.e. committed to the organization's culture and values) and highly motivated by a concern for the community and a desire to serve the public interest or intrinsic values…

This study supports Park and Word's findings about the motivation of the public sector principals in this study. While some studies of principal mobility cited compensation as a reason given for principal movement to other positions (Fuller & Young, 2009; Baker, Punswick & Belt, 2010; Long, 2000), every principal in this study felt that their compensation was fair for the job they were doing. And while three cited

the potential for increased compensation as a factor in initially pursuing an administrative career, only one indicated that he came to his present job because it provided a higher level of compensation than he received in his prior principalship. These principals felt that while compensation was important and they wanted fair compensation for their work, it was not the primary motivator for remaining in their positions. While most shared that they felt educators in general and principals specifically are not paid what they are worth for the work they do, they accepted this as something that they knew when they entered the profession. They all stated that their school districts fairly compensated them for their work within the ability of the district in which they were currently working, and that their current compensation was not a driving force for them to seek other positions at this time.

Personal Factors Affecting Principal Longevity

In addition to the institutional factors affecting principal longevity that emerged from the data, several personal factors were found in common among the participants. They included of moral purpose, impatience with the status quo, a view of self as the facilitator of teaching and learning, both belief in and action toward distributing leadership in the organization, and family support.

Moral purpose. Fullan (2001) defines moral purpose as "acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers and society as a whole…"(p. 3). Principals in this study view their work through a lens of moral purpose. Whether they stated their desire to "shepherd the building through all the changes" so that teachers could focus on instruction (Scott), supported the startup of a Gay-Straight Alliance at the school so that the lives of students could be improved (Ed),

struggled with a way to find what he felt were long overdue pay raises for the teachers (Frank), or to be able to "say the place is a better spot because of the work you did when you were there" (Paul), the principals interviewed all shared and clearly communicated a sense of moral purpose in their approach to their work.

Optimistic attitude. The principals in this study shared a positive attitude and commitment to their work, including continuous improvement of their own knowledge, skills and abilities. While all acknowledged the challenges that come with their positions, their responses to interview questions focused on the positive aspects of what they do. They approached their work from a "glass half full" perspective, realizing that no workplace is perfect and that the challenges they know they have are the challenges they choose to pursue. Several stated they could not envision working elsewhere, sometimes because their families were so much a part of the school and community that it didn't make sense to them to contemplate changing, others because they had made clear commitment to the work they are doing and know that work is far from over.

Impatience with the status quo. Teske and Schneider (1999) cite their own work in the study of public entrepreneurs, those who have "revitalized and transformed local governments" in their discussion of successful principals in New York. They define an effective transformational leader as one who is "alert to opportunity and unfulfilled needs" (p. 22), able to take the risks necessary to pursue a course of action without knowing the consequences in advance, and "able to assemble and coordinate teams or networks of individuals…that have the talents and resources necessary to undertake change" (p. 22). As with the principals that Teske and Schneider studied, the principals who participated in this study also "took risks, seized opportunities, and worked to

establish a cohesive like-minded network of parents, teachers and staff" (p. 22). The primary focus of change for these principals took the form of initiatives to improve instruction in their schools in order to improve the achievement of the students.

Facilitator of teaching and learning. More than ten years ago, Gerald Turozzi (2001), then executive director of the National Association of Secondary School recognized the skills and mindset that principals would need to develop to take on the challenges of leading schools in a changing environment. He cited the need for principals to focus on leadership and vision and to become a facilitator of the teaching and learning process, adapting to changing circumstances and with a commitment to "lead the accountability parade, not follow" (p. 438). The principals in this study view of their role as facilitator of teaching and learning as a primary focus of their work, recognizing that this is the area in which they needed to devote their time and developing strategies to ensure that this happens. These principals maintained the view that improved instruction is their ultimate goal, one that they would be held accountable for. While they recognized that the managerial aspects of tending to a high school must be attended to, they have developed ways to ensure that teaching and student learning are at the forefront of what they do each day. One way that many have done this is by managing their schedules to take care of many of the paperwork tasks during the early morning or evening when teachers and students are not in the building.

Belief and action in distributing leadership. These principals recognized that teacher leadership is the key to improved classroom instruction and ultimately student achievement. They also recognized that they don't hold all the answers, that teachers have the expertise and skill to make instructional decisions, and took measures to initiate

and support teacher leadership efforts in their buildings. This sometimes took the form of the development of building leadership teams (Dennis), of support for professional development and curriculum based work outside of the school day and school year (Sam) or simply meeting with teacher teams in which instruction was discussed in a way not previously seen in the school (Jason). As they valued the direction and autonomy they received from their school district, these principals in turn provided that same direction and support to their faculty and staff, providing direction for the improvement of the educational program and autonomy for teachers to develop and implement ways to undertake the improvement efforts.   These principals also maintained a close view of the work of the instructional staff and, therefore, knew when to push and when to lie back, accomplishing more in the long term.

The principals in this study also valued the role and contributions of their assistant/associate principals and took steps to structure their roles in a manner that developed them as instructional leaders rather than attendance and behavior monitors. This sometimes took the form of restructuring the administrative team to differentiate roles by having a designated dean of students responsible for student attendance and behavior issues, freeing up the assistant/associate principal to focus on instructional issues and teacher evaluation. Principals also assigned their assistants/associates to lead specific projects such as the school's Response to Intervention (RTI), Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS), student data tracking and analysis, and building schedule, giving them the responsibility to carry out the initiative, the autonomy to do so, and the accountability to the principal for the results. Eight of the principals in this study all male, work with 9 female assistant/associate principals. Seven principals work in

schools in which one of their assistant/associate principals is a female; in one school, both assistant/associate principals are females. Those that commented on their work with their female associates all spoke of their appreciation for the different perspective that these women brought to their positions and the administrative team, acknowledging that they have different relationships with the building staff than the principal, and the combination of the principal's relationship and the assistant/associate's made a stronger administrative team. The principals in this study appreciated the value that diversity brings to the administrative team in the school.

Family support. Principals interviewed cited the support of their families in their ability to stay in their positions as long as they have. All participants in the study are married, most for the first time. One participant discussed his divorce, not attributing it to the job, but feeling that the pressures of the job didn't help the relationship. He is committed to not having that happen again and has shifted his response to activities at the school as a result. Several discussed the role that their wives took in reminding them of their family life when the pressure of the job appeared to take a disproportionate amount of their time. Of the principals in the study, four reside in the community in which they work, three do not live in the community but reside in close proximity to their schools and three live in another part of the metropolitan area from their schools. Regardless of the location of their family, most of the principals described ways in which they have integrated their family life into their work life by bringing children, especially when they were young, and sometimes spouses to events at the school, recognizing that visibility was an expectation of their districts, and striving to balance their lives between school and family. In addition, these principals have developed strategies to help them balance

work and family life. One principal shared that at times that his wife and children come to school with a picnic dinner so they could all eat together before one of his evening activities; others described coming to work in the early hours of the morning, while still others return late at night to attend to the work that doesn't get done during the day. Three described how they've stepped away from attendance at every event, and have developed strategies to have the visibility that they know is required by the job without sacrificing their family life. The paradox that Scott identified, of the community expectation that the principal be a family person without time to be with their family is one that resonated throughout the conversations with these principals. Principals and their families approached this expectation in different ways. The four principals who resided in the community in which their school was located reported that their families were active participants in the school community as did one principal who lived within a fifteen minute drive of his school. For the other 5 principals who lived outside the district, family support was more indirect. Rather than being actively involved in the school community, family support centered around maintaining the family at home, understanding the expectations for the principal to be at school events. No matter what strategies the principals utilized to balance their work and home life expectations, it was clear that this was on their minds, and something that they went to great lengths to navigate.

Relationships

The importance of building and maintaining positive relationships in school leadership is well established in the literature. Relational skills have been identified as having a significantly larger impact on organizational performance as analytical skills do

(Reeves, 2002), are viewed by many as a key skill that principals need to have to successfully implement change in their schools (Teske and Schneider, 1999; Fullan, 2002), and seen as the foundation for an organization to flourish (Hoerr, 2005). Fullan (2001) stated:

> …we have found that the single factor common to every successful change initiative is that *relationships* improve. If relationships improve, things get better. If they remain the same or get worse, ground is lost. Thus leaders must be consummate relationship builders with diverse people and groups – especially with people different than themselves. Effective leaders constantly foster purposeful interaction and problem solving, and are wary of easy consensus. (p. 5)

Establishing and maintaining positive relationships were cited by all principals in the study as critical factors in their tenure in their positions. These principals recognized the importance of relationships and put significant time and effort into relationship building and care. They were clear to point out that positive relationships were not free of conflict, but that establishing and maintaining ongoing positive relationships with diverse groups, including the district office and school board, staff members, students and parents allowed them to successfully face challenges and tough discussions with these groups.

Of the groups with which high school principals interact with regularly, their relationships with the school board, superintendent and faculty and staff are the ones that most influence their tenure in their positions. One principal specifically mentioned changes in the membership of the school board as causing concern for his desire to

remain in his position, noting that the new board seemed to be taking away educational decisions from educators. Others cited appreciation for the direction their boards were taking, especially related to the educational direction for the district. The types of relationships that principals have with the school boards vary among the participants, but all are mediated to some extent by the superintendent, and all principals expressed appreciation for this. They described a variety of ways in which the interactions between the superintendent and school board affected their work. One principal cited coming to board meetings as part of the administrative team as a new practice he appreciated, since he had little contact with the board under his previous superintendent. Another described how he felt the formal interactions that he had with the board while presenting formal reports was beneficial to their relationship, but that he appreciated that the superintendent routinely handled interactions with board members that involved questions or concerns about building related matters. Four principals discussed the importance of the superintendent as a mediating force between them and the school board when children of board members were students in their buildings. When discussing relationships with their school boards, the majority of the principals felt that their current relationships with the board were positive and important, but they also indicated that this was subject to change as the board changes.

Relationships with the superintendent were mentioned by all principals as critical to their tenure in their positions. Overall, they reported strong and positive relationships with their current superintendent. Several noted that their current superintendent was not the person who hired them, but that they had a better relationship with the new superintendent than the one who did hire them. Relationships with current or prior

superintendents were mentioned frequently as a factor in the tenure of the principals. Participants felt that it was important that they were able discuss situations with their superintendents honestly, especially when they had a difference of opinion. They appreciated knowing where they stood on an issue. They also mentioned that they preferred a relationship in which they were told what was expected of them, held accountable for it and given the latitude to make it happen. Another area in which the superintendent-principal relationship was identified as important was in the support for change and innovation in their schools. Principals cited times that they took risks to accomplish their goals and received the support they needed to see it through. The fact that these principals who are change agents, have in some cases implemented changes that have significantly changed the educational program and/or climate in their school and have remained in their positions speaks to the strength and significance of a positive relationship between them and their superintendents. In fact, several principals acknowledged that they have pondered their own future should their current superintendent leave.

Finally, relationships with faculty and staff were cited as critical to their success in remaining in their positions for long periods of time. Some attributed this to the high percentage of the faculty that many of the principals interviewed were able to hire. As one principal indicated, hiring like-minded people who could carry out the direction the district and school were moving made his job so much easier. Others spoke of the friendships that had developed between them and some staff members over the years, and the challenges that sometimes pose. It was noted that developing and maintaining positive relationships with teachers from the beginning made the hard conversations

easier to have, especially about teacher performance, because a relationship of respect for both the individual and the mission of the school was the building block for the conversation.

Discussion

The schools led by principals in this study represented a range of demographics, district philosophies and locations. The principals included those of different ages, backgrounds, paths to the principalship, and plans for the future. These principals also differed in personality and style. Some were outgoing and demonstrative in their discussion; others were reserved and took a more reflective approach. However, they all shared some common philosophies and traits regarding their approach to their positions. They viewed their jobs as primarily facilitating the work of others, both teachers and students. They value the relationships that they've developed across populations. They expected and appreciated the accountability that came with their positions today. They liked change, and have been at the forefront of some major changes in practice within their districts. While principals in the most recent Met Life survey of school principals revealed that most principals feel their jobs have become too complex (Met Life 2013), these principals relished the complexity of their roles, commenting that it is often what drives them.

Information from the interviews suggests that these principals have remained in their positions for long periods of time for a variety of reasons, but that there are some institutional and personal factors that are common among the participants. The school districts in which these principals work have adopted and implemented clear educational missions that focus on student achievement and effective teaching as hallmarks of their

programs. School boards and superintendents entrust the hiring decisions for faculty and staff to the principals and hold them accountable for developing the people they hire. Superintendents follow through on the implementation of the mission, holding principals accountable for results and providing them the autonomy needed to accomplish the tasks. Research in the area of principal mobility and attrition has examined principal movement and identified several characteristics of organizations related to principal movement. These included low student achievement, high poverty rates of the student body (Fuller & Young, 2009; Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton & Ikemoto, 2012), the racial makeup of the student body, and the racial/ethnic background of the principal (Gates, Guarino, Santibanez, Brown, Ghosh-Dastidar & Chung, 2004). In addition, several studies identified relationships with the school board, superintendent and district as reasons for principals leaving their positions (Tennille, 2008; Evans, 2011; Johnson, 2005). Other studies point to compensation as a reason for seeking another position (Fuller & Young, 2009; Baker, Punswick & Belt, 2010).

This study supports previous studies as it represents the converse of the findings of the previous studies. While all of the districts the principals worked in have experienced changes in the socioeconomic and racial makeup of their schools over the past ten years, all maintain relatively high levels of student achievement and none have a student body that is primarily composed of low-income students. With the exception of one school, all the student bodies in the schools were predominantly white. In addition, the principals in this study reported positive relationships with their superintendents and school boards and feel they are being fairly compensated for their work.

Personally, the principals shared positive outlooks, genuine concern for the people they work with, both faculty and students, and were clear that student learning and achievement was their primary concern. They trusted the faculty they work with to carry out the direction they provided by distributing leadership across the school, held faculty and staff accountable for their teaching and their students' learning, worked with staff members to improve instruction through the use of data, took great pride in the staff that they hired and developed and the culture they were able to build, and always worked for continual improvement, in their schools and for themselves. These principals are positive, focused individuals.

Principal Longevity and Change

Change is the ever-present word in schools today. And principals are expected to lead the change process in their buildings. The participants in this study can be described as change agents in their schools, with some leading significant changes that resulted in schools that look very different from the ones they entered as first year principals. Others continue to lead their faculty and staff through the beginning stages of the change process. Research in leadership and school change tells us that change takes time, frequently defined as at least five to seven years (Boyd, 1992; Protheroe, 2005; Teske & Schneider, 1999; Fullan, 1991; Kotter, 1995). These principals have served in their positions long enough to effect some level of change in their organizations.

Fuller and Young (2009) found that "just over 50% of newly hired high school principals stay for three years and less than 30% stay for five years". If change takes a minimum of five to seven years and principals generally do not remain in their positions for more than three to five years, it is understandable why the changes in schools called

for today are not happening in many places. The principals in this study all served in

their positions for at least eight years. They led change in their schools. A look at the

factors that emerged from the study may help create an understanding of how these

factors work together to create an environment in which principals can take risks, make

changes, and remain in the positions for sufficient time for the changes to become part of

the school culture.

Getzels & Guba (as cited by Getzels, Lipham & Campbell, 1968) offer a view of

social systems theory that describes the fit between the needs and responsibilities of the

organization and the personal needs and dispositions of the individual. In this theory, a

close the fit between the needs of the organization and the needs of the individual leads to

both effectiveness for the organization and personal efficacy for the individual. They

identify the questions that they describe as the central issue in a social system, "What are

the dynamics of the interaction between the externally defined role expectations and the

internally given needs-dispositions?" (p. 83). The data from the study support the idea

that the principals interviewed found the balance in their school districts between the

priorities of the district and their personal needs and dispositions. Working in a situation

in which both sets of needs and priorities are in balance contributed to the principal's

longevity in their positions.

Relationships with superintendents and school boards were cited as positive

factors in the lives of the participants and provided the base for the development of trust

between the superintendent, the school board and the principal. These districts

maintained a clear educational mission and framework within which district personnel

worked. With trust an established factor in their relationship and a clear mission in place,

principals were afforded the autonomy needed to undertake change in their buildings. Most often, the hiring and development of staff members were areas in which autonomy was clear. Autonomy is an area that Teske and Schneider (199) identified as critical in the retention of principals.

Having the autonomy to hire and develop staff members provided principals with the ability to implement the district's educational mission with people in place who possessed the skills, abilities and mindsets necessary to do so. Data from the interviews suggest that the relationships, trust and autonomy described by the principals led to the development of a sense of confidence and competence that allowed them to continue to pursue the changes in their schools that continue today. In turn, the sense of confidence they held in their positions led them to begin distributing leadership to others in the building and supporting others in building their leadership capacity. Distributing leadership in the organization contributed to meeting the needs of the organization, getting the work done, and meeting the individual needs of teachers to share their skills and abilities. In addition, with leadership distributed throughout the school, the principal was able to define his role more distinctly than was previously possible, and devote his time to those things he found most critical. Without the day-to-day responsibility of leading all change in the building on his shoulders, the role of principal becomes more manageable and sustainable. It is reasonable to conclude that working in an environment in which the balance between organizational and personal needs was tight increased productivity and satisfaction and contributed to the tenure of the principals.

Benefits of Staying

Some principals interviewed discussed the idea that there was a shelf life on the high school principalship and that no one individual could be expected to do the job for extended periods of time, with seven to ten years cited as a reasonable tenure. Some research into the principalship supports the view that the job is too big for one person to handle (Muffs & Schmitz, 1999; Fuller & Young, 2009; Gray, 2001; Grubb & Flessas, 2006; Walker, 2009). Other participants talked about the fact that their longer tenure brought with it an opportunity to extend their leadership and attempt new things, things that they wouldn't have tried early on in their career in the building. Many of the principals interviewed shared that one of their major challenges was staying fresh in their jobs, not taking their position for granted. These principals also shared that distributing leadership among teachers and other faculty in the building contributed to their own growth, that they were learning from those they led and that this was a benefit to them. They felt that they had been in the position long enough to master the technical aspects of the job and could concentrate on broadening the leadership circles in their staff.

By distributing leadership and sharing responsibility, these long-term principals were able to step back from some of the day-to-day operations that they had been involved in their early work on the job. They were able to share the leadership for curriculum development, district initiatives, and co-curricular activities to others, helping others build and develop their skills and abilities, while learning themselves. This contributed to their sense of self efficacy and supported further institutional and personal growth.

Limitations of the Study

This study presents the viewpoints and experiences of 10 high school principals in a specific geographic area of a Midwestern state, sharing their perspectives on their tenure in their positions which is longer than most high school principals seen today. While the information gathered is valuable and provides insight into actions for school districts and superintendents to consider in their interactions with their high school principals, there are limitations to the study that must be taken into account when doing so. First, the sample size is small and the opinions and experiences of this group of high school principals cannot be generalized to a larger population. Second, the sample includes only principals of suburban high schools, all of whom are White males This was not the original intent of the researcher; however, of the 51 potential participants, only two urban high school principals and one female met the criteria of serving in their position for at least 5 years. The two urban principals did not respond to the researcher's request to participate and the female principal declined to participate Therefore, the context in which these principals work may not easily translate to action in settings of differing demographic makeup, different political circumstances or governance models.

Implications for Practice

Information gained from this study leads to recommendations for consideration by school officials, superintendents, principals, and institutions of higher education that prepare individuals to assume the role of principal. Those recommendations include:

For School Boards and Superintendents

- Given the fact that the literature supports the idea that substantive change takes between five to seven years to occur and most high school principals leave within their first five years on the job, school boards and superintendents should examine

and develop support systems to assist principals during their first five years on the job. Asking principals to determine the kind of support that they feel need would be a beginning step.

- School boards and superintendents would be wise to keep in mind the sometimes delicate balance between the direction and autonomy they provide the leaders of their schools. Principals should be provided direction for the educational program for which they are responsible and autonomy to work with their staff to determine the most effective method for implementing that program in their school. Principals also need the autonomy to hire and develop staff members to carry out the educational program with individuals who share the vision of the district and the school.

- While compensation was recognized in the literature as a reason for principals leaving their positions, it was never mentioned in this study as a critical factor in a principal's decision to stay or leave the position he currently holds. School boards and superintendents should be aware that the demand for quality high school principals is increasing, and that while the compensation offered should be fair for the location and market, it appears to be secondary to other factors that influence principal decisions. Offering a higher salary in an otherwise unattractive environment is no guarantee of attracting and retaining a quality leader who will remain in the position.

- School boards and superintendents need to carefully assess the impact of their approach to change, especially the pace at which change is expected. The principals in this study welcomed well thought out relevant change in their work.

They are concerned with the impact that the pace and number of changes expected has on their staff and monitor closely how much their staff can effectively undertake at one time. This is an area in which meaningful discussion with principals prior to undertaking a major change could result in better implementation.

- School boards and superintendents should examine their beliefs about the longevity of high school principals. Questions they might ponder include: Do we recognize how challenging this position is? Do we believe that moving principals every few years is positive? If so, is there research to support this belief? Is there a downside? Do we support principals through difficult situations? While ineffective principals certainly deserve scrutiny and perhaps removal, school board and superintendent support is clearly important to retaining the principals the organization desires to keep.

For Principals

- Individuals who are seeking to become principals should carefully study the programs offered in institutions of higher education in preparation to become a building administrator. Selection of a program that emphasizes the research on relational leadership and focuses on the change process, innovation and distributed leadership will better prepare candidates for the future of the principalship rather than those that continue to focus on more traditional areas of principal preparation.

- Prospective principals should seek information about the priorities of the district to which they are applying, the type of structure that exists and examine the match between district priorities and structure and their own needs and dispositions.

- Principals should also carefully examine the fit between the district to which they are applying and the priorities they have in their work and family lives.

For Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs)

- Periodic review of leadership preparation programs should be considered to ensure that principals are exposed to the experiences they will need to face the rapidly changing challenges of the high school principalship today. While managerial tasks, such as budgeting or scheduling are important aspects of the job, they are technical skills and should take a back seat.

- IHEs and school districts should consider their role in the ongoing professional development of principals. Collaborative relationships with school districts could develop to provide information and ongoing support to principals as they navigate the ongoing changes in education.

- Support to new high school principals is another area in which IHEs could consider development. Specifically, identifying successful long-term principals in the community and seeking their thoughts on the development of support systems tailored to the first three to five years of a principalship would be a place to start.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Further Study</div>

While the area of principal tenure and retention is becoming more frequent in research studies, it has primarily focused on quantitative studies that provide information about the reasons that principals have left their positions. There are few studies that

examine the reasons that principals stay in positions. With the changing landscape of school administration today, there is a benefit to learn about the factors that enter into a principal's decision to remain in positions for sufficient time to accomplish the kinds of changes desired in schools today.

Additional research is needed to ensure that the voices of women and members of minority groups are included in conversations about the high school principalship. Participation in this study was limited to high school principals with at least five years of experience in the same building. In addition to this stable group of principals, the movement of high school principals in urban districts, where principals may experience more frequent moves as a matter of routine, needs additional focus and study. Further study related to the tenure of experienced urban high school principals regardless of time in an individual building and exploration of the professional and personal characteristics of this group of administrators would provide additional insight into common factors that affect the longevity of high school principals. Related to this, questions of best practice for school improvement and principal movement need to be addressed, as current research indicates that change efforts require time to take hold and become sustainable.

The issue of the employment and retention of female high school principals continues to be an area in which additional study is needed. The majority of the principals in this study work with female assistant/associate principals in their schools. Of the ten schools represented in the study, eight had at least one female assistant/associate principal; in one school both assistant/associate principals were females. Yet there was only one female high school principal in the sample population that had met the longevity criteria to be considered for this study. With the number of

assistant/associate principals in the participating schools, additional studies that focus on the career aspirations of female assistant/associate principals and the factors that influence their decisions to pursue the principalship of a high school would add to the literature. Are female assistant/associate principals choosing not to apply for high school principalships, and if so, what factors affect their decisions to pursue the next level of school administration typically followed by males? Or do they pursue and obtain high school principalships but leave within the first five years? If this is the case, what factors play into their decisions to leave before lasting change can be successfully implemented in their schools? These are questions that deserve attention as the underrepresentation of females in the ranks of high school principals continues.

Further exploration of the concept of fit and the high school principalship, specifically related to members of minority groups and females, is also recommended to examine the relationship between the community's view of the high school principal and the absence of members of minority groups and females in these positions on a long term basis. Additional research that examines how school boards, superintendents and communities view the role and expected skill set of the high school principal would be a start in examining this

The area of principal preparation is another topic for additional research. While this study did not address the issue of the adequacy of the principals' preparation compared to the demands of their positions today, this is an area in which additional research could provide information that would be valuable to institutions of higher education and aspiring building leaders.

Finally, because the literature indicates that significant and substantive change in a school involves processes that take time, research in the area of leadership succession and planning in high schools is an area that could provide school districts, superintendents and high school principals with information about how to sustain the changes they work so hard to institute.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences and factors, both institutional and personal that influence high school principals to remain in their positions for a longer period of time than is usually seen today. Ten principals who had served more than 5 years in their positions in comprehensive 9-12 high schools in a major metropolitan area participated in two hour-long interviews to gain their perspectives on their tenure. Specifically, they discussed factors in their districts and in themselves that supported their lengthy tenure.

Four major themes emerged from the analysis of the interview data: relationships, balance, fit and change. Relationships included those with the superintendent and school board, faculty and staff and parents and students. In addition, the areas of trust and autonomy were discussed as part of relationships. Balance included balancing the multiple demands of the job, balance between work and family, personal health, and discussion of strategies that the principals had developed to manage the necessary balance. Fit referred to a match with the school district and community, and also encompassed the area of compensation. Finally, the theme of change included continuous improvement, instructional leadership, changing culture, student achievement and socioeconomic factors.

This study provides insight for school districts and superintendents, principals and aspiring principals, and institutions of higher education as part of their role in the development and retention of effective high school principals. School boards and superintendents can use information gained from this study to examine their district practices regarding change, and specifically the amount and pace of change that a school staff can successfully implement. They can also use the information to study the district's beliefs and attitudes toward principal mobility and if institutional practices may inadvertently work against retention. Information from this study can also be used to assess the balance between direction and autonomy that exists in a district, and how that balance may affect principal mobility.

Aspiring principals can use this study to learn from those principals whose tenure in their positions is greater than average today. They can use information to assess the principal preparation programs they may be considering to determine if they are addressing the issues that are important to principals today. They could also use this information to assess the match between a prospective district's goals and their own needs and strengths.

For institutions of higher education, this study provides information about the kinds of challenges high school principals are facing today, especially in the rapidly changing world of public schools. The information from this study could be used to work in collaboration with school districts to design support programs to get high school principals over the five-year hump, and hopefully lead to longer tenure and sustainable change in high schools throughout the area.

Since I'd been a high school principal at one time in my career, I came to this venture with bias and my own experiences as a back-drop, things I worked to overcome as much as possible. Having worked with some of the participants of the study as peers in neighboring school districts, I thought that I knew them. But as the study progressed, I found I had a lot to learn. The group of individuals who participated in this study led me to greater insights about the challenges they face and how they conquer them, regardless of the location or demographics of their schools. Their common experiences provide valuable information for those seeking to not only recruit effective high school principals, but to retain them.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Guide #1 – Initial Interview with a Principal

I am investigating the factors that influence high school principals to remain in their positions during this time of ongoing expectations for change and would like to hear your perspective on this issue.

1. Let's start with some general information. How long have you been an administrator? Why did you decide to become an administrator?

2. How long have you served in your current position? How did you come to be principal of this building? What experiences led you to this position?

3. Think about and tell me about your first year as principal of this building. What were the biggest adjustments you had to make from your previous position?

4. Let's talk a bit about the school district. Has the district changed during your years here? In what ways?

5. Have the expectations your district has for you as principal changed during your tenure in this position? What were the expectations in your first year? What are the expectations now?

6. I'd also like to know about the expectations that you have for yourself. Have your expectations for yourself changed during your tenure in the position? What were your expectations in your first year? What are your expectations now?

7. How do you grow professionally in your current position? How is your growth supported by those around you?

8. Who do you go to when you need professional support? When you need someone to bounce ideas off of or discuss difficult situations you're facing?

9. Is there anything else that you'd like to share with me today?

If time---let's talk a little bit about your relationships with others in your school community: students, parents, the district office, the school board, other administrators. How do those relationships influence your decision to remain in this position.

Appendix B

Interview Guide #2 - Follow-up Interview with a Principal

You've had a chance to review the transcript from our first interview and reflect on your experience as a high school principal in the same position for a length of time. I'd like to expand on the first interview today.

1. Tell me about your greatest challenges in this position. What do you struggle with the most?

2. Let's move on to your greatest accomplishments in this position to date. Of what are you most proud? How do you know it was a significant accomplishment?

3. What do you have yet to accomplish in this position? Do you have any regrets about remaining in this position for the length of time you've been here?

4. I'm going to identify some factors associated with the high school principalship today and ask that you respond to the issue from your perspective in your position. For each item please talk a bit about how much of a role the topic plays in your principalship and to what extent the area might influence your decision to remain in the position.

   a. Student achievement

   b. Socioeconomic makeup of the student population

   c. Racial/ethnic makeup of the student population

   d. Accountability

   e. Complexity/intensity of the position

   f. Relationships with

      i. Building staff and faculty

      ii.   The district office

      iii. The school board

      iv. Parents

   g. Compensation

   h. The politics of schools

   i. An emphasis on change

   j. Time

   k. Family

5. Are there other factors that I haven't named that might influence your decision making about remaining in this position?

6. What are your long-term professional aspirations? How long do you want to stay in this position? How does it contribute to your long-term goals?

7. What else is important for me to know about you as an educator and your tenure in this position?

8. How do prefer to be contacted if there is a need for follow-up to this interview?

Appendix C

**Patricia A. Luebke
6220 Upper Parkway North
Wauwatosa, WI 53213**

Dear (High School Principal):

My name is Patricia Luebke and I am a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee in the field of administrative leadership. I am also a recently retired school administrator in southeastern Wisconsin.   In my dissertation I plan to examine the longevity of high school principals in an era of rapid and intense change for schools, specifically for high school principals who have served in their present position for five or more years. Through my study I hope to identify institutional and personal factors that influence high school principals to remain in challenging positions for longer periods of time. The information from this study can be useful to school districts and institutions of higher education as they identify ways to support high school principals in their work.

My initial examination of data about high school principals in southeastern Wisconsin led me to identify you as a principal who has served in your present position for at least five years. I am requesting your participation in this study. Your participation in the study would consist of two one-to-one interviews. Each interview will last from sixty to ninety minutes. The time and place of the interviews will be scheduled at your convenience within the next two months. The interviews will be audio-taped and professionally transcribed by a confidential transcription service, and you will have the opportunity to review the interview transcript to ensure that it clearly and accurately represents your views. Neither your name nor the name of your school or district will be used in the study. All interview responses will remain confidential.   You may withdraw from the study at any time during the process.

I will contact you within the next week to answer any questions you may have about the study, provide any additional information that you may need, and hopefully arrange a date and time for an interview. Thank you in advance for considering participation in this study. Through this work we will expand the literature on principal retention in high schools. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or need additional information at this time. You may also contact my doctoral advisor, Dr. Gail Schneider, at (414) 229- 5253 or by email at gts@uwm.edu if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. Luebke
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Graduate Student

Appendix D

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study regarding the longevity of high school principals in southeastern Wisconsin. I am looking forward to talking with you about your experiences as an educator and as principal of _____ High School.

As we discussed, your interview is scheduled for _____and will be conducted at   _____High School. Attached you will find a consent form for participation in the study. Please retain it until the time of our interview and I will then collect it at that time. I'll bring a hard copy with me as well. As we also discussed, your name and the names of your school district and school will not be used in the study. Confidentiality will be maintained in all aspects of the study.

Again, I would like to thank you in advance for your participation in this study. It is sincerely appreciated. As a former administrator I know how busy your schedule is and how precious your time. Not only will this work assist me in completed my doctoral degree at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, it will also add to the literature on the longevity of high school principals in an era of rapid and intense change.

Please let me know that you have received this message and if this date still fits in your schedule. And please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need additional information about the interview or about the study. I can be reached at 414-258-6443 (home), 414-704-9405 (cell), or by email at paluebke@uwm.edu. You may also contact my doctoral advisor, Dr. Gail Schneider, at (414) 229-5253 or by email at gts@uwm.edu if you have any questions or concerns.

Looking forward to our conversation,

Pat Luebke

Appendix E
CONSENT FORM

I consent to serve as a participant in the research investigation entitled "High School Principals who Stay: Stability in a Time of Change". The general purpose of the study has been explained to me by the researcher, Patricia Luebke, a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. I understand that the purpose of the research is to describe the experiences and factors, both institutional and personal that influence a principal to remain in a position for a longer period of time than is commonly seen today. I also understand that the research procedures include two interviews, of approximately sixty to ninety minutes with the researcher.

The potential benefit to participants in the study is to play a role in developing an expanded knowledge base about the factors that lead high school principals to remain in stressful challenging positions. This research can be utilized by superintendents and school boards as they examine ways to retain individuals in these positions. The information from the research can also be used in higher education leadership development programs to assist aspiring principals in learning about factors that may influence their retention in the position of high school principal. A potential risk in this project could be concerns about confidentiality. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that all information involved in the project is confidential. My identity will not be revealed, nor that of my school or school district. All data collected from my interview will be stored in a password protected computer or a locked filed cabinet for at least three years following the completion of the study. I understand that the primary investigator is the only person who will have access to my interview data. I am free to withdraw my consent for participation in the project at any time during the process and understand that a decision to not answer any questions or withdraw from the study will not change any present or future relationship with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Any questions I may have about the research will be answered by the researcher named below.

The researcher named below has primary responsibility for ensuring that participants in research projects conducted under the auspices of the University are safeguarded from injury or harm resulting from such participation. If appropriate, the person listed below may be contacted for remedy or assistance for any possible consequences from such activities. You may also contact her doctoral advisor, Dr. Gail Schneider, at (414) 229- 5253 if you have any questions or concerns. If you have any questions about your rights or complaints about your treatment as a research subject you can contact the UWM IRB at (414) 229-3173 or irbinfo@uwn.edu.

On the basis of the information listed above, I agree to participate in this research project.

Participant's Signature_____

Participant's Name (printed)_____

Date_____

Researcher: Patricia Luebke
Address: 6220 Upper Parkway North
                   Wauwatosa, WI 53213
Home Phone: (414) 258-6443
Cell Phone: (414) 704-9409

Email: paluebke@uwm.edu   IRB Approval#: 13.070 Approval Date: 9/11/2012

CURRICULUM VITAE

Patricia Ann Luebke

Place of Birth: Milwaukee, WI

Education:

B.S., University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, May 1971
Major: English
Minor: Secondary Education

M.S., University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, May 1974
Major: Special Education

Dissertation Title: High School Principals Who Stay: Stability in a Time of Change

Teaching Experience:

Assistant Professor, Alverno College, 2012 - Present

Adjunct Instructor, Alverno College, 2011 - 2012

Adjunct instructor – University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Department of
Exceptional Education, intermittently between 1980 and 2001

Principal, Wauwatosa School District, 2007 – 2011

Director of Student Services, Wauwatosa School District, 1990 – 2007

Director of Student Services, Germantown School District, 1989 – 1990

Administrator, Wauwatosa School District, 1980 – 1989

Publications:

Lessons Learned: Keys to Effective Special Education Services. Wisconsin
School News, Vol. 57 No. 3, July 2002

Awards/Honors

State Superintendent's Special Education Council – member, present

Wisconsin DPI Special Education Stakeholder's Group – member, 2005-09

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Education Alumni Achievement
Award, 1997 – first award recipient in Exceptional Education

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