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Principal turnover is a national problem with costly side effects. There is a growing interest in this problem of practice. Although more studies are emerging, there is limited qualitative research into understanding why principals are leaving their positions. This is a basic qualitative study examining the experiences of three former North Carolina principals who resigned their roles to return to the classroom. It is through the analysis of these stories that I seek to answer my research question: Why are North Carolina principals leaving their positions as school leaders to return to the classroom? I conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with two former North Carolina principals who are currently serving as teachers in North Carolina. I interviewed each participant three times. In addition, I used reflexive journaling to collect data from myself as the third participant in this study.

The findings in my study imply that further research is needed to understand reasons principals are leaving their roles. The complexity of the role appears in literature and studies as a reason for principal turnover (DeJong, Grundmeyer & Yankey, 2017; Goldring & Taie, 2018; Hansen, 2018; Spillane & Lee, 2014). Principal impact on the climate and culture of a school stresses the importance of principals effectively managing the constant conflict and compromise with stakeholders (Bartanen, Grissom, & Rogers, 2019). As the experiences of Ms. Taylor resonate throughout this study, the need for additional studies on the impact of intersectionality on Black women principals is clear (Aaron, 2020; Moorosi, Fuller, & Reilly, 2018).

During my analysis of our stories, five thematic findings emerged. I found that the complexity of the principalship is such that one person cannot do it alone, and that principals are in constant conflict or compromise with stakeholders. Also, principal salaries should account for

the additional months of employment and increased workload in comparison to the staff they supervise. Finally, I discovered that principals are impacted by stereotypes related to race and gender identities and that there is little differentiated support provided to principals once in their roles.

WHY WE LEFT: A STUDY OF NORTH CAROLINA EDUCATORS WHO LEFT THE

PRINCIPALSHIP TO RETURN TO THE CLASSROOM

by

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DEDICATION

To my dear Aunt Rachel, my first and most inspirational teacher. Thank you for your unconditional love, undivided attention, and unwavering commitment to me. You gifted me with a love of learning, and for that I will be forever grateful.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Michelle D. Maxfield has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

"…for this reason, I resign my position as Principal…" I wrote in my resignation letter in the spring of 2017. My reason was "to experience new opportunities and challenges for continued growth and development as an educational leader." I typed, deleted, and retyped words filled with emotion before settling on these nebulous phrases. I was conflicted with the decision I had made. Just a little over two years ago, I had excitedly signed my contract to serve as an elementary school principal. Now, I was writing my letter of resignation. What happened during that short time that distorted my excitement to tension and resulted in a heavy-hearted resignation?

As I wrote my letter of resignation, I experienced principal turnover for the 6th time. This time, it was me. During the spring of 2017, I was in my second semester of graduate school, working on my Specialist in Education (EdS) in Educational Leadership. Completion of this program was my intended first step toward obtaining my EdD in Educational Leadership. I was supposed to be deciding who I would ask to be my site supervisor and mentor for my superintendent internship. Instead, I was resigning from a district I had been with for nearly a decade. During this time, I was also conducting research on topics of interest to me that would hopefully lead to the development of the research question(s) that would drive my dissertation. I now had *no* prospects for my internship. However, I *was* gaining interest in a new research topic. I served North Carolina public education as a principal for 2½ years. At the conclusion of that term, I became a statistic, one of many educators who shows up in the numbers titled principal turnover. This research includes my story and the story of others like me who left the principalship to return to the classroom.

Statement of the Problem

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 6% of all public school principals in the country moved from being the principal at one school to the principal of another and almost 10% left the principalship from 2015-16 to 2016-17 (Goldring & Taie, 2018). Data presented in Goldring and Taie's report included findings from the Public School Principal Status Data File of the 2016-17 Principal Follow-up Survey (PFS). The PFS is a nationally representative sample survey of K-12 public schools created in the 2008-09 school year to inform discussions and decisions between policymakers, researchers, and parents about principal attrition and mobility. The 2016-17 Principal Follow-up Survey represented 86,180 public school principals across the U.S. In this survey, questions were answered on topics surrounding principal attrition and mobility.

Disaggregated data in Goldring and Taie's (2018) report indicated differences in principals who moved to become principals at a different school and those who left the principalship altogether based on gender, race, and salary. More men (6.4%) than women (5.7%) moved schools, but more women (10.5%) than men (8.9%) left the principalship. White principals moved schools at the lowest rate of 5.6%, while Black principals moved schools at the greatest rate of 7.9%. Black principals left at the lowest rate of 8.9%, and 10% of White principals left the principalship. Principals earning less than $60,000 left the principalship at the greatest rate (15.7%) compared to those earning $60,000 - $79,000 (10.4%) while those with salaries $80,000 and above left at the lowest rate of 9.3%.

The role of the principalship is complex (De Jong, Grundmeyer, & Yankey, 2017; Hansen, 2018; Shoho & Barnett, 2010; Spillane & Lee, 2014). The complexity of the principalship appears in literature, evaluation instruments, and in the stories of my study

participants. As such, it stands to reason the number of hours spent on school related activities would impact principal mobility. Nearly 60% of principals reported they spent 60 or more hours per week on all school related activities (Goldring & Taie, 2018). These principals left at a greater rate than those who reported working between 45 and 59 hours per week; almost 6% moved schools, and just over 10% left the principalship (Goldring & Taie, 2018). Less than 5% of principals surveyed reported they spent less than 45 hours per week on all school related activities. Interestingly, a greater percentage of these principals left the principalship than all other principals. Just over 8% of these principals moved schools, and approximately 13% of these principals left the principalship.

As part of the PFS survey, principals were asked questions about their job satisfaction. Of the statements highlighted in this report, three statements stood out to me. The first statement that appeared significant demonstrated the impact stress and disappointments of the job had on principal turnover. A second statement that was important is on salary dissatisfaction which also appears in literature, arises as a theme in my study, and is addressed in recent policy and salary schedule changes. A third statement I highlight is on principals' plans to move or leave the principalship as that represents possible future turnover that could potentially be prevented.

An additional issue is that principals are in constant conflict. Perceptual data gathered from working conditions surveys are used as evidence samples in principal evaluations. Based on 2016 North Ccarolina Teacher Working Concitions Survey (NCTWCS), principals' perceptions surrounding positive school climate are higher than the perceptions of teachers (Center for Optimal Learning Environments, 2021). Misaligned perceptions between principals and teachers can be cause for stress and disappointment. The job of the principalship also comes with high stakes and high accountability. Principals are ultimately responsible for and have

some of the greatest impact on student growth and achievement (The Wallace Foundation, 2014). Almost 16% of principals represented in Goldring and Taie's (2018) report agreed strongly or somewhat with the job satisfaction statement, "The stress and disappointments involved in being a principal at this school aren't really worth it" (p. 9). Of the principals who agreed with this statement, 7.5% moved to become principals at other schools, and 13.3% left the principalship.

Linking salary to test scores intensifies the high stakes environment for principals in some states like North Carolina which overhauled the principal salary schedule in 2017, connecting principal salary to student growth. Low principal pay is a reason some principals give for leaving the principalship (Hansen, 2018; Levin et al., 2019; Owings et al., 2011). Approximately 25% of the principals surveyed in the PFS agreed strongly or somewhat with the job satisfaction statement, "If I could get a higher paying job, I'd leave this job as soon as possible" (Goldring & Taie, 2018, p. 9). Of the principals who agreed with this statement, 8.1% moved schools and 12.4% left the principalship. Based on mobility and departure of these principals, salary is a cause of job dissatisfaction and principal turnover.

Principals cite lack of support as a reason for leaving the principalship (Levin et al., 2019). In such a complex role with wide-ranging responsibilities, support is essential to feeling valued and having the tools and resources to be successful. In the PFS survey reported by Goldring and Taie (2018), principals were asked about their plan to remain a principal. Over 12% of the principals responded strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement, "Until a more desirable job opportunity comes along" (Goldring & Taie, 2018, p. 10). Of the principals who agreed with this statement, almost 20% moved schools and close to 15% left the principalship.

Purpose

My study was prompted by my decision to resign my principal role and return to the classroom. I started my study with a personal question, trying to understand what had just happened in my life. As I began researching literature and studies on principal turnover, I realized principal turnover was not something that just happened to me. I realized principal turnover was a problem in our nation that was gaining the attention of researchers and policy makers.

The purpose of this research is to identify reasons North Carolina educators are leaving the principalship and suggest practices districts can implement to reduce principal turnover. One of the many challenges public education faces is high principal turnover rates. School leaders play an important role in the success of our students, which makes high principal turnover rates a significant concern (Spillane & Lee, 2014; Rangel, 2018). The Wallace Foundation (2014), which has funded research on school leadership for nearly two decades, indicated school leaders have the second greatest influence on student achievement, only behind that of classroom teachers. With principals playing such a vital role in the success of students, Rangel (2018), who conducted a review of research regarding principal turnover, and others have explained that it is important to understand why principals are leaving their leadership roles to return to the classroom.

Research Question

One research question drives this qualitative study:

Why are North Carolina principals leaving their positions as school leaders to return to the classroom?

Background Context

Principals are essential school leaders. Among other tasks, principals are responsible for leading strategically and building capacity within their school and community, maintaining a healthy climate and culture, protecting and making the most of instructional time, balancing budgets, and ensuring all stakeholders in their school community are provided a safe environment with access to resources to meet needs of each student (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 2008; Spillane & Lee, 2014). Principals are essential to the success of their schools. They play an integral part in the school improvement process (Marzano et al., 2005; Spillane & Lee, 2014). They also have a significant impact on the engagement, growth, and achievement of students (Miller, 2013; The Wallace Foundation, 2013; Spillane & Lee, 2014).

Babo and Postma (2017) conducted a study to explore the influence of an elementary school principal's length of service on school performance. In a random sampling of 172 schools selected from the approximately 700 New Jersey elementary schools, researchers reviewed data from the Language Arts Literacy (LAL) and Mathematics sections of the 2014 New Jersey end of grade tests (NJASK). The researchers found that as a principal's length of service increased, the percent proficient on both the LAL and Mathematics sections also increased. This led them to conclude that "competent school principals promote the success of the nation's public school children" (Babo & Postma, 2017, p. 125) and recommend that districts provide principals with appropriate preservice training as well as continued support and professional development after principals assume their positions. Results from Miller's (2013) North Carolina study confirm this assertion, finding that student achievement typically experiences a decline after a principal leaves as well as when a new principal arrives.

DeAngelis and White (2011) employed data from multiple sources for their Illinois-based study focusing on principals' mobility from 2001 to 2008. For personal characteristics including years of experience, positions held, and education, they reviewed the annual Teacher Service Record (TSR) and Teacher Certification Information System (TCIS) files. Information about the schools served by the principals was obtained from annual Illinois school report card files and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). For their study, DeAngelis and White (2011) reviewed information on over 7,000 individuals who served as a principal for Illinois public schools for at least one year from 2001 to 2008. Over 72% of principals who changed positions from 2001 to 2008 moved to a non-principal administrative job. An additional 11% moved to assistant principal positions and over 10% went back into the classroom (DeAngelis & White, 2011).

The study performed by DeAngelis and White is similar to and pulls from the same data sources as the 2004 study conducted by Rigel and colleagues which presented research on principal turnover in Illinois from 1987 to 2001. This enabled DeAngelis and White to make comparisons between the two time periods and draw the conclusion that principal turnover is increasing. In the Rigel (2004) study of Illinois principal turnover from 1987 to 2001, 38% of first time principals were still leading their original schools after six years. DeAngelis and White (2011) found a significant decrease in this percentage with only 28% of first time principals studied between 2001-2008 remaining in their school after six years.

With such high levels of responsibility for individuals in principal positions, it takes time to learn to perform these tasks well. A key factor in developing leaders and making differences in schools is that it happens over time. It takes around five years for the average school leader to demonstrate change in results (School Leaders Network, 2014). School Leaders Network (SLN)

is a nonprofit national organization that provides a wide-range of training for new and experienced school leaders to continually develop their abilities and succeed in their roles. In 2014, they published a report that stressed that focusing solely on the supply end of the principal pipeline through funding principal preparation programs that produced highly effective candidates was ignoring the problem of "churn" (School Leaders Network, 2014, p. 1). Churn is what they call principal turnover, typically losing an experienced principal for a less experienced principal.

SLN based the assertions in their report on a literature review of principal studies, survey data, analyses of statistics from the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the National Center for Education Statistics, and the U.S. Census. According to School Leaders Network's (2014) report, principal turnover rates are highest in Alaska, California, Delaware, Idaho, North Carolina, Nevada, New Mexico, and Rhode Island. Based on data from the 2018 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions, only 60% of North Carolina principals had been in their role more than three years and less than 40% had been at their current school for four or more years. When principals are constantly changing, it is difficult to see positive change in the school.

Review of existing literature indicates principals may be leaving for any number of reasons. Some reasons are linked to demographic or experiential characteristics of the individual such as sex, age, race, experience, or education (Goldring & Taie, 2018; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Yan, 2020). Some researchers argue the realities of the position are simply too much for one person (Rangel, 2018; School Leaders Network, 2014). Regardless of the reasons, we know principals are leaving (Rangel, 2018). Whether it is their schools, their districts, or the field of

education, they are leaving. In my study, I ask: Why are they leaving, and what can be or is being done to reduce principal turnover?

Brief Description of Methods

This basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) consisted of semi-structured interviews with two former North Carolina principals who currently serve as teachers. I interviewed each participant three times, recording the interviews for later analysis. The purpose of the first interview was to gain background context on each participant to understand desire and motivation to become a school principal. After reviewing, coding, and analyzing data from the first interview to determine any emerging themes, I conducted second interviews with participants. The purpose of the second interview was to understand each participant's time as a principal: the responsibilities and complexity of the position and the specific support received once becoming a principal. After reviewing data, I conducted a third interview. The purpose of the third interview, was to understand why each participant left the principalship and why they returned to the classroom. Participants were offered transcripts to review to make revisions or clarifications at the third interview. We had the option of follow-up interviews for this purpose as well, but they were not needed.

In addition to interviewing two former principals, I served as the third participant in this study. The data collection method I used for myself as a participant was reflexive journaling. I journaled answers to the same interview questions I asked the other two study participants. I journaled before each interview and revisited my journal after each interview to make additions, clarifications, and connections. I also reviewed video recordings of each interview after the interviews in search of additional comments I made during the interviews that needed to be part

of my responses to the interview questions. I repeated these same steps with each round of interviews.

Theoretical Overview

I did not begin my study with any specific theory in mind. As I planned, read, and conducted research, determining the theoretical lens through which I would view my study was one of my biggest challenges. I did not know what existing theory fit my experiences. I was told theory is everywhere in the research process. It helps us understand and think critically about information (Anyon & Dumas, 2009). It is a powerful tool by which we can broaden our thinking or move our positionality from one place to another. However, theory was not that for me in the beginning.

As I began analyzing the data from my study, theory found me. My study participants consisted of three people from three different social roles: a White male, a Black female, and a White female. Watching interview recordings and reading our stories, I observed the experiences of these three culturally different individuals whose paths took the same turn. The experiences of each participant were unique to them. The ways in which participants were received and treated by their districts and school communities were equally unique. The two females in my study experienced challenges adjusting to and being accepted in their roles. These experiences were starkly different than those experienced by the White male participant. Noticing these experiential differences initially led me to social role theory.

Social role theory is a social psychological theory concerning sex differences and similarities in social behavior (Eagly & Wood, 2016). Social psychology is the "scientific study of how people's thoughts, feelings, beliefs, intentions, and goals are constructed within a social context by the actual or imagined interactions with others" (McLeod, 2007). It examines how

human behavior is affected by other people and the circumstances under which social behavior and feelings take place. The fundamental tenet to social role theory is that women and men are distributed into social roles within their society. There are gender stereotypes "prescriptive of what women and men are expected to do" (Eagly & Wood, 2016, p. 2). Communal traits such as concern for others and compassion are attributed to women while agency traits such as self-assertion and independence are attributed to men (Ramsey, 2017).

Stereotypes "justify our conduct" in social groups (Allport, 1954). They give us permission to rationalize our behaviors. It is when members of our social group try to move into social roles different from those predetermined them based on their race or gender that they are considered comparatively unqualified (Eagly & Diekman, 2005). These individuals face impediments blocking their entry into nontraditional roles and devaluation of their work in the new roles. This is evidenced in experiences of women entering male-dominated leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Social role theory is evident also through the stories and experiences of my study participants.

Although both female study participants experienced prejudices from the communities and districts they served based on their gender, the experiences of Ms. Taylor, the Black female in my study, were by far the most profound of the three. Ms. Taylor's story drove me to intersectionality theory. The term intersectionality was coined in 1991 by a Black feminist and legal academic as a critique against a judicial system that disadvantaged women of color (Crenshaw). Crenshaw (1991) argued that while racism and sexism freely overlapped in the lives of real people, they rarely did in feminist and antiracist practices. She contended that feminists and antiracists focusing on White women as victims of sexism and Black men as victims of racism were concentrating on "the most privileged members of the subordinate

groups" (Crenshaw, 1993, p. 383). She continued that this resulted in making Black women invisible. Intersectionality provides my study with a structure for analyzing stereotypes linked with the combination of gender and ethnicity.

<center>**Significance**</center>

I am a North Carolina educator, former principal, and current teacher. I left the principalship and returned to the classroom in 2017. My experiences as a principal led me to wonder about principal turnover rates. I learned North Carolina has one of the highest principal turnover rates in the nation (School Leaders Network, 2014; BEST NC, 2017). The average North Carolina principal leads a school for only 2.7-3.5 years (BEST NC, 2017). According to results from the 2018 NC Teacher Working Conditions survey, 40% of NC principals have been in their role less than three years and 60% have been at their school for less than 4 years. Principal turnover rates in North Carolina are alarming. Additional research is needed to figure out why turnover is so high and what can be done to reduce it.

Principals have a great impact on student achievement (Bartanen, Grissom, & Rogers, 2019; Miller, 2013; Spillane & Lee, 2014; The Wallace Foundation, 2014; Babo & Postma, 2017). Principals are responsible for their school's climate and culture (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Lemoine et al., 2014; Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Principals also play a significant role in creating and managing the perceptions of the community (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Rousmaniere, 2013). Principals are also crucial for recruitment and retention of quality teachers; ultimately responsible for job satisfaction and teacher working conditions (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Principals are expected to observe, coach, evaluate, and support teachers in their growth and development.

Since I began my research, there has been an increase in qualitative research on why principals are leaving their positions. The complexity of the role is driving some principals to leave (DeJong, Grundmeyer & Yankey, 2017; Goldring & Taie, 2018; Hansen, 2018; Rangel, 2018). Some principals determine the salary is not enough to compensate for the working conditions (Goldring & Taie, 2018; Hansen, 2018; Pijanowski & Brady, 2009).

Data from studies indicate some principals are leaving for non-administrative roles (DeAngelis & White, 2011; Goldring & Taie, 2018; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Yan, 2020). Some principals, like myself and several of my former colleagues, are returning to the classroom. A central concern is that principal turnover has been shown to have a negative impact on student growth and achievement (Bartanen, Grissom, & Rogers, 2019). It has been linked to disruption in school climate and an increase in teacher turnover (Bartanen, Grissom, & Rogers, 2019).

Importantly, North Carolina has one of the highest rates of principal turnover in the United States (Goldring & Taie, 2018). My study is significant to the existing research of principal turnover since I focused my research on former North Carolina principals who have left their positions and returned to teach in the classroom. Through virtual face-to-face Zoom interviews, I gained an understanding of the experiences of these former principals and what led to their decisions to return to the classroom. Knowing about the negative impacts of principal turnover on school communities compels me to find out why principals are leaving. Findings from this study will be useful to school and district leaders, leaders of principal preparation programs, and North Carolina policy makers.

In this dissertation, I contribute to the literature on principal turnover documenting experiences of three former North Carolina principals who returned to the classroom: a White male, a Black female, and a White female. I support the existing literature by examining the

experiences of these three individuals across different cultures. My hope is that we learn from these stories and reduce principal turnover in North Carolina.

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter 2, I review existing research related to the background and history of the principalship (Rousmaniere, 2013). I highlight how the role and salaries (Pijanowski & Brady, 2009) have changed over time as well as characteristics of a school principal (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020; Rousmaniere, 2013). I also look at how stereotypes surrounding societal and cultural norms impact the principalship (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Burton & Weiner, 2016; Fuller et al., 2019; SteelFisher, et al., 2019). In addition, I examine the issue of principal turnover (Rangel, 2018). Finally, I share my theoretical framework, based on social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Koenig and Eagly, 2014) and intersectionality (Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1993; hooks, 1989).

In Chapter 3, I describe the methods I used for this study. This is a basic qualitative study. I conducted three in-depth interviews with two former North Carolina principals who left their roles to return to the classroom. I also used a reflexive journal on my experiences leading up to and during the principalship.

Chapter 4 is my findings chapter. In this chapter, I introduce the three study participants: Mr. Marsh, Ms. Taylor, and myself. I share the stories of each of the three study participants, providing a glimpse into the experiences of these three former North Carolina principals who left their roles as principals and have returned to the classroom to teach. I identify five underlying themes in their stories.

In Chapter 5, I delve deeper into the five underlying themes I discovered from analyzing the experiences of these three former North Carolina principals. I link these themes to current

and historical literature. I also provide examples from the stories of each participant as I analyze

from a social role and intersectionality perspective.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a growing body of studies on principal turnover. In this literature review, to provide a broader context for this study, I focused on scholarship related to the following areas: the background and history of the principalship, the challenges principals face during the principalship, and principal turnover. I conclude by providing an exploration of my theoretical framework including studies and literature on social role theory and intersectionality.

Background and History of the Principalship

"There's the principal's office: you only go there if you are in trouble," are the words historian and educator Kate Rousmaniere's five-year-old niece spoke as they walked past the principal's office of a high school (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 1). Puzzled at how little research there was on the principalship and at the common perception across popular and professional cultures of the school principal as "a small, often disagreeable functionary of bad news, the wet blanket of progressive teacher practice, the prison guard of students' feedom," Rousmaniere began her research on the history of the principalship in 2006 (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 1). In introducing her social history that relied on archival records and first hand accounts, she described the American public school principal as,

the most complex and contradictory figure in the pantheon of educational leadership. The principal is both the administrative director of state educational policy and a building manager, both an advocate for school change and the protector of bureaucratic stability. Authorized to be employer, supervisor, professional figurehead, and inspirational leader, the principal's core training and identity is as a classroom teacher. A single person, in a single professional role, acts on a daily basis as the connecting

link between a large bureaucratic system and the individual daily

experiences of a large number of children and adults (2013, pp. 2-3).

As Rousmaniere (2013) illustrates in her historical portrayal of the principalship, the role

of the school principal has changed significantly since the initial implementation of this position.

The history of the principalship offers opportunity to understand the role of the principalship

itself, how it has changed since its creation, and why the role is essential to the success of public

education. Knowing about the role is important background information to why people stay and

leave the profession. The following pages provide background context on the role of a principal,

characteristics of principals, and North Carolina principal salaries over the past two decades.

Role of a Principal

Prior to and through the American Revolution, teachers worked alone in one or two room

schools, governed by community school boards or trustees. Educators were considered

"misfits," unfit for better opportunities in life (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 9). As communities

developed, lead administrators, or principals, were employed as teachers and school managers in

one. However, these early school leaders, described in a 19th century report as "a man who

had… fits or was too lazy to work," (p. 9) operated with no job descriptions and had no

employment contracts or protection from community demands. Before the implementation of

compulsory attendance, schools were inconsistent in how they were organized and managed on a

day-to-day basis. Community developers saw the creation of a school and the naming of a

principal as a way to promote a growing town. Still, well into the middle of the nineteenth

century, there was no protection for education or educators from pressures of public opinion or

bureaucracy.

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, some educational reformers and government officials joined together to develop common schools, now known as the public-school system. Centralized district administrative structures began to emerge with decisions being made by professionally trained management who developed and delivered policy to the school level administrators. Principals' offices were added to new school buildings, and the role of principals shifted from being teachers with extra administrative duties to administrators with authority over teachers (Rousmaniere, 2013).

Additional changes to the job description and role of school principals continued to be made over the next couple of hundred years, forming into the current role of today. While they vary slightly by state, the roles of principals are similar throughout the country. Given that I focused on North Carolina in this study, it is useful to look more closely at how the principal role is defined in that state.

McRel's NC School Executive rubric provides a detailed outline of elements and standards by which principals are evaluated. This list points to current priorities for principals in the state. NC Principals are evaluated on seven standards: Strategic Leadership, Instructional Leadership, Cultural Leadership, Human Resources Leadership, Managerial Leadership, External Development Leadership, and Micro-Political Leadership. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) summarizes expectations for principals in each of these seven standards.

As strategic leaders, principals are expected to lead staff in the continuous reflection on their collective vision, mission, and school improvement plan goals. Principals demonstrate instructional leadership by creating an environment that fosters collaboration and the use of best instructional practices while holding staff accountable for student performance. Principals are

expected to understand and value school traditions as well as encourage school culture focused on student growth and achievement to demonstrate cultural leadership. As human resource leaders, principals are expected to recruit, support, and retain high-quality staff. Principals are charged with managing their school by using the budget to maximize student achievement. As external development leaders, principals are expected to resolve conflicts and problems and use various forms of communication to keep all stakeholders informed. Principals are expected to engage the community in the school as well as highlight the positive differences between staff members to continue to improve to meet goals.

The role of a school principal has been one of great complexity for nearly half a century. North Carolina principals have been charged with many of the same responsibilities they have now since the 1980s. Greater attention was brought to these responsibilities when George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002 and again with the 2008 implementation of McRel's school executive evaluation rubric. These made standardized tests part of household language and the tool by which student academic performance, teacher effectiveness, and principal leadership were measured.

Characteristics of Public School Principals

Rousmaniere (2013) highlighted the perception of the first principals as lazy male teachers who were not fit for any other work. Even at the beginning of the 21st Century, men were still the predominant gender in this line of work. As Rousmaniere noted, "It seemed to be the natural order of things that women taught, and men managed" (p. 102). The implementation of graduate programs for educational leadership made the principalship a more common career path for men. Coaching also attracted more men to the profession of education with clear

pathways to the principalship. In Rousmaniere's (2013) social history of the principalship, she notes that

> The work of athletic coaching – communication, authority, disciplinary training of students, and public relations – aligned with the emerging professional identity of the new principal and, in a happy coincidence, provided the masculine image that appealed to both the public and to school reformers. An aspiring male principal who had a background in athletic coaching was automatically identified with a physicality that excluded women…The message was that school principals were not only responsible for bureaucratic paper-pushing but also for such physical work as supervising fire drills, breaking up playground fights, disciplining adolescent boys, and providing a virile and stabilizing presence in the school (p. 101).

Review of responses from 7,520 principals who participated in US Department of Education 2011-2012 Schools and Staffing Survey shows while women principals are twice as likely as their male counterparts to have prior service as curricular specialists, men are three times as likely to have had prior experience as athletic coaches (Maranto et al., 2017). Review of this data also indicates 90% of elementary teachers are women, but only 66% of elementary principals are women, and 63% of secondary teachers are women, but only 48% of secondary principals are women (Maranto et al., 2018). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the percentage of female public school principals increased from 44% in 1999-2000 to 54% in 2017-2018.

Desegregation of schools with the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision resulted in the reduction of Black educators and almost elimination of Black principals. The number of Black principals in the South was reduced by 90% in the decade following this decision (Rousmaniere, 2013). Prior to *Brown v. Board of Education*, many Black teachers were employed in the segregated South. Teaching, one of the few careers open to middle class Blacks prior to *Brown*, was a significant profession in the Black community. Black teachers and principals were respected leaders in their communities and important role models. Black principals served as the connection between the school and the community.

Unfortunately, many Black teachers and principals lost their jobs because of the *Brown* ruling (Tillman, 2004). Specifically in North Carolina, the number of Black principals dropped from 620 to 40 between 1967 and 1971 (Hooker, 1971). According to an annual report on the characteristics of public school principals created by the National Center for Education Statistics, the percentage of White principals has decreased from 82% in 1999-2000 to 78% in 2017-2018. The percentage of Hispanic principals has increased from 5% in 1999-2000 to 9% in 2017-2018. The percentage of Black principals remained constant over these two decades at 11% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

Principal Salary

Studies indicate principal salary is not enough to compensate for all that comes with the role (DeJong Grundmeyer & Yankey, 2018; Goldring & Taie, 2018; Hansen, 2018). In Pijanowski and Brady's (2009) review of reports of the Arkansas Department of Education Teacher Salary Schedule Analysis and the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators annual administrator salary surveys, teachers identified to have strong leadership potential but chose to remain in the classroom named salary and working conditions as their reason. It "isn't

just that the money is not enough, but more specifically the money isn't enough to compensate for the stress and working conditions of the job" (Pijanowski & Brady, 2009, p. 39).

Due to differences in contracts for teachers, assistant principals, and principals, Pijanowski and Brady (2009) compared salaries based on days in each contract. Their findings showed elementary school principals earn 8-14% more than elementary assistant principals and 34-41% more than elementary school teachers in their district with master's degrees and 15 years' experience (Pijanowski & Brady, 2009). Considering contract days, junior high and middle school principals earn 4-8% more than junior high and middle school assistant principals and 26-38% more than secondary teachers in their district with master's degrees and 15 years' experience (Pijanowski & Brady, 2009). Also considering contract days, high school principals earn 8-22% more than high school assistant principals and 28-53% more than secondary teachers in their district with master's degrees and 15 years' experience (Pijanowski & Brady, 2009).

Today, average secondary school principals in the United States earn $87,000 annually (Zippia, 2021). Only 33% of the survey participants in DeJong and colleagues' (2017) study of secondary principals in a midwestern US state indicated salary/benefits as the most powerful factor keeping them in their current role. To gain perspective, there are 12 Midwestern US states. The average salary of these twelve states is $76,523 and the media salary is $77,402 (Zippia, 2021). The average salary of secondary principals in North Carolina is $65,621. This is $21,379 lower than the national average and $10,902 lower than the average midwestern principal.

Until recently, North Carolina principal salary schedules were rather complex. Salaries had been directly connected to years of service and the number of adults supervised by the principal. In 2016, a principal with 20 years' experience supervising 33-43 teachers earned a

monthly base salary of $4,600 over 12 months for an annual salary of $55,200. In 2016, a teacher with a bachelor's degree and 20 years of experience earned a monthly salary of $4,800 over 10 months for an annual salary of $48,000. Although a principal with the same number of years' experience in 2016 earned a higher annual salary than a teacher, the principal worked two additional months and received a monthly salary $200 less than a teacher with the same years of service. Teachers with 15-19 years of experience only earned $75 less each month worked than their supervising principal. A teacher with 20 years' experience with a master's degree earned $5,280 monthly, $480 more per month than a principal with the same years of service. Nationally Board Certified (NBPTS) teachers earned $5,376 with a bachelor's degree and $5,856 with a master's degree, resulting in these teachers earning $776 and $1,256 more each month than a principal with the same years of service.

The role of the principal has changed over the years. As such, it stands to reason salaries would also change. The salary schedule for public school principals in North Carolina went through a complete overhaul in the veto-overridden 2017 budget. There are no step increases based on years of experience. No longer are salaries based on the number of adults supervised by the principal. North Carolina principals are now paid based on the number of students enrolled in the school with increases for meeting and exceeding expected growth based on end of grade test data. These changes linked principal pay to student achievement, increasing the already high pressure, high stakes situation for North Carolina principals.

In 2017, a principal leading a mid-sized school of 401-700 students earned a monthly base salary of $5,403.25 with potential to earn $5,943.50 monthly for meeting student growth goals and $6,483.83 for exceeding student growth goals. Comparatively, teachers with 20 years' experience and a bachelor's degree earned a monthly salary of $4,830 without NBPTS and

$5,410 with NBPTS. Teachers with the same years' experience and a master's degree earned a monthly salary of $5,313 without NBPTS and $5,893 with NBPTS. Even with the principal salary overhaul, North Carolina principals are still earning less per month than some of the teachers they supervise, especially if they do not meet or exceed expected student growth.

The changes made in the 2020 North Carolina salary schedule for public school educators showed another rise in principal salaries by increasing the steps regarding school size with the smallest school being under 200 students. In 2020, a principal leading a mid-sized school of 401-700 students earned a monthly base salary of $6,244.83 with potential to earn $6,869.33 monthly for meeting student growth goals and $7,493.83 for exceeding student growth goals. Comparatively, teachers with 20 years' experience and a bachelor's degree earned a monthly salary of $5,000 without NBPTS and $5,600 with NBPTS. Teachers with the same years' experience and a master's degree earned a monthly salary of $5,500 without NBPTS and $6,100 with NBPTS. A principal leading a mid-sized school earns a base salary of just over $100 more per month than a 20-year NBPTS teacher they supervise.

Challenges Principals Face

Principals face a multitude of challenges in their roles. In the fall of 2013, an electronic survey was sent to the 324 current middle and high school principals in a midwestern state in the United States. De Jong, Grundmeyer, and Yankey (2017) reviewed data from the 176 who responded to determine themes of job dissatisfaction. They found the most prominent sources of dissatisfaction were: "high job demands with unreasonable expectations, managing difficult stakeholders, problematic work/life balance, and lack of support" (De Jong, Grundmeyer, & Yankey, 2017, pp. 359-360).

To investigate the factors that influenced their decisions to leave their schools, Hansen (2018) conducted a multisite case study using semi-structured interviews of six former rural, Minnesotan elementary school principals who had left their schools the previous year. All participants identified workload and lack of professional support as factors that contributed to their decisions to leave. Five of the six participants identified principal salary and contract negotiations as a contributing factor.

In this discussion regarding challenges that principals face, I consider the complexity of the principalship, constant conflict or compromise, testing and accountability, societal and cultural norms, and lack of support.

Complexity of the Principalship

Many companies promote individuals because of their abilities or success in a particular area. They may be specialists in their area, but that does not mean they are ready for or even well suited for leadership. A key factor in developing leaders and making differences in schools is that it happens over time. It takes around five years for the average school leader to demonstrate change in results (School Leaders Network, 2014). When principals are constantly changing, it is difficult to see positive change in the school.

In a 2009 New York University study, Weinstein and colleagues reviewed quantitative data on 80 New York City high schools to determine which schools were able to maintain or increase student achievement in the face of principal turnover. Four schools were recruited to participate in a study to understand what measures were in place to support principals transitioning into their new roles. Principal interviewees indicated navigating the complexity of the role was one of the most complicated parts of transition into their new roles (Weinstein et al., 2009).

Researchers of a multi-year qualitative study of 62 new principals in Texas was conducted to establish what challenges new principals face and how the principalship compares with their expectations (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). The study consisted of 36 elementary school principals, 24 females and 12 males; 15 middle school principals, 7 females and 8 males; and 11 high school principals, 1 female and 10 males. Of the 62 participants, 36 were White, 6 Black, and 20 Hispanic. Findings in the study indicate "the principalship has become far too complex" (2010, p. 590) and can be "daunting for newly hired principals" (2010, p. 563).

In an extended longitudinal study of two cohorts of beginning principals in Chicago Public Schools in 2009 and 2010, Spillane and Lee examine experiences of a random sample of new principals during their first three months on the job. Through interviews of 17 elementary school principals in 2010, the researchers discovered new principals experience a "reality shock" when transitioning into their new roles due to the "ultimate responsibility" brought on by the "volume, diversity, and unpredictability of tasks" (p. 431).

New principals experience many challenges in the "pressure cooker" the role has become including those pertaining to instructional leadership, budgeting and personnel, and issues within the community, including school climate, politics, and differing expectations from all stakeholders (Shoho & Barnett, 2010, p. 562). Principals are responsible for a school's climate and culture, ensuring effective delivery of curriculum, communication with all stakeholders, management of the building, and providing a safe and secure learning environment (Alvoid & Black, 2014; The Wallace Foundation, 2013). Expectations for school principals come from all stakeholders with responsibilities ranging from traffic flow to student achievement. Although beginning principals are often expected to be experts on Day 1, many skills by which principals

are evaluated are developed and refined over time based on experiences and reflection (Shoho & Barnett, 2010).

The role of the principal has changed. Principals are expected to be instructional leaders, not just managers of school buildings (Lemoine et al., 2014). Instructional leaders are knowledgeable about curriculum, instruction, assessments, and utilizing data to drive instruction and professional development for teachers (Backor & Gordon, 2015; Hoerr, 1996; Lemoine et al., 2014). Principals who are effective instructional leaders can positively affect a school's performance on assessments by supporting creative and effective teaching (Du Plessis, 2013). Vanderhaar and colleagues (2006) studied quantitative data to determine predictors of student achievement in urban schools. Although principal preparation programs did not show a direct correlation to student achievement, the length of a principal's tenure at a school was linked to a positive impact on student achievement (Vanderhaar et al., 2006).

Studies show that, even in the highest performing schools, principals spend up to 75 percent of their time on administrative tasks such as arranging bus schedules and supervising custodians, and too little time on instructional leadership (The Wallace Foundation, 2010). Through a historical review of the role of the principal and changes overtime, Lemoine et al. (2014) identified obstacles school principals must overcome to effectively lead instruction including social factors, wide range of job expectations, understanding of curriculum and instruction, and human relations. According to Lemoine et al., principals must have a solid foundation of knowledge and understanding of challenges students face beyond the school building. The principal role has two branches – manager and instructional leader. Effective principals must master these two separate roles and use them synchronously.

In another study, 89% of the midwestern secondary principals surveyed expressed feeling overwhelmed with "high job demands and unreasonable expectations" (De Jong et al., 2017, p. 360). One participant in their study shared, "As a principal, I wear many hats. I cannot be fully effective in any single role because of balancing these many responsibilities" (2017, p. 360). While studying why rural principals leave and interviewing former Minnesotan elementary principals who left their positions the previous year, Hansen (2018) classified responsibilities described by former rural Minnesotan elementary school principals as

Curriculum Director, District Assessment Coordinator, Title I and II

Coordinator, Preschool Director, Special Education Director, Staff

Development Director, Human Resources Manager, Support Staff

Supervisor, Transportation Director, Technology Director, Counselor,

Athletic or Activities Director, Dean of Students, School Improvement

Coordinator, Instructional Coach, Response to Intervention Coordinator,

Professional Learning Community Leader, and Teacher Evaluator (p. 48).

Of the principal participants planning to leave their schools in the 2019 survey administered by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and Learning Policy Institute (LPI) study, 63% reported heavy workload as a factor in their decision (Levin et al., 2019).

As noted earlier, participants in Spillane and Lee's (2014) study experienced "reality shocks" linked to the ultimate responsibility of their new positions, contributing to "three problems of practice: high levels of task volume, task diversity, and task unpredictability" (p. 434). All participants mentioned the stress of their new roles. Although close to 60% experienced a decrease in the intensity of the responsibility after the first three months, the intensity of the responsibility increased after the first three months with almost 20% of the

participants, and the stresses of the role remained constant with a little over 10% of the principals.

The sheer amount of tasks principals are charged with in their roles is abundant. Principals in Spillane and Lee's (2014) study described the workload as "almost overwhelming" (p. 447). Before the start of the school year, over 40% of the principals stressed over the "volume" of the work load (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 447). This increased to nearly 60% after the first semester. Almost 50% of the principals indicated their work volume had intensified since their first interview.

The workload itself can be overwhelming. On top of the amount of work, there is a wide range and multitude of tasks. The diversity in the tasks required was a concern for 35% these new principals in their first interview (Spillane & Lee, 2014). This increased significantly at the second interview to 53% of the participants expressing concern with the variety of tasks to manage. At the conclustion of the first semester, over 40% of the principals shared an increase in the mixture of their workload since the beginning of the year.

In addition to the amount and variety of work, a principal's day is unpredictable (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Responses to the unpredictability of the principalship closely aligned with those regarding the amount of work required of principals. Unpredictability was mentioned as a concern with over 40% of the principals before the start of the school year in their first interview. Three months later, this percentage increased to almost 60%. At the end of the first semester, nearly 50% of the principals expressed the unpredictabilty of their role had intensely increased since the beginning of the school year.

Constant Conflict or Compromise

Relationships are imperative to the success of a school leader (Bennis, 2009; Marzano et al., 2005; Robbins & Alvy, 2009). Principals must possess interpersonal skills to build relationships and make connections with students, teachers, staff, and families. Principals who create a climate and culture that is supportive and encouraging will empower a school to grow and flourish interdependently (Lemoine et al., 2014). Because principals are instrumental in creating and maintaining a positive and supportive work environment for teachers, high principal turnover can lead to decreased teacher satisfaction and retention. Teachers regularly cite support from school administrators as an important component in their decisions to stay at a particular school (Elfers et al., 2006). Components of creating positive, consistent climates take time to build and are disrupted with principal turnover (The School Leaders Network, 2014).

North Carolina educators complete a Teacher Working Condition Survey (NCTWCS) every other school year. Districts and schools use information from these surveys to improve working conditions and increase student learning. Stakeholder perceptions are important to the success of a principal. Data from NCTWCS indicates there are significant differences in the perceptions of teachers and principals regarding the positivity of their workplace and the efforts of principals to address teacher concerns (Hirsch & Emerick, 2006).

In a classic study and narrative portrayal of Principal Debbie Presley, Reitzug and Patterson (1998) looked at the assumptions about the necessity of empowerment. They focused on the choice of empowerment Ms. Presley made in her practices as principal as well as her interactions with students. The researchers provided a stark contrast between Ms. Presley and Joe Clark, the famous principal from Eastside High School in Paterson New Jersey and the movie *Lean on Me* that depicted his story and choice of control over empowerment. When the

leadership style of the principal does not align with the leadership style the school community is used to or comfortable with, there is conflict.

Forty-nine percent of the secondary principals in a midwestern US state indicated "managing relationships with difficult stakeholders contributed to job dissatisfaction" (De Jong, et al., 2017, p. 361). Participants in this same study shared they did not always feel supported by the school district, superintendent, school board, teachers, or parents. When sharing about the overwhelming nature of the job, one disclosed, "depending upon the superintendent that you have, you may feel as though you have little support" (2017, p. 364). Participants also described feeling constrained by a "micromanaging school board" (2017, p. 364). Researchers concluded the burnout is likely due to the feeling of isolation principals experience when not supported by their superintendent in the face of challenges by stakeholders.

High Stakes, High Accountability

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 required every school receiving federal funds to administer standardized tests annually to students. Sanctions were put on schools not meeting proficiency targets. These new accountability measures increased the attention on the role of the principal and the importance of their leadership in the school. When schools did not meet their testing goals, it was implied that inadequate principal leadership was at least part of the problem (DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Townsend et al., 2013).

In a recent mixed-methods study, almost all principals expressed emotional exhaustion from their jobs (DeMatthews, Reyes, Carrola, Edwards, & James, 2021). DeMatthews and colleagues (2021) collected and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data from 203 of the 210 principals in a large urban school district in the Southwestern U.S. Data collection took place from June 2019 to February 2020. Researchers began with quantitative data obtained through

three surveys: a 22 question burnout inventory, a 30 item questionnaire measuring positives and negatives of caring for individuals who have experienced trauma, and a 29 item survey about worklife. Qualitative data was then collected via an open-ended survey to bettter understand links between burnout and working conditions, secondary trauma, and coping strategies.

Researchers in this study found that novice principals reported somewhat higher levels of burnout compared to their experienced peers. Further analysis showed secondary trauma, experienced by those who care for individuals who have experienced first-hand trauma, was the only significant indicator of burnout for new principals. This indicated for researchers that the more secondary trauma a new principal experiences, the greater their chances are of burnout. Over 50% of the principals surveyed, new and experienced, shared that addressing mental health issues of students was one of the most psychologically draining aspects of their job.

Although nearly all principals in this study shared that they were emotionally exhausted from their jobs, none of them received any professional development on coping behaviors either before or after entering their roles as principals. This means they were left to cope with the stresses of the principalship on their own. When asked about coping methods, the top responses were exercising, meditating, spirituality, networking with other principals, and time with family. Researchers in this study recommended additional research on principal burnout to better understand the impacts of working conditions, secondary trauma, and coping strategies on principal turnover.

Societal and Cultural Norms

Gender norms are still common in our society. Stereotypes like "women take care, men take charge" are part of our history and ingrained in our societal norms, how people of a certain

gender are supposed to act in their role. Women are the historical care givers. We are expected

to have more empathy than men.

From a study conducted through the University of Connecticut on a turnaround principal

program, a smaller study developed to investigate how gender influenced the experiences of the

participants in a leadership development program (Burton & Weiner, 2016). Two participants

were selected for this study, one male and one female. In this comparative study, the participants

were interviewed four times, every three months, over a year for approximately one hour each.

The female participant described herself as a "fighter" and her journey as an "ongoing and uphill

battle" while the male participant described himself as a "born leader" and his journey a "natural

progression." One of the female participant's goals was to tone down her "roar," showing she

entered the program seeing her style as in need of transformation. The male participant's goals

were to build upon his existing skills and become more forceful in his approach to

communication. Findings presented from the study suggested there is a difference in the

narratives of women and men relating to the understanding of the principalship which may lead

to women being more vulnerable to internalizing gendered critiques of their characteristics as a

leader.

In 2017, Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, the Robert Wood Johnson

Foundation, and National Public Radio collaboratively designed a study to examine reported

experiences of gender discrimination and harassment among women in the United States.

Researchers used Social Science Research Solutions, Inc., to conduct a nationally representative,

probability-based telephone survey of 3,453 US adults from January 26 to April 9, 2017.

Researchers examined the responses of the subsample of 1,596 US women. Of the women in

this study, 65% were White, 15% were Hispanic/Latina, 13% were Black, 16% were Asian, and 1% were Native American.

Results from this study indicated a significant number of women in the United States experience both institutional, "propagated by social institutions," and interpersonal, "propagated by individuals," discrimination (SteelFisher, et al., 2019, pp. 1443-1444). In this study, women reported personal experiences of institutional discrimination in employment. Of these women, 30% of the White women and 40% of the Black women reported being discriminated against when applying for a job. Also, 41% of the White women and 50% of the Black women reported being discriminated against in equal pay or being considered for a promotion. Women in this study also reported personal experiences of interpersonal discrimination via microaggressions (26% of White women and 25% of Black women) and gender-based slurs (21% of White women and 15% of Black women).

According to the annual report, *Characteristics of Public School Principals*, the percentage of Black public school principals has had no measurable differences across the past two decades (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). This statistic alone indicates racial stereotypes and biases are also challenges principals face. Bailes and Guthrie (2020) conducted a research study in Texas and used survival analysis to assess the probability and time to promotion of 4,689 assistant principals in Texas from 2001-2017. Of the approximately 4,700 assistant principals in the study, 60% were White and 15% were Black. Roughly 2,000 of the participants were promoted to principal. Nearly 45% of the 2,800 White assistant principal candidates were promoted while only 35% of the 690 Black candidates were promoted. Although women had the same chance of being promoted to principal as men, they had an average of over a year more teaching experience than men before becoming an assistant principal

and worked on average 8 months longer as an assistant principal. Researchers found that race and gender are associated with the probability of promotion to school leadership. With education, experience, school level, and urbanicity constant, Black assistant principals are the least likely to be promoted and wait longer for promotion when compared to White assistant principals (Bailes & Guthery, 2020).

In a recent quantitative study, researchers examined 25 years of educator employment data from Texas (Fuller et al., 2019). They discovered that while Black male and Latino educators are more likely than White males to be hired as assistant principals, they are less likely to be hired as principals. They also discovered women, regardless of race or ethnicity, are less likely to be hired as assistant principals or principals than White men. However, women of color are least likely of all to be hired in any position relative to their White male colleagues (Fuller et al., 2019). In other words, race and gender matter in regard to principals.

Lack of Support

Principals have demanding jobs, and it is important for districts to understand these challenges and provide supports to help them succeed (Daloisio, 2017). In a study on the connection between principal turnover and student achievement in New York City High Schools, principals agreed they received minimal support from their district which was generally in the form of principal meetings instead of targeted professional development (Weinstein et al., 2009). These same principals indicated maintaining a sustained connection with another principal was essential during the transition into the principalship. Over half the principals in the NASSP-LPI study indicated a factor contributing to their decision to leave their school or the principalship altogether was lack of support from the district (Levin et al., 2019).

Results from the 2018 NCTWCS showed significant differences in the mentoring and coaching supports received by North Carolina beginning teachers and North Carolina beginning principals. Approximately 2,100 North Carolina principals participated in additional survey questions in the 2018 NCTWCS specifically for principals. Of these participants, 59%, or approximately 1,240 principals, were in their first three years as a principal at their current school, and 40%, or approximately 840 principals, were in their first three years with their current school district.

As with beginning teachers, beginning principals also answered questions specifically related to supports for new principals. Only 677 North Carolina principals participated in this part of the survey. Only 43%, or approximately 270 principals, indicated they had been formally assigned a mentor in the past three years. Of these 43%, only 47% of the responding principals were assigned a mentor who worked at the same academic level, 13% were assigned a mentor outside of their district, and 14% had a mentor who was over 50 miles away. When asked about the utilization of observations for coaching and support, 32% of principals indicated they were never observed by their mentor in their school and 58% indicated they never observed their mentor in their school. With 82% of principals identifying their mentoring experience as important in shaping their effectiveness as a school leader, it appears that North Carolina is not doing enough to support beginning principals.

Principal Turnover

Principal turnover has been gaining the attention of researchers and policy makers for the past couple of decades. When I began my initial research on principal turnover, there were few recently published studies surrounding principal turnover. Rangel (2018) published the first review of research on principal turnover, examining 36 empirical studies, after I began my

research. Her work served as roadmap of sorts for me, directing me to other research on principal turnover as well as a concise overview of principal turnover across multiple studies. In Rangel's (2018) study, she constructed a rigorous review of research surrounding the area of principal turnover to find answers to three questions. She first wanted to understand how principal turnover was defined. She wanted to determine reasons for principal turnover. She also wanted to know the consequences resulting from principal turnover.

Because hers was the first of its kind, Rangel (2018) included a wide range of mixed methods and quantitative empirical studies in her review. She organized the studies into one of two categories within her conceptual framework. Studies either focused on causes of principal turnover or consequences of principal turnover. Once in these two initial subgroups, she further categorized studies based on how principal turnover was measured. Rangel (2018) concluded her study describing scholars' understanding of principal turnover as "relatively weak" (p. 116). She attributed this fact to the different ways in which principal turnover was measured across studies, lack of replication of studies, and inconsistency in findings. Based on her assessment of the 36 studies included in her review, the greatest causes of principal turnover were student achievement, accountability, and lack of support (Rangel, 2018). The greatest consequences of principal turnover were student achievement, teacher turnover, and school climate, culture, and resources (Rangel, 2018).

In the spring of 2019, The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) partnered to administer a survey to 424 current school principals across the United States (Levin et al., 2019). Researchers also conducted six focus groups from attendees at NASSP's national professional learning and advocacy conferences in March and July 2019. The groups consisted of 33 total members, 30 principals, one assistant

principal, and two district administrators from rural, urban, and suburban districts across 26 states. Their purpose was to identify reasons and effects of nationwide principal turnover. Forty-two percent of principals participating in this study were considering leaving their school, and 19% planned to "leave the principalship as soon as possible" (2019, p. 10).

In a 2019 study, researchers analyzed statewide data from Missouri and Tennessee to understand the consequences of principal turnover, employing a difference-in-difference model with a matched comparison group to determine possible effects of principal turnover on students and teachers (Bartanen, Grissom, & Rogers, 2019). Difference-in-difference (DID) model utilizes longitudinal data from treatment and control groups to develop an appropriate estimate about one based on the other (Columbia University Public Health, 2021). In this case, the treatment group consisted of schools who experienced principal turnover from one year to the next. The control group was a "comparison group" of schools in the same state with the same trajectories of student achievement and teacher turnover during the previous 5 years who did not experience principal turnover from one year to the next (Bartanen, Grissom, & Rogers, 2019, p. 351).

Like researchers before them, Bartanen and colleagues (2019) stressed the importance of the principal on school outcomes. They implied it takes time for new principals to develop the relationships and amass the knowledge possessed by existing principals. They also indicated principal transitions create a degree of instability and give rise to uncertainty about future leadership. Based on these implications, principal turnover can generate negative impacts on the climate and culture of a school before, during, and after the principal turnover takes place.

Bartanen and colleagues (2019), after reviewing 15 years of data from Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and nine years of data from Tennessee's

Education Research Alliance (TERA), concluded both Missouri and Tennessee schools

experience principal turnover on average every 4.2 years. Missouri, at 20%, had a slightly

higher principal turnover rate than Tennessee's 18%. Over the course of the study, almost all

schools in both states changed principals at least once with many experiencing principal turnover

multiple times (Bartanen, Grissom, & Rogers, 2019).

Researchers in this study identified different types of principal turnover: transfers, exits,

promotions, or demotions (Bartanen, Grissom, & Rogers, 2019). Those identified as transfers

moved schools but remained principals. Those identified as exits left the school system all

together. Those identified as promotions moved to central office positions. Those identified as

demotions moved to a school-based non-principal role like an assistant principal or teacher.

Overall, Bartanen and colleagues (2019) found that principal turnover has a negative

effect on school performance and teacher turnover. By classifying principal turnover into

categories, Bartanen and colleagues were able to analyze the effects of principal turnover based

on the conditions of the turnover. They found negative effects were most common when

principals transferred or were promoted. When principals exited the school system, schools saw

a decline in performance in the short-term, but then returned to a positive trajectory. When

principals were demoted, schools were not negatively affected. Researchers found the schools

may experience positive effects in this type of turnover. They found that not all principal

turnover is the same, and that not all principal turnover has negative effects.

In a recent national study, Yan (2020) examined how principal working conditions are

associated with principal turnover in traditional public and public charter schools. She

performed multinominal logistic regressions with region fixed effects on data from 2011-2012

Schools and Staffing Survey and 2012-2013 Principal Follow-up Survey. Yan used modeling to

predict the relationships between principal characteristics, school context, and working conditions and principal mobility and turnover. Principals were categorized into six groups based on comparing their positions in 2011-2012 to 2012-2013: stayer, mover, demoted, promoted, leaver, or retired. Stayers remained in the same role at the same school. Movers remained principals but transferred to another school. Demoted changed to a school-level, non-principal role. Promoted moved to a district position. Leavers went to work outside of education. Those in the retired category retired from the school system.

Yan performed several multinominal logistic regressions resulting in eight models. Based on Yan's Model 1, principal characteristics influence principal turnover. Male principals and principals of color were 50% more likely to be demoted than female and White principals (Yan, 2020). Principals with 11 or more years' experience as a principal were 56% less likely to be demoted than those with 3 or less years as a principal (Yan, 2020). Principals in their current schools for 2-3 years were less likely to be demoted than those at their schools for a year or less (Yan, 2020).

Yan's (2020) Model 2 illustrated the impact of school context on principal turnover. Principals with larger student enrollment were less likely to move than those with lower student enrollment. Principals over schools with high concentrations of students of color were 60-70% more likely to move than those with the lowest concentrations of students of color. However, principals with a high percentage of students receiving free or reduced priced meals were 60% less likely to be demoted than those with the lowest percentages of students receiving free or reduced priced meals.

Models 3, 4, and 5 in Yan's study assessed the impact of specific working conditions on principal turnover. An increase of one-unit of principals' logarithmic salary lowered the risk of

principals moving schools by 53%. Models 6, 7, and 8 in Yan's study illustrated the link between school disciplinary environment and principal turnover. She found that improving school disciplinary environment had a positive impact on principal turnover in schools with high concentrations of students of color. Specifically, principals were almost 40% less likely to move to another school with only a 1 standard deviation improvement in school disciplinary ratings.

<div align="center">

Theoretical Framework

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My theoretical framework references and relies on two theories, social role theory and intersectionality. In this section, I discuss both theories.

Social Role Theory

Social roles are identified as roles in which certain group members are overrepresented comparative to their numbers in the overall population (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Stereotypes are formed based on the views observers have of behaviors that they perceive as typical of a group (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Social role theory, well known in psychology as a theory of gender, relates to the division of social roles between women and men. This theory maintains that social roles are confined by the innate characteristics of women and men as well as by each society's socioeconomic development and environment (Eagly & Wood, 2016). This theory serves as an explanation of gender stereotypes.

Koenig and Eagly completed a multi-part study to examine the suggestion that observations of groups' roles determine stereotypes. In their preliminary survey, they asked 313 community members in public settings in and around Chicago and 257 students from a Midwestern university to name three occupations disproportionately held by members of different groups. The four categories were Black men, Black women, White men, and White women because stereotypes of intersecting categories often differ from those of gender or race

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alone (Ghavami & Peplau, 2012). Results of this survey were accurate when compared to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Next, Koenig and Eagly (2014) surveyed 505 community members and 379 university students. Participants were asked to rate characteristics linked to occupational stereotypes from the preliminary survey with Black men, Black women, White men, and White women. The connections between the groups' stereotypes and the characteristics of their typical roles were clear and considerable. This reinforced social role theory's premise that stereotypes are generated from observations of the typical social roles represented by group members.

As part of this study, Koenig and Eagly (2014) collected data from 123 online survey participants. These participants were provided a list of tasks typically completed in various occupations and asked to rate characteristics of that role. Researchers compared this data with the stereotype data from the previous survey. As with the previous survey, the connections between the typical roles and groups' stereotypes were evident and significant. This further reinforced social role theory's stance that stereotypes are created based on observation.

Koenig and Eagly's (2014) next phase took place in a laboratory setting at a West Coast university with 48 study participants. Participants rated characteristics required for work based on six occupational interest descriptions. As with the two previous surveys, this survey aligned with social role theory's prediction. The relationships between the groups' stereotypes and the characteristics of their typical roles based on the occupational interest profile were strong and substantial.

In Koenig and Eagly's (2014) next survey, 623 participants received information online about a prediction in a social group shifting into new occupations they had not held previously. Participants were then asked to rate the typical opinion about that group in the future. This study

was designed to determine if stereotypes would shift to align more with characteristics of the new occupation. The results demonstrated that the new occupation had a greater impact on the projected stereotype than the current group stereotype. Although stereotype change is typically slow, results from this study indicate seeing change will foster shifts in stereotypes and social roles.

Intersectionality

Decades after first coining the term, Crenshaw shared intersectionality was a metaphor identifying an ongoing means of trying to understand race in terms of gender or gender in terms of race (Collins, 2019). Collins views intersectionality as a "tool for social change" with the potential to become a critical social theory that can deal with current "social problems and the social changes needed to solve them" (2019, p. 2). Collins likens intersectionality to a "window into thinking about the significance of ideas and social action in fostering social change" (Collins, 2019, p. 286). She continues,

> Although intersectionality has been consistently aligned with visionary
> ideals such as freedom, social justice, equality, democracy, and human
> rights, neither change itself nor intersectionality's connections to such
> change is preordained. The only thing that is truly certain about human
> existence is that it will change… Social Change is a cyclical process
> brought about by people… we cannot cling to scripts that have already
> been written for us and simply follow the rules… Through critical
> analysis we can reinterpret those traditions and imagine new possibilities
> for ourselves and our societies (Collins, 2019, pp. 286-287).

In a recent study, researchers interviewed three successful Black women principals, one each from England, South Africa, and the United States (Moorosi et al., 2018). Researchers used the life-history interview model to study the lives and understand the experiences of these Black women leaders. They employed intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991) to analyze each leader's experiences of gender and race in creating success in leadership (Moorosi et al., 2018).

Nicola, in her late 30s, grew up in a "deprived White area" of England and described herself as a "triple whammy, too young, too female, and too Black" (Moorosi, Fuller, & Reilly, 2018, p. 154). Molly, in her 60s, grew up in South Africa, child of migrant laborers, where there were limited opportunities for Black people. Kay, in her 50s during the study, grew up in the U.S. foster care system due to family struggles with drugs and prison. Discovered through the stories of these three successful Black principals, researchers defined what successful leadership means.

Nicola strives to take a "pupil-centered" approach to leadership by "wanting the best and doing whatever it takes to get the best for those groups of students" (Moorosi, Fuller, & Reilly, 2018, p. 155). Molly takes a similar "holistic child" approach through "involvement in learners' work and hands-on engagement with the community" (Moorosi, Fuller, & Reilly, 2018, p. 155). Kay serves as a positive role model sharing, "I am the only professional woman my students see. We've evolved from nurses and teachers, nannies and housekeepers. It's important that girls see us in positions of power" (Moorosi, Fuller, & Reilly, 2018, p. 155).

Researchers Ghavami and Peplau (2012) asked 627 U.S. undergraduate students to come up with 10 characteristics for one of seventeen groups. The groups were separated into five ethic groups, two gender groups, and ten gender-by-ethnic groups (i.e., Black women or Latino men). Participants were instructed to list at least ten characteristics of the current cultural stereotypes of

the target group they were assigned. The researchers' intersectionality hypothesis was consistent with the findings that gender-by-ethnic stereotypes were unique rather than just the combination of the gender stereotypes with the ethnic stereotypes. Review of the top fifteen characteristics attributed to each group revealed ten unique attributes for Black women. Only five of the top fifteen characteristics listed for Black women coincided with stereotypes of Blacks and none coincided with stereotypes of women (Ghavami & Peplau, 2012).

Aaron (2020) conducted an in-depth semi-structured interview study over a four month period with four Black women principals recruited in the same way as the participants in my study, through recommendations from colleagues. She used intersectionality theory and Black feminist epistemology to understand how Black women principals acted out their leadership and how their leadership was influenced by their experiences with racism and sexism (Aaron, 2020).

Black culture is more collective in nature than the individualistic Euro-centric culture (Collins, 2019). Because of this cultural influence, Black women educational leaders traditionally lead with specific attention to individual students, families, staff members, and the community. Their focus is typically as servant leaders, implementing changes in schools to transition communities from places of despondency into places of promise (Aaron, 2020).

Participants in Aaron's study were in their 30s and 40s and had various years of experience in education and as educational leaders. Aaron's (2020) findings resulted in two broad themes: "student centered leadership and perceptions of racial stereotypes and deconstructing perceptions about Black women" (2020, p. 153). The first theme arrived as all participants in this study saw themselves as student-centered leaders. The second theme arose through participants' stories and the challenges they shared that were associated with their identities, specifically race, followed by gender.

As student-centered leaders, participants in Aaron's study put student growth at the forefront of all decisions. Each participant also served as "caretakers," using their role to meet the needs of students (Aaron, 2020, p. 153). Three of the four participants stressed the importance of building relationships with all stakeholders as it linked to student growth. Teacher working conditions was a high priority to these principals. They emphasized the importance of them showing care toward their teachers to enable the teachers to care for the students. Principals in this study practiced "context-informed decision-making" (Aaron, 2020, p. 154). One principal shared "students' familial contexts (with teachers) to help teachers empathize and effectively respond to student needs" (Aaron, 2020, p. 154). Principals in this study held firm expectations of teacher performance as it directly impacted student success.

All principals in Aaron's study shared challenges they experienced regarding their race and gender. Each participant faced challenges due to negative perceptions and stereotypes of Black women and their efforts to distance themselves from these stereotypes. One principal shared she felt that her faculty of majority White women were challenged with accepting her authority because she was a young woman of color (Aaron, 2020). Another shared she was "hyperaware" of her tone and body language when communicating with teachers (Aaron, 2020, p. 158). These principals led purposefully to dismantle the negative stereotypes of Black women and detach themselves from them.

Conclusion

Approximately 18% of principals are leaving their jobs each year which makes understanding why principal turnover rates are so high important (Goldring & Taie, 2018; Rangel, 2018). Changes to climate and culture can be problematic for principals due to teacher working conditions and community perception (Buckrham, 2016; Townsend et al., 2013).

Standardized tests, used to determine if teachers and principals are effective, delivers the message: generate increased student growth and achievement or else (West, Peck, & Reitzug, 2010). Principals are expected to manage day to day operations of their buildings while developing and maintaining relationships with various stakeholders within their school community (Goldring & Taie, 2018). They are to support teachers in their continued growth and development and produce data indicating students are benefiting from instruction under their leadership (Babo & Postma, 2017; Bartanen, Grissom, & Rogers, 2019). Although continued coaching and professional development is needed to allow principals to develop and grow as leaders, there is limited continued support once in the principal's seat (DeJong, Grundmeyer & Yankey, 2017; Hansen, 2018).

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Principals are leaders of their buildings and school communities. They have a significant impact on the academic success of students. They are accountable for the climate and culture of their school community. They are responsible for the overall success or failure of their school. Principal turnover rates are high. North Carolina's principal turnover rates are among the highest in the country. With the importance of principal leadership to the success of a school, principal turnover is alarming. Although there is some research on principal turnover itself, there is limited research on why principal turnover is so high. I am a former North Carolina principal who made the decision to leave school administration to return to the classroom after 2½ years as a principal. My experiences in and commitment to North Carolina public education drive my inquiry into why some North Carolina principals are leaving their roles and returning to the classroom. The purpose of my study is to provide insight from the stories of three, including myself, former North Carolina principals who are current North Carolina teachers to gain a better understanding of why these principals chose to leave their leadership roles to return to the classroom.

Pilot Study

I conducted pilot interviews during two separate data collection projects. Initial exploratory interviews are common in qualitative research to inform refinements and additions for later interviews (Menter et al., 2011). One purpose for conducting these pilot interviews was to practice doing qualitative research and using the data collection method of semi-structured interviews. The second purpose was to test draft question sets to determine if they generated useful data to answer my research question. A final purpose was to identify any preliminary

themes related to why principals left their positions to provide direction for additional reviews of literature on the topic of principal turnover.

Initially I planned to conduct one 60-75-minute interview with each participant, following up as needed. During my pilot interviews, I realized the need to conduct multiple interviews to prevent rushing through any questions. I wanted participants to have time to share stories, experiences, reflections, and thoughts, providing richer data to identify common themes and understand why the educators chose to leave their school leadership roles to return to the classroom. To better organize the interviews for my dissertation study, I chose to conduct three interviews: background and leading up to the principalship, during the principalship, and why they left the principalship. Between interviews, I watched and listened to recordings to prepare follow up questions and notes to ask for clarification of any answers. I also provided copies of transcripts to participants between interviews to give them a greater sense of ownership of this process as well as the opportunity to review their responses to questions and clarify or add to any statements made in the previous interview.

Due to scheduling conflicts, two of the three pilot interviews were conducted over the telephone. Audio recordings were made of all three interviews, and I took 7-10 pages of typed notes during each interview. Telephone interviews are preferred by some because they can reduce bias based on visual and nonverbal factors (Menter et al., 2011). However, conducting interviews over the telephone prevented me from seeing facial expressions and body language during the interviews that might have prompted me to offer or ask for clarification. Video conferencing would have provided a setting more closely to that of a face-to-face interview and possibly have generated richer data (Menter et al., 2011). Due to COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines in place in North Carolina in 2020, I used Zoom conferencing for interviews in my

study rather than in person. This allowed me to see my participants during the interview process as well as record video and audio for coding and data analysis purposes.

In listening to my pilot interview recordings, I realized how much I talked with the participants. I found great commonalities in our stories as educators. I connected with the participants, and at times the recordings sounded more like conversations between friends than research interviews. I wondered if these types of conversations would serve as a hinderance to collecting rich data for my study or as a catalyst to gain a greater understanding of why the participants left the principalship than would be gained by a researcher who is not also a practitioner. Interview participants in my study and I share common experiences as principals. To reduce interviewer influence during my interviews for my dissertation research, I refrained from verbal and nonverbal signs that indicated my approving or disapproving of the interviewee's answers (Menter et al., 2011).

Pilot interview questions consisted of six primary questions with sub questions to generate a better understanding of the participants' time during their role as principals.

1. Tell about your background; education, work, and life experiences that led you to become a school principal.

2. Tell about your time as a school principal.

    a. What supports did you receive during your first year, first 3-5 years, after 5 years?

    b. How would you describe a typical day for you as a principal?

    c. What challenges did you experience? What supports were in place for you for challenges such as these?

3. Why did you leave the principalship?

4. Why did you decide to return to the classroom (non-administrative position)?

5. What, if anything, could have been done to keep you in the role as a school administrator?

6. What changes would you like to see made in policies or practices involving principals to reduce the principal turnover rates in NC?

These pilot study questions influenced my development of interview questions and protocols for my formal dissertation research. The interview protocols for my actual dissertation study are in Appendix A. I present details on the development of these questions in those protocols later in this chapter in the section on methods.

Participants

Mr. Jaxon, a White male, went into education with the plan to teach for 7-10 years before becoming a school administrator. After teaching 7½ years in a mid-sized, rural school district in North Carolina, he became an assistant principal in that district at a large, Title I elementary school. After two years in that position, he accepted an assistant principalship at a small elementary school in a large, urban district also in North Carolina. After six years in this position, he accepted a principalship at a Title I elementary school in the district in which he had previously worked. He served in this role for five years before transitioning to an assistant principal position split between two elementary schools in the district. After a year, he moved back to the large, urban district he had served in previously where he worked as a high school assistant principal for a year. At that time, he returned to the classroom where he currently teaches at a mid-sized middle school in the same school district.

Ms. Ottoman, a White female, went into education with no initial plans to pursue school administration. She was a classroom teacher at a small elementary charter school in a large, urban district in North Carolina when she was approached by someone in leadership about the

upcoming assistant principal vacancy at the school. She was offered and accepted the position

the same year she began work on her master's in school administration (MSA). She served as

the assistant principal and then took over as the principal upon completion of her MSA. She left

the position after only one year, not returning after going on maternity leave with her first child.

Ten years later, after her third child started Kindergarten, she reentered the workforce. After

applying for but not receiving interviews for several positions in school administration, she

accepted a teaching position at a mid-sized middle school in a mid-sized rural school district in

North Carolina.

Like Ms. Ottoman, Ms. Shay did not go into education with a goal of becoming a school

administrator. She taught first grade her first year as a teacher. Ms. Shay, also a White female,

stated nine teachers retired that year "because of the new principal" which gave her the

opportunity to move to upper grades her second year where she served as a fifth-grade teacher

for five years. She began specializing in mathematics and took on leadership roles with the state.

This prompted her interest in school administration. She became a principal fellow at a large

public university in North Carolina and completed her internship at a mid-sized, non-Title I

middle school in the same district in which she taught. After her internship, she became the

assistant principal at a mid-sized Title I middle school in that same district. After six years as an

assistant principal, she accepted a principalship in the same district at a mid-sized, Title I

elementary school. She served in this role for six years before transferring to a small, non-Title I

elementary school in the same district. She resigned her position at that school in the winter of

that year and is now teaching in a hybrid setting at a small charter school in a neighboring school

district.

Themes

Each participant in the pilot studies had different experiences and stories. Ms. Ottoman's time as a school administrator was significantly shorter than that of Mr. Jaxon or Ms. Shay. Review of interview transcripts and notes yielded a few common themes in their experiences that also appear in literature on principal turnover. I highlight specifics from their stories in the sections below on these emerging themes: support, changes in culture and climate and complexity of the principalship.

Support

Ms. Ottoman shared nothing but positive experiences in her transition to the principalship and during her first and only year as a school principal. She was hand-selected by the school's principal to serve as the school's assistant principal. That same principal groomed her to take over as her replacement as principal the following year. She served as a classroom teacher, assistant principal, and then principal in the same small charter school. She felt very much supported by the school administration and staff in each role she held. She did not have professional development aside from what she received in her MSA program.

Both Mr. Jaxon and Ms. Shay were assigned mentors during their first year as principals. Mr. Jaxon and his mentor had previously worked together as teachers, and he stated they had "great rapport." He also shared he had a lot of support his first year from other principals and district leaders, including assistant superintendents, helping him "learn the ins and outs of the school (and) helping lead the first school improvement team meeting." Ms. Shay said she had a mentor "in name only" who never called her. She stated she felt like the mentor did not have time for her and that she felt she was bothering the mentor anytime she called. Ms. Shay also

had relationships with other principals in the district from having worked with them before, so she called on people she already knew for support.

Ms. Shay participated in monthly beginning principal meetings her first year. She felt the meetings were good because each meeting was facilitated by a different district-level department chair: finance, human resources, curriculum and instruction, maintenance, transportation, etc. However, she thought they could have been in a better order due to feeling some department information would have been more helpful at different times in the year. She also participated in quarterly quadrant meetings during years 3-5 which she classified as "a waste of time," indicating the meetings were more about getting signatures than building relationships and working together.

Mr. Jaxon felt the support he received from the director of elementary education in year two was "priceless and genuine." He shared this district leader was "extremely supportive" and that she took time from her day to come out to his school to make sure he was "on the right track with PDP goals, day-to-day operations, and meeting deadlines." He stated the support received in years 2-3 was like year 1. He commented he could pick up the phone and call multiple department leaders in the district anytime he had a question. Mr. Jaxon stated he noticed a change during his fourth year as a principal due to a change in district leadership. I will share specifics of these experiences in the following section on changes in climate or culture.

Mr. Jaxon and Ms. Shay participated in monthly principal meetings ran by superintendents and assistant superintendents in their school districts. Neither participant saw these meetings as beneficial due to them consisting of mostly sit and get board meetings where they were inundated with information to take back to their buildings and assigned additional tasks to complete. Both participants expressed a greater need for principals to collaborate on

actual happenings in their buildings and communities in more of a professional learning community setting rather than sitting in day-long meetings to receive information both felt could have been pushed out in shared drives or emails.

Changes in Climate or Culture

Mr. Jaxon shared transitioning from his first to second year was difficult owed to losing his assistant principal due to her moving out of state. He shared the school had experienced a great deal of principal and teacher turnover over the years with the assistant principal being pretty "main-stay." During his first year as the principal, Mr. Jaxon had made observations and was prepared to discuss changes to move the school forward. He expressed having a change in school leadership two years in a row was difficult for staff. That, combined with new curriculum and instruction mandates by the district and state, caused great stresses in the school community. He celebrated that the newly hired assistant principal stayed with him for his remaining four years as principal.

The superintendent in Mr. Jaxon's school district retired at the end of his third year as principal. Mr. Jaxon stated he noticed a change due to a change in district leadership with a new superintendent and a new assistant superintendent. He stated monthly meeting supports were still in place, but he felt like he was starting over in year 1 because he did not know the new leaders. He likened it to the first semester in college, not knowing the expectations and trying to learn the ropes. He indicated the leadership style was different from the previous administration with more of a "micromanage system." He stated that he understood superintendents are responsible for the school district and it is up to them to make changes as they see fit. He concluded, "I felt the difference for sure, and colleagues at the time also noticed a difference."

The superintendent in Ms. Shay's district accepted a superintendency in another state at the end of her third year as a principal. Two assistant superintendents also changed in years 3-4 of her principalship. Having worked with the pervious administrators for her entire career as an educator, she expressed noticing an abrupt change in the district with each change in district leadership. Ms. Shay stated the new superintendent touted the importance of building relationships yet left veteran principals feeling a sense of "distrust and lack of support." She characterized the superintendent's leadership style as "do as I say, not as I do," elaborating she would never have been able to conduct staff meetings the way his leadership team conducted principal meetings. She also stated he transformed good assistant superintendents into "yes men."

Ms. Shay transferred schools her last year as a principal. She moved from a mid-sized Title I school on one side of the district to a small, non-Title I school on the other side of the district. Her assistant principal moved with her to the school. The school Ms. Shay transferred to had experienced principal turnover twice before in the past five years. Ms. Shay's predecessor had been at the school only three years, and the principal before her had been at the school only two years. She shared her previous school "felt like home," and this school was "just different."

Complexity of the Principalship

Mr. Jaxon and Ms. Shay shared what a typical day was like as a principal. Both expressed the role was complex. Mr. Jaxon described it, "As principal, you are it. Everything comes to you, ends with you." Ms. Shay shared that she was fortunate to have leaders in her building she trusted to handle things.

For Mr. Jaxon, each day was different, but the work started the minute he stepped on campus, at or before 7:00 each morning and ended 12-14 hours later when he "felt (he was)

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prepared for the next day." He interacted with students and families as they arrived on campus

in the car rider line each morning which was his way of getting going and motivated for the day.

He classified days as some good and some bad, identifying good days as those he was able to get

into classrooms and bad days as those when he was consumed with discipline referrals and irate

parent phone calls.

As with most elementary schools in the district in which Mr. Jaxon served, he shared an

assistant principal with another school. Although his school had a high exceptional children

(EC) population, two self-contained classrooms and one of the district's Serious/Emotional

disabled (SED) classes, Mr. Jaxon received allocation for 40% of the assistant principal he

shared with another elementary school. He said with the population challenges and complexities

of multiple EC classrooms, increased numbers of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and

enhanced behavioral needs, he sometimes felt like the district's "red headed stepchild."

Ms. Shay started her morning with bus duty, greeting students as they arrived on campus.

She then reported to the cafeteria to help with breakfast duty. She indicated her assistant

principal handled most of the school and bus discipline and that she only dealt with it if the

assistant principal was unable to do so during their time on campus. She, like Mr. Jaxon, shared

an assistant principal (50%) with another elementary school. Ms. Shay expressed a concern for

spending too much time on the computer, responding to emails, or preparing reports. She spent

as much time as she could in classrooms, conducting walkthroughs and observations and

providing support to teachers and students.

Conclusion

The pilot study informed my actual dissertation study in important ways. Conducting

pilot interviews enabled me to see myself in both the role of a researcher and that of a study

participant. Through this process, I realized the importance of keeping my experiences and my story separate from the interview process with study participants. My commitment to have my story as part of this research pushed me to investigate ways to include my story without skewing the data from the interviews by participating in conversations. This is how I decided to use reflexive journaling as the data collection method for my story.

Three areas of concern were evident in this pilot study: The role of the principalship is complex; changes in climate and culture affect the principalship; and there is a lack of differentiated support for principals once in their roles. I used these three underlying themes from the pilot study to aid in crafting my questions for the semi-structured interviews and reflexive journal prompts in my actual dissertation study. Since the second interview in my dissertation study focused on the time during the principalship, I prepared questions for this interview to probe study participants to reflect on the topics that arose as common themes in my pilot study. To gain a better understanding of the climate and culture of the schools and districts of the study participants in my dissertation study, I asked each participant to describe the region, size, demographics, academic performance, and turnover in the schools and districts they served as well as the surrounding community. To provide a clear picture of the complexity of the role, I asked dissertation study participants to describe their responsibilities as a principal on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual basis. Since pilot study participants expressed a concern for the lack of support received once in the role, I designed dissertation study questions to comprehend the level of support received by each participant in their first year, first three years, and after their first three years.

Research Question

One research question drives this qualitative study:

Why are North Carolina principals leaving their positions as school leaders to return to the classroom?

Methodology

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), basic qualitative research is inspired by "intellectual interest in a phenomenon" with a primary purpose to know more about the phenomenon (p. 3). I chose my research topic because I am interested in principal turnover and want to know more about it. Qualitative research applies to an assortment of explanatory methods which seek to explain and interpret the meaning of genuine phenomena in the social world (Van Maanen, 1979). Qualitative research is about understanding, from the participants' perspectives, "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their words, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). The purpose of my research study is to understand why principals are leaving and what they believe, based on their experiences, that districts could do to improve principal retention. Interviewing former North Carolina principals who have resigned their roles to return to the classroom gives me the "emic or insider's perspective" to understand why principals are making this decision (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 16).

Basic interpretative study, or basic qualitative research, is the most common type of qualitative research in applied fields of practice such as education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data are collected by the researcher through means such as document reviews, interviews, and observations. Analysis in these types of studies involved identifying recurring patterns. Findings in qualitative studies are the recurring patterns in the data and are descriptive and comprehensive. Given that I am collecting the stories and in-depth experiences of former principals, basic qualitative research is the most appropriate methodological approach.

Sample Population

Participants for this study are North Carolina educators. Selection criteria was that the educators be former North Carolina principals as well as current teachers in North Carolina. Candidates for participants were discovered through word of mouth from peers and colleagues as well as academic and professional networks. Candidates were pre-screened to ensure they met criteria for my study on initial contact.

Data Collection Methods

I conducted three semi-structured interviews each with two former North Carolina principals who, like me, left their school leadership roles to return to the classroom. In addition to the interviews with these participants, I completed a reflexive journal of my own story during my time as a North Carolina principal. In the following pages, I outline why I selected each of these data collection methods and how I used them for this qualitative study.

Interviews

Research interviews are interpersonal, conversations between two people who share a common interest (Kvale, 1996). I am not only a researcher in this study; I am a practitioner, also a former North Carolina principal and current North Carolina teacher. I share similar experiences with the interviewees. The purpose of my research is to understand why principals left their roles. I want to know and understand their experiences, their stories, their narratives (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Schostak (2005) illustrates well the intimate challenge of interviewing:

> Listening to people's lives, recording their experiences, their moments of
> crisis, their frailties, their intimacies, these are the challenges to the
> researcher. What is this moment of listening? And how does it 'translate'

into the text of the transcript? How is the text then to be read? By

focusing upon that moment of engagement between people where each

attends to and addresses the other, this moment of engagement is critical

for every dimension of what it means to be human. It sounds like a grand

statement. But here an emancipatory project either stands or falls. (p. 9)

During the spring of 2020, I contacted three prospective candidates for my study. These

educators were referred to me as possible candidates for my study by colleagues who were aware

of my research question and proposed study. I reached out to each prospective candidate via

email to introduce myself, tell them a little about my story, and request a Zoom call to discuss

further. I had Zoom calls with all three prospective candidates over the next weeks.

After the initial meetings with prospective candidates, I invited two of them to participate

in my study, and they both accepted. I scheduled the first interview with each participant for the

following week, completing all three interviews by the early fall of 2020. Each interview ranged

in length from one and one half to three hours, totaling twelve hours and was conducted virtually

through the Zoom video conferencing platform.

I did not invite the third candidate to join my study. The third candidate was referred to

me by a colleague as someone who might fit my study. After our initial meeting, I discovered

the candidate did not meet requirements for my study. She was a former assistant principal, but

not a former principal. She had left her leadership role to return to the classroom. However,

prior to our conversation she accepted a new assistant principal position and was no longer in the

classroom.

I completed in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the two former North Carolina

principals who left their positions to return to the classroom. Semi-structured interviews allow

for open-ended questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), providing participants with opportunities to share their feelings, experiences, and stories to better understand why they traded in the principalship for the classroom (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The consistency of using the same open-ended questions on my interview protocol with each participant allowed for any underlying themes to emerge.

I conducted three virtual face-to-face interviews with the two former North Carolina principals utilizing the video conferencing service Zoom. The first interview focused on background information on each participant to understand desire and motivation to become a school principal. The second interview focused on each participant's time as a principal. The purpose of the second interview was to understand the role of a principal, the complexity of the position, and the level of support received through coaching and professional development once becoming a principal. The third interview focused on why each participant left the principalship, and why they returned to the classroom. The interview protocols for each round of interviews are in Appendix A.

Some of the data collection I used in this study was like what I would have done had I conducted the interviews face-to-face. I took notes during each interview. I also recorded the audio of each interview. I then submitted the Zoom audio recording of each interview to be transcribed using an online transcription software. I compared transcriptions to recordings, checking for any errors, omissions, or need for clarification with a participant. I reviewed and coded each transcript, identifying themes as they emerged.

Utilizing Zoom provided an additional benefit to data collection than a face-to-face interview would have offered. I recorded the video of each of the six semi-structured 60–180-minute Zoom interviews with study participants. This allowed me to review these recorded

video sessions as a third party observer after the live interviews. As part of the data collection for my study, I reviewed the video of each recorded interview three times. The first time, I reviewed videos as part of my reflexive journaling process. I will explain this in greater detail in the following section. The second time, I reviewed videos alongside the transcripts of each interview as another means of ensuring the transcripts I would use for coding were correct, making corrections and notes along the process. The last time, I reviewed videos after identifying themes from the coded transcripts and in the writing of each participant's story for Chapter 4.

Reflexive Journal

I used reflective writing as a primary data source for my study to collect data on myself as a study participant. Reflective writing as a primary data source is well-established in qualitative research in the field of education (Choi, 2020). I completed a reflexive journal of my experiences as an educator, former principal, and current classroom teacher. I used guided reflexive journaling, a form of interactive writing between myself the researcher and myself the study participant (Quirke et al., 2021).

Prior to conducting the first round of interviews, I journaled to answer questions for the first interview as a participant in my study. Based on my reflection from the pilot interviews that at times took on more of a conversation tone, I used the journal to express myself prior to the interviews to ensure my story had a place in my study while minimizing the interference and influence of my experiences on the interview data collection process of my study. I also revisited my journal after I completed the first round of interviews in the same way that participants were provided the opportunity to review and clarify between interviews. I also

added to my journal any notes I took while reviewing the video of each interview, including

direct quotes of myself from the interviews.

I repeated this process of journaling before both the second and third interviews as well

as reviewing and revising between interviews. I reviewed and analyzed data from this reflexive

journal separately from interview data. Once data analysis of journal and interviews were

complete, I compared data sets to determine underlying themes. I share my story in Chapter 4

following the same format as the two interview participants, in three sections aligned with the

three interview sessions: before the principalship, during the principalship, and the reason for

leaving the principalship.

Data Analysis Strategies

I recorded and took notes during interviews. I transcribed recordings and reviewed notes

after interviews. I transcribed the recordings by using online transcription software and I

reviewed all recordings, notes, and transcriptions to ensure accuracy. I analyzed interview data

through a qualitative, constant-comparison approach and use of emergent coding (Creswell &

Creswell, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Spradley, 1979). I began the coding process with a

keyword analysis in which I searched transcriptions for words that frequently occurred (Savin-

Baden & Major, 2013). I determined relevance of words by eliminating repeated words such as I

that have no significance on my study. I also looked at the content surrounding the keywords

and the context in which they are used (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). During this process, I

looked for any common phrases that emerged as possible categories connecting to themes

identified in literature: climate and culture, student achievement, responsibilities of the

principal, and supports provided once a principal.

I maintained a reflexive journal (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), writing about and reflecting on experiences I had in the three stages addressed in interviews: background context and my reason(s) for becoming a principal, during my time as a principal, and reason(s) I left the principalship. I have reflections from previous writings completed during work on my MSA, 2010-2012, as well as my EdS, 2016-2018. I also reviewed these documents as data for my reflection.

Trustworthiness

Formal research integrity plays an important role in fostering fundamental ethical standards such as respect for the autonomy of participants (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2020). Anonymity is important for participants in this study. All participants were currently serving as educators. This study is based on their memories and perceptions. It is important that I ensure participants' anonymity. A pseudonym is a fictitious name used to conceal someone's real name. Pseudonyms are often used in qualitative research to provide confidentiality and anonymity to participants (Given, 2008). To provide participants with anonymity, pseudonyms were created for each participant and used throughout this study.

Because of my experiences, I have opinions and biases about the role of the principalship. I began my research with ideas of why some principals leave. Support is a reason provided in some literature as to why principals leave their roles. Support is also something I considered in my decision to leave the principalship. Both my review of the literature and my experiences were used in developing interview questions for this study. Support is a theme that I outline in my study as well as a topic addressed in my recommendations. I have identified the biases I have based on my experiences, and I will monitor them to provide an accurate depiction of how they may have impacted the data collection or analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Acknowledging my biases and subjectivity establish rigor for my qualitative research (Lather, 2004).

When listening to recordings from pilot interviews, I realized how much these experiences played a role in my position as a researcher. At times I found myself in what seemed to take on more of a conversational sound than interview. I made connections with the participants. However, my responses of affirmation could have yielded incomplete or skewed data. My experiences during the pilot interviews guided my position in this research as an insider, not solely a researcher but a practitioner, and during my reflexivity a participant as well.

Position can affect trustworthiness in research, particularly related to the bias of findings due to influences of the researcher's ideals, experiences, perceptions, and interpretations (Bryman, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Gaus, 2017). Reflexivity is self-questioning and self-understanding (Cumming-Potvin & Sanford, 2015). Applying reflexivity enabled me to engage with interviewees, being aware of my own cultural, ethical, or otherwise origins as well as of those of my participants (Patton, 2002; Schwandt, 1997). In my Chapter 4, I present data, analysis, and findings from my reflexive journal separate from participants' data. During this process, I served as both a participant and the researcher. Keeping my reflexive journal separate from interview data contributed to the trustworthiness of my study. Previous empirical research drawn from relevant literature is presented along with my reflection and participant stories to strengthen the trustworthiness of my qualitative research study (Tracy, 2010).

Limitations

The focus of this study is on why some North Carolina principals made the decision to leave their positions and return to the classroom. This narrow focus itself creates a limitation. I only interviewed educators in North Carolina. Specifically, I only interviewed educators who

currently teach in North Carolina who also served previously as North Carolina principals. My

study consists of three participants: myself and two interview participants. This small sample

group limits the generalizability of my study.

Summary

This is a basic qualitative study. In preparation for this study, I conducted pilot studies to

gain practice with the process of interviewing and analyzing data. This also gave me an

opportunity to fine tune questions. During the pilot studies, I realized the ease in which these

interviews could turn into conversations with colleagues due to our common experiences and

connections as practitioners. This awareness created from the pilot studies guided me toward

finding a way to participate in the research as a study participant without skewing interview data

by my input. For my dissertation study, I employed reflexive journaling which allowed me to

serve as both the researcher and a participant. I used semi-structured interviews conducted via

Zoom for the other two principal participants.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to understand why some North Carolina principals are leaving their roles as school administrators to return to the classroom. This chapter contains the stories of three former North Carolina principals and their reasons for leaving the principalship to return to the classroom. The stories are all quite different yet share many commonalities. Mr. Marsh served as the principal at three different schools in the same district over a continuous twelve-year period before leaving the principalship to return to the classroom. Ms. Taylor served as the principal at three different schools in three different districts, leaving the principalship briefly after each. Most recently, she left the principalship to return to the classroom and pursue her doctorate in educational leadership. I served as the principal at one school for 2½ years before leaving the principalship to return to the classroom.

In the following pages, I share backgrounds, stories, and experiences gathered from each of the three interviews with two of the study participants as well as my reflexive journal responses around the same interview questions. I share information about each study participant leading up to accepting their roles as North Carolina principals. I also provide details of experiences, responsibilities, and professional support received while in school leadership positions. I conclude each story with data collected in the final interviews and my reflexive journal around the day each decided to resign their positions as principals.

Mr. Marsh's Story

Mr. Marsh, a White male in his 40s, currently teaches at a large, non-Title I high school in North Carolina. He grew up in a small rural community in upstate New York with six older siblings, two half-brothers and four half-sisters. He is his parents only child together, and the "baby" of the family. Both of Mr. Marsh's parents worked in education. His mom was a teacher

assistant, and his dad was a bus driver. Mr. Marsh was an accomplished three-sport athlete. He

shared the impact athletics had on his life and performance as a student as well as serving as a

driving force and reason for entering the field of education as a career,

> I knew what sports had done for me. As a three-sport athlete, in between
>
> sports, my grades suffered because I didn't have the discipline and
>
> motivation. I didn't put as much effort into school. I knew I wanted to be
>
> a coach and have a connection with kids. Most learning for kids takes
>
> place - it's not curriculum related. What they use, what they remember.
>
> My fondest memories are not about the great lesson my teacher did on
>
> functions. It's the stuff that went on in the classroom that wasn't
>
> instructional, relationships – teachers and coaches inspired me. So, I knew
>
> I wanted to do something like that.

Mr. Marsh graduated in the top 10 of his graduating high school class of 100. He shared

that he was given poor direction from his school counselor and thought the only alternative he

had after high school was to go into the military. He applied to a couple of colleges for athletics

but did not want to burden his parents or himself with debt after college, so he opted for the

military which he knew would help him get into and pay for college. After graduation, he joined

the Navy and was stationed in South Carolina where he fell in love with the South.

Mr. Marsh's love for athletics and desire to coach called him to pursue a degree and

career in education. He returned home to attend a small but rigorous state college. He described

college as a "struggle," a "smack in the face" for him. He revealed, "High school was easy. I

never had to study. I was a decent student. I never knew how to study." These experiences later

served him well during his third principalship at an AVID (Advancement Via Individual

Determination) school. Mr. Marsh successfully completed college, graduating with an undergraduate degree in secondary education and math, grades 7-12 in New York that converted to grades 6-12 in North Carolina.

After graduation, Mr. Marsh began his teaching career on the east coast of Maryland at a rural middle school where he taught math and partnered with the high school to coach football and wrestling. After three years, Mr. Marsh left the middle school to teach at a rival high school and coach wrestling where he remained for the next two years. Mr. Marsh was interested in advancing his career into an athletic director position and began work on his administrative degree at a mid-size university in Maryland as a step in that direction. He knew Maryland was not far south enough for his liking, but Charleston was too hot. He wanted to return south and work in a place that put a strong emphasis on education. This prompted him to begin looking for teaching positions in North Carolina.

After Mr. Marsh's fifth-year teaching and during his work on his administrative degree, he accepted a position as a high school teacher at a large high school of approximately 2,400 students in a small, rural district in North Carolina. During Mr. Marsh's first three years as a North Carolina teacher, he experienced principal turnover five times. He described this experience as an "absolute nightmare" that "discouraged me from wanting to pursue a degree in administration."

After three years at this school, Mr. Marsh left the school and district to teach at a mid-sized non-Title I middle school in a large, urban district in North Carolina. Under the leadership of a "fabulous" principal, Mr. Marsh was reinspired to finish his degree in administration. Mr. Marsh shared,

Honestly, I never wanted to be an administrator. Up north in New York,

to be an athletic director, you needed an athletic administration degree,

and they pay you almost like an administrator salary for that position.

Being naive, I never asked questions about down South. I just assumed

everybody did it that way. I had already started (the degree) and had no

intention of moving back North where you would need that degree. I was

already in it, might as well finish it.

After working two years at this school and upon completing his administrative degree,

Mr. Marsh applied for assistant principal positions both within and outside the district. He was

offered an interview for an assistant principalship at a mid-sized middle school in the rural

district in which he began his North Carolina teaching career. At the interview, he was informed

that position was no longer available as the seated principal had decided not to retire. Mr. Marsh

was then offered the assistant principal position at a large, Title I elementary school in the same

district. He described being "scared" to take a position in elementary school, "I had never done

anything lower than seventh grade."

Assuming the Principalship

After Mr. Marsh's first six months as the assistant principal, the principal of the school

was diagnosed with cancer, resulting in Mr. Marsh supporting the school as "kind of both

assistant principal and principal while he was doing treatments." Mr. Marsh was named the

interim principal of this school about 1½ years into his role and continued as the principal of the

school for the next four years. After four years at this elementary school, Mr. Marsh was

transferred to serve as the principal for a mid-sized Title I middle school in the same district. He

served as principal at this middle school for three years before being transferred to a large, Title I

elementary school. Mr. Marsh served at this school for five years before resigning to return to

the classroom as a high school math teacher at a large, non-Title I school in North Carolina. Mr.

Marsh served as a principal for the North Carolina public education system for a total of twelve

years. All of Mr. Marsh's principalships were consecutive and in the same school district.

During our first interview, Mr. Marsh described his transitions between schools,

> After I had been at Mapleton for 5-6 years, the superintendent called me
>
> and asked me how I felt about going to a middle school. And I told him,
>
> no way, I was happy where I was at. And he said, no, let me ask you
>
> again. They were starting their one-to-one initiative and they were a
>
> STEM school and all these things he told me he wanted my leadership for.
>
> So, I went over to Bluefield and spent 2 ½ years there. That same
>
> superintendent came to me after 2 ½ years and said, okay, we like what
>
> you are doing here, but we want you to help the feeder school because the
>
> kids you are getting are so far behind. We'd like you to do what you did
>
> before but at the elementary school. He said, how do you feel about that?
>
> I said, I don't. He said, let me ask you again, how do you feel about going
>
> to the elementary school? So, I went to the elementary school…

Over the following pages, I will share details about the schools and communities Mr.

Marsh served, the duties he performed as a school principal at each school, the transitions to each

new school, and the professional support provided to Mr. Marsh while serving in the role of a

school principal. I will conclude Mr. Marsh's story with the reason he gave for leaving the

principalship and returning to the classroom where he currently serves as a high school math

teacher for North Carolina public schools. In Chapter 5, I will share suggestions Mr. Marsh

offered in our final interview that may serve to reduce principal turnover in North Carolina.

Mapleton

Mr. Marsh's first principalship began mid-year as an interim principal at Mapleton, the

same school at which he was serving as assistant principal. The school was a large, Title I

elementary school in a small rural district in North Carolina. The population was diverse, having

enough students to identify NC End of Grade (EOG) subgroups in categories Black, Hispanic,

White, Economically Disadvantaged, English Learners, and Students with Disabilities. Over

80% of students at this school identified as economically disadvantaged, receiving free or

reduced priced meals. Based on North Carolina Department of Public Instruction disaggregated

EOG performance data, White and Hispanic students demonstrated significantly greater

proficiency than Black students. However, the school's overall performance was above the

district and state averages each year under Mr. Marsh's leadership. Mr. Marsh described his first

principalship by explaining,

> I had been serving as principal and assistant principal within the first six
>
> months. I was not offered interim principal until 1½ years into doing the
>
> responsibilities of both administrators. I had right around 550 students, a
>
> large ESL population at about 20%, about 20% African American, Title-I.
>
> It was a high needs school. As far as support from the Central Office,
>
> there was nothing. When I first started, I was having to do all the
>
> observations, discipline, buses, PLCs. There was no offer of help from the
>
> Central Office. I was told there was no one that was qualified that could
>
> assist.

Responsibilities

Mr. Marsh shared that he operated under the same philosophy at each place he served as a principal. His primary focus was to get into every classroom daily, "I think one of the keys to administration is being visible, really letting them know and making them feel like we are in it together." Mr. Marsh noted that "across the board in more rural districts teachers really just soaked up the leadership because they felt supported." He continued that clarity was at the forefront of his leadership,

> There are county decisions or mandates. I let teachers know this is beyond
>
> my control. It might not be something that I would ask but this is what we
>
> have to do. We will figure out the best way to make it work for us. That
>
> is what is missing from several administrators, a school that is unique to
>
> you.

Regarding discipline, Mr. Marsh indicated he did not do much with bus discipline as his assistant principal managed that. However, he believed in working with the assistant principal on school discipline. "We did not split grade levels. We just basically did it together. I felt like it was our role to do that together."

He also indicated a shared workload as the LEA (Local Education Agency) representative for IEP (Individualized Education Program) meetings and observations. He described this as a "teamwork approach. I didn't feel there was something I shouldn't do on a regular basis. I was involved in all of it." Mr. Marsh and his assistant principal also shared responsibilities of being at weekly PLC (Professional Learning Community) meetings, expressing "that is where PLCs go awry when admin is not present."

Mr. Marsh's monthly, quarterly, and annual responsibilities consisted of PTA meetings, parent events, festivals, open houses, and PTA sponsored drives. He shared a dislike of monthly faculty meetings stating, "90% can come out in an email or should be covered in PLCs unless faculty meetings are used for training." He continued that faculty meetings can also be used to discuss data, but that was not something they did a lot of at Mapleton.

Mr. Marsh described additional responsibilities outside of the school building. District responsibilities consisted of monthly meetings at the county office. Mr. Marsh believed it was his responsibility to become vested in the community. He was a member of the Kiwanis Club, American Legion, and Moose Club. These were organizations that could help provide support to the school, and he invested time in attending meetings and playing an active role in these organizations as the principal of a school within the community.

Responsibilities for principals continue over twelve months, not only during the months when students and teachers are in the building. Summer months were spent reflecting on the previous year and preparing for the upcoming year. Mr. Marsh spent summer months fine tuning schedules, finalizing class lists and student schedules, filling vacant positions, attending district meetings, and continuing to participate in community involvement responsibilities.

Support

Mr. Marsh described the support he received during his first principalship as similar during each of the four years.

First year? I had no mentor. We only had monthly principal meetings.

Then we had monthly grade level meetings, elementary, middle, and high.

Through these, I established relationships with colleagues to discuss things

that were relevant. We had monthly curriculum and instruction meetings,

75

also at the district level, but these involved other teachers and board members as well. Basically, we had three different county office meetings each month, with the same information at each one of them.

Bluefield

As described earlier, in the spring of Mr. Marsh's fourth full year as principal at Mapleton, he was transferred and graciously accepted his appointment as the new principal of Bluefield. Bluefield's enrollment was roughly the same as Mapleton and was considered an average size middle school. Demographics were also similar as Bluefield served the same community as Mapleton. However, the percentage of students identified as economically disadvantaged was significantly less at around 65%. Performance data at Bluefield was also significantly different than that of Mapleton with proficiency far less than that of its feeder school. This had been one of the reasons the superintendent wanted Mr. Marsh's leadership at the middle school.

Responsibilities

Mr. Marsh continued efforts at Bluefield as an instructional leader to be in all classrooms daily as he had at Mapleton. At Bluefield, Mr. Marsh had three assistant principals, one for each grade level. When he arrived at Bluefield, teachers were observed by three different administrators. He changed this his second year because he did not feel that allowed teachers to demonstrate growth when they were observed by a different administrator each time. Beginning in year two, one administrator oversaw the first and last observation of a teacher with a different administrator conducting the second observation allowing the teacher and primary observer to see growth from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

Mr. Marsh started PLCs at Bluefield as he had at Mapleton. However, due to scheduling he did not have department PLCs but rather grade level PLCs. He shared the struggles with implementing PLCs,

There was a group of teachers that fought tooth and nail against PLCs, but we were large enough that there were at least a couple of teachers on each grade level who bought in. In the beginning, no one could drill down data. By the end, it was ELA teachers who were really digging into data and using it the way it needed to be used.

Mr. Marsh discussed the role he played in the climate of his school and teacher satisfaction and retention. He indicated there was not significant teacher turnover at Bluefield or Mapleton. He attributed teacher retention in part to the community stating that many of the teachers are still at the three schools he served as principal. He added,

I tried. If you weren't doing your job, I made sure you had the support to get it done or you knew you needed to move on. At every school, I have gone in and taught with a teacher or arranged for other teachers to work with you or provided opportunities to go see other teachers. When I had a hard conversation with a teacher about leaving, I honestly felt like I did everything I could. If you were a teacher that was doing your job, I made sure you knew that. I would always try to feed the staff once a month, try to purchase t-shirts or school spirit attire. We treated teachers like professionals. For the most part, they respected that. EVAAS (Education Value-Added Assessment System) really started to come into its useful form at Bluefield. It was data you could actually lay hands on. It was a

hard struggle to get across to teachers that growth is different than

achievement. Well, that kid didn't do anything. You're right. What did

we do differently with him or her? If your whole class is not making

gains, there is something wrong.

Mr. Marsh communicated the additional duties of athletics at the middle school. When

he first came to Bluefield, one of the assistant principals was also assigned the responsibility of

serving as the athletic director. However, he eventually turned that role into a teacher position

assigned to one of the PE (physical education) teachers. Mr. Marsh and the three assistant

principals served on a rotation of who got to stay late for which events. Describing the

difference between elementary and middle school, Mr. Marsh stated, "It was a little more

political at that level than at the elementary school. Just knowing you are feeder into a high

school, athletics was a focus instead of curriculum sometimes more than should be."

Support

Mr. Marsh's support during his second principalship far outweighed that of his first. He

shared,

I had the opportunity to shadow, for about a good month to a month and a

half, the current principal who was going to retire the next year. I had at

least 4-6 weeks of being there with him, going through the school getting

to meet the people, seeing how things were run and taking it all in. That

was the best thing - if I could recommend anything for new principals. I

know it's not possible in all cases but having that opportunity to see how a

school runs before you actually come in (helps) because you don't start the

year blind. The worst thing a first-year principal can do is come in with

blanket changes without seeing what has worked. As a principal, you

spend the first six months seeing what is going on and then saying, okay

this is what I would do differently. I saw how things worked. We were

just starting one-to-one in the county with middle schools. We were also

the first STEM middle school in the state. I saw the daily operation of the

school, and I could spend the summer thinking about changes.

Mr. Marsh shared that, once he was adjusted to his role, meeting responsibilities were the same as at Mapleton. He attended the same required meetings each month at the district level with the only difference being he now attended the middle school grade level principals' meetings instead of the elementary school principal meetings. He indicated the grade level meetings with middle school principals were much different than those he experienced as an elementary school principal. He described them as more competitive with less collaboration and sharing.

Eastview

As outlined previously, Mr. Marsh was transferred back to elementary school after his fifth year as principal at Bluefield. That summer, Mr. Marsh would begin as the new principal of Eastview Elementary School. Eastview was a smaller school than either of the two previous schools. However, Eastview was still considered a large elementary school. Like Mr. Marsh's two previous schools, Eastview was a Title-I school with close to 75% of the school's population identified as economically disadvantaged. Performance data fell between that of Mapleton and Bluefield with similar demographics and similar performance and growth gaps between White, Hispanic, and Black students. Based on NC School Report Card data, student growth and performance increased significantly under Mr. Marsh's five years of leadership, meeting growth

every year except one and increasing the school performance grade by nine percentage points and one letter grade.

Responsibilities

Mr. Marsh continued in his third principalship as an instructional leader. He described responsibilities as similar in all three schools. As the principal at Eastview, Mr. Marsh had an opportunity to apply his life experiences with an emerging philosophy, AVID. He expressed, "It really hit home for me, this philosophy." Eastview was the first elementary school in the district to start the AVID program, and under Mr. Marsh's leadership was a showcase school during their first year. Mr. Marsh identified that,

> AVID really helped kids and teachers. In our first year, we had 5th grade,
> 3rd-5th in our second year, and K-5 in our third year. The county really
> invested in the program. One year, we took 150 teachers to AVID
> Institute Training. We had to fly down in different planes to Tampa, FL.
> It really helped with buy in. We used a data wall, moving students
> quarterly based on testing, reading levels. Everyone took ownership and
> used AVID tools. We even started departmentalizing all the way down to
> 3rd grade.

As at his previous two schools, Mr. Marsh continued supporting teachers in PLCs. He said,

> As tough as it was to accomplish, I really tried to make sure that I was in
> every single PLC that I could. I tried to spread PLCs over three days,
> Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday; never booked Monday and Friday. I
> tried to have two grade levels per day. I never let lunch be the thing that

drove my schedule. I never let specials be the thing that drove my

schedule. If specials had to start at 8:00, that was just how it was, and

staff and students had to deal with it. I tried to make sure recess, specials,

and when a TA (teacher assistant) could cover overlapped in such a way

that there was a 90-minute block every day, but at least 75-minute block

every day and at least 90-minutes once per week for PLCs so teachers

could meet during the instructional day. It is important to show them that

you support them.

Mr. Marsh also shared his responsibility of supporting teachers in their growth and doing

what was best for students even if it was difficult for adults.

I would move a teacher that had been a 5th grade teacher for 7-10 years to

1st grade because I thought it was a better fit. Usually about March, in the

PLC room, I would take one of our white boards and I would put K-5

across the board and underneath it, I would put teachers' names. I would

purposely put people's names in different positions just to get them

talking, thinking. But I did it in such a way, and I would change it like

every week and teachers said they hated it, but it generated the best

conversations. Teachers would come to me to talk about it when I moved

them. Ultimately they would all go, but most were very hesitant to begin

with, but after I moved them the following year, I would ask if they

wanted to go back, and they did not want to because they were happy.

Mr. Marsh shared his responsibility to use his budget in a way that mirrored his values.

He said,

If you looked at my budget, my priority was people. I took every dime I

could to keep as many assistants as I could. I brought in tutors. I

maximized months of employment for secretaries and custodians.

Mr. Marsh continued describing "the most effective principals are not best friends but are someone teachers feel they can go to, to talk." He believes it is the responsibility of the principal to build trust and respect and to understand and support teachers. He shared,

I have, behind closed doors, I have allowed teachers to come in and curse

me up one side and down the other. They didn't do it in front of the

group. I didn't address it at the moment, but after a day or so to calm

down, I would talk to them about words that were probably not most

professional. But to me that told me that they appreciated the opportunity

to have that relationship.

Support

Mr. Marsh appreciated and saw great benefit in the support he received by shadowing his predecessor when transitioning from Mapleton to Bluefield.

When asked to go to Eastview, I asked if I could go there for the last few

weeks because I felt so strongly about how that transition was before. It

didn't happen for whatever reason even though it was a transition under

the same superintendent. It was so helpful to shadow or follow for a

period of time to see how the school operated.

Departing the Principalship

During our final interview, Mr. Marsh shared his reflection on his twelve years as a principal in North Carolina. He stated,

Elementary is never where I would have wanted to have started, but it would be the only place I would go back. Elementary school teachers are all about the kids. You can tell them, I need you to teach doing a handstand and being punched in the stomach, and they will do it because they want to do it for the kids. Middle school, half the teachers are like that and the other half are like high school, all about content. High school, it's all about the content. You can't please anyone at high school. I like the elementary atmosphere. It is totally whatever is best for the kids, we're going to do it. We all buckled up and went about it. It didn't matter if we didn't have money or support, we were going to find a way to make it happen.

When I asked Mr. Marsh about the day he resigned and why he left the principalship, he responded,

The day that I resigned; it was a build up for about 3 years. I had been in conversation with the superintendent for about 3 years, and it was discussion about salary. Comparing the people that retired while I was still an administrator, counting their supplement, they were making $90,000+, and I was only making in the low $70s, and I had been an administrator for 14 years. I kept talking to him about how we can fix this. He kept saying he was locked into what the state could do like he could only give what the state was allotting. But, in my final year, he gave the high school principals a $20K raise, and the rest of us, all the middle and all the elementary got nothing. I had already begun my search. I had

interviewed in another county. I was looking for other jobs, but

ultimately, it just came down to doing my own research online and seeing

I can travel an extra 10-15 minutes, and my monthly paycheck will stay

the same. Being a principal is not a… there is not a low stress time…

even the summer… the summer is not a down time… even the summer is

stressful… it was a long time coming… it was that last year… he showed

me how much he valued the job I had done by giving two people with

unproven track records a lifestyle change, $20K is a lifestyle change,

especially since the rest of us got nothing.

Like myself, Mr. Marsh resigned his principalship before accepting a new position. Also

like me, Mr. Marsh currently serves the North Carolina public education system as a math

teacher. I asked Mr. Marsh why he decided to return to the classroom after being a school

principal. He replied,

I still have a passion for education. I believe in education. I was a little

nervous. I believe in… the most gratifying thing a kid can say is man,

class went by fast. You get an email from a kid who graduated and says

they never loved math before. I don't remember getting any accolades as

a principal. In the classroom, you are in the front lines. That in itself… I

wanted to stay in education.

Ms. Taylor's Story

Ms. Taylor, an African American woman in her 40s, currently teaches at a small, Title I

middle school in North Carolina. She grew up in a majority African American community

established by her ancestors; her great-great-great-grandfather was a minister, and her great-

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great-great-grandmother was a teacher. After high school, Ms. Taylor attended one of North

Carolina's historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) as a North Carolina Teaching

Fellow. After graduation, she returned to teach in the same county in which she attended school,

K-12. She taught middle school for three years and high school for four.

Ms. Taylor's decision to go into school administration came in her last year as a high

school teacher. She explained,

> My decision to go into administration was a pretty easy one. One
>
> afternoon in my tenth-grade class, I witnessed a fight. I always had good
>
> classroom management. I never had any behavior problems. I was bossy.
>
> Two guys got into a fight in my classroom. A White guy and an African
>
> American young man got into a fight in my classroom. Because I had
>
> never had a fight in my classroom in the years that I had been there, it sort
>
> of… it didn't shake me. The fight itself was not the revelation. The
>
> revelation was the fact that when the deputy sheriff came to my classroom,
>
> in spite of both young men being engaged in the physical altercation, only
>
> the African American young man was put in handcuffs and escorted from
>
> the classroom. So, that was a pivotal moment for me. Because in
>
> witnessing that episode and now being the mom of a two-year-old, it was
>
> like a light came on for me. That was my last year there. I made my
>
> decision in the days that proceeded that event in that room, I needed to do
>
> something other than just teach this whole notion of social justice and
>
> equity, of course I didn't have those fifty-cent words to call it that at that
>
> time. I just knew I wanted to do something beyond teaching. Could I

impact kids in a different way? I had no job, no plan for a job. I had not

even applied to graduate school. And, at the end of April, I sort of pushed

myself to make an announcement that I was going back to graduate

school. I was going to be a principal. I didn't know where it came from;

just sort of looked online and thought, okay, this is what I need to do.

Ms. Taylor applied and was accepted into a North Carolina university as a Principal

Fellow. She worked as a custodian and librarian assistant to fill in the gaps while she attended

school. During Ms. Taylor's work on her MSA, she served as a principal intern at a mid-sized

non-Title I middle school in a large, urban school district. She shared an encounter the first day

of her internship with a female student who was experiencing a mental health crisis. Ms. Taylor

stated, "I loved it. I was sold." She further explained that from that moment forward her

mindset shifted from school being just academics but "mental health, emotional, family

connections, community relations, outreach, connecting families to other services, so much

bigger than just school."

At the conclusion of her MSA program, Ms. Taylor interviewed for and accepted the

assistant principalship at the school at which she completed her internship. Ms. Taylor's time as

an assistant principal was primarily spent on the three Bs: books, busses, and butts. During her

three years as Assistant Principal, she observed the school community as racialized and

bureaucratic indicating she could see the politics and how successful you could be if you led an

entitled life. She resolved to "learn what you have to learn, do your time in the seat, and get

out." After her fourth year as an assistant principal, she applied for principalships in a larger

neighboring school district where she accepted her first principalship.

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Ms. Taylor served as a principal for a total of seven years at three different schools across three districts. Over the following pages, I will share details about the schools and communities Ms. Taylor served, the duties she performed as a school principal in each district and at each school, the transitions to each new district and school, and the professional supports Ms. Taylor was provided while serving in the role of a school principal. I will conclude Ms. Taylor's story with the reason she gave for leaving the principalship and returning to the classroom where she currently serves as a middle school teacher for North Carolina public schools. In Chapter 5, I will share suggestions Ms. Taylor offered in our final interview that may serve to reduce principal turnover in North Carolina.

Garden Hills

Assuming the Principalship

Ms. Taylor's first principalship was at a mid-sized Title-I middle school in a suburban area of a large, urban district in North Carolina. The student population was majority, 50-60%, White with approximately 25% African American, and only 4-5% Hispanic. Ms. Taylor described the community of Garden Hills as affluent in appearance. The school was in a new housing development off the interstate. Less than 50% of students identified as economically disadvantaged. However, she termed 30-40% of the student population as "fragile." These were students who resided in mobile home parks or subsidized apartments in the community. Some parents drove long distance trucks for a living, and kids were doing a great deal of raising themselves.

Ms. Taylor described her first meeting with teachers as "kind of like meeting with the mafia." Teachers informed her they would get her the scores, and all she had to do was what they asked her to do. The principal before Ms. Taylor had been in the position for four years and

the principal before her had been there for ten years. The school culture was well developed

when Ms. Taylor arrived with many of the staff behaviors, perceptions and practices wedded to

the two previous principals' practices. Students walked on one side of the hallway, were

required to always carry a book in their hands, were not to talk in the hallways, and were

expected to "toe the line" in terms of behavior. This did not align with Ms. Taylor's operating

style.

Responsibilities

Ms. Taylor managed and shared professional development calendars for herself and her

staff. She facilitated monthly staff and PTA meetings as well as weekly Monday morning

meetings. These meetings were extended leadership meetings with administration, guidance,

support services, and the School Resource Officer (SRO). They would talk through kids and

families who needed to be on the radar, review attendance, discipline, and medical data.

Because the school nurse and social worker served other schools, they were only pulled in for

certain cases. Ms. Taylor stated she would show up at duties, do walkthroughs, meet with

parents, sit in on meetings, and give 100% all day long. In describing responsibilities of the

principalship at Garden Hills, Ms. Taylor shared her "character flaw, Achilles's heel, an area of

growth for me continues to be the inability to delegate as effectively as I need to." She said in

her experience, "your face is black, you're female, you need to know ten times more than what is

required."

Garden Hills' fragile students who lived outside the new development close to the school

were the ones who seemed to be on a "discipline hamster wheel," constantly being written up for

minor offenses like chewing gum or looking out the window while the teacher was teaching.

Ms. Taylor believed in home visits and getting into the community as she had done during her

internship and assistant principalship in the previous district. She was used to accessing resources and taking a clinical approach to doing the work, but that was not the culture at Garden Hills. Despite Ms. Taylor's efforts to connect in the community, teachers demonstrated they did not want to be bothered with these students and were unwilling to entertain conversations to help students in need.

Support

Ms. Taylor shared there was no transition plan to her new role as the principal at Garden Hills. She realized after taking the role that she made more money as an assistant principal in her previous district than she made as a principal at Garden Hills. She drove to Garden Hills with her current internship mentor to meet the staff and see her new office the summer she was appointed. When she arrived at the school, the office staff "was so accustomed to White leadership" that they greeted her mentor as the new principal and offered to show her to her new office. Ms. Taylor described the facial expressions of the secretary and bookkeeper as shocked when they realized Ms. Taylor was the new principal. The teaching faculty at Garden Hills was mostly White with four African American certified staff members: a counselor, assistant principal, social worker, and now Ms. Taylor, the school's first African American principal.

Ms. Taylor described the superintendent as "hands on." He reached out to her and developed an informal mentoring relationship with her during the school year. Ms. Taylor was assigned a formal mentor once she started in her role as principal. Her mentor, an older African American female, had been in the district for many years. Additional supports provided by the district included principal meetings, middle school principal meetings, and new principal meetings.

The district identified Dr. Lizzington, a successful African American female, middle school principal in a "fairly affluent, majority White community" who had served in the district for many years, as Ms. Taylor's mentor for her first year as a principal. Ms. Taylor described Dr. Lizzington as "very sharp" and "really skilled at the politics of the place and in the district." Dr. Lizzington provided mentorship to Ms. Taylor in the beginning that was focused on getting into the office, a calling list of who to call if something breaks, for transportation, etc. There was nothing, however, around the culture or the first 100 days. Highlighting the support provided her during her transition into the principalship at Garden Hills, Ms. Taylor iterated,

> I feel like going into Garden Hills, all the ingredients were there for
> success. Except I wish someone had been able to say to me, here is the
> culture you should expect when you get there. Here is sort of the culture
> and nature of the teachers. And more importantly, and this is I guess my
> degree of naivete, this is the culture you should expect in terms of small-
> town administrative experiences. Because, I had worked in a large, urban
> district in the sense of the access to resources and people and almost a
> clinical approach to doing the work. This kid needs this, we'll contact this
> agency. We'll put these things in place. That was not the culture of
> Garden Hills. The culture at Garden Hills was, we'll that's such and such
> kid from such and such place, and you don't know a lot about that family,
> but that mama drinks all weekend long and then she expects us to do these
> things for this kid. We're not going to keep doing these things for this kid.
> So that was the culture of that place. But I had left a place where the
> culture had been, we know that in spite of all these things happening in

this kid's life, this is what we need to do for this kid. So, I had left that

culture and moved to a culture that was very different from that.

Ms. Taylor continued that Dr. Lillington was more than willing to help her and would

often remind her to call if she needed anything, "but if you don't know what you don't know,

how do you know how people can support you?" She likened the mentor experience, not only of

this principalship but all three of her principalships, to a "meet and greet," and suggested districts

should formalize this relationship. She categorized the mentor-mentee relationship as,

Okay, I'll mentor you based on what your needs are as opposed to, alright

in terms of this principal experience. These are the things you need to be

focused on in the first 30 days of school. These are the things you need to

develop in the next 30 days of school. None of it was mapped out to make

it more than just a narrative.

Aside from a formal mentor, Ms. Taylor described no differentiated support from the

school district. She attended monthly principal meetings. These were mostly management

meetings with information for principals to take back to their buildings and reminders of

upcoming tasks to be completed. There was no time allotted for collaboration or hands on work

with mentors, just "sit and get."

Departing the Principalship

Ms. Taylor described her first year as a principal as a rough year. Although she was

offered a new four-year contract in place of her current two-year contract at the end of her first

year, she was "exhausted from fighting that internal battle," and she left the school, the district,

and even the principalship for a brief time. She continued her description,

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I told my superintendent how much I adored him, but I could not do

another year there. Sometimes I think what people of color realize, at

least my perception of it is, that you end up in spite of your best intentions

doing more harm than good to the children you want to impact most by

simply being in the seat, by simply being in the position. And, so at the

end of that year, I walked away.

Ms. Taylor spent the summer contemplating whether or not she wanted to continue to

pursue a career in education. This first experience in the position of the principalship was not

what she expected. By this point, she was the mother of three including small twins. She and

her family loved spending time together that summer, and she thought about being a stay-at-

home mom and working odd jobs to pay off the student loan debt. Her family was supportive of

whatever decision she made but encouraged her to consider giving it another try because she was

so passionate about education and helping students.

As the summer drew to a close, Ms. Taylor received a call to return to a mid-sized non-

Title I middle school in the large, urban school district in which she completed her internship and

first served as an assistant principal. Due to one of her former mentors going out on medical

leave, there was a need for an interim assistant principal. She saw this as an opportunity to

determine if she was certain she wanted to walk away from school administration. She

reconnected with old relationships and was encouraged to remain in the district and continue in

her pursuit to be a principal. Ms. Taylor served the full school year as the school's interim

assistant principal.

Williams

Assuming the Principalship

As the next summer approached, the principal at Williams Middle School was promoted to serve as the principal at a high school in the district, leaving her seat vacant. Williams Middle School was a mid-sized non-Title I school in that same large, urban district in which Ms. Taylor had just completed her role as an interim assistant principal. Williams was also the school at which Ms. Taylor had completed her Principal Fellows internship and first stint as an assistant principal. Ms. Taylor was encouraged by the principal being promoted, a former mentor of hers, to apply for the position. She successfully completed both rounds of interviews and was appointed to begin that summer as the new principal of Williams Middle School.

Williams Middle School was considered academically high achieving and had a diverse student population with approximately 50% White, 20% Asian, 12% Black, and 10% Hispanic. Approximately 25% of the student population identified as economically disadvantaged and presented familial and behavioral challenges. Ms. Taylor described the community as feeling "old hat." She felt comfortable about being there before and having relationships, but none of that mattered because now she was the principal.

The school hosted a mixer for community members and families to meet the new principal. Ms. Taylor was met with parents letting her know they had Googled her and knew her back story. Rather than a casual meet-and-greet, community members fired specific questions at her about what she was going to do to meet the needs of specific concerns they had. Although she was prepared to answer those questions, she said the mixer was her first clue that, "alright, put your big girl undies on for this ride."

Responsibilities

Over the summer, Ms. Taylor met with the School Improvement Team (SIT) weekly. It was the expectation of the team that Ms. Taylor prepare weekly reports to present to them about what was going on in the functions and operations of the school. Members from the team would stop by unannounced with questions or requests. This was what the team expected. It was the culture of the school community. She had no mentor and no one to say to her that she did not have to meet with this team weekly and prepare reports for them weekly. As the summer ended and school started, she welcomed a break in terms of the day-to-day demands of the SIT.

Ms. Taylor described school improvement team meetings at Williams. As a principal, she had to post notes and agendas for SIT meetings at least a week ahead of time. Information including team member contact information was to be made available to the public. Every other Monday night, Ms. Taylor was expected to prepare and share principal reports which included details about the happenings in the school including a review of student data and in-depth information about teachers and teacher performance. After she presented these reports every other Monday night at the SIT meetings, the floor was open for the public to come in and ask questions. She likened these meetings to district board meetings, but at the school level, every other Monday night.

In discussing school performance, Ms. Taylor shared,

Scores were great. The district is high achieving anyway. If the teachers

all left the classroom, and the kids stayed in there by themselves,

invariably they'd pick up books, they'd teach each other. So, we had a

whole segment of our population, about 75% of whom could manage

school on their own. Then we had this huge gulf between those kids, and

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about 25% of our children had some significant economic, familial, behavioral challenges. And so, during my first year, I worked predominantly with my guidance department to align their work with the work of our administrative team. And so, we developed and used a system. Every Monday morning administration, guidance, the school nurse, all of us got together and the SRO, we talked about our kids. Who were our fragile students? What had gone on in the community over the weekend? What did the police reports say? Which parents had shown up at the emergency department that weekend? We really used that time in a prescriptive way to focus on those kids from a social emotional perspective. And then we could disseminate vital information to their respective teachers about what their needs would be for the week and what teachers would need to be on the lookout for. So that system was hugely effective. Meanwhile our other 75% of our student population who was doing very well, high achieving, was able to function in an environment where they were not feeling like their teachers were facing a barrage of emotional challenges beyond the classroom. So that system worked well.

Ms. Taylor remembered words from one of her professors when she was working on her MSA about working in an affluent community, "You cannot appear to give more to the have nots and ignore the haves." Ms. Taylor did everything twice, "I would have one parent night at the school and another one in the projects." She felt she had to work overtime to make the haves feel like they were going to continue to have. She "lived" at Williams, reading emails at home at 4:30 in the mornings, arriving on campus at 6:45, and leaving around 9:00 on a typical night and

7:00-7:30 on an early night. Her days were consumed with the political piece and her evenings were consumed with the management of the school, discipline, parent contacts, and principal reports.

Ms. Taylor was assigned a first-year assistant principal, Ms. Alton, to support her in her first year at Williams. Ms. Alton, a White female, had been an intern for the principal before Ms. Taylor. Ms. Alton had never worked for a woman of color before, and she and Ms. Taylor did not share the same perspectives on working with children of color. Although Ms. Taylor enjoyed working with Ms. Alton in the beginning, as the year continued, it did not feel the two of them were working on the same team. Ms. Taylor shared the relationship went from collegial to coaching to prescriptive with following up in writing on almost a daily basis. Ms. Taylor described the relationship with her assistant principal as "contentious," and explained she had expressed to Ms. Alton she felt someone else would be better able to grow her in her leadership work. Ms. Alton stopped coming to work and reported to the central office that "she feels threatened by my aggressive behavior and she feels threatened by my leadership style and she feels like she cannot be supported at our school." The school operated on an all-hands-on-deck mentality, helping each other with discipline and working together to support one another due to the loss of their assistant principal.

Aside from the struggles with Ms. Alton, Ms. Taylor described her first year at Williams as "smooth as silk." At the conclusion of that year, she recalled a conversation with her superintendent at her end of year evaluation. He told her this was one of the first years he could remember not having any calls about a principal. He asked her how she did it, "How did you manage to make everybody happy?" She continued that her goal had not been to satisfy everyone, but she had gone into this year with the plan to observe during her first 100 days, get

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to know students, and build relationships. Ms. Taylor stated her "perfect storm arrived" at the beginning of her second year.

Ms. Taylor hired a new assistant principal, Mr. Anthony, to replace Ms. Alton. She described him as "outstanding, by the book, mild mannered, calm, tech-savvy, and a get it done kind of guy, exactly what I needed." She shared that Mr. Anthony, an Asian American male, did all the informal, male networking things that she did not do, like golf on the weekends with the other assistant principals and find out the buzz around the community. She continued that Mr. Anthony came from a somewhat privileged background which enabled him to connect with the elite portion of the community. Ms. Taylor described herself as "middle class, working family kind of girl," and said she felt like she and Mr. Anthony had a great dynamic working in their favor.

After hiring Mr. Anthony, the storm began with a change in the dynamics of the SIT. There was a new president, Mr. Gregory, who did not share the same perspective as Ms. Taylor. She described their relationship as a clash of cultures, not from the same background, and that her "gut told me, be sharp around this guy." There were different types of dynamics in the school community, those who lived in the surrounding affluent neighborhood and those who were bussed in from a housing project. Her analysis of the SIT was that most members were self-serving, looking out for their children and those like them with the perception of her as "this woman with this black face is in the chair, and she's talking about equity and she's talking about social justice issues…"

Mr. Gregory, the new SIT president, contacted Mr. Anthony and expressed concern with Ms. Taylor's vision of the school and the direction in which they were headed. He indicated Ms. Taylor was spending too much time on "trouble kids" and not enough time on the "good kids" in

the building. He invited Mr. Anthony into an off the record covert relationship of sorts, requesting Mr. Anthony feel comfortable telling him things he might not normally tell the SIT. Mr. Anthony reported the conversation to Ms. Taylor who in turn discussed it with Mr. Gregory. The conversation between Ms. Taylor and Mr. Gregory ended with Mr. Gregory telling Ms. Taylor, "You are going to be sorry for this. You have embarrassed me. You are going to be sorry, and I am going to make your year miserable. I am going to get you back, just you wait and see."

Although data without identifying student information was shared with SIT regularly at the meetings, Mr. Gregory and some other team members did not want that. They wanted specific data about specific students and wanted students they deemed to be problem students moved out of their school. Mr. Gregory was able to find faculty members who were willing to share specific discipline data with him about specific students. He began hosting meetings after the SIT meetings at homes of families in the community. Students began divulging information about students who were going to see the principal again. Members of the SIT began bringing this information with them to the meetings to make it public discourse about these specific students. Ms. Taylor described the SIT meetings as toxic.

Local media received reports that Ms. Taylor was not fit to serve the school community, that the school was dangerous, teacher turnover was high, and she did not know what she was doing. Ms. Taylor began fielding weekly interviews from the paper and radio. She did not receive any support from the district in terms of a public relations standpoint on how to deal with these accusations. Shortly after this, another principal and district leader were sent to observe in the school. All discipline referrals and actions were turned over for review due to Mr. Gregory's report to the school board that Williams was dangerous and not safe for students and teachers

because of Ms. Taylor's leadership. A full review of the data resulted in findings that all actions had been justified. Discipline referrals had been reviewed with the Monday morning meeting team. Appropriate resources were assigned as needed, including counseling and other supports instead of suspensions.

Ms. Taylor described this as "a real fire storm." She was in her second year as the principal at Williams. She had been painted in a poor light and did not feel supported publicly by the superintendent. She was leading her school, supporting the growth of a new assistant principal, handling questions and accusations from local media, and answering to the principal and district oversight team. At the end of the year, student achievement data was still outstanding and teacher conditions were still decent. She managed to get all observations completed that year and all summatives written. However, she did not get all summative conferences completed by the deadline. Based on this, she was placed on a mandatory growth plan for the next school year.

After offering Ms. Taylor a continued contract for the next school year on a mandatory growth plan, the superintendent resigned that summer. Mr. Anthony was exhausted from his first year as an assistant principal. He shared with Ms. Taylor, "I didn't sign up for this. You are in such dire straits right now, I worry that by aligning myself with you, I am going to limit my own opportunities for advancement in the district." He resigned from Williams to work at an elementary school in the district.

Ms. Taylor recalled a SIT meeting at the beginning of her third year. She described it as a mediated meeting to get back on track and recover from the previous year with a plan to move forward in a positive direction. She remembered expressing her feelings to the SIT,

What is disheartening to me is that what is being sold in the press is that these students in this building are a futile waste of time. I personally don't drive these students in with me from home in the mornings. These are the students from your community. When you are berating them, and talking about them being thugs, and talking about them being aggressive, and talking about teachers feeling so unsafe. We are going to operate like a school. We are not going to operate like a prison. We are not going to force our children to walk in straight lines. We are not going to track or hover over kids we feel like because they are kids of color or because their pants are sagging or because their hair is in an afro, we are not going to track those students all day long to figure out what they are going to do in our building. We are not going to police them in that way. That is not our work. Our work is to teach them. And these are your kids. You can teach them now, educate them well, have them be productive members of this community or you will see them again. You will see them in your courts. You will see them in your houses when they are committing crimes in the community. So, we need to make a choice about what we are going to do. Most people at that meeting got it.

Although there were still a few members on the SIT who she described as "toxic," she was ready to move forward in a positive direction for year three.

Ms. Taylor described the beginning of her third year as reaching her "Zen moment" in terms of her internal leadership team with "the dynamic trio." She hired her third new assistant principal, Ms. Kris, a White female. Ms. Kris, whom Ms. Taylor described as progressive, was

aware of the publicity the school and Ms. Taylor had the previous year and was ready for a challenge and the opportunity to work with her. Ms. Taylor was also contacted by Ms. Coretta, an African American female, who also heard about the issues from the previous year, to join the team as an administrative intern. Ms. Taylor continued in year 3 with Monday morning meetings, meeting in the community, and gathering resources for service groups and community programming.

Ms. Taylor elaborated on the programs offered in her third year at Williams and how she felt the "student services groups bloomed and became community service groups." They implemented a backpack program at the school during her third year. Students in need received backpacks on Friday to take home with food for the weekend. They returned the backpacks the following weeks to be refilled and sent back home. With the support of a local LGBTQ+ community organization and two of her staff members who were members of the LGBTQ+ community, they created a teen support group club for students who were struggling with mental health issues surrounding their sexual identity. She shared that this club moved beyond just kids who identified LGBTQ+ to being "all-inclusive where all kids felt welcomed, kids of color, kids who were marginalized, kids who were just quirky, where they could talk and meet." They started a Wildflowers affinity group for African American females. Ms. Taylor shared, "The urgency around that was to change the community perception of kids of color and what they were reading about them in the paper to actually seeing them." A counselor started a knitting group with African American females where they could knit and chat in quite a way without feeling they needed to prove a point and then donated what they knitted to assisted living facilities in the community.

Ms. Taylor began her third year under the leadership of a new superintendent. Because Ms. Taylor was under scrutiny of the board, the new superintendent was to clean it up and either get Ms. Taylor out or get it straightened out, so the board did not hear about Williams anymore. The new superintendent was on campus all the time. Ms. Taylor described this time as contentious, as feeling very isolated, feeling she had to protect herself, the school, and her students.

Mr. Gregory, frustrated that Ms. Taylor had not been removed from her position, pulled his child from the school. A new SIT president took his place, Mr. Jefferson. However, after aggressive behaviors and comments, other members of the SIT requested he step down from his seat and replaced him with another member who agreed with Ms. Taylor's comments at the beginning of year three and put a focus on moving the school forward and shifting the reputation in the community. Reports to the papers began to take on a more positive outlook about the school appearing to be making progress or seeming to be functioning normally.

Support

In Ms. Taylor's second principalship, she noticed two female middle school principals had established an informal mentor relationship. The principal who was more experienced had documents and things she set up for herself that she shared consistently with the less experienced principal who was only in year two or three of her principalship. Ms. Taylor highlighted this relationship and the benefits the veteran principal was providing her unofficial mentee which allowed the new principal to operate the day-to-day management of the school with templates and processes already in place for her to use and be successful. Ms. Taylor described this as "sponsorship, not just mentorship." Ms. Taylor worked under this veteran principal as an interim

assistant principal prior to taking on her new role as principal and was able to see and benefit

from this relationship and support.

Sponsorship is somebody who is willing to say, that individual knows

what they are doing. I know that because I have worked with them.

These are the things they have produced. These are their work standards.

I know that. When we are talking about sponsorship for people of color,

often times the teeth that would give us our credibility is the piece that is

missing. It's not that people aren't willing to help you with your affective

domain of your work. How do you feel? How are you getting along? Do

you have enough resources? How is so and so treating you? All of that is

there, but the logistics piece that gives you status in terms of being in the

seat. You've got a black face and you are leading people, so your ducks

have to be in a row. If your ducks aren't in a row, it doesn't matter how

you feel about kids. The perception around your work that you may or

may not be clear about in terms of the expectation for that particular

district culture, if that piece is missing, you won't have an opportunity to

be in the seat long enough to prove that you belong there. And so, that's

the piece in terms of the sponsorship that I felt like was missing in terms

of those principal experiences.

Ms. Taylor continued to attend monthly principal meetings while she was at Williams

Middle School. These meetings were similar to those she attended while serving as a principal at

Garden Hills. They were whole group meetings designed to provide information and district

updates with no time for collaboration, networking, or problem solving. In addition to the

monthly principal meetings, Ms. Taylor also attended monthly middle school principal meetings and monthly new principal meetings. These meetings operated similarly to the monthly principal meetings, more delivery of information rather than differentiated support or networking. The only difference was she was pulled away from her building for three principal meetings each month instead of one.

Ms. Taylor praised the work this district did on professional development around equity. She shared the district "invested a huge amount of time on race and race relations, equity work and children of color, and improving academic experience and behavioral experiences of those children." She stated this did not change over the years. This piece was evident when she completed her internship in the district as well as when she returned after her first principalship in a different district. She noted this work was not taking place when she was at Garden Hills nor when she moved to Bellwether after this principalship.

Departing the Principalship

That spring, a family made accusations that a student had been bullied all year and the administration had done nothing about it. Ms. Taylor was contacted by the media for a response, in which she denied the student had been bullied, but was not able to discuss any other details surrounding the concerns with the student. One morning in March, Ms. Taylor arrived at school to see a local news channel and 60-70 students outside picketing with signs supporting her and the school. Through tears, Ms. Taylor shared,

> None of that had been my intention. All of my work up to that point had
> been about them (students) feeling great about school, feeling great about
> being there. It had been about them knowing that was their school; that
> the adults who were there were there to serve them. That it was much

bigger than test scores. That it was much bigger than a report card of all

As. That it was about who they were going to be in this world, what kind

of adult were they going to be, what kind of contribution were they going

to make. And to see them picket for that right from people who had

collaborated around a lie was heartbreaking. But in hindsight, it helped

me do two things. So, it helped me get the hell up out of the seat there. I

had decided that I was going to fight the battle to stay. The superintendent

at the time offered me an extension of my contract. The NAACP and their

attorney were meeting with me every Saturday morning to talk about my

options for staying. But it was at that point that I decided that that school,

those students were more important than any kind of personal battle I felt

inclined to fight. And so I went to my evaluation that May like I would

any other evaluation. I went to that meeting and resigned.

Ms. Taylor elaborated on the meeting with her superintendent during her final evaluation

that May. She understood the politics of the situation with the negative press dictated a

continued mandatory growth plan to show the district was "managing the situation." To

continue her contract, she would have done so on a mandatory growth plan. This felt personal to

her, so she resigned with "no job, no prospects, no plan, nada."

Ms. Taylor described her experience as traumatic. She no longer trusted the institution of

public education and did not want her children to be in the school system. She waited until "the

last hour" to enroll her children in school. She spent the first six months of the next school year

volunteering in her children's classrooms. She began feeling the call to go back into education.

In January of that year, she began looking for a job. She applied for a teaching position in a

small rural district. A former colleague of hers called her in for an interview to find out what

happened and why she was looking for a teaching position. She was offered and accepted a

position as an interim high school teacher at Bellwether. She taught from January to March of

that year. In March, the curriculum coach stepped away. Ms. Taylor was asked to serve as the

curriculum coach for the remainder of the school year. During that time, she began providing

discipline support as well. In May, an assistant principal left, leaving another opening. Ms.

Taylor was offered and accepted the assistant principal position in June.

Bellwether

Assuming the Principalship

Ms. Taylor served that next year as an assistant principal at Bellwether High School.

Near the conclusion of the year, the principal stepped down for personal reasons. Ms. Taylor

was asked to serve in the role as an interim principal while the district looked for a replacement.

While on a summer AVID trip with teachers, she was contacted by the central office to complete

her application so she could participate in the interviews for the new principal of Bellwether for

the upcoming school year.

Bellwether had never had a female principal. She did not see herself as a serious

candidate for the position. She interviewed and was offered the position as the new principal for

the upcoming school year. She was told, "You've made history. We've never had a female high

school principal before in this district." Ms. Taylor continued, "The next leg of my journey

becomes not about race but gender."

Bellwether was a large Title-I high school with approximately 1,800 students in a small

rural district in North Carolina with heavy connections to the military. This resulted in a lot of

transition but also a lot of diversity within the school community. The student body was diverse

with approximately 35% White, 35% African American and 20% Hispanic. Approximately 45% of the student population identified as economically disadvantaged. Ms. Taylor was the first female high school principal in the district's nearly 100 years.

Ms. Taylor described the feeling of walking into the room for high school principals' meetings and not only being the only African American female in the room, but being the only female in the room, "I wasn't intimidated, but it was interesting. It was definitely interesting." She shared that the meetings were very management driven with more of a focus on athletics and buildings management than academics.

Responsibilities

Ms. Taylor described many of the same responsibilities at Bellwether as she had at her two previous principalships. She continued to work on improving her delegation skills.

I'm not a micromanager, but I need to know what is going on. I would

show up at bus duty, car rider duty, cafeteria duty, do walkthroughs, meet

with parents, sit in on discipline meetings, be in IEP meetings. There is no

facet of school programming that I do not know about in an intimate way.

Being an administrator is 100% all day long. There is no, I'm giving this

off to so and so to handle this for me. I have never been able to function

in that way. I want to see. Show me the plan. I'm going to be in the

meeting. I am going to ask questions. I may not do all the work assigned

to that particular duty, but I am going to know what is going on. I have

never given anything off to, even a head custodian, without having my

hand in it. I get completely submersed. That is a good and a bad thing.

In addition to the day-to-day management of the school as in her two previous middle school positions, Ms. Taylor indicated high school was different. Discipline took up much more of her time than in her two previous schools, "Because we had so many kids, we had a pretty significant amount of discipline; weapons at school, smoking in the bathroom." Ms. Taylor continued to use the Monday morning meetings as she did at each of her schools to work with all her support staff to identify root causes behind discipline and attendance issues and partner with organizations to provide support needed for students aside from simply consequences.

Bellwether had around a 30% teacher turnover rate which created additional responsibilities. Due to the turnover, there were lots of inexperienced teachers. She shared staffing issues she had to deal with at Bellwether she had not had to deal with at the two previous middle schools.

We had an issue one year with a teacher inappropriately touching and

kissing a student. We had a teacher who hit a student. So, we had some

fairly significant staffing issues that had to be cleaned up when I assumed

the role. Thankfully, I had been a real stickler behind knowing NC law,

being familiar with NC law, and of course accessing human resources just

to guide me in things that required some close alignment in terms of

philosophy and practice.

Bellwether had fully implemented AVID into core instruction. Ms. Taylor praised the leadership of the superintendent who hired her for this role for the focus he led regarding instruction in the district. Because of the school's location, she was unable to get volunteers to travel to Bellwether to tutor. She trained high school students who were enrolled in advanced

courses to serve as tutors for the AVID program. She was able to give them high school credits for tutoring.

Sports also played a huge role in the position of being a high school principal. Especially with her second superintendent while in this role, management became a larger part of the job than instruction. She described her principalship, especially under the second superintendent, as "management driven, grass, football, coaches, not a lot around instruction typically."

Support

Ms. Taylor served under the leadership of two different superintendents while she was at Bellwether. She described the superintendent who hired her as being a visionary, wed to instruction in the classroom and kids being successful. Ms. Taylor described her experience at Bellwether as a great experience. She said so many of the faculty members at Bellwether and support staff at the central office were from the community and "really wed to making sure those fragile students were successful." She described the district as having, "all the nuances of a small town but a district that wanted to be successful." She continued stating, "Anytime I needed support or resources or help with a teacher, I really felt like folks at the central office understood clearly that their work was in the schools. That was a great thing. I really felt a strong sense of collaboration there." Ms. Taylor worked for this superintendent for two years.

Ms. Taylor described the new superintendent as an older White gentleman, from the community, very traditional in his thinking. She shared others had classified him as a "good ole' boy." This superintendent's background was a coach and athletic director. His focus was more on management and logistics, contrary to the previous superintendent's focus on curriculum and instruction. Working under the leadership of the new superintendent is when "the gender piece

was made clear to me as a potential obstacle in leading there because I was the first (female), and to my knowledge there has not been another one since."

Departing the Principalship

Ms. Taylor worked more hours as a high school principal than she had in any of her previous roles in education, "I would be at school at 6:30am with classes beginning at 7:15. I would leave campus at 1:30am on Fridays during football season." This left little time to be at home with her family. Partly due to the stresses and time this position consumed, she and her husband went through separation while she was serving in her second year at Bellwether.

Ms. Taylor was running one of the largest high schools in the area. Now she was also learning how to be a single parent. She was fortunate to have the support of her family. Ms. Taylor shared the new challenges she faced managing a high school with close to 500 seniors, "One day I realized. I was making plans for our school's graduation. I had to ask a colleague about my own son's graduation at another school." The long hours and late nights, even with the support of her family left her children longing for more time with their mom, "My daughter confessed to taking naps after school so she could wake up and see her mom for a few minutes when I got home late at night."

Ms. Taylor defined her time as the principal at Bellwether as a "great experience." She described the district as "rural, small town district that wanted to be successful." She commended the first superintendent she worked for while at Bellwether for moving the district forward with technology advancement. She championed the counselors and social workers who were given "limited resources, but they were wed to making sure kids were successful."

Ms. Taylor commented, "I might still be there if my family dynamics had not changed. I knew I could not continue to work the hours I believed the school required of me and be a single

mother to my three children." At the conclusion of her second year as the first female principal of Bellwether High School, Ms. Taylor decided to return to school to work on her doctorate. She resigned her principalship at Bellwether and accepted a teaching position the next day. Ms. Taylor continues to work toward her doctorate in educational leadership, teach ELA, and be an involved mother for her three children.

My Story

I am not sure *exactly* when I first developed the desire to be a teacher. It may have been sometime between 1976 and 1979 when my loving Aunt May read and sang to and with me every day from the only book she had, *The Real Mother Goose*. I practically had the book memorized by the first day of kindergarten. It may have between 1980 and 1981, my Kindergarten year at Roseboro Elementary School. Ms. Braxton was my Kindergarten teacher, and she made school my favorite place to be! Ms. Braxton was a kind, caring person. She read to us, taught us numbers and letters, and loved us. Both Aunt May and Ms. Braxton inspired me to love reading and school. I knew I wanted to be like both when I grew up. I knew I *wanted* to be a teacher. I continued to have positive, encouraging experiences throughout K-12 in North Carolina's public school system, and by the conclusion of elementary school, I knew I was *going* to be a teacher.

I grew up in a small, rural town in central North Carolina. I am the middle child of three. My sister is fourteen years older than me, and my brother was three years younger. My mom is the oldest of eight children. She grew up in a small, rural town in eastern North Carolina where she attended school and helped raise her seven younger siblings. My dad was a middle child like me, with an older brother and sister and a younger sister. He grew up on a small farm just outside Elk City. My parents were both high school graduates. My mom attended some college

after high school. My dad served briefly in the United States Army before meeting my mom a decade later across the street from David Elk School, where I would attend first and second grades a few years later.

My parents disagreed often and were divorced the summer after my 6th grade year. One thing they agreed on was the importance of me going to college to be a teacher. This had been a dream since I was five, not only of mine but of everyone in my family. Because of their never losing sight of this goal and my dad's service in the army, I attended a public North Carolina university immediately after high school on a full scholarship. In May of 1998, I became the first in my family to graduate college and the first in my family to become a teacher.

Immediately after graduating, I accepted a position teaching 2nd and 3rd grade multi-age at Spring Elementary School, a year-round Title I school in a large, urban district in North Carolina. This was my first experience with principal turnover. The principal, Ms. Marine, who hired me had just recently moved to North Carolina and been appointed as the school's new principal. She was adjusting to her new role as she attempted to fill vacant teaching positions. As a first-year teacher, I struggled to plan instruction that merged two curriculums, not yet being confident in either. The adults in the building did not appear to like each other and most were unhappy. Teaching was not what I had dreamed it would be. I had been working toward this since I was five. I resigned after my first year and left education all together for nearly a decade.

Ten years later, after the birth of my daughter, I returned to education, accepting a position at Frazier Elementary School in February of 2008. The principal who hired me, Mr. Wrenn, was funny, supportive, and easy going. His encouragement reignited my passion. Mr. Wrenn was my principal for the 2008-2009 school year before being transferred to another elementary school in the district. This was my second experience with principal turnover.

I began the following school year with a new principal, Ms. Jefferson. She was data-driven and brought great change to Frazier Elementary school. She was also the person who encouraged me to attend the interest meeting in 2010 to join a 2-year cohort at UNC-G for Masters in School Administration (MSA). She later became my mentor and site supervisor during my administrative internship.

I graduated with my MSA in May of 2012. Shortly after graduating, I was offered an assistant principalship that would be split between Frazier and Oak Hill elementary schools. I already had a relationship with Ms. Jefferson. Ms. Lite, a veteran administrator with Stevenson County School System (SCSS), was beginning her first year as the principal of Oak Hill, the school's third principal in four years. Ms. Lite and I had an immediate connection that indicated to both of us that we shared a similar vision and would work well together. I began serving both schools as their assistant principal in the fall of 2012, marking my third experience with principal turnover.

For the next 2½ years, I started my day at either Frazier or Oak Hill and ended it at the other. Near the end of the 2014/2015 school year, Frazier's Ms. Jefferson, was reassigned to Virginia Elementary School. That summer I experienced principal turnover for the fourth time and met Frazier's new principal, Mr. Napoleon. Ms. Lite resigned her position as Oak Hill's principal in October of 2014.

Assuming the Principalship

When Dr. Rudolph, in his second year as SCSS's new superintendent, called to discuss finishing out the rest of the school year as the interim principal at Oak Hill, I ecstatically accepted. My life was about to change. No longer would I be split between two schools and communities. I would now be able to focus all my efforts on Oak Hill. I took over as Oak Hill's

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principal in December of 2014 and completed the school year, marking my fifth experience with principal turnover. I transitioned from interim principal to the named principal of Oak Hill in the summer of 2015.

Oak Hill Elementary School was a mid-sized Title I school in a mid-sized rural district in North Carolina. Most of the student population was middle class and White, yielding enough enrollment diversity to identify the following additional subgroups: Hispanic, Academically/Intellectually Gifted, Economically Disadvantaged (ED), English Learners, and Students with Disabilities. Approximately 55% of the students were identified as ED. Under my leadership, students at Oak Hill Elementary School met academic growth in both 2016 and 2017. We also increased performance grade scores by 12% from 2015 to 2016 and an additional 6% from 2016 to 2017, raising our letter grade from C to B.

Responsibilities

I started each day at Oak Hill around 6:45 in the morning. As I arrived on campus, I reported to my office to review my schedule for the day and check for any urgent telephone or email messages that might shift where I put my initial focus of the day. I assigned myself to car rider duty each morning because I wanted to see families and students as they arrived on campus. I loved starting my days with hugs, high fives, and handshakes. I was also available and visible for those impromptu meetings families might need to have first thing. I found the more visible I was in the mornings, the more I could head off at the pass before the day began, the smoother the day would run.

Due to the number of students who qualified for free or reduced priced meals, I worked with our cafeteria manager to get our breakfast numbers up to ensure students were not sitting in class hungry. We made a big deal out of breakfast, announcing menus on buses and on our

marque each morning at car riders. Immediately after the first morning bell rang, I left car duty each morning and headed over to the cafeteria to support getting students finished up with breakfast and to class. I was there to relieve assistants so they could get to their instructional roles, help with cleaning up, and wishing a great day to our cafeteria staff.

When I first arrived at Oak Hill, we had a tardy issue with students arriving after the start of the instructional day. When families knew I would be out there closing doors when the bell rang, they knew they had to get their kids to school a few minutes earlier to keep them from having to park and sign them in. There was a little resistance at first, but it was minimal, and I was there for parents to fuss at and tell me what they thought so I could smile, hug their kid, and remind them of the importance of valuing our instructional time.

Our superintendent expected all principals to be in classrooms a minimum of two hours each day. This was something I practiced as an assistant principal, so it was not a difficult transition once I became the principal. I loved being in classrooms. Seeing students engaged in learning was one of the best parts of my job. I worked with my assistant principal and curriculum support instructor to divide up the six grade levels. We created a rotational calendar that allowed each of us to visit every classroom at least once each week. We met as a curriculum team weekly on Mondays to share our observations from the previous week and confirm our plans for the upcoming week.

Morning news and announcements were done by our media specialist and her news crew. Occasionally, I was a special guest on the news in the mornings to promote a good book, celebrate winners of our monthly reading challenge, or make a special announcement. However, most of the time I just knew I needed to be ready to teach as soon as announcements were over.

During my first full year as the principal at Oak Hill, we began our instructional day, all-hands-on-deck. This was something in the making over the past couple of years, but by my year one as principal, we were in full swing. Everyone taught for the first thirty minutes of each day, including our head custodian, instructional assistants, specialists, and administrative staff. Our grade level teams worked together vertically to determine power standards. We then taught and assessed from those standards weekly. At each week's data review, we grouped students based on their understanding of the power standards. Students were served in small groups for the first 30 minutes of each day to provide intervention, additional practice, or enrichment in those standards. Having everyone at the same time allowed us to move students between grade levels as well. It made for a quick and effective start to the day, each student receiving individualized attention by an adult in our building. It was rigorous, but it showed the importance we placed on growth and achievement.

I attended weekly PLC (Professional Learning Community) meetings with grade levels weekly. The schedule changed a few times over the 2½ years. I tried having all meetings on the same day, but that left our curriculum team too exhausted by the end of the day and less effective as support for our teacher teams. The schedule that worked best for us was meeting with K-2 one day and 3-5 another day. I also rotated with the assistant principal when she was able, with her attending K-2 one week and me attending 3-5 and then flipping the following week.

Our school data was average. I participated in personalized professional development with our school staff on standards and planning lessons that were on target instead of on topic to help us ensure we were teaching the standards as they would be assessed. I worked with my assistant principal and curriculum support instructor to review all lesson plans weekly. I asked for teachers to submit by the start of each school week, and we provided feedback or questions

for reflection for the following week. Because our feedback was standards-driven, this task became very rigorous. However, by the middle of my second year several grade levels were accomplished at aligning their plans to be on target.

I wanted our school community to feel valued and appreciated. I worked with parent volunteers and our Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to provide duty-free lunch for teachers at least once a month. On those days, I worked in the cafeteria with our volunteers to provide coverage so teachers could eat in the lounge or their classrooms with their colleagues. I supported our PTA in all fundraisers, including dressing as the cow mascot for a fast-food restaurant at which we hosted quarterly family nights. I worked with our school social worker to organize a food drive competition between myself and one of our neighboring elementary schools. Contributions stocked food pantries at both our schools, funded our back-pack-program and donated food to local food pantries in our community. I developed relationships with community businesses and organizations resulting in donations to our school including: a $20,000 walking track on our back field for students and staff to use at recess and community members to access outside of school hours, mulch for our playgrounds and school beautification projects, and plants for our school garden beds.

As a Title I elementary school, we were required to have several family nights each school year. I was at the forefront of each of these events, hosting, facilitating, networking, and leading. Each school year, we hosted at minimum the following family nights: Title I, Open House, Family Reading Night, Family Math Night, and Family Science Night. My second full year as principal, we added a Read to Achieve Family Night as well to support families in grades K-3 in understanding how to support their reader at home as well as understanding the new progress monitoring reading reports we frequently sent home with students.

In my second year, I was asked to participate in Principal for a Day with a member of the local business community. I was partnered with an amazing leader from the local hospital. She shadowed me, participated in our Read to Achieve Family Night, and supported me in recruiting and maintaining volunteers to read to our students. I continued this relationship and was a guest speaker at a couple of networking events for organizations and boards she served on over the next year.

My days were remarkably full and incredibly busy. I have exceedingly high expectations for myself. In turn I had extremely high expectations for Oak Hill's staff and students. Delegation was not my strength. It is something I have always struggled with. I have a hard time trusting and letting go, especially when I see something is not being done to the level of my expectations. This is clearly shown in the 2016 NCTWCS data highlighted in the following paragraphs.

Perceptual data is included in the evaluation of North Carolina principals through North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (NCTWCS), a tool that provides teachers in North Carolina an opportunity to express their feelings about the working conditions in their schools every two years. Much like annual end of grade tests (EOGs) provide data by which a school and its leaders can be evaluated, so do bi-annual NCTWCS. Although student performance data indicates the school made progress under my leadership, NCTWS provided a different perspective. Specifically, responses to two questions on the 2016 NCTWCS highlighted concern:

- There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school.
- Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them.

In 2016, 75-77% of teachers in the district and state agreed with the statement, "There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school." However, only 66% of the teachers at Oak Hill agreed with this statement. For additional perspective on the perception of Oak Hill teachers, I reviewed survey results the years the survey was given between 2012 and 2020 along with the demographics of the seated principal at the time of the survey. In 2012, when the seated principal was African American female, only 32% of Oak Hill's teachers agreed there was an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect at the school. This percentage skyrocketed to 90% in 2014 under the leadership of a White female principal and me as the assistant principal. After my resignation, Oak Hill received the requested leadership of a White, Christian male. Under his leadership, the percentage of teachers at Oak Hill who agreed there was an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect at the school increased to 82% in 2018 and 93% in 2020.

In 2016, 73% of teachers in the district and state agreed with the statement, "Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them." However, only 48% of the teachers at Oak Hill agreed with this statement. For additional perspective on the perception of Oak Hill teachers, I reviewed survey results the years the survey was given between 2012 and 2020 along with the demographics of the seated principal at the time of the survey. In 2012, when the seated principal was African American female, only 18% of Oak Hill's teachers agreed they felt comfortable raising issues and concerns that were important to them. This percentage soared to 84% in 2014 under the leadership of a White female principal and me as the assistant principal. Under the leadership of Oak Hill's requested White, Christian male, the percentage of teachers who agreed they felt comfortable raising issues and concerns that were important to them increased to 82% in 2018 and 83% in 2020.

Support

       As a first-year principal, I attended monthly new principal meetings. These meetings were facilitated by a different district department leader each month, focusing on different aspects of the principalship: Human Resources, Transportation, Finance, Child Nutrition, Operations, Exceptional Children, English Language Learners, Testing and Accountability, and Title I. These meetings were held in a small conference room at the central office and were intended to build relationships between new principals and district leaders as well as provide information and support to new principals in each of these areas that were all important aspects of our new roles. The meetings were informational and benefitted new principals by creating somewhat of a support group and place to network with other new principals each month. Reflecting on these meetings, I wrote in my reflexive journal before conducting the first round of observations with my study participants as well as my reflection after completing the first round of interviews.

       I started being a new principal in December, so I got to start going to new principal meetings in December. Those meetings were fine. It was more about the management of the school. This is how you do this. This is how you do that. I think it would have been more beneficial to have mentors in the meetings with us. So, we are going to look at this today. So, here is this. Now, you sit and talk with your mentor. Work together with your mentor to analyze your data and see how this will work at your school.

       I was assigned a formal mentor at the beginning of my principalship. She and I had known each other for years during our work together in the same district. She called on me to see how I was doing and asked if I needed anything. I appreciated the call, but I did not know

what I needed to know what to ask for. I knew our schools were nothing alike. She was a veteran principal at the highest needs elementary school in the district. Honestly, I was intimidated by her and not comfortable calling on her for anything. Over the 2½ years I was a principal, we had a couple of casual conversations, but we never developed a mentor-mentee relationship or worked together in any way that was beneficial to my development as a leader.

During the 2½ years of my principalship, I attended monthly principal meetings with all principals and department leaders in the district. These meetings were formatted as "sit and get" information sessions with most mornings filled with policy review, information from different departments, and new assignments to take back to our schools and most afternoons filled with smaller groups by levels (elementary, middle, and high), focusing on new initiatives and professional development. We had an hour in the middle of each day allotted for lunch. However, we rarely had time scheduled during the meetings to network, collaborate, or problem solve with our peers about things going on in our buildings even though it was requested often.

During my second year, we began having quarterly quadrant meetings when small groups of us met with a district department leader or the superintendent. These were casual and informal, often with no agenda. They were not as beneficial as the other meetings and at times felt like time that could have been better spent elsewhere.

When I first took over as the principal at Oak Hill, I was appointed a retired principal to serve as my assistant principal since my promotion had vacated that seat. The school was only allotted a half-time assistant principal, so Ms. Suzy was only scheduled to be on campus approximately 20 hours each week. She worked the role around her schedule, sometimes working mornings and sometimes working afternoons. Although I tell myself she meant well, she spent more time hanging out and talking with office staff than anything else. Our work

ethics did not align well. I worked at maximum speed from the time the day started until I crashed at the end. She operated on a part time, retiree pace who was there as a warm body and a box checked to support me in my transition to the principalship.

Near the conclusion of that half year as interim principal, I was given the opportunity to participate in selecting the assistant principal for the upcoming school year. Due to a high number of vacant assistant principal positions, our superintendent and district leadership team pre-screened applicants and allowed several principals to sit in on group interviews with individuals they determined were qualified candidates. The justification for this was to prevent us from going against each other for the same candidates. The reality was the assistant principal candidates who were determined to be district leaders chose where they wanted to go. Our district had a small section that received an additional supplement. The candidates of the highest quality selected positions in the higher paying areas of the district. Being on the far side of the district with no additional supplement and sharing an assistant principal with another elementary school fifteen minutes away placed my school on the bottom of the list. None of the candidates I expressed interest in were interested in coming to Oak Hill.

I started the following school year sharing an assistant principal with another first-year principal at Frazier. Mr. Napoleon, the previous principal, resigned right before school started that summer. Frazier and Oak Hill schools were similar in many ways. Both schools were Title I, neighborhood elementary schools in a mid-sized rural school district in North Carolina. Most staff members at each school had been teaching 10+ years. The schools were supported by active parent teacher associations (PTA). Based on North Carolina End of Grade (NC EOG) trend data, student performance over the past few years at both schools had been on a downward trajectory.

Frazier and Oak Hill schools were different in many ways as well. Most students at each school were White, but Frazier served a more diverse student population. On average approximately 55% of Oak Hill's students were identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged (SED), while Frazier's percentage of students identified as SED averaged closer to 70%. Bus and office referrals were much higher at Frazier Elementary School. Less than 15 miles apart, students at Frazier and Oak Hill would attend different middle and high schools. Most students at Frazier would attend Tabbies middle and high schools while students at Oak Hill would attend Malamute middle and high schools. The rivalry between these schools and communities was longstanding and such that my new assistant principal's first order of business on Fridays, as mine had been for the previous 2½ years, was to switch her school spirit shirt. It was unacceptable to walk the halls of one school wearing the shirt of the other.

When I served Frazier and Oak Hill, I split my days to ensure I was able to provide service to both schools and principals each day. We kept this same arrangement with Ms. Lorry, our new assistant principal. However, on days Ms. Lorry started her day at Frazier, she was rarely at Oak Hill in time to complete bus tickets before students left for the day. There was a greater need in terms of discipline at Frazier which left Oak Hill short in terms of support by an assistant principal. Due to some turnover with our bus drivers, Oak Hill had a significant amount of bus discipline at times. Although this was something I completely handled at both schools when I served as the assistant principal, I often helped with bus discipline at Oak Hill as the principal due to Ms. Lorry not getting to them during her regular schedule. I attended all family nights at both Oak Hill and Frazier when I served as the assistant principal for these schools. Ms. Lorry attended half at each. Her second year, I do not recall her attending any due to being out on medical leave and supporting Frazier.

Over the two years Ms. Lorry and I worked together, we had a positive working relationship. Ms. Lorry and I, along with the new principal at Frazier, put a great deal of focus on curriculum and instruction. Ms. Lorry was a former middle school ELA teacher, and the new principal at Frazier was a former district reading specialist. We all worked very well together in terms of collaboration on initiatives and implementation of state and district curriculum mandates.

Ms. Lorry experienced several health and family issues over the two years she served as my assistant principal. She was out for extended periods of time on multiple occasions. I felt alone on many fronts. However, after my first full year, I was able to hire a new curriculum support instructor when the one who had been serving Oak Hill for the past several years retired. Ms. Shelton filled in many of the gaps in terms of instructional leadership, and I felt truly blessed to have her in my corner.

Departing the Principalship

After 2½ years of trying to hustle, to prove I deserved to be there, I let the cynics in the stands get the best of me. There were so many things I loved about being the principal at Oak Hill Elementary School. However, the few things I did not love began to overshadow all the joys. I received calls from the superintendent that began, "Mrs. Maxfield, is it true…" My answer almost always began with, "No, sir, it is not true…" Whether the accusations were true was not the point as the conversations also included a reminder that, "perception is reality."

I came to dread those calls as much as the "heads up" calls that had preceded them. In the "heads up" calls, I was provided vague information about a problem that may or may not be taking place on my campus and directed to just be aware but do nothing to address. The calls were typically the result of some unfounded complaint that Mrs. Quisling had discussed with her

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husband or as she proudly referred to him, "my board member" the night before. I felt like everything I did or said was taken out of context, twisted, manipulated, and turned upside down into something it was not. I was asked to defend things that I should not have had to defend.

I expected *all* staff, not excluding the privileged or well-connected, to do what was best for *each* child we served, not only those with prominent families in the community. This made a small group of teachers feel uncomfortable. Unfortunately, one of those teachers was Mrs. Quisling who happened to be married to a newly elected school board member. In hindsight, my soft skills needed softening, and I needed a more experience, mentoring, and coaching to know how to best maneuver the waters of such a highly political small-town position. In our final interview, Ms. Taylor summed this up very well,

> There are lots of caveats to the principalship. I think the political aspect of it is not something that is intentionally taught, and it needs to be taught. It needs to be part of what we prepare principals to be able to navigate. I think the other pieces of it around the management part of it are underplayed. We have some really lofty goals in graduate school and MSA programs around people being instructional leaders, and yes that is the pinnacle of the work, but the reality of the work is often that we are at the mid-range of that pyramid in terms of navigating politics and the minutiae of people in the community and managing a building effectively and handling the day to day of the work. I felt energized when I could just focus on curriculum and teaching, but your day can be wrapped up in what feels like management minutia.

By the start of my second full year, Mrs. Quisling was recruiting anyone and everyone who might have a little bit of ugly feelings about me to come together and form a team to get me out as they had done with the two principals preceding my predecessor. I reported this to the director of elementary school who served as my advisor, the assistant superintendents of human resources and curriculum and instruction, and the superintendent. I asked for support on how to handle it, but I was in over my head. Nothing I did seemed to matter or make things better. This dysfunction and, for lack of better words, battle between Ms. Quisling and I had completely divided our school community. There was a segregation in our school of Team Maxfield and Team Quisling that ultimately damaged our climate to a point of disrepair.

After months of devastating interrogations about things that were easily verified to be false, I was told by two assistant superintendents that I was a good principal and I should let the superintendent know I still wanted to be a principal, but Oak Hill was probably not the best fit for me. Although I now know this to be true, I did not feel this way at the time. My initial response could easily have been taken as disrespect or even insubordination. I was offended and angry. I declined the opportunity to be a "good principal" at another school and, with no prospects considered and with total disregard to what this next move would do to my career in education, I wrote and submitted my resignation for the conclusion of that school year.

After a summer of reflection and regrouping, I accepted a position teaching middle school math in a neighboring school district. With the district supplement and considering teachers work two less months than principals, I made as much per month as a teacher in the neighboring county as I did as a principal in SCSS. While teaching, I was fortunate to connect with a district leader to complete my superintendent internship in a large, urban district, broadening my view and experiences from those of the mid-sized, rural district I left.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a glimpse into the experiences, memories, and reflections of three North Carolina educators who left their roles as school principals to return to the classroom. Mr. Marsh, a middle-aged White male, served as a principal at two elementary schools and one middle school in the same rural district in North Carolina for a total of twelve consecutive years. Ms. Taylor, a middle-aged Black female, served as a principal at two middle schools and one high school in three different districts for a total of seven years. I, a middle-aged White female, served as a principal at one elementary school in a rural district in North Carolina for 2½ years.

The purpose of my study is to understand why North Carolina principals are leaving their roles to return to the classroom. Although the experiences of each former principal in this study are unique to them, they share experiences across some common themes. In Chapter 5, I dig deeper into the analysis of the five themes I surfaced. This will provide a better understanding of the factors in each of these principals' experiences that resulted in them resigning their leadership roles to teach in the classroom. As my study is grounded in social role theory and intersectionality, theory will be evident throughout my analysis.

CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One research question drove this qualitative study: Why are North Carolina principals leaving their positions as school leaders to return to the classroom? During this study, I immersed myself in the stories of three people with many commonalities. Each of the study participants was from a working class family. Each was inspired to be an educator. Each served North Carolina public schools as a principal before leaving their leadership roles to return to the classroom.

The small number of participants in this study is a limitation. However, the diversity of the group is significant. The diversity in the characteristics of the study participants combined with the experiences in their roles gave me the opportunity to view our stories through the theoretical lens of social role and intersectionality.

For instance, Mr. Marsh is a White male. His education and training prior to becoming a principal included United States Navy, New York Secondary Education Mathematics, and Masters in School Administration (MSA). His experience before his first principalship included teaching middle school math for five years, teaching high school math for five years, coaching for thirteen years, and serving as a middle school assistant principal for one year.

Ms. Taylor, conversely, is a Black female. Prior to becoming a principal Ms. Taylor earned her undergraduate teaching degree in Secondary Education English Language Arts (ELA) as a Teaching Fellow from a North Carolina Historically Black College or University (HBCU). She also obtained her MSA as a Principal Fellow. Her experience before her first principalship included teaching middle school ELA for three years, high school ELA for four years, and serving as an assistant principal for four years.

And I am a White female. My education and training prior to becoming a principal included obtaining my undergraduate degree in Elementary Education, completing my certification to teach Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) learners, and earning my MSA. My experience before the principalship included teaching elementary school for five years and serving as an assistant principal for 2½ years.

As I reviewed the profiles of each participant, I surfaced five common themes across the stories. In this chapter, I will take a closer look at each of these five themes, which represent my study's main findings:

- The complexity of the principalship is such that one person cannot do it alone.

- Principals are in constant conflict or compromise with stakeholders.

- Principal salaries should account for the additional months of employment and increased workload in comparison to the staff they supervise.

- Principals are impacted by stereotypes around social roles, specifically related to race and gender.

- There is little differentiated support provided to principals once in their roles.

In the first section of this chapter, I analyze the experiences of the study participants, before and during their principalships, to understand why they left their positions as school leaders to return to the classroom. I examine their experiences surrounding the five common themes through a theoretical lens of social role (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Eagly & Wood, 2016) and intersectionality (Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1993; hooks, 1989). I connect my findings to existing scholarship. Next, in consideration of theory and my findings, I make recommendations for practice and research. I conclude the chapter with some final thoughts.

<center>**Analysis**</center>

In this section, I analyze my findings by connecting them to existing research.

Complexity of the Principalship

One finding from my study that relates directly to existing research is that the complexity of the principalship is such that one person cannot do it alone (DeJong, Grundmeyer, & Yankey, 2017; Goldring & Taie, 2018; Hansen, 2018; Shoho & Barnett, 2010; Spillane & Lee, 2014). In previous pages, I outlined the responsibilities Mr. Marsh, Ms. Taylor, and I had as principals. As Ms. Taylor noted, "there are many caveats to the principalship." Each of the three of us expressed successes and challenges with the teams we surrounded ourselves with or longed for as principals.

When discussing the complexities of the role of the principalship, Mr. Marsh, said "I was involved in all of it." However, he did not share the self-identified "character flaw" that Ms. Taylor and I shared, which was to effectively delegate the complexities of the role of the principalship to others around us. Although the role of the principalship was incredibly complex, I often took on more than I should have because I wanted to prove I deserved to be in the role and could handle it. Ms. Taylor believed she had to know "ten times more than required" because she was a Black female.

Each study participant also shared the long hours they worked as principals. As an elementary school principal, I did not have the additional responsibilities of athletics as Mr. Marsh did in his time as a middle school principal or as Ms. Taylor did in all her roles but most significantly at Bellwether High School. Principals must be skilled in delegating responsibilities to others. Building relationships and developing trust take time and effort. In 2003, nearly two decades ago, Hall, Berg, and Barnett concluded,

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It would be that the job has become increasingly complex, more difficult,

and with intense and unreasonable pressures to solve a broad menu of

education, social, and personal problems. At this time, the demands for

accountability, maintaining a safe environment, and serving all the needs

of children (and many needs of their parents) means that in reality no one

person can do it all (pp. 2-3).

Job responsibilities for principals have not decreased since 2003. The role is at least as complex today as it was then (Goldring & Taie, 2018; Hansen, 2018; Spillane & Lee, 2014).

After their multi-year study of 62 new principals in Texas, researchers suggested new principals be provided induction support upon taking on their new roles (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Challenges the new principals in that study faced were categorized into three overarching themes: instructional leadership, management, and community leadership. Participants in my study also experienced challenges with the complexity of the role in each of the three themes identified by Shoho and Barnett.

Each of my participants surrounded themselves with other leaders in their buildings and worked collaboratively to solve problems. Efficient delegation of tasks to others was a self-identified struggle of both Ms. Taylor and me. Although Ms. Taylor and I both strived not to micromanage, we felt compelled to know and have a hand in all aspects of our job and obligations due to our ultimate responsibility as principals. Ms. Taylor described this as her "Achilles' heel," a characterization I related to 100%. When faced with not only trying to learn your job but trying to prove to those around you that you deserve to be in the roll, delegation to others is not something Ms. Taylor and I had the privilege of taking lightly.

Like the uphill battle referenced by the female participant in Burton and Weiner's (2016) study, perhaps the struggles Ms. Taylor and I experienced with letting go were due at least in part to feelings we had to work extra hard to prove ourselves because of our gender, and in Ms. Taylor's case her gender and race. After she and her husband separated in her second year in this role, she became a single mother to twins getting ready to enter middle school and son graduating high school. As the first female principal of Bellwether High School, she worked incredibly long hours. The sheer workload of the job in Ms. Taylor's final principalship forced her to decide between the principalship and her family.

Mr. Marsh, Ms. Taylor, and I all participated in PLCs with teachers, reviewed lesson plans, and conducted walkthroughs and observations throughout the school year to support instruction in our buildings. Although the instructional piece of being a principal is one greatly focused on in current principal preparation programs, this area of the principalship was not as great of a struggle for the three participants in my study. Students at the schools the participants in my study served demonstrated academic growth and/or proficiency under their leadership.

Constant Conflict or Compromise

My second finding is that principals are in constant conflict or compromise with stakeholders. It reminded me of the Charlie Brown sign Ms. Quisling gifted me my first week as principal which read, "Complaint Department. Get in line!" When working on a team, there must be conflict and compromise. That is how you develop trust, build relationships, and make progress toward a common goal.

Relationships are crucial to the success of a school leader (De Jong, Grundmeyer, & Yankey, 2017; Goldring & Taie, 2018; Yan, 2020). Principals must have the skills to build and maintain relationships with students, teachers, staff, and families. The perceptions stakeholders

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have of the principal are integral to the success of the principal and play a role in the evaluation of a principal. Adding to the conflict, perceptions of the principals are often different from that of the teachers (Hirsch et al., 2006).

In the minds of some Oak Hill teachers, I was less qualified to lead Oak Hill because I was in a role inconsistent with my gender. Because I demonstrated behaviors inconsistent with my social role, I was punished. Ultimately, many stakeholders know the authority they have. The yielded powers of some stakeholders in this study were used to dethrone individuals currently underrepresented in educational leadership roles because they did not align with the socially accepted characteristics of a school principal. This was evident in my experiences at Oak Hill as well as each of Ms. Taylor's principalships. This is a problem that must be addressed.

Mr. Marsh described difficult conversations with staff members when he made grade level assignment changes. He shared struggles with some teachers resisting use of data to drive instruction. However, most teachers responded well to Mr. Marsh's leadership. I received push back from a small group of teachers, who resisted data driven decisions and an increased focus on student growth in math and reading. My primary resistor, residing under the same roof as a newly appointed board member, reigned from a higher level of power than the principal's office. Similarly, Ms. Taylor dealt with community politics in each principalship, though most aggressively at Williams. Mr. Gregory demonstrated he had the power to make Ms. Taylor "pay" for daring to stand up to his pressures to erase certain students from the school.

Just as early school administrators had no protection from community demands, principals today are not safe from community demands and aggressions either (De Jong et al., 2017; Rousmaniere, 2013). Nearly 50% of the secondary principals in a midwestern U.S. study

indicated the management of relationships with problematic stakeholders created increased job stress (De Jong et al., 2017). These same principals shared that unsupportive district leadership and meddling school boards added to the constant conflict and compromise.

Like Principal Debbie Pressley (Reitzug & Patterson, 1998), Ms. Taylor took an analytical approach to leading each school she served and opted for empowerment over control in interacting with students. Stakeholders at some of the schools in this study were accustomed to control over empowerment. However, they were not content controlling the students. They also wanted to control the principal and the school. As stated, stakeholder perceptions are powerful in the school system. Stakeholders in this study gave demands and issued threats "like the mafia." If things did not go their way, they took their issues straight to their board members, television stations, and newspapers.

Principal Salary

The third finding from my study is that principal salaries should account for the additional months of employment and increased workload in comparison to the staff they supervise. Salary came up as an issue in each of our stories. Salary was the reason Mr. Marsh gave for leaving the principalship and returning to the classroom. Ms. Taylor was shocked when she realized accepting her first principalship also meant accepting a pay cut. When I resigned my principalship in the spring of 2017, I accepted a teaching position in a neighboring school district with a higher supplement which resulted in minimal reduction in income for the months worked.

Principals are stressed by "low salary compared with the position's responsibilities" (Owings et al., 2011, p. 217). Of the principals surveyed in the national 2019 NASSP-LPI study, 40% of those planning to leave their schools or the principalship identified compensation as a

motivator for leaving (Levin et al., 2019). Participants in the NASSP focus groups mentioned

that principal salaries have not always maintained stride with teacher salaries, especially when

considering the greater workload assigned to principals. Former rural elementary school

principals from Minnesota expressed dissatisfactions with low salary, especially when mixed

with substantial workload (Hansen, 2018). For salary perspective, the average elementary school

principal earns an annual salary of $92,000 nation-wide, $87,279 in Minnesota, and $68,734 in

North Carolina (Zippia, 2021).

North Carolina's principal salary schedule was revised in 2017 with additional revisions

and increases in 2020. A detailed review of the salary schedule before and after this change is

included in Chapter 2. Each of the participants in my study left their principalships to return to

the classroom prior to the 2017 principal salary revision. Based on the newest North Carolina

educator salary schedule, the highest teacher base monthly salary with a master's degree and

NBPTS, not accounting for any local district supplement, is $6,344. North Carolina principals

serving schools with less than 701 students earn less than this as a monthly base salary. The

average salary for a North Carolina school principal is 25% below the national average (Zippia,

2021).

Studies show pay unequal to the workload required of principals is a reason some

principals have left or are planning to leave their positions (De Jong et al., 2017; Hansen, 2018;

Levin et al., 2019). Although North Carolina revised the principal salary only a few years ago, it

is evident in the highlights above that North Carolina principal pay is still not comparable to

North Carolina teacher pay for the workload and responsiblities. Mr. Marsh expressed this

annually to his superintendents. He was a veteran principal in the district and was making less

than some teachers in his buildings. Mr. Marsh shared that returning to the classroom did not

result in a significant decreaes in salary, especially when accounting for a decrease in workload and months of service. Ms. Taylor realized after moving from an assistant principalship in one district to a principalship in another that she had also accepted a reduction in pay to accompany her new role with increased responsibility, accountability, and workload. As noted previously, the difference in pay was not noticeable when I left my principalship to return to the classroom just one district over.

Societal and Cultural Norms

Another finding of my study is that principals are impacted by stereotypes around social roles, specifically related to race and gender. Age, class, race, and sexuality are classifications created to associate individuals together (Eagly & Koenig, 2014; Gunter, 2006). Gender role expectations are stereotypes that provide us with justification for our behaviors (Allport, 1954; Eagly & Wood, 2016). They serve as guidelines to determine which groups of people are socially accepted for which roles. If everyone stays in their place and plays their predetermined roles based on their sex or race, all is well. It is when individuals try to venture outside their realm of what is accepted in a society that problems arise (Eagly & Wood, 2016).

According to an annual report on characteristics of public school teachers, about 76% of public school teachers are female (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Ninety percent of elementary school teachers are women and 63% of secondary teachers are women (Maranto et al., 2018). According to a 2013 Gallup Poll, 40% of women prefer to work for a man (Glass Ceiling, 2014). With most teachers in public schools being female, addressing gender norm narratives is essential to addressing the challenge principals face of dealing with societal and cultural norms.

Men are more likely to be promoted to principal and do so quicker than women. On average, men teach 10.7 years and women teach 13.2 years before becoming principals (Maranto et al., 2018). Mr. Marsh taught 10 years before becoming a principal. Mr. Marsh fits well the perception of what a principal is supposed to be according to Rousmaniere (2013). He is White. He is a man. He is former military. He is a secondary math teacher. He is a coach. Mr. Marsh had different experiences than those of Ms. Taylor or me with the climate in his schools. Possessing characteristics attributed to a school principal lessens the initial burden or hurdle of first proving you deserve to be there.

According to Gallup Poll, the percentage of people who prefer to work for a man has decreased dramatically from 66% in 1953 to 35% in 2013. Meanwhile over the same six decades, the percentage who prefer to work for a woman has increased from 5% to 23% while those with no preference has increased from 25% to 41% (Glass Ceiling, 2014; Hoyt & Burnette, 2013). Recently, Scott, the coordinator of the educational leadership program at the University of North Carolina said, "We still have an overrepresentation of women in classrooms and an under representation of women in leadership positions" (Gordon, 2020, para. 16). Women still have greater challenges than men in being accepted as having what it takes to be a leader (Hoyt & Burnette, 2013). Women and people of color are still underrepresented as principals (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

Historically, principals at Oak Hill Elementary School had been White, Christian males. In a special called meeting with district leaders in the spring of 2012, documented in a letter I found in a filing cabinet during a summer cleaning of my new office four years later, teachers from Oak Hill Elementary School requested the current African American female principal be removed from her role and replaced with a White, Christian male. Only part of the request was

granted as the principal was reassigned to an assistant principal position in the summer of 2012. However, she was replaced with a White Christian female. From 2009 to 2017, Oak Hill Elementary School was served by four different female principals including myself, yielding turnover five times in seven years. My replacement, a White, Christian male, has been holding the seat since July of 2017.

These same teachers expressed deep concerns about their working conditions under my leadership. As noted above, Oak Hill had historically been led by principals who were White, Christian males. This was what teachers at Oak Hill perceived to be right because this was what they had observed. Their shared proneness to infer principal characteristics to their observations is known as "correspondent inference" or "correspondence bias" (Eagly & Wood, 2016, p. 1).

As I looked critically at both the quantitative and perceptual data of my time as a principal, social role theory was evident. Although students demonstrated growth under my leadership, some Oak Hill teachers did not perceive I was qualified for the role simply because I am a female. Their immediate rejection of the first and so far only African American principal after only one year in her role suggests that in the eyes of Oak Hill teachers, being female and Black makes you even less qualified.

As I stated previously, Oak Hill Elementary *suffered* from principal turnover five times in seven years. I emphasize "suffered*"* because there is countless research, some of which I mention in Chapters 1 and 2 in this study, that principal turnover has negative effects on schools (Rangel, 2018; Spillane & Lee, 2014). However, some vocal, influential, and veteran staff members at Oak Hill Elementary School did not see it this way. Principal turnover was just the staff's way of demonstrating, in three of those five turnovers, it was their way or the highway.

Two of the schools Mr. Marsh served were elementary schools. He commented that the teachers he worked with, especially at the elementary level, "soaked up the leadership." Often, women leaders are perceived as disruptive, difficult, or dangerous because they challenge the dominant maleness and methods of management (Gunter, 2001). Ms. Taylor wanted to determine root causes for behaviors and provide resources to empower students to be their best. I expected ALL adults on campus to put students first in their actions, not just their words. We were difficult. We did not provide preferential treatment based on last name or family standing in the community. We were dangerous.

Like the three Black women principals in Moorosi and colleagues' (2018) study, Ms. Taylor leads from the heart and "strives to serve pupils in socially just ways" (p. 156). Each of these Black women leaders overcame barriers of race and gender. As these researchers did through the stories of Nicola, Molly, and Kay and as I am doing through the story of Ms. Taylor, it is imperative to share the narratives of Black women leaders. It is through these stories, we are "disrupting centuries of assumptions and beliefs about Black women and uncovering new ways of supporting these women as leaders while benefitting from the unique perspectives they bring to leadership" (p. 157).

As noted, women leaders are often seen as disruptive. Although disruption is important for developing new and reviewed ideas that might not have emerged otherwise, it is by definition "a break or interruption in the normal course or continuation of some activity, process, etc." (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Ms. Taylor and I were both perceived as disruptions, interruptions to the status quo and the way things had been.

Ms. Taylor, an African American female, experienced significant discrimination in each of her positions because of her intersectionality and being a Black woman (Crenshaw, 1991).

During each of her principalships, Ms. Taylor was subjected to "double jeopardy," a term used to describe the disadvantage suffered by Black women for possessing a dual- as opposed to single-subordinate identity (Rosette & Livingston, 2012). Ms. Taylor's story confirms hooks' statement that "even when black women are able to advance professionally and acquire a degree of economic self-sufficiency, it is in the social realm that racist and gendered stereotypes are continually used as ways of defining black women's identity and behavior" (hooks, 1989, p. 194).

In Ms. Taylor's first two principalships, race played a key factor in how she was received and treated by her school communities. As Garden Hills' first African American principal, Ms. Taylor began her role by shocking the office staff who she described as "accustomed to White leadership" with her "black face." Her attempts to solve problems at Williams by meeting the needs of her fragile students were seen by some dominant members of the predominantly affluent schools she served as creating an environment that was unsafe for them and their children. They wanted a principal to control the "trouble kids" or get them out of their school.

Black women have been portrayed as loud, angry, and aggressive (Aaron, 2020). Each of Aaron's study participants shared their intentionality in distancing themselves from negative stereotypes such as these against Black women. Ms. Taylor experienced similar prejudices in her principalships. Most vivid to me was Ms. Taylor's struggles with the school leadership team at Williams Middle School. Mr. Gregory and other members of Williams' SIT reported to the media and school board that the school was dangerous under Ms. Taylor's leadership and that she was unfit to serve the school community. Yet, an internal review of behaviors at the school resulted in no such findings.

Ms. Taylor arrived at Williams, an overall high performing school. She described a small pocket of around 25% of the students who needed additional SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) to succeed academically and behaviorally at higher levels. Rather than punish, suspend, or erase the "fragile" students of Williams, Ms. Taylor went to work as the principals in Aaron's study did. She collaborated with other leaders in and outside of the school to make decisions in context by viewing student behaviors alongside other aspects in their lives. Ms. Taylor enacted student-centered leadership through seeking solutions to care for the students' needs, therefore supporting their academic growth. The perception of those vocal to the media and school board did not see this as such. To the individualistic members of SIT only focused on their child and those like them, Ms. Taylor, with her collective nature and focus on each child, was undeserving of her position.

The challenges with societal and cultural norms do not stop at the school level with parents, students, and staff. The values districts place on certain roles also speaks volumes for the individuals they value. When Mr. Marsh transitioned from an elementary school principalship to a middle school principalship, he was provided weeks to shadow his predecessor before taking on his new role. When he asked for a similar transition plan moving from the middle school to a new elementary school, his request was denied although it had proven to be beneficial to him and the school. The district valued Mr. Marsh's transition to middle school, but not to elementary school. According to a recent national teacher and principal survey, 67% of elementary school principals are female compared to 40% at the middle school level and 33% in high school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). It was important to the district to prepare the male principal for the male dominated role of running a middle school. However, it

was not important to the district to prepare the male principal for the female dominated role of running an elementary school.

Mr. Marsh possessed stereotypical societal and cultural norm characteristics of a school principal, but he also served his communities and demonstrated effective leadership at each school he was assigned. He developed leaders and facilitated data driven, student-centered change. However, the district culture did not place value on Mr. Marsh's proven track record. To many districts and school boards, the constructs of education most dominated by women, curriculum, classroom instruction, and building relationships with children, are invisible (Maeroff, 2010; Maranto et al., 2018). This proved to be the case with Mr. Marsh. With the salary increase provided to high school principals only, the district placed value and importance on the male dominated high school principal role over all other levels of principals. This resulted in the resignation of a loyal, successful, and effective twelve-year veteran principal.

Lack of Support

A fifth finding from my study was that there is litter differentiated support provided to principals once in their roles. Each of us received support from our districts in the form of monthly principal meetings. We all described these meetings as generic, designed to disseminate information rather than support and develop us as school leaders. Ms. Taylor and I were assigned mentors as beginning principals. However, the mentor relationships we described were more formality than sponsorship relationships we believed would have been more beneficial to our success as developing leaders. Mr. Marsh was not assigned a principal mentor even as a first-year principal.

In Hansen's (2018) study, all six former Minnesotan rural elementary school principals identified lack of professional support as a reason for leaving (2018). They conveyed a need for

an assistant principal or full-time secretary. Five of the six participants cited dysfunctional school board dynamics and micromanagement that included overriding principal decisions. One of the participants shared, "I didn't feel the superintendent stood behind me strong enough either… He didn't want to ruffle any feathers" (2018, p. 49).

In the NASSP-LPI study, principals expressed frustration with impediments to professional development (Levin et al., 2019). Ninety-eight percent of all principals participating in this survey revealed a need for additional professional development. Experiences of each of the former principals in this study indicate that there is little differentiated support in place to help principals be successful in their schools. Principal preparation programs are beneficial to give an overview of types of work you will be involved in as a principal. However, on the job training is the only way to get it.

Mr. Marsh participated in a six week transition plan when he transferred from Mapleton to Bluefield. He shared how integral this was to his success. He was able to observe and learn before taking over in the role. Principals are people, and all people are different. Schools are unique to their own communities, cultures, traditions, values, etc. Principals need support as they continue to grow and develop as leaders.

Currently districts push out their support in large meetings providing information to take back to the schools. However, little time is afforded to principals in the areas they identify as important. Mr. Marsh shared how important the informal supports were that he gained from building relationships with the other elementary school principals at meetings. Ms. Taylor shared the success she observed in the sponsorship a veteran principal provided a new principal. Each of us shared the need for collaboration and conversations with others in our similar roles.

Although mentors are assigned to new principals, the mentor-mentee fit and structure of the program is important to the success of the new principal.

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

Once in the role, there are many challenges principals face. I begin with my recommendation regarding the complexity of the role. I then share my recommendations to address the constant conflict or compromise with stakeholders. Next, I make recommendations to focus on the lack of support provided principals once in their roles. I include recommendations on addressing the alignment of principal salary to the workload and time requirements of the position over that of a classroom teacher. Finally, I share my recommendation to address the challenge of dealing with stereotypes and discrimination around race and gender.

Responding to the Complexity of the Principalship

The findings from my study as well as existing research demonstrate that the principal's job is too much for one person (DeJong, Grundmeyer & Yankey, 2017; Goldring & Taie, 2018; Rangel, 2018; Spillane & Lee, 2014). Understanding how to effectively delegate responsibilities and develop supportive teams is essential to the success of a principal. As illustrated in all three study participants' stories and literature, there is also a lack of differentiated support provided to principals once in their roles. With the complexities of the role and the many challenges principals face, lack of support continues to be a problem that causes job dissatisfaction (DeJong, Grundmeyer & Yankey, 2017; Goldring & Taie, 2018). Below are some recommendations I share with other researchers. As some researchers recommend addressing complexity of the role with compensation, those recommendations are in the later section on Responding to Principal Salary.

I agree with Shoho and Barnett's (2010) suggested need to design and provide

consequential introduction and training for beginning principals, but also for beginning assistant

principals. The role of the principalship is too much for one person and requires delegation. It is

important to have meaningful induction for the person closest to the principalship as this is the

logical person to whom to delegate some of the instructional, management, and community

responsibilities.

DeMatthews and colleagues (2021) recommended revamping the principal workload

expectations based on principal evaluation and district expectations. Based on the complexity of

the role, I agree a review of the expectations of this position is needed. Spillane and Lee (2014)

identify the complexities of the principalship as sheer volume as well as diversity and

unpredictability of the workload. As suggested by these researchers, one way to help principals

with the complexity of the role is to help them manage their stress and create and maintain a

healthy work environment (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Researchers also suggested distributive

leadership through delegating responsibilities to others within the organization. This is

something Ms. Taylor and I both identified as a personal challenge. I recommend districts

provide continued education and guidance to principals on how and to whom to effectively

delegate certain responsibilities. Providing this support would take some of the guess work out

of the distributive leadership process.

Responding to the Constant Conflict and Compromise

Like my study participants, one of the stressors for the principals in DeMatthews and

colleagues' (2021) study on principal stress and burnout was constant conflict and compromise

with stakeholders. Nearly all principals in this study reported aspects of their job that were

emotionally exhausting. Seventy-three percent indicated the most emotionally exhausting

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aspects involved school culture. Just under half the principals surveyed shared that constantly engaging in relationship building was exhausting.

New principals enter their positions with experiences, beliefs, and values that shape their expectations for their new roles (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Stakeholders also enter this transition period with their own expectations based on their experiences, beliefs, and values. Situations encountered, combined with expectations of the new principal and all stakeholders, influence how the new principals make sense of and adjust to their new roles. Due to their responsibilities to the school community as a whole, principals make decisions that are not always favorable to individuals which in turn make those individuals unpleased with the principal (Spillane & Lee, 2014).

My recommendation is that NCTWCS be analyzed with principals and their mentors, coaches, or supervisors in the same way that Ms. Taylor and many other Black women principals looked at other data, through context. My multi-year review of Oak Hill's perceptual NCTWCS data included in Chapter 4 indicates this evaluation instrument was used as a weapon to yield the desired results of a group of educators. Since leaving the principalship, I have interacted with NCTWCS as a classroom teacher, intern in a principal supervisor position, a member of a School Improvement Team, and a PTA board member. Based on my experiences, I recommend districts reduce the use of this survey as an evaluation instrument without context. I also recommend providing support and training to principals and teachers in understanding how to interpret and use NCTWCS data to make improvements in their schools.

Ms. Taylor commented on the cultures of each school she served. She suggested principal preparation programs place additional emphasis on educating future principals on how to navigate the political waters of the principalship. I agree with Ms. Taylor. Climate and

culture are essential elements linked to the success of a school community. It is imperative for new principals to understand the existing culture of the schools they will be leading to provide perspective to guide their way while they are developing and building relationships within their school communities.

Responding to the Lack of Support

In my final interview with Ms. Taylor and Mr. Marsh, I asked them what could be done to decrease principal turnover rates in North Carolina. Before and after these final interviews, I also reflected on this question myself. Each of us expressed concerns with the support principals receive once in their leadership roles. Ms. Taylor commented, "There is a lot of work recruiting, but not a lot of effort retaining and supporting in the work of the position." In my reflection, I wrote, "When the focus is only on hiring that bright, shining star without measures in place to effectively support them once in the role, they get swallowed up by the culture, climate, or something, and there's your turnover."

Large monthly meetings designed to distribute information and upcoming assignments are important. However, these meetings should not serve as the primary means to support principals. As teachers, we are expected to differentiate instruction and scaffold support to ensure the best possibility for success for each of our students. With the incredible importance of the principalship on the success of students, districts should offer the same level of differentiation and scaffolding for their new and developing principals.

Of the principals interviewed in Spillane and Lee's (2014) study, almost 50% experienced feeling alone and isolated in their new roles. Some principals chose to distance themselves to prevent creating the perception that they had favorites. Others shared feeling isolated by teachers after making decisions for the school that they did not agree with. For the

health and wellbeing of principals, principal preparation programs and districts might consider putting measures in place to address the emotional aspects of the principalship. Education and continued support on managing stress and creating and maintaining healthy work environments can alleviate some of the stresses that come with the overwhelming nature of the role.

The mentor-mentee relationship is a support system most districts already have in place that all three study participants believe, with a little improvement, can make a significant difference in principal turnover. When new principals are assigned a mentor who offers, "call me when you need anything," that is a great offer. However, as Ms. Taylor and I commented, it is difficult to know what you need when you are new to the principalship. If mentors and mentees are assigned specific tasks to complete as a team in the first 30, 60, 90… days of the school year, the process may be more beneficial.

Mr. Marsh was not assigned a mentor in his first principalship. He was, however, provided a great transition plan when moving into his second principalship. He shadowed the principal he was replacing for 4-6 weeks before taking over as the new principal. He shared how beneficial this was for him and how much of a difference he believed it made in the success of his second principalship. Mr. Marsh suggested bringing in new principals to shadow their predecessor before transitioning into the role when possible. This is not likely feasible in most situations. However, a similar experience could be created through the mentor-mentee experience. New principals could shadow their mentors in their schools and follow up with mentors shadowing the mentees. Debriefing after these shadowing experiences could lead to discoveries and open dialogue to support the new principal in their development.

Ms. Taylor described a sponsorship relationship she observed as an interim assistant principal between a veteran principal and new principal. Although they did not share the formal

mentor-mentee relationship, the veteran principal sponsored the new principal by sharing

templates and best practices. Rather than expecting the new person to know what to ask for, the

veteran principal openly shared everything to provide support. In turn, she built trust and

developed a relationship which are important aspects to helping a new principal feel comfortable

asking for help when they do know what they need.

       After conducting their own research on stresses of principals and the effect of working

conditions on burnout, DeMatthews and colleagues (2021) provided recommendations to district

leaders and school administrators to reduce burnout. Researchers suggested training in self-care

for both principals and principal supervisors. They also suggested collaborating with other

leaders in the building to delegate certain responsibilities to ensure a healthy work-life balance.

Peer support is also highlighted as an important recommendation to address principal burnout

from the complexity and diversity of the role. Collaborating and sharing responsibilities with

those around us is something that appeared in each of my participants' stories. The need for peer

interaction and differentiated support were identified by each of my participants as a concern.

       Principals who felt challenged by stakeholders and not supported by their superintendent

were of real concern for burnout (De Jong, Grundmeyer, & Yankey, 2017). These researchers

made a recommendation that I agree is essential to addressing principals' feeling of lack of

support. Superintendents should provide clear expectations to principals and support when faced

with challenges from stakeholders (De Jong, Grundmeyer, & Yankey, 2017). In all three of my

study participants' experiences, differences in support from district leadership may have resulted

in different outcomes.

Responding to Principal Salary

DeJong and colleagues (2017) suggested complexity of the role be addressed through salary. They gave the example of one district applying equity to their salaries by paying all K-12 principals the same salary and requiring each principal supervise the same number of after-school activities (De Jong, Grundmeyer, & Yankey, 2017). Another example they shared as a possible answer to the complexity of the role was a school board who paid their superintendent and principals approximately 10-15% more than any district within 100 miles (De Jong, Grundmeyer, & Yankey, 2017). This district's actions resulted in increased loyalty among principals and the superintendent.

All participants in Hansen's (2018) study indicated workload compared to compensation as a reason for their decision to leave the principalship. Studies on principal salary indicate the salary is not comparable to that of a teacher in relation to workload and months of employment. Although in most circumstances, principals make more per year than teachers, the salary often fails to compensate for the additional months worked. Most teachers in North Carolina operate on a 10-month contract while principals operate on a 12-month contract. Taking into consideration the additional workload and time requirements, principal salaries are not that appealing. Just like the responsibilities of school principals need to be reviewed, so does principal salary.

Over 30% of principals in DeJong and associates' (2017) study shared salary/benefits as the most influential factor keeping them in their role. In Yan's (2020) study, principals with one-unit increase in influences on teacher professional development were almost 37% less likely to leave education. One of my study participant's outcome would have been different had his concerns regarding salary been met by his district. Mr. Marsh resigned his role as principal

because of his dissatisfaction with his salary's alignment to his workload and responsibilities. An increase in salary would have prevented turnover in Mr. Marsh's case.

Responding to Societal and Cultural Norms

This dissertation consists of stories from three former North Carolina principals who all resigned their leadership roles to return to the classroom. The experiences of each of these three participants is as different as the participants themselves. Each of my three participants represents a different group in our current society: a White male, a Black female, and a White female. My research is my way of talking back, my contribution to the literature, giving a voice to those underrepresented in the research and the role of the principalship (hooks, 1989; Moorosi, Fuller, & Reilly, 2018). Of the challenges principals face, one that appears as an underlying theme in all of them is that principals are impacted by stereotypes around social roles, specifically related to race and gender. This was evident in the challenges faced by each study participant with demanding staff members, overbearing school improvement team members, interfering school board members, headline seeking news outlets, and unsupportive district leadership.

As outlined in chapters 2 and 5, Koenig and Eagly conducted a multi-part study to determine if stereotypes are based on observations, what the members of that society see. Across all surveys, researchers overwhelmingly noted that what society members observe influences cultural norms and stereotypes (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). As evidenced in literature throughout this study, women continue to be underrepresented in school leadership roles. Black women are even less represented in this role. Based on social role theory, and in support of Koenig and Eagly's (2014) study, when we change what society members see, we can shift their perceptions.

Although change is slow, continuing to support members of underrepresented subgroups in securing and maintaining leadership roles is a step in the right direction of shifting perceptions.

Women and minorities continue to be underrepresented in characteristics of school principals (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). It is imperative that qualified candidates in underrepresented categories be provided opportunities to lead. I agree with the recommendations suggested by Burton and Weiner from their 2016 study. Narratives need to be analyzed. Although women persisting to have a seat at the leadership table may support some in their development of strength and courage to work harder, it is time for our society to examine the existing norms and stereotypes to break down these barriers and increase the percentage of women and Black women holding leadership roles.

Ms. Taylor fought to defy the negative stereotypes of being a woman, being Black, and being a Black woman (Aaron, 2020; Burton & Weiner, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991) in each of her principalships. I recommend districts develop a plan to support women of color in leadership roles. Like Aaron (2020) suggests, districts could begin by developing successful coping strategies for Black women principals and providing them support in execution of these strategies.

Research Recommendations

Principals are leaving their roles to return to non-administrative positions (Goldring & Taie, 2018). Since starting this research, I have encountered many more former principals who have returned to the classroom. Both principals I served under as an assistant principal returned to classroom teaching positions during the time I worked on this research. Additional research is needed to determine why principals are leaving their roles. Instructional leadership is one of the

seven strands of leadership for North Carolina principals. Principals who leave to return to the classroom are taking their instructional leadership skills with them.

Rangel (2018) suggested replicating existing studies to increase our understanding of principal turnover. In the DeAngelis & White (2011) study, researchers were able to compare similar principal turnover data from 1987-2001 to 2001-2008. They were able to determine a rise in principal turnover in this comparison and make stronger connections between principal turnover and its determinants.   Additional qualitative studies on why principals are leaving their roles is essential to understanding principal turnover and how to reduce it.

Final Thoughts

I began this research journey in the spring of 2017 when I became a statistic. I became another number in the data representing principal turnover in North Carolina. I had seen others before me leave their roles as principals to return to the classroom. However, I had not considered that the career path of my trajectory. Little did I know when I resigned my position, "to experience new opportunities and challenges for continued growth and development as an educational leader" just how much I would gain through this process.

After writing my resignation, I began to wonder more about principal turnover. Looking back over my years in education, I realized how much principal turnover had impacted my life. I accepted my first teaching job with a principal beginning her first year in a new school, district, and state. I am not sure what life was like at Spring Elementary School prior to the spring of 1998. However, experiencing life as a first year teacher entangled in principal turnover and transition was challenging for me and played a part in my decision to abandon my dream of being a teacher in less than one full school year.

After deciding to return to education ten years later, I continued to experience principal turnover and the impact it has on school communities. The year after returning to the classroom, I experienced principal turnover for the second time. I saw the effects of principal turnover. I also observed a school heal and grow under new leadership over time. As an assistant principal, I experienced principal turnover when I observed both principals I served under leave their schools. As a principal, I observed my colleagues move schools, districts, and leave the principalship. I started researching and discovered principal turnover was not just something that was happening to and around me but a nationwide problem that needed to be investigated further.

Each participant in this study is a statistic. We all fall nicely into a multitude of data sets on principal turnover. We represent data points as principals in rural and urban communities in North Carolina. We represent principal turnover in elementary, middle, and high schools. We are demographically representative of White principals, Black principals, female principals, Black female principals, White female principals, male principals, and White male principals. Through this study, and the telling of our stories, we became more than merely statistics.

I began this research journey to find the answer to what ultimately became my research question: Why are North Carolina principals leaving their positions as school leaders to return to the classroom? Although I am unable to fully answer this question with only 3 accounts, I have a far greater understanding now than I did when I began. During this study, I was welcomed into the lives, memories, and experiences of two North Carolina educators who made the same decision I and many others made. Although our stories and experiences are unique, I found many commonalities in our journeys. Each of us have had a passion for education as far back as we can remember. Mr. Marsh wanted to make a difference and inspire students as he had been

inspired by educators and coaches in his life. Ms. Taylor followed in the footsteps of her great ancestors and became an educator fighting for social justice and equity for her students and school communities. Becoming a teacher was not only my dream, but a dream of my entire family, and I am proud to be the first in my family to graduate college. When Mr. Marsh, Ms. Taylor, and I resigned our positions as school principals, we returned to our passion, the classroom.

Since leaving the principalship nearly five years ago, I have been asked many times if I regret leaving the principalship. I have reflected on that question a lot over these years. Because each of my experiences before, during, and after the principalship have contributed to and continue to guide my development as both a person and educator, I am grateful for each and would not trade them for anything.

After only two consecutive years in the classroom, I was encouraged to pursue a path into educational leadership. After only four years in the classroom, I found myself in my first leadership role as an assistant principal. Although I served at Oak Hill as the assistant principal for 2½ years prior to taking on the role of the principal, I hectically split my days between two elementary schools, completing management tasks. I quickly mastered many of the management aspects of that role. However, my skills as a coach and mentor for my staff were not as fine-tuned and remained areas of growth opportunity for me as a developing educational leader. Less than three years into my assistant principalship, I became a principal. Although I was learning and growing, I was also moving through positions rather quickly.

I had an incredible experience as the principal at Oak Hill Elementary School. I made a difference in the lives of students by being a student-centered leader. However, I struggled with constant conflict and compromise during my time as a principal. Mr. Quisling, the husband of a

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teacher I had struggled with to see the value in data and protecting instructional time, was appointed as a new school board member around the same time I was appointed as Oak Hill's principal.

Prior to deciding to resign my principal position, I was comforted by assistant superintendents who told me that I was a "good principal." I was encouraged to communicate my desire to the superintendent to continue to be a "good principal" but at a different school than Oak Hill. As the superintendent had shared with me in some of the "Is it true…" phone calls, "perception is reality." Based on the support I received during what I perceived to be an unwarranted, unfounded, and nepotistic conflict with a school board member because of his wife, my perception was that I would receive the same level of support should I encounter conflict at any other school in SCSS. For that reason, I declined the offer to remain a "good principal" and transfer to a different school. Even after declining this offer, I was presented other opportunities to remain in the district, including assistant principal and teacher. Driven by emotion, partnered with professional immaturity, I declined these offers as well and resigned.

Regaining the perspective of a classroom teacher has been beneficial to my development as an educational leader. For that I am profoundly grateful. However, I do regret leaving the principalship. With some of the supports suggested by other researchers and me, my outcome at Oak Hill may have been different. I happily accepted my charge to put students first in everything I did. However, I was blindsided by the fact that none of my efforts to move the needle forward by increasing student growth and achievement, improving school attendance, increasing parental and community engagement, and developing a school of strong instructional leaders were a match for the mighty powers of a disgruntled teacher and "her board member." Rather than vague "heads-up" phone calls that created or enhanced divides within Oak Hill

school community, a "heads-up" from my mentor or district leadership on the power wielded by elected officials on the school board and support on how to effectively make my way through the political waters of my newfound position would have served me better as a developing educational leader.

In my naivete, I was personally affected by the falsehoods and misrepresentations. I found myself playing defense against members of my school community. I armored up, and my ego resorted to self-protection in the form of anger, placing blame, and avoidance (Brown, 2018). Fast forward five years, blessed with incredible experiences that have widened my lens, I can definitively say there are things I would handle much differently today. Regardless of accuracy or intent, it is the responsibility of the principal to receive and respond to feedback from all stakeholders. Perceptions of all members of the school community are important as they impact the climate and culture of the school community which in turn affect community engagement, teacher turnover, and student growth and achievement. Faced with these same challenges today, I would forge a relationship with Ms. Quisling to work together toward our common goal of providing the best education for each student at Oak Hill Elementary School.

Principals are profoundly important to the success of public education. Principal turnover rates have negative consequences for school communities and the students they serve. It is my hope that this research serves others as it did me, providing perspective via a glimpse into the lives and experiences of three former North Carolina principals. It is also my hope that this research sparks questions and curiosity in those who read it. More research is needed on why North Carolina principals are leaving. Understanding why principals are leaving can guide a path toward addressing problems of practice and reducing principal turnover in North Carolina.

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APPENDIX A: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

First Interview

1. Tell me a little about yourself.

2. When did you first decide to pursue a career in education?

3. Where and when did you attend college as an undergraduate?

4. What degree did you receive?

5. What inspired or motivated you to become an educator?

   a. What inspired or motivated you to become an educator in North Carolina?

6. Tell me about your first job as an educator.

7. How long have you worked in education?

   a. How long have you been an educator in North Carolina?

8. What inspired or motivated you to become a principal?

   a. What inspired or motivated you to become a principal in North Carolina?

9. Where and when did you attend college for your master's degree?

10. What degree did you receive?

11. How long and in what roles did you work before becoming a principal?

12. Is there anything else you want to share about your background leading up to becoming a principal in North Carolina?

Second Interview

1. Tell me about your time as a North Carolina principal.

2. When did you accept your first principalship?

   a. When did you accept your first principalship in North Carolina?

3. Describe the school district, school.

    a. Region

    b. Size

    c. Demographics

    d. Academic performance

    e. Turnover

4. Describe the community.

    a. Size

    b. Number of schools at each level

    c. Demographics

5. Describe your transition into the principalship.

    a. Prior to your first day as the principal

    b. First 90 days

6. How long were you a principal at this school?

7. Describe your responsibilities as a principal.

    a. Daily

    b. Weekly

    c. Monthly

    d. Quarterly

    e. Annually

8. Describe the professional support you received during your

    a. First year

    b. First three years

    c. After three years

9. Is there anything else you want to share about your time as a principal?

Third Interview

1. Describe the day you decided to resign your position as principal.

2. Why did you decide to leave the principalship?

3. Is there anything that could have been done to prevent you from resigning your position?

4. What are your thoughts about principal turnover?

5. Why did you decide to return to the classroom?

6. Will you ever consider returning to a principalship position?

7. What can be done to decrease principal turnover rates in North Carolina?

8. Is there anything else you would like to share for the purposes of this research study?

9. Describe the day you decided to resign your position as principal.

10. Why did you decide to leave the principalship?

11. Is there anything that could have been done to prevent you from resigning your position?

12. What are your thoughts about principal turnover?

13. Why did you decide to return to the classroom?

14. Will you ever consider returning to a principalship position?

15. What can be done to decrease principal turnover rates in North Carolina?

16. Is there anything else you would like to share for the purposes of this research study?