

PRINCIPAL SUCCESSION: TRENDS AND IMPACTS

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education
in Professional Leadership

by

Catherine Bartlett

May, 2011

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Completing this dissertation and my doctoral degree has truly been a combined effort of learning, leadership, and love. The support of my family, friends, colleagues, advisors, and cohort has been invaluable throughout the process. My family has patiently waited behind mounds of research and long nights at the computer. Colleagues at the building have appeared at events and programs when there were scheduling conflicts. Dr. MacNeil and Dr. Busch have made themselves available via email and cell phone for virtually the smallest of any question, and Dr. Anthony's support as our district's leader has been inspirational. Dr. Emerson has given guidance on topics ranging from appropriate margins to buying pearls overseas. Traveling halfway around the world with any other group of peers could have been an anxiety-ridden time, but the trip to China simply brought our cohort together as we stood in support of each other.

It is my hope that the research and literature I have put together through this experience combined with practical leadership knowledge will have an impact on all readers. My goal of stepping forward with a new title next to my name is secondary to the goal that I can continue to grow into the type of leader our students deserve. As a learner, I have had many leaders who inspired me. As a leader, I hope to inspire many learners.

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Abstract

This study addresses the critical issue of planning for principal succession and the need for transitional assistance as new leaders acquire the position. Principals are constantly being replaced, and many times by a leader who is inexperienced and has not had the leadership opportunities to develop their skills to the needed level (Fuller, 2009). The literature consistently shows that minimal time is spent in the planning for future principals (Fuller, 2009). Additionally, critical time spent between new principals and their supervisors may not happen to the extent that it should (Hargreaves, 2009). Ironically, however, the role of the principal is an undisputed key factor in both student and school success (Leithwood, 2004). Principals have great indirect impact on student achievement through the people, purpose, and goals of the school; through the structure of the school; and through the organizational culture of the campus (Hallinger, 1996).

This qualitative survey uses open-ended questions and responses to supplement the research findings that show the need for principal succession. The data supports the literature inasmuch as finding the principal's role to be a critical one, yet overwhelmingly unplanned for in the future. Effective succession management addresses the need for the recruitment, training, and on-going support of all school administrators (Hargreaves, 2003). However, both research and the survey indicate the often unmet need for specific guidance as new leaders emerge. These findings have implications for school districts in general, as well as for specific campus needs as a principal begins his or her tenure.

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Chapter One:

Introduction

While many factors can have contributions to school reform, instructional change, and strong visions, leadership is the catalyst for powerful impact and growth (Leithwood, 2004). Principals are able to have great indirect impact on their students' achievement through the people, purpose, and goals of the school; through the structure of the school; and through the organizational culture of the campus (Hallinger, 1996). Effective leadership from the principal is so critical that research supports the conclusion that the success and graduation rate of students can be directly linked to the principal. Districts that do not provide the needed working conditions for principals result in "unending graduation and preparation problems" within their students. (Bottoms, 2009)

School reform is strongly reliant on the efforts of a principal to create a common vision that focuses on implementing the school reform effort over multiple years (Hallinger, 1996). A sustained effort is important in order to create the vision and continue to integrate it (Fuller, 2009). Transformational principals have to recruit and retain teachers, educate staff to become comfortable with a changing education system, ensure training is available, and prepare both parents and students with new realities (Levine, 2005). Principals must align curriculum and instruction with assessment, prioritize collaboration and instructional leadership, and create a school-specific agenda or goal (Portin, 2009).

Although there are many factors that can contribute to school improvement, such as parental involvement, students' background, school characteristics, and the

state/district curriculum, a key player is definitely the principal. Practices that principals embrace and uphold can have a specific relationship to student success (Augustine, 2009). Indeed, knowing that the principal is the key factor, school district leaders are considering current trends in attracting and retaining quality principals, such as creating incentives and conditions within schools that will entice applicants to consider them (Wallace, 2009).

Looking at school improvement as a whole can be overwhelming due to the many factors that contribute to the rise and success of a campus. Leadership such as the principal of the school, however, has been shown to be one of the most important pieces of the puzzle. In a review of research for the Wallace Foundation, Leithwood, et al. states that next to classroom instruction, leadership is the next most critical school-related factor to create student learning. Although research shows that the teacher has a direct and immediate impact on student success, it is the principal who has the authority and responsibility to be certain that teaching and learning are strong throughout the school (Shelton, 2009). Moreover, the principal is the determining factor within most campuses on the recruitment, hiring, and maintenance of the best teachers. In teacher decisions of whether to remain at a campus, the number one factor is the quality of administrative support (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

The principal of the school wears many different hats, of course, and all of them with probable impact on the students. A strong leader has the ability to generate high expectations, create a sense of urgency in instruction, encourage sharing professional collaboration, and build an appropriately challenging curriculum (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Districts must look at different strengths and

personalities when seeking to fill openings at the principal level. For example, the principal of a large secondary school requires a different skill set than the principal of a small elementary school (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Inner-city school principals find it necessary to use more direct forms of leadership than suburban school leaders. Additionally, elementary principals typically need a stronger sense of curricular understanding than high school principals, who have department heads or directors of instruction (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). This means that a district must look ahead to be certain they are building leaders in appropriate areas. Not only must a pool of candidates be deep; it must be wide as well.

Realizing the importance of the position of the principal, school districts across the nation and at a global level must begin to plan ahead for the perfect fit for possible principal job openings. The amount of turnover in the principalship has grown due to Baby Boomers reaching retirement age and the job market widening for women. Districts across the nation are dealing with a trend of retiring principals. Up to 40 percent of principals are expected to retire within this decade (Wallace, 2007). Districts must prepare to fill openings for more than the upcoming year; they have to think ahead for several years when building their talent pool. As retirements and promotions occur within a school district, the impact on individual schools is great. In a study on the retention of principals (Fuller, 2009), findings show that 90% of principals who leave a school actually leave the principalship. While this may include staff rising to central administrative office positions, it also highlights the critical need for a strong principal succession plan. Principals are constantly being replaced, and many times by a leader who is inexperienced and has not had the leadership opportunities to develop their skills

to the needed level (Fuller, 2009). For the 2010-2011 school year, Cypress Fairbanks Independent School District in Houston, Texas will start with 13 of their 52 elementary schools being led by first year principals. Additionally, out of the remaining 39 campuses, only 22 principals have five or more years of experience in that role.

In looking at principal retention, regardless of the reason that a principal leaves, it has direct impact on teacher retention as well. It is critical that the principal is an appropriate match as principal and teacher retention rates are inextricably linked. Schools whose principals remain successfully at the campus also have high teacher retention rates (Young, 2009). Research shows that many factors are affected by principal turnover, including trust, morale, teacher efficacy, discretion, conscience and loyalty. Issues of power and control and the negotiation of influence play an important role in the development of relationships within a school community when a new principal assumes his or her position (Meyer, Macmillan, & Northfield, 2011). Change brings about readjustment for all staff. Both administrators and teaching staff are typically affected throughout the succession (Macmillan, Meyer, & Northfield, 2011).

Knowing that the principal is critical in student success, time and effort must be placed into creating a smooth transition for the new campus leader. The principal has the distinctive role to ensure that quality instruction is taking place in every classroom. Rather than investing money in a campus overhaul of professional development, the investment into building and maintaining a quality principal can be a cost-effective path of school reform (Wallace, 2009). Support must be provided on a consistent, timely manner for new principals. While many school districts purport that their central office staff has a common goal of providing assistance and support to principals, time to

complete those actions become a problem. In one study by Plecki, area directors noted that although their role was to advocate for principals and their schools, the process required so much time that the support did not happen as quickly as it should have. Moreover, it is common knowledge in the education field that teachers need a support system. Indeed, at least 30 states currently require a teacher mentoring program, and research shows that teachers who receive mentoring are less likely to leave after the first year. (Wallace, 2007) The logical follow up is mentoring for principals.

Three basic practices need to be in place for successful leadership. These components are necessary for student achievement, and support programs can be put into place for new principals to help them build these strengths (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). First, clear goals or directions must be in place. This accounts for the largest proportion of a leader's impact. Although leaders will use their strengths differently, principals still retain the responsibility for building a shared vision among the staff. Second, staff must be motivated and moved toward the goals. Having compelling directions is not enough. Principals must be able to influence staff to want to achieve those goals. Third, principals must be able to identify organizational and instructional structures and practices that need to be changed or redesigned in their building. These practices need to be in place in a strong mentoring program in order to help new principals build their repertoire (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004).

Problem Statement

The limited amount of research on actual succession planning indicates that there is minimal preparation and forecasting for future principal positions. Additionally, the

small amount of structure and guidance on supporting new principals once they assume the position is hindering the growth of what should be considered the most important position in the campus. This study will examine the need for a structured, established succession plan within districts for principals at both elementary and secondary levels and will provide insight into the type of support and mentoring provided to new principals. The goal of this study is to (a) identify the importance of the principal within a school; (b) provide reflections by a widespread group of principals on the assistance they received when assuming the principal role; (c) distinguish the criticalness of a planned, ongoing succession program to build, attract, and retain quality leaders within a school district; and (d) differentiate the best time of year to assume the principalship as set forth by current principals and researchers.

Research Questions

With the goal of more fully understanding the importance of leadership and providing a relationship between the planning for new principals and transition into their position, this study will focus on the questions listed below:

1. How many years ahead of time do area school districts plan for campus openings at the principal level?
2. Did anyone from central office assist the new principal with the responsibility of setting goals and priorities?
3. Does gender or level of campus (such as elementary or secondary) factor into transitional assistance?
4. From a principal's perspective, what is the best time of the school year to assume the role of a campus principal?

Definition of Terms

1. The term “succession” will be referred to throughout the study. It refers to the coming of a principal to take the place of the former principal.
2. The term “principalship” refers to the overarching goals and all-encompassing responsibilities of the campus leader: the principal.

This study is expected to make contributions to the overall understanding of the importance of the planning for succession of the principalship and the support or guidance provided during the transitional time. Using responses from a widespread survey, this study will encompass reflections from actual principals from various levels of schools, TEA ratings based on TAKS scores, years of experience, and socioeconomic levels. It will provide valuable insight for district leaders as they plan for the success of individual campuses.

Chapter Two:

Review of Literature

Hargreaves and Fink (2006) state, “Effective succession means having a plan and making plans to create positive and coordinated flows of leadership, across many years and numerous people.” Effective succession management addresses the need for the recruitment, training, and on-going support of all school administrators (Hargreaves, 2003). It ensures that first-time school administrators have adequate time to prepare for administrative roles, that the training support is linked to clearly defined leadership standards and competencies, and that strong professional communities are built that deepen the pools of leadership talent (Daresh, 2004).

The role of the principal is undisputedly critical in school improvement, from the hiring of the new leader to the plan for the next leader and that transitional period. For this reason, the second chapter will be divided into three sections:

The principal as a leader and his or her role in school improvement;

1. The importance of a principal who is a strong leader; and
2. Building and maintaining effective principal succession programs.

School Improvement and the Principal

Indeed, improving the schools of America has become a top priority at the local, state, and national level. New leadership standards and structured criteria for leadership training are taking place in many states as the criticalness of the principal’s role becomes even more evident (Augustine, 2009). In this outcome-based and accountability-driven time, principals have to be the model in changing the goals, priorities, methods, and

curriculum at the school (Levine, 2005). Although there are many factors that can contribute to school improvement, such as parental involvement, students' background, school characteristics, and the state/district curriculum, a key player is definitely the principal. Practices that principals embrace and uphold can have a specific relationship to student success (Augustine, 2009). Indeed, knowing that the principal is the key factor, school district leaders are considering current trends in attracting and retaining quality principals, such as creating incentives and conditions within schools that will entice applicants to consider them (Wallace, 2009).

Stability in the principalship is a key factor when creating school reforms (Fuller, 2009). Hallinger (1992) describes the principal as the lynch-pin of educational change. The principal maintains the control of curriculum and power to select motivated, skilled teachers, ways in which they can transform schools into learning-centered organizations (Augustine, 2009). It is critical that they continuously engage in ongoing campus evaluation and rethinking (Levine, 2005). School reform is strongly reliant on the efforts of a principal to create a common vision that focuses on implementing the school reform effort over multiple years (Hallinger, 1996). A sustained effort is important in order to create the vision and continue to integrate it (Fuller, 2009). This requires trust and community among the campus. Principals must take steps to build and maintain trust and build team-oriented cultures (Portin, 2009).

Principals are no longer working as classroom supervisors anymore. School leaders internalize and spread the high expectations assumed by the district (Portin, 2009). They are taking on tasks such as the redesigning of their schools and school systems (Levine, 2005). In order to transform schools, effective principals spend more

time in direct classroom supervision, work with teachers to coordinate the school's instructional program, help solve instructional problems collaboratively, and help teachers secure resources and professional training (Augustine, 2009). Transformational principals have to recruit and retain teachers, educate staff to become comfortable with a changing education system, ensure training is available, and prepare both parents and students with new realities (Levine, 2005). Principals must align curriculum and instruction with assessment, prioritize collaboration and instructional leadership, and create a school-specific agenda or goal (Portin, 2009).

Principals involved in schoolwide change need support from their colleagues and their school districts in order to network and reach their goals (Wallace, 2009). The district environments provide direction, guidance and support. In effective, transformational districts, these elements will enable, not inhibit, the principal's efforts toward teaching and learning (Portin, 2009). Within a transformational process, data and the principal have a close relationship. For example, data regarding the campus should be a central part of the interaction between school leaders and other staff. The interaction includes training, collaboration, and conversations on specific matters (Portin, 2009). The campus should have a capacity for using a data-based practice within their walls as well. Principals that effect change on their campus not only use these practices, they train their teachers to embrace them as well. Conversely, teachers cannot create the conditions for student learning unless the same types of learning conditions exist for them (Haslam, 2006).

The relationship between the principal and the district is critical for school improvement. Principals at most improved school feel they have a working relationship

that is collaborative with their school district, while least improved schools were reported by principals to be following reform initiatives that began in central office (Bottoms, 2009). Principals profoundly influence student achievement by working with the teachers closely, aligning instruction, making decisions about hiring, and allocating resources (Bottoms, 2009). Indeed, research shows that effective leadership contributes to teacher retention and student learning. At the high-school level, the quality of the leadership is the single greatest predictor of whether or not schools had high student achievement as defined by No Child Left Behind (Bottoms, 2009). It is evident that strong leadership in schools is the key factor to student success.

The Importance of Strong Leadership

Effective leadership from the principal is so critical that research supports the conclusion that the success and graduation rate of students can be directly linked to the principal. According to SREB (Bottoms, 2009), districts that do not provide the needed working conditions for principals result in “unending graduation and preparation problems” within their students. The principal of a school can clearly have life-altering impact on students. Globally, one may wonder whether the same accountability exists for principals across the world. Indeed, at a lecture at Beijing Normal University (2010), Dr. Wang Guangyan, Director of Personnel Division Ministry of education, pointed out that the principal teaching leadership to the staff is a big part of school improvement. Dr. Wang Guangyan stated that the principal should have a passion for education, be familiar with law, and want to dedicate their life to education. In accordance with that same theme of leadership, Dr. Mingua Li, an associate professor at the East China Normal University stated that reform must begin in the school level (2010). Moreover, the principal has the

distinctive role to ensure that quality instruction is taking place in every classroom.

Rather than investing money in a campus overhaul of professional development, the investment into building and maintaining a quality principal can be cost-effective path of school reform (Wallace, 2009).

In a review of research for the Wallace Foundation, Leithwood, et al. states that next to classroom instruction, leadership is the next most critical school-related factor to effect student learning. Although research shows that the teacher has a direct and immediate impact on student success, it is the principal who has the authority and responsibility to be certain that teaching and learning are strong throughout the school (Shelton, 2009). Moreover, the principal is the determining factor within most campuses on the recruitment, hiring, and maintenance of the best teachers. In teacher decisions of whether to remain at a campus, the number one factor is the quality of administrative support (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

Three basic practices need to be in place for successful leadership. These components are necessary for student achievement, and support programs can be put into place for new principals to help them build these strengths (Leithwood, 2004). First, clear goals or directions must be in place. This accounts for the largest proportion of a leader's impact. Although leaders will use their strengths differently, principals still retain the responsibility for building a shared vision among the staff. Second, staff must be motivated and moved toward the goals. Having compelling directions is not enough. Principals must be able to influence staff to want to achieve those goals. Third, principals must be able to identify organizational and instructional structures and practices that need to be changed or redesigned in their building. Hess (2003) notes that principals are

expected to leverage accountability and revolutionary technology, devise performance-based evaluation systems, reengineer outdated management structures, recruit and cultivate non-traditional staff, drive decisions with data, build professional cultures, and ensure that every child is served. This overwhelming list of practices needs to be addressed in a strong mentoring program in order to help new principals build their repertoire (Leithwood, 2004).

While different principal roles require different skill sets, two specific objectives are critical to all school effectiveness: helping to create a sense of direction or goals, and coaching staff to move toward that vision (Leithwood, 2004). In addition to the global goals, a principal also faces difficult daily tasks including budgeting, busing, personnel, union matters, and public relations (Wallace, 2007). Specific role training and mentoring has become such critical issues that state legislatures are beginning to address it. During the 2008 legislative sessions, 22 states enacted laws to support school leader initiatives. The laws addressed topics such as:

1. Roles, responsibilities and authority
2. Preparation and leadership academies
3. Licensure and certification
4. Mentoring and induction
5. Professional development
6. Assessing leader effectiveness
7. Compensation and incentives
8. Governance structure issues. (Shelton, 2009)

A strong leader has the ability to generate high expectations, create a sense of urgency in instruction, encourage sharing professional collaboration, and build an appropriately challenging curriculum (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). How, one may wonder, does a principal become such a force? Regardless of the leadership qualities one may possess at the start of his or her tenure, a guiding support system is critical. Over half of all states and many districts in the other states now have a mentoring program for principals (Wallace, 2007). It is critical that the programs are built upon student success, not just providing a buddy system for new leaders. This results in the need for funding and training. Specific elements of mentoring must be placed into the training of a mentoring program, rather than just friendly conversation (Wallace 2007). The cost of building an effective principal through mentoring is small compared to the cost of repairing the damage done by an ill-prepared leader. In fact, any funds channeled into creating a quality mentoring program could be viewed as a cost-effective way to run campuses within the district (Wallace 2009). Strong leadership development programs not only provide learning opportunities for new leaders, they also provide growth for the mentors (Sherman, 2005). Mentors do not necessarily have to be gender specific (Mendez-Morse, 2004).

It is evident that the leader of the campus is in a critical position that encompasses many responsibilities. Principals are able to have great indirect impact on their students' achievement through the people, purpose, and goals of the school; through the structure of the school; and through the organizational culture of the campus (Hallinger, 1996). Principals' impact on their schools, however, is often influenced greatly by their

predecessors and their successors. Sustaining the improvement of a school depends on managing this process over a period of time (Hargreaves, 2004).

Building and Maintaining Effective Principal Succession Programs

Districts across the nation are dealing with a trend of retiring principals. Research shows that between 40 percent (Wallace, 2007) and 70 percent (Fink, 2004) of principals are expected to retire within this decade. Districts must prepare to fill openings for more than the upcoming year; they have to think ahead for several years when building their talent pool. It is critical that specific thought and preparation is put into the future roles of principalship and who may be ready to assume them. Most school districts tend to select new principals from within their own ranks (Johnson, 1995). This enables them to continue the values, norms, and practices of the district.

One of the most significant factors affecting the life of a school and the strength of its improvement is the principal succession. School improvement that occurs over long periods of time and through multiple leaders must have carefully planned continuity (Hargreaves, 2005). However, many times a change in leadership is made in order to disrupt the continuity: a planned discontinuity. This may occur in order to give a nudge to complacent schools. Unplanned discontinuity, however, may occur when a principal is removed prematurely or leaves without lengthy notice. This takes the crisis off of one school, but typically puts it back to the former (Hargreaves, 2005).

If there is a shortage of teachers, it is a logical conclusion that there is a declining pool of quality applicants for the principalship (d'Arbon, 2002). With the current trend for retirement or promotions deleting the principalship, the overwhelming decline of appropriate applicants is disheartening. Demographically driven retirement, the difficulty

of retaining leaders in urban schools, and the popular practice of moving around principals to address failing schools mean that principal turnover is accelerating dramatically (Hargreaves, 2005). In a poll of participants within a teacher leadership program, researchers found that the love of teaching overpowered the desire for leadership positions. Specifically, teachers mentioned the desire to avoid dealing with difficult parents and lack of appropriate salaries (Adams and Hambright, 2004). Future leaders are beginning to wonder if the pay is worth the stress. Additionally, “Expansions of scale, decentralization, and increasing autonomy of schools are making the business of running schools more complex and principals are being asked to do the impossible” (Kruger, 2008). The role of school leader has become decreasingly popular as a potential career for many current educators (Daresh, 2004).

Human resource directors and superintendents agree with the top three reasons that prospective principals are bowing out of the race for a job (Cushing, 2003). The low pay of beginning principals is typically even or less than an experienced teacher. While the salary may appear greater, the hours and days worked by the principal does not even out to an appropriate wage. Additionally, the stress of accountability and public criticism combines to be a discouraging factor. Health issues due to the stress of the job are common with principals. Finally, the long hours of a principal are considered to be detrimental to the position and to the principal’s family structure (Cushing, 2003). In general, the role and expectations of the principal are increasing in intensity and complexity, and they are causing many principals to reflect on why they should continue to do the job or why aspiring principals might be discouraged from applying (d’Arbon, 2002). In 2001, the National Association of Secondary School Principals reported that

there was a serious shortage of applications for vacant principal positions, illustrating the problem by stating there was only a trickle of qualified applicants (Dorman, 2003). The roads to leadership have many bumps along the way, including role conflicts, high job demands, and low salaries. Teachers tend to have a more nurturing personality, which cannot always translate to the principalship (Grogan, 2000). Furthermore, Loder and Spillane (2005) found that female administrators commonly faced role conflicts when shifting from teaching positions to principal or other administrative job.

In a study on the retention of principals (Fuller, 2009), findings show that 90% of principals who leave a school actually leave the principalship. While this may include staff rising to central administrative office positions, it also highlights the critical need for a strong principal succession plan. Dr. Mingua Li (2010) agrees by stating that high quality principals make a difference, as they are a teacher of teachers. Principals are constantly being replaced, and many times by a leader who is inexperienced and has not had the leadership opportunities to develop their skills to the needed level (Fuller, 2009). Some areas and districts believe in rotating their principals after a certain time period, contending that it rejuvenates the leader (Fink, 2004). They believe that once principals gain experience and settle into a school, they take fewer risks (Macmillan, 1996). Other findings, however, point to regular principal rotation as a determinant in attrition of teachers and principals (Fink, 2000). Research shows that leadership succession is often undermined by poor planning. Moving strong administrators to a different school and replacing them with less experienced leaders typically results in the prior gains being eliminated and the successful school becomes mediocre (Hargreaves, 2005). Moreover, the bottom line suggests that as long as leaders are continuing to grow professionally and

maintain their learning curve, they will continue to be effective (Fink, 2004).

Additionally, when improvement efforts are successful, principals should be able to stay in their schools longer than five years (Hargreaves, 2005).

Making the best match for an organization with its leader is a common problem for human resource departments, whether they are education based or in the business world. Torbert (1987) states in his book, “Managing is the art of making dreams come true. Done properly, managing is the broadest yet most precise, the most unrealistically demanding yet simultaneously the most practical, the most straightforwardly humane yet also the most mysterious and paradoxical of all the social arts. But how rarely is managing done properly?” Making that perfect fit, whether for a global company or a small school, is critical. Young and Fuller suggest seven major findings. Inasmuch as knowing how long a particular leader will be expected to remain at a campus and knowing what type of leader the campus will need, these findings provide direct impact on the process of planning for principal succession.

1. Elementary principals have the longest tenure and greatest retention rates, while high schools have the shortest tenure and lowest retention rates.
2. Just over 50% of newly hired high school principals stay for three years and less than 30% of them stay for five years.
3. Principals in the lowest achieving schools have the shortest tenure and lowest retention rates; principals in the highest achieving schools have the longest tenure and highest retention rates.
4. Principals in high-poverty schools have shorter tenure and lower retention rates than principals in low-poverty schools.

5. Schools in rural and small town districts have a lower rate. Suburban, White, and not economically disadvantaged schools have a greater retention rate.
 6. Personal characteristics (age, race, gender) do not have a significant impact on principal retention rates.
 7. Certification tests do not have significant impact on principal retention rates.
- (Fuller, 2009)

Making the best match between a principal and a campus is critical for student success. Evidence goes so far as to suggest that a principal must remain at a school for a minimum of five consecutive years to fully impact a school (Fuller, 2009). As mentioned previously, stability in the principalship is a key factor when creating school reforms (Fuller, 2009). When successors fail to adhere to the organizational norms or goals, conflict and tensions tend to arise among staff. However, when they uphold the campus' norms and reveal their concern and expertise, the teachers respond favorably and supportively. (Ogawa, 1995) While careful planning does not guarantee that there will be successful continuity, it does result in the leader having an opportunity to identify with the school and have a shared sense of meaning with the staff in a cooperative manner (Fink, 2004).

Districts must look at different strengths and personalities when seeking to fill openings at the principal level. For example, the principal of a large secondary school requires a different skill set than the principal of a small elementary school (Leithwood, 2004). Inner-city school principals find it necessary to use more direct forms of leadership than suburban school leaders. Additionally, elementary principals typically need a stronger sense of curricular understanding than high school principals, who have

department heads or directors of instruction (Leithwood, 2004). This means that a district must look ahead to be certain they are building leaders in appropriate areas. Not only must a pool of candidates be deep; it must be wide as well. It is critical that the principal is an appropriate match as principal and teacher retention rates are inextricably linked. Schools whose principals remain successfully at the campus also have high teacher retention rates (Young, 2009). This is not a new concern. Marshall (2004) predicted over six years ago that the field of school leadership would be repopulated by 2010.

Leadership is a global concern. China, however, tends to have a culture that lends itself to teachers and principals following the status quo or accepting change set forth by their authority figures (Dimmock, 2005). While American principals are chosen and mentored to effect change and try bold approaches, Chinese societies group harmony and respect for position is a way of life. Therefore, the teachers and principals tend to avoid open disagreement and situations which risk conflict (Dimmock, 2005)

While most new principals do not arrive with experience in that job role, they are typically expected to have a clear understanding of their role, including how to exercise power appropriately, how to maintain professional relationships, and how to design processes or structures to facilitate goal achievement (Hewitson, 1995). A new principal will need a strong support system to put knowledge into action. New principals often express frustration over the fact that they do not understand the nature of their leadership responsibilities prior to receiving the position (Daresh, 1994). The induction period for new principals often consists of sink or swim: being handed a map and a key (Hart, 1993). It is common knowledge in the education field that teachers need a support system. Indeed, at least 30 states currently require a teacher mentoring program, and

research shows that teachers who receive mentoring are less likely to leave after the first year. (Wallace, 2007) The logical follow up is mentoring for principals. Mentoring must be much more than a mere buddy system. In recent research, the Wallace Foundation (2007) found that common symptoms of mentoring shortcomings included:

1. Vague or unclear goals
2. Insufficient focus on instructional leadership and/or overemphasis on managerial roles
3. Weak or non-existent training for mentors
4. Insufficient mentoring time or duration to provide enough sustained support to prepare new school leaders for their multifaceted job challenges
5. Lack of meaningful data to assess benefits or build a credible case for sustained support
6. Underfunding that contributes to all of these shortcomings.

Research shows that the reason for the departing principal can have a strong effect on the resistance or acceptance with which the incumbent principal may be greeted. For example, if the departing principal is advancing to a career promotion within the district, the staff believes that their previous leader is being valued by the school district. Additionally, the predecessor is more reluctant to initiate immediate changes, thus making the staff feel more secure and accepting (Miskel, 1984). Additionally, when the staff is allowed to have input on the qualities that a prospective principal should have, they have a sense of confidence in the new leader (Miskel, 1984). Finally, new principals that come into the position with a reputation that is positive have already begun with a foundation of support from their new staff (Miskel, 1984). These key points are important

for districts as they plan their succession programs and leadership pools, and for principal applicants while they complete their current positions. Hartle and Thomas (2006) name a six step cycle approach to succession planning:

1. Creating a culture that propels growth in others through the use of collaboration, trust, and discussion.
2. Auditing the needs that are present and may be present within the next five years through the use of surveys and conversation.
3. Defining the type of leaders desired at campus and district levels so that there is a systematic approach to growth.
4. Identifying current talent through the use of character traits in order to groom them and/or seek outside strengths.
5. Assess and monitor future leaders to see what strengths need to be developed and provide the necessary training.
6. Grow leadership talent through networking programs and mentorships to contribute to a wider pool of leadership talent.

Although the principal is seen globally as a direct influence on student success, the succession plans in place for the leadership building of future principals vary greatly. In China, talented teachers with leadership potentials and at least a bachelor's degree are selected through a screening process and selection committee as the candidates for future principals. They receive a minimum of 300 hours in a training program, and they are awarded a certificate upon completion, which was shared by Dr. Li (2010). Principal candidates tend to be leaders, such as an assistant principal, within their own campus in

China. It is very rare for different areas to switch leaders or to look for them in other regions within China according to Dr. Wang (2010).

Mentoring is a serious commitment that needs to be complete with time and training. Oftentimes, successful, experienced principals are selected to be mentors. Success and experience are not guarantees that a person will be a good mentor (Wallace, 2007).

Active listening and non-judgmental communication are key elements in strong mentors.

While it may be pleasant to have collegial friends, a mentor creates a different type of relationship. In mentoring new principals, Leithwood (2004) suggests four basic research-based goals that leaders need to be able to embrace. These would be appropriate mentoring focuses:

1. Creating and sustaining a competitive school – critical in a time of alternative school systems
2. Empowering others to make significant decisions – necessary when schools have so many stakeholders
3. Providing instructional guidance – important in designing appropriate professional development based on needs of school
4. Developing and implementing strategic and school-improvement plans – essential for all district leaders

In her book, *Mentoring and Induction Programs that Support New Principals*, Susan

Villani describes five stages that new principals pass through as they master the position:

1. Survival – the shock of new leadership
2. Control – setting priorities
3. Stability – basic routines become mastered

4. Educational leadership – the focus begins to be curriculum and instruction
5. Professional actualization – internal self confidence and personal vision set by the leader

The stages of this process seem difficult for a new leader to undertake alone without appropriate support (Villani, 2006). The need for a strong mentoring relationship becomes apparent when faced with the daily tasks and long term objectives a principal must master. One succession philosophy is that of the exiting principal to mentor the emerging leaders (Hartle, 2003). The role of the principal, however, has changed throughout the years as much as the classroom teacher's position has grown. It is critical that leaders share the same vision for the campus and district prior to agreeing to mentor.

Having new principals enter the leadership arena is an exciting time. They cause people to reexamine the possibility of change risks. They challenge their staff with modified or new visions, resulting in what Senge (1990) calls generative learning. This type of learning can lead staff members to a level of performance where they see possibilities not previously considered. Having new leaders can be a positive, upward-moving event, if handled and guided tenderly and appropriately by the central office staff.

While many school district purport that their central office staff has a common goal of providing assistance and support to principals, time to complete those actions become a problem. In one study (Plecki), area directors noted that although their role was to advocate for principals and their schools, the process required so much time that the support did not happen as quickly as it should have. It is critical that attention be given to the transitional time of the principalship: when the new leader assumes the role and

responsibilities of the campus. Chinese officials, however, place principals in their position. The government oversees the direct transition into office by a new principal, (Wang, 2010). As the government has been instrumental in selecting the future leaders to attend the training hours, the thought is that there is little transitional support or mentoring needed. The principal is ready to assume the position, or else he would not have been offered the job (Wang, 2010).

Like the findings in business literature, a significant result in research is that leadership succession must be tailored to an organization's unique needs, culture and history; there are no quick fixes (Souque, 1998). Typically, it is designed to promote the continuity of leadership by planning for and preparing the future administrators. It must be related to the goals of the school district and expected growth and development of the district leaders. Districts must offer support to the new principals. Current principals and central office administrators should recruit and develop teachers with leadership potential, encouraging them to risk taking a position to share their strengths. Principals must be talent agents, seeking and developing their future successors. (Walker, 1992) Succession plans must tie leadership recruitment, preparation, hiring, and training in a cohesive way. They must incorporate training for new principals, providing adequate time to prepare for administrative roles. It ensures that the training support is linked to clearly defined leadership standards and competencies, and that strong professional communities are built that deepen the pools of leadership talent (Daresh, 2004). Principals need different types of preparation and support depending on the stage of their career, their various experiences, and their curricular knowledge. Succession plans must include professional instruction for new leaders.

Early identification of future leaders will help districts develop a deep pool of applicants. Mentoring new leaders and providing opportunities for networking will make the transition smoother. Districts must link their plan with strategy and support in order to grow, groom, and guide each new cadre of leaders. In this way they will be better prepared to face the declining number of principal applicants.

Chapter Three:

Methodology

The research in this study is a section of a much larger database of principals in the Houston and surrounding areas. This study is designed to better understand and make suggestions for the role of the principal. The section of data that this particular study will incorporate will include general information about the principals and the following specific questions:

1. How many years ahead does your school plan for the principalship?
2. When you were hired as a principal, did anyone in central office assist you in setting goals or priorities in order to successfully lead this school?
 - a. If yes, explain.
3. In the succession planning, do you think the best time to place a principal in a school is at the beginning of the school year?
 - a. Explain.

This chapter describes the methods that will be used to investigate these questions and is organized into the following sections: Research Design, Participants, Instrument, Procedures, Data Analysis, Validity and Reliability, Limitations, and Implications.

Research Design

A qualitative survey research that incorporates two open-ended questions will be used. A mixed methods approach will also be used to analyze differences between groups and look for trends.

Participants

This survey will include existing principals of campuses in the Greater Houston and surrounding areas. It will be a widespread group of professionals, representing a wide variety of leaders. The total of 178 usable responses will be incorporated. Of the 178 participants, 112 are female principals and 65 are male principals. The principals include an appropriate representation of different ethnicities. There are 91 white/non-Hispanic, 49 black/non-Hispanic, 34 Hispanic, 3 Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 non-resident/international, which results in: 51% white/non-Hispanic, 28% black/non-Hispanic, 19% Hispanic, 2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.6% non-resident/international. The average experience level of the participants in education is 21 years with the range of 5 years to 46 years. The average experience level as a principal is 6 years with the range of 0 year to 38 years. The spread of years of experience and age will help represent the various principals in this area more fully. The locations of the elementary, middle, and high schools where the participants serve as principals are varied, including 13 rural, 103 urban, 60 suburb, and 2 unanswered. According to the state of Texas' accountability system, each school is given a rating of Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, and Low Performing. For the survey, each principal self-reported the rating of the school, which includes a sum of 52 Exemplary, 53 Recognized, 66 Acceptable, and 7 Low Performing campuses.

Instrument

The focus of this study was on principals' responses to three questions regarding principal succession, transition, and time of placement. Survey questions were in open-ended format, which allows for greater flexibility in participants providing answers. This

instrument was originally intended for students in the Master's of Education program in order to gain exposure and practice of the research methods. Questions regarding principal succession planning were addressed through discussions. A group of principals were initially interviewed in attempt to formulate specific questions. The questions were revised based on additional feedbacks obtained from more principals over time.

A copy of the complete survey instrument will be included in Appendix A of this study as it will be approved by the institutional human subjects board of the university at which it was developed.

Procedures

The data and information used for this particular study on principal succession and its trends will be gained through a previous study. The data were obtained through cognitive interviews of each participant conducted by students in Master's degree program. They later recorded the responses through the use of on-line tools in order to analyze and compare the results. Thus, the information regarding the data collection procedure was acquired through an interview from a university professor who designed the instrument and monitored the process. It was decided to utilize individual face-to-face cognitive interview method in order to collect the responses. This helps capture the specific insights and comments from the principals, without limiting their answers. Although different sections of the particular survey included Likert scale questions, the sections to be utilized and analyzed in this study will incorporate just the three open-ended questions with the principals' descriptions.

Data Analysis

The answers provided to the research questions will be analyzed in search of common themes among answers and participants. Participants' answers will provide a general percentage of how far in advance districts plan for principal succession. The answers to this section range from 1 to 5 years. These responses will be sorted and analyzed to determine if there is further advance planning in rural vs. urban districts or in larger vs. smaller districts. The open-ended questions will provide information about the transition into the principalship. Specifically, the percentage of how many principals were given assistance, and to what extent, as they entered the principalship will be examined. Responses will be coded to determine which level of campus received more support (elementary vs. secondary). Finally, respondents' professional opinions on the best time to enter into the principal position will be reviewed and analyzed. Like responses will be coded and grouped together, once more determining any trends among the representing principals in the study. Thus, to begin the analytical process, similar answers will be coded and grouped to see if there is a trend on the participants' answers. The data will be further examined to determine if there is a difference between the common responses based on whether it is an elementary or secondary position, the accountability differences of schools, percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch, locations of schools, sizes of schools, and other emerging factors. Finally, the study will use a descriptive model to understand predominant lines of thought that emerge from the responses of the open-ended questions. The responses will be coded and analyzed to discover significance between response sets and demographic data groups.

Validity and Reliability

The survey questions are used in such a way to gain more information by asking open-ended questions. This offers respondents the opportunity to expand on their answers and opinions, as well as to clarify vague responses. However, there is a potential risk associated with coding the responses due to the researcher's own opinions and biases. Therefore, the reliability of the data will be maintained by reassessing the coding by multiple individuals. Another potential concern is that a sample population was selected through the convenience sampling. The interviewers have the freedom to choose from their personal and professional connections. There is a possibility that this type of method may prevent the sample population from representing the overall population. However, the participants selected for this particular research represent a sufficiently diverse group with a large portion of area schools included. Furthermore, the university is a large well-known commuter school located in a large metropolitan area. This factor allows for many different types of principals, schools, ages, and districts to be represented well within the research.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. Though the results were produced from a sample of 178 principals, it cannot be presumed that the data collected accurately represents all school principals in the southeast region of Texas. Also the study's data will be archival data, which involves another person using it after the fact. This could decrease the integrity of the data. The interpretation of the researcher's data into categories or coding may vary from another researcher's method, which could cause results that are not identical to one another. Additionally, several principals were

interviewed more than one time, perhaps due to having multiple staff members complete the survey. This could lead to their opinions and answers being more heavily weighted than other respondents. Therefore, the decision has been made by a group of researchers using some of the same data to include participants' first responses only. The extra responses were eliminated from the data. As with any study or research, there are limitations. The use of audio or video taping during the interviews could have added an element of further reliability to the study, although the answers to most questions seem adequate. Further discussion was not available, due to the researcher having to type the answer in order to fit into a survey. Nevertheless, as a preliminary study that seeks deeper knowledge of general trends and impacts with respect to principal succession, the researcher remains convinced that the significance of this study's contribution to the field remains preserved.

Implications

The data and research will be used in order to determine the implications and usefulness of the study as well as to make recommendations about principal succession and transitioning into the position. The data and the research will tie together to provide substantial information about the importance of the position, planning for the position, and the transitioning of the position of the principal.

Chapter Four:

Results

The results of this qualitative study will be organized around three specific questions and their detailed responses. After analyzing the results of the survey, 178 useable responses were included in the final research. As Table 1 indicates, the participants included 113 females (63.4%) and 65 males (36.5%), with a range of 0-38 years' experience as principals. However, 154 of the 178 participants (86.5%) have 10 years or less of experience, which supports the research showing that principals are leaving the profession quickly. In fact, out of the 154 principals with 10 years or less experience, almost two thirds of them, or 97, have 5 or fewer years. The participants in the study represented various levels of campuses, including elementary, secondary, and some which were mixed levels (such as kindergarten through 8th grades). Similar numbers of urban and suburban campuses were polled. Likewise, campuses with state accountability ratings of Low Performing, Acceptable, Recognized, and Exemplary were all represented in the survey. Overall, the survey is illustrative of the varying campuses across the state.

Table 1

Attributes of Principals Represented in the Survey

Years of Experience	Number of Respondents
0	2
1	23
2	19
3	23
4	17
5	13
6	16
7-10	41
11-14	13
≥ 15	13

Question 1 (“How many years ahead does your school district office plan or project principal arrangements or vacancies?”) provides the responses from the wide-range of respondents in the survey. As the survey encompassed respondents from elementary, secondary (middle level or high school), and mixed level campuses from the greater Houston area (178 schools), it offers a strong group of varied answers. Question 2 (“When you were hired as a principal, did anyone in central office assist you in setting goals or priorities in order to successfully lead this school?”), has a follow up question (a) (“If yes, explain”). This data was sorted with respect to the different levels of campuses (elementary, secondary, or mixed), TAKS rating (Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, or

Low Performing) and location of campus (urban, suburban, or rural), as seen in Table 2.

Statistical significance was determined, and relevant comments will support the findings.

Question 3 (“In the succession planning, do you think the best time to place a principal in a school is at the beginning of the school year?”) has an additional question (a)

(“Explain”). The data for Question 3 was also treated to determine any statistical significance with regard to the principals’ years of experience. Relevant answers are shared that support the findings as well.

Table 2

School Characteristics: Level of Campus

School Level	Number of Respondents
Elementary	86
Secondary	79
Mixed Level	10
Not Reported	3

Table 3

School Characteristics: Location of Campus

School Setting	Number of Respondents
Rural	14
Suburban	59
Urban	102
Not Reported	3

Table 4

School Characteristics: Accountability Rating of Campus

Texas Accountability Rating	Number of Respondents
Exemplary	54
Recognized	53
Acceptable	64
Low Performing	7

When determining the need for principal succession, research throughout this study supports the critical need for prior preparation. Indeed, literature forecasted the current need for principals several years ago, projecting that the field would be repopulated by 2010 (Marshall, 2004). Table 3 shows that the majority of succession planning occurs the year that the opening arises. 116 out of 176 respondents answered that their district plans just one year in advance, 65.9% of responses. Twenty-eight of the remaining responses (15.9%) shared that their district plans up to two years ahead of the opening. Just twenty eight respondents shared that their districts plan three or more years in advance. It is clear from the evidence of this survey that there is a lack of long range planning on school districts' parts in relationship to the vacancy of the principal.

Table 5

How Far in Advance Does Your District Plan for Succession?

Years	Responses
1	116
2	28
3	15
4	3
5	10
Not reported	2

The importance of transitional assistance, mentoring, and structured guidance for new principals is clear. The principalship is a difficult position, and researchers have acknowledged that school leaders are challenged, both personally and professionally, during their entry into a leadership position (Begley, 2003). However, the need for an action does not necessarily correlate to the action taking place. Indeed, Table 4 shows the less than stellar amount of assistance that principals received when they took helm at their campus. Slightly less than half of participants received helped. Just 47.7% of all respondents (84 of 176) stated that they had a mentor, a conversation, or some other form of assistance. Those who answered “Yes” in their response had comments ranging from, “I was assigned a mentor that assisted me when needed,” to “Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent basically outlined the goals of the district and the expectations.” This loosely applied form of assistance does not necessarily mean that the principal was fully supported. Indeed, one participant shared that, “New principals meet monthly.”

While this collegiality is beneficial, it does not mean that specific, individual guidance takes place.

Slightly more (52.2%) principals shared that they had not assistance whatsoever. A high school principal described the process as, “From frying pan to fire. Little support.” One frustrated respondent shared that she was assigned a mentor, but they rarely spoke to her. Moreover, no central office person ever visited with her either. Simply assigning a mentor doesn’t always ensure success. In looking at the differences between assistance or not, ratings of schools were analyzed. One may assume that a district has a vested interest in guiding a principal that will be placed at a low performing school or perhaps, more importantly, at an exemplary school. However, as Table 6 shows, the ratings of the campus were fairly evenly distributed among both answer groups. Out of those respondents from Exemplary campuses, 30 received assistance and 24 did not. Of the recognized campuses, 22 received guidance and 30 did not receive any. A principal at a Recognized campus tried to make sense of the lack of support by suggesting, “They want to see what the new principal will come up with.” Acceptable campuses were almost evenly divided: 31 did receive help and 33 did not. There were only seven Low Performing campuses in the survey, which was not a significantly large amount. However, two did receive assistance and five did not.

For the purpose of the study, the campuses were coded into either elementary levels, secondary levels (included both middle and high school), and “mixed” for campuses that were multi-level. Of the 83 elementary campuses, more principals reported the lack of support or assistance than that of receiving it. One elementary principal theorized that she did not receive assistance because she was the assistant principal at the

same school prior to being named principal, so central office might not have thought she needed help. However, she shared that she does believe that a mentoring program should be in place for principals. A successful elementary principal shared that goals were set and revisited throughout the year, and that the goals were set on campus needs as well as her strengths and weaknesses as a principal. Just 35 of the principals (42.1%) shared that they had a mentor or some other type of guiding factor as they began their career. Conversely, more than half of the respondents, 48, (57.8%) did not receive any support. More secondary principals, however, did receive support. Forty-three (55.1%) reported having a mentor or strong conversation to set goals. Many made note of an assistant superintendent coming out to set goals or meet with them. Less, 35 respondents (44.8%), did not have any assistance. With only 10 mixed campuses, the number was less significant. Six principals did not receive any guidance, but four did. The data shows that secondary principals do seem to have slightly more assistance as they begin the principalship.

Location of the campus, as well, was analyzed in order to find any statistical significance. Table 6 indicates that there is no significance with this factor as well. Of the 13 rural schools, 8 received assistance while 5 did not. A principal at a rural high school shared that his boss gave him “assistance” by telling him two things: “1. Get the school to Recognized, and 2. Don’t mess up!” Suburban schools were almost completely split, with 30 of the schools receiving assistance and 28 failing to receive any help at all. Less urban campuses received help than those who did, but the difference was still slight. Just 44 of the respondents from urban campuses (45.3%) stated that they had received assistance, with 57 (58.7%) of the principals reporting that they had received no help at all. Many of

the participants who replied that they had help at the start of the principalship alluded to meetings with the superintendent to discuss district goals and vision. This is a very loose interpretation of assistance, as the mere discussion of a vision does not delineate how to achieve that, nor provide support as the leader moves forward. Clearly, the need for mentoring or transitional assistance is felt by principals at each level of instruction, various performance levels, and all locations.

Table 6

Principal Support Received During Transition by Types of Campus

Yes	84	Exemplary	30	Rural	8
		Recognized	22	Suburban	30
		Acceptable	31	Urban	44
		Low Performing	2		
No	92	Exemplary	24	Rural	5
		Recognized	30	Suburban	28
		Acceptable	33	Urban	57
		Low Performing	5		
Not Reported	2				

Table 7

Principal Support Received During Transition by Level of Campus

Elementary	83	Yes	35
		No	48
Secondary	78	Yes	43
		No	35
Mixed Level	10	Yes	4
		No	6

In looking at the responses for participants who checked “yes” in answer to receiving transitional support, simple goal setting meetings were overwhelmingly used as examples for support. Mentoring and specific coaching assignments were minuscule, as evidenced in Table 8. Indeed, out of the 84 responses that positively indicated support, only 19 (22.6%) stated that they had a personal mentor. Several replied that they had mentor programs, monthly meetings, and/or common training for all new campus leaders. One principal who had experienced this type of support agreed, “There are monthly meetings to instruct, guide, and motivate. New principals will certainly need help along the journey.”

Table 8

Types of Assistance Received by New Principals

Assigned Mentor	19
Goal Setting Meeting	40
Other Person Available	16
No Further Response	9
Total	84

It is critical to see the responses to this answer delineated in such a way, because 40 of the 84 responses (47.6%) agreed that they had support; however their support was in the form of a goal setting meeting with a supervisor. One respondent pointed out that the superintendent provided the goals and it was up to the principal to get there. One can assume that goals being provided is somewhat linked to “support” in his mind. Others offered the fact that the goals were provided by the school board or an area superintendent. One principal with minimal experience remembered that she was told upon hire that “they didn’t know what was going on with the campus because of area superintendent transition.” She was given some tips of what content and subpopulations to watch, and then sent along her way.

Other respondents, who agreed that there was available support, suggested that they could seek it out if needed. Just 16 of the 84 respondents (19.0%) went to other sources when they had questions. Participants listed their area superintendents, PTO, staff members, campus improvement committees, and outgoing principals as examples of assistance they were provided. All of these respondents, however, stated that the support

was there if they requested it. Providing a goal to a leader does not even scratch the surface of the type of assistance and mentoring that new principals require. It is similar to the thought of telling a teacher to “get the children to pass”, but failing to provide her with the tools and strategies. Clearly, the idea of assistance was loosely interpreted.

Question 3 (“In the succession planning, do you think the best time to place a principal in a school is at the beginning of the school year?”), was also analyzed in order to look for statistical significance within the responses of the principals. Out of the 176 answers used to determine any trends, 104 (59.1%) of the principals felt that the beginning of the school year was, in fact, the best time to place a new principal in that position. Many participants felt that the start of the school year gave a principal a fresh start. One respondent felt that, “the beginning of the year is the best time to implement new policies and procedures.” Another principal shared, “because I don’t know any other way,” which supports the researcher’s beliefs that people tend to answer with their own frame of reference. Fewer principals disagreed with that statement, 72 of the respondents (40.9%). Seeing the sense in starting the position earlier than the start of the school year, one principal stated that the best time would be, “at the end of the year prior to the beginning of the school year.” She furthered her response with the comment that it enabled her to hire staff, make plans, and bond with the assistant principals and teachers. One principal who has “done this three times” stated that it can be very challenging to arrive in the summer without prior knowledge of students and staff. Having done both, she sees “a benefit in spending time on campus in the spring semester to better set goals and have more effective staff development at the beginning of school.” Another principal agreed that the “ideal time is probably around March, but that rarely happens.”

Interestingly, several participants used similar answers for varying reasons. For example, one respondent stated that the principal should start at the beginning of the school year so that they principal would have the entire year to observe and absorb the school. A counterpart felt that starting at the beginning of the year would make the principal sit as a lame duck trying to get to know the campus and the personnel. Just as specific personalities fit best with particular campuses, so then can personality affect the success of a timely placement as principal.

Table 9

Do you think the best time to start as principal is the beginning of school?

YES		NO	
Years' Experience	Number Responses	Years' Experience	Number Responses
0	1	0	0
1	12	1	11
2	11	2	6
3	9	3	14
4	7	4	9
5	7	5	6
6	11	6	5
7-10	31	7-10	8
11-14	5	11-14	8
≥ 15	8	≥ 15	5

It seemed as though some participants did not fully understand the question regarding the “beginning of the school year.” Perhaps, as their answers indicate, they felt that the start date must be the beginning of the school year or there would not be a principal at all. One respondent stated, “The principal should be at the school on the first day to show that someone is there for staff, students, and parents.” Another respondent answered “yes” to the question about the beginning of the school year, but explained that she is moving from one campus to a brand new campus that is opening, and it is spring time. She went on to say that it has allowed her successor to move in and see how things are done while she plans for the new school. So, although her answer was yes, her comments did not support that.

Several participants supported a full transition year, with comments such as, “Year 0 would be best!” Another pointed out that, “having the opportunity to know that you were becoming the principal in as far advance as you could would be extremely beneficial. If a succession plan is in place and you could know a full year ahead of time, that would be ideal.”

Chapter Five:

Findings, Conclusions, and Implications

In summary, this chapter will provide an overview of the study, its purpose, rationale, and research methods. Additionally, with the data findings analysis, this chapter will include personal thoughts from the researcher and implications for future practice. Therefore, the organization of this chapter will be:

1. Summary of the study
2. Findings of the research
3. Personal thoughts
4. Conclusions

Summary of the Study

This study deals with the importance of principal succession. Effective succession management addresses the need for the recruitment, training, and on-going support of all school administrators (Hargreaves, 2003). However, it also incorporates training for new principals, providing adequate time to prepare for administrative roles. It ensures that the training support is linked to clearly defined leadership standards and competencies, and that strong professional communities are built that deepen the pools of leadership talent (Daresh, 2004). It incorporates several facets, including the essential role that a principal plays, the transition time and support with the new principal, and the critical process of succession planning. Principals have great indirect impact on student achievement through the people, purpose, and goals of the school; through the structure of the school; and through the organizational culture of the campus (Hallinger, 1996). Inasmuch as the

principal is a critical factor in campus achievement, research supports the link of student graduation rates to their principal (Bottoms, 2009). Creating the right match between leader and campus is of vital importance. In teacher decisions of whether to remain at a campus, the number one factor is the quality of administrative support (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

The transition of a new leader requires several best practices. Clear goals and directions must be in place and reviewed with the principal. Staff must be motivated to move toward the goals of the campus, which falls upon the principal. Last, principals must be able to identify organizational and instructional structures and practices that need to be changed or redesigned (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). New leaders need transitional assistance with these factors when assuming the principalship. Mentoring or other formal structures must be in place.

With the current trend for retirement or promotions deleting the principalship, the decline of quality applicants is disheartening (Hargreaves, 2005). Principal turnover is accelerating rapidly and prospective leaders are bowing out due to the salary, stress, and hours of the job (Cushing, 2003). Educators are increasingly avoiding careers in administration because they were fearful of taking on responsibilities that are filled with demands for accountability but with little support. School leaders are held accountable for how well teachers teach and how well students learn. The role of school leader has become decreasingly popular as a potential career for many current educators (Daresh, 2004).

A pool of varied applicants with much strength is necessary in order to find the appropriate leader. Different settings and needs require different types of leaders.

Whether a school is secondary, elementary, inner-city, or suburban all become factors in finding the best-fitting principal (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). It is critical that the planning for succession begins earlier than when the need arises.

Findings of the research

In determining statistical trends with the study, it is difficult to understand that there does not seem to be any specific trends. When research shows that the principal is such a critical force on the campus, one might suppose that much planning and forethought would go into making that perfect fit or match. Planning for principal succession does not seem to occur with much more foresight than one or two years. Similar to current research, districts understand that it is important but are still unable to commit to doing so. Mentoring or guidance occurs here or there, without any patterns. Again, although research shows that it is relevant and worthy, it is still not entirely commonplace. Level of campuses does not seem to be a factor, as elementary, secondary, and mixed campuses seem to be split fairly evenly among support. While more secondary campuses reported support and transitional assistance than elementary campuses, the help was overwhelmingly meetings to discuss the district's vision. While these are helpful and can set the stage for goal setting and reflection, they are not similar to having a mentor or "go to" person in the district.

Like the other characteristics, urban or non-urban characteristics and success rate of the campus do not show any trends either. In fact, the pattern seems to be that, quite simply, there is not one. The answers throughout the study seem to be fairly split among all choices. This shows that districts have yet to fully take on the responsibility of

properly setting their principals up for success from the start. It is time to stop talking about it and commit to having a structured plan in place for assisting new leaders.

Research supports the position that principals benefit from having mentors and from being mentors. Additionally, having a colleague or friend is not enough; a structured program with clear expectations must occur for ultimate success.

While there does seem to be a clear preference of the best time for a principal to begin, the caveat must be in place that most principals have not had the opportunity to begin at various times. Moreover, several participants in the study included statements such as, “But this is all that I know,” in their responses. The most insightful responses came from principals who had reasons for starting mid-year to spring time. Additionally, the reasons that most participants provided for starting at the beginning of the school year would be even more applicable to a spring time start date (getting to know staff, community, and school culture). Again, although trends of thought may support a springtime start date or an overlap between the outgoing and incoming principal, districts are bound by funding, staffing, and other difficulties.

Personal thoughts

As a principal who had the opportunity to take helm mid-year (March), I have a strong opinion that this was not only an appropriate time to assume the principalship, but the most effective time as well. This time allowed for staff to determine whether they would prefer to stay and join the changing regime or transfer to a different location. Teachers did not need to bide their time for one year while we got to know each other. I had several months with my new staff to gather information, learn about my staff and community, and begin to set goals for what would truly be my first year. As many

participants in the study stated, the start of the school year is the best time to enforce expectations. However, I saw firsthand that the best time to make them known was prior to the “enforcement time.”

Although the interview process was lengthy and incorporated several levels of conversation to make certain that I was the best match for this campus, learning the status of the campus, staff, and community, however, was my sole responsibility. Any prior knowledge about the campus was not offered or shared. Public information, such as the campus improvement plan written by the former principal and the AEIS academic indicator reports were readily available if I chose to search for them online. There was not a formal meeting with a supervisor to review the campus success rate or to assist in creating a vision. At the start of the next year, a generic goal setting meeting did occur, but the actual transition into the principalship was done with “a map and a key.” A mentor was assigned to me, but it was not one of my specific choice. Although she was very nice, she was limited in her ability to help me. In her defense, there was no mentor training prior to assuming this informal role. Luckily I maintained strong friendships with two principals who were readily available to my calls and emails.

Personnel files were available, of course, but most principals know that some of the most important issues are not found inside a file. For example, after being at the school for several months, I inadvertently found out that one of the teacher’s husband had emailed her a suicide note to school that fall, then committed the act shortly thereafter. Additionally, I had a teacher who had just completed a FERPA (Family Educational Rights to Privacy Act) lawsuit that school year. These were just small pieces of the recent school history that were impacting teacher effectiveness, student success, and campus

culture. Yet, these were also pieces of school history that were not shared with me by the outgoing principal.

In order for new principals to achieve a strong success rate, the personal opinion of this researcher is that the best time for a new leader to assume the position is prior to the end of the school year. It provides time to become acclimated to the campus and formulate plans that are personal to the new principal, not merely implement the prior leader's vision. Timing, however, is not enough. Clear and structured meetings to address goals and needs of the school must take place. Although these will take time, students deserve to have principals with a clear vision and plan. In order to have appropriate ones, new principals need on-going guidance and support.

Conclusions

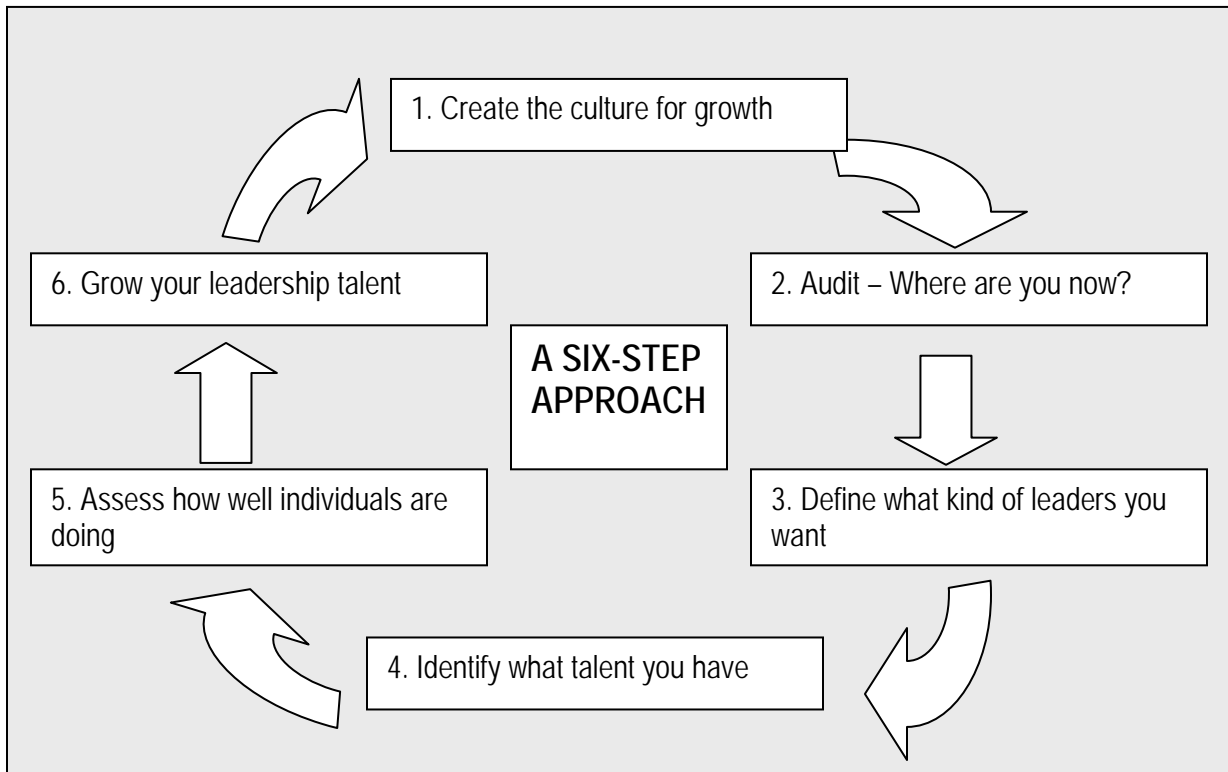
It is evident from current literature in the field as well as the results from this survey that more thought and timeliness needs to be placed into the planning for principal succession. With the current data showing that between 40 percent (Wallace, 2007) and 70 percent (Fink, 2004) of principals retiring with this decade, school districts must be planning ahead far in advance. Much literature abounds on the shortage of effective teachers. If there is a shortage of teachers, it is a logical conclusion that there is a declining pool of quality applicants for the principalship (d'Arbon, 2002). Specific thought and preparation must be in place in order to create a pool of applicants and find the best fit in leadership. The pool needs to encompass all levels and strengths of possible principals due to the differing needs of campuses. For example, elementary principals have the longest tenure and greatest retention rates, while high schools have the shortest tenure and lowest retention rates (Young and Fuller, 2009).

It is critical that new leaders receive support and collaboration with their district offices. New principals often express frustration over the fact that they do not understand the nature of their leadership responsibilities prior to receiving the position (Daresh, 1994). Principals at most improved schools feel they have a working relationship that is collaborative with their school district, while least improved schools were reported by principals to be following reform initiatives that began in central office (Bottoms, 2009). One of the most significant factors affecting the life of a school and the strength of its improvement is the principal succession (Hargreaves, 2005). The cost of building an effective principal through appropriate placement, transitional guidance, and mentoring is small compared to the cost of repairing the damage done by an ill-prepared leader. In fact, any funds channeled into creating a quality mentoring program could be viewed as a cost-effective way to run campuses within the district (Wallace, 2009). Planning for future principals must begin at the teaching and assistant principal level in order to build a strong talent pool of individuals. The essence of succession planning is for school systems to have plans in place that can address the issue of a need for leadership that continuously cultivates future leaders who are skilled in the abilities to bring about continuous improvement. Hartle and Thomas (2003) illustrate the importance of continuously building the leadership pool. As Figure 1 shows, it is a cyclical event.

Figure 1

Growing Leaders: The Challenge of Finding Tomorrow's Leaders Today

(Hartle & Thomas, 2003)



Regardless of where a district may be in leadership development, any location can be a starting point to the act of building a foundation of strong principals. Developing, placing, and assisting principals as they begin the critical role of leading schools is a powerful responsibility that continues to deserve more time and research.

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APPENDIX A
APPROVAL LETTER



U N I V E R S I T Y *of* H O U S T O N

COMMITTEES FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

March 3, 2011

Ms. Catherine Bartlett
c/o Dr. Angus MacNeil
Educational Leadership & Cultural Studies

Dear Ms. Bartlett:

Based upon your request for exempt status, an administrative review of your research proposal entitled "Principal Succession" was conducted on January 31, 2011.

At that time, your request for exemption under **category 4** was approved pending modification of your proposed procedures/documents.

The changes you have made adequately respond to the identified contingencies. As long as you continue using procedures described in this project, you do not have to reapply for review.* Any modification of this approved protocol will require review and further approval. Please contact me to ascertain the appropriate mechanism.

If you have any questions, please contact Alicia Vargas at (713) 743-9215.

Sincerely yours,

Enrique Valdez, Jr.
Director, Research Compliance

*Approvals for exempt protocols will be valid for 5 years beyond the approval date. Approval for this project will expire **January 1, 2016**. If the project is completed prior to this date, a final report should be filed to close the protocol. If the project will continue after this date, you will need to reapply for approval if you wish to avoid an interruption of your data collection.

Protocol Number: 11233-EX

APPENDIX B
SURVEY QUESTIONS
USED TO GATHER INFORMATION

1. Default Section

Graduate Student's Name

Code

2. Section A: Demographic Information

The Principal's Name

Age

Age (in Years)

Sex

☐ Male

☐ Female

Years as a Principal

Years in Education

Degrees Held

☐ Bachelors

☐ Masters

☐ Doctorate

Management or Principal Certification Year

Institution

Ethnicity

Ethnicity

Major Teaching Field

Extra-curricular activities directed while a teacher

The School's Name

Location

☐ Rural

☐ Suburban

☐ Urban

Number of Teachers

Number of Students

Percentage of Students

White/Non-Hispanic	<input type="text"/>
Black/Non-Hispanic	<input type="text"/>
Hispanic	<input type="text"/>
Asian/Pacific Islander	<input type="text"/>
American Indian/Alaskan Native	<input type="text"/>
Non-Resident/International	<input type="text"/>
Other Certified Personnel	<input type="text"/>
Non-certified Personnel	<input type="text"/>

TAKS Rating

<input type="checkbox"/>	Exemplary
<input type="checkbox"/>	Recognized
<input type="checkbox"/>	Acceptable
<input type="checkbox"/>	Low Performing

Percentage of Students on free and reduced lunch

Name of School District

3. Section B

In this section, we are trying to understand how principals use their time and if they think that they are making good use of their time . Specifically, we want to know the following:

On average, how many hours per week do you work as a principal?

On average, what % of those hours are spent off campus?

Do you think the time that you spend off campus is necessary?

☐ Always

☐ Occasionally

☐ Very Rarely

☐ Very Frequently

☐ Rarely

☐ Never

Explain.

Describe the effective use of your time off campus. Give examples.

Describe the ineffective use of your time off campus. Give examples.

Who arranges the off campus meetings that you must attend? Give specific examples.

4. Section C

In this section, we are interested in how principals are evaluated in their job performance.

Does your district utilize the state's recommended appraisal form for principal evaluation?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Does your district use a district generated evaluation form?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Do you feel that the evaluations are fair ?

☐ Always

☐ Occasionally

☐ Very Rarely

☐ Very Frequently

☐ Rarely

☐ Never

Explain.

Do you feel that evaluations are useful?

☐ Always

☐ Occasionally

☐ Very Rarely

☐ Very Frequently

☐ Rarely

☐ Never

Explain.

Do the evaluations impact or change your behaviors or practices in your school?

☐ Always

☐ Occasionally

☐ Very Rarely

☐ Very Frequently

☐ Rarely

☐ Never

Explain.

Do you feel that you have improved as a result of the evaluation appraisal process?

☐ Always

☐ Occasionally

☐ Very Rarely

☐ Very Frequently

☐ Rarely

☐ Never

Explain.

5. Section D

In this section, we are trying to determine if your district uses a "succession plan" to replace Principal's. Specifically:

How many years ahead does your school district office planning, project Principal arrangements or Vacancies?

☐ 1 year

☐ 3 years

☐ 5 years

☐ 2 years

☐ 4 years

When you were hired as a principal, did anyone in central office assist you in setting goals or priorities in order to successfully lead this school?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, explain.

In the succession planning, do you think the best time to place a principal in a school is at the beginning of the school year?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Explain.

6. Section E

In this section, we are trying to determine the role of the Principal in Teacher's Professional Development. Specifically:

How important would you rate teacher professional development as a task for Principals?

☐ Very Important

☐ Moderately Important

☐ Unimportant

☐ Important

☐ Of Little Importance

Explain.

How important is the PDAS in determining your assessment of the developmental needs of your teachers?

☐ Very Important

☐ Moderately Important

☐ Unimportant

☐ Important

☐ Of Little Importance

Explain.