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## Comprehensive Leadership Development: Principal Characteristics, Experience and Performance

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Comprehensive Leadership Development:  
Principal Characteristics, Experience and Performance

by

Gregory Basham

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Educational Program Development  
with a concentration in Educational Innovation  
Department of Language, Literacy, Ed. D., Exceptional Education, and Physical Education  
College of Education  
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Keywords: prior role, recruitment, selection, effectiveness

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Scottie Basham, my best friend and my biggest supporter. None of this would be possible without you. Thank you for always being there for me and believing in me. I love you.

To my daughter Ainsley. You are a bright, intelligent, and resilient woman. I am so proud of you, and just know, you can do anything you want in life. I appreciate your support and encouragement. I look forward to watching you continue on your journey. Never forget, being your Dad is my greatest accomplishment.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The principal's role in creating a generative learning environment to influence student achievement is well documented in research (Davis et al., 2017; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2008; Sebastian et al., 2017). This research has led to the creation of frameworks for developing leaders and constructs identifying effective leadership practices (Leithwood, 2012; Murphy et al., 2006; Sebring et al., 2006), but very little research has been done to investigate the relationship between prior roles and principal performance. Research designed to focus on the professional background of effective principals, and the relationship of how prior experience or prior roles influence the principal's ability is necessary to gain insight for improving recruitment and selection of school leaders. In this study, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the 2018-2019 human resource records of principals in one school district with a comprehensive leadership development program to determine their characteristics, previous experience, and prior roles, then assess if a relationship exists between their experience as educators and the scores on their performance evaluations. A review of the human resource records for 216 principals revealed 54 who met the criteria of participating in at least two portions of the district's pipeline program; the Aspiring Principals Preparation Program and the New Principals Program. The findings suggest (1) experience as a teacher leader influences a principal's leadership ability, (2) there is a positive relationship to years of experience as a principal, and (3) comprehensive leadership development has the potential to generate positive outcomes across multiple factors for leadership development to impact school improvement.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Four decades of research has generated a substantial amount of evidence to support the claim that a school leader's role in promoting a generative learning environment for teachers and students is crucial to improving student achievement (Davis et al., 2017; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2008; Sebastian et al., 2017). There is significant research to support the proposition that leadership is second only to classroom instruction as a factor for learning in school (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2008; Nettles & Herrington, 2007). Leading a school is a complex endeavor and involves interacting with a wide variety of stakeholders. Principals need a multitude of knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be effective as an instructional leader, a building manager, professional developer, politician and advocate for the school community (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Deal, 2009; DeMathews, 2019; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2008; Sebastian et al., 2017).

Leadership matters in terms of its effect on teachers through professional development, instructional focus, climate and culture (Hitt & Player, 2018; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Nettles & Herrington, 2007; Seashore Louis et al., 2010; Sebastian et al., 2017; Shatzer et al., 2014) and support the claim principals ultimately affect student learning conditions through the work they do to influence the organizational context (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). The complexity and demands of school leadership requires a skilled principal – “one with the attributes and abilities beyond simply the possession of an appropriate administrative

credential” (Myung, et al., 2011, p. 697). Principals need to be adept at the technical and theoretical aspects of leadership today, while possessing the instructional background and coaching skills to support teachers.

It is important to keep in mind the act of leadership is not fixed, and it involves human interaction along with a changing set of variables (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Depree (1992) uses the metaphor of a jazz band to capture the interplay and flow of skilled leadership as an art and science as cited in *Making Sense of Social Networks* (Deal et al., 2009). “Leaders need skills, theories, and a good ear to weave cacophony into melody and capture the full potential of human capacities” (Deal et al., 2009, p. 7).

Some scholars who conduct research on educational leadership seek to operationally define effective leadership to improve student learning. These researchers aim to develop constructs or frameworks for effective leadership in different school environments to improve learning for all students (Leithwood, 2012; Nettles & Herrington, 2007; Hitt & Tucker, 2016). This research has informed the development of national standards for leadership, like the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015), and standards adopted by individual states. These standards, constructs and frameworks are designed to provide guidance to states and districts, as well as serve as a resource for reflection as school leaders strive to meet the demands of leading a school community.

## **1.1 Frameworks**

Although widely debated, researchers have created frameworks to identify core practices for successful school leaders. These frameworks serve as a reference of the core competencies for effective leader practice and have become the foundation for assessing a school leader’s

performance. Three major frameworks often referenced to identify a school leader's ability to influence student learning include:

1 - The Ontario Leadership Framework - developed by Leithwood (2012) through a review of the literature focusing on leadership practices or activities that enhanced student achievement. The framework consists of five domains: setting directions, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization to support desired practices, improving the instructional program, and securing accountability.

2 – Learning-Centered Leadership Framework – Murphy et al. (2006) developed this framework as part of the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education project. The project designed a 360-degree assessment tool for school leaders. This framework also reviewed studies for influence of leadership on student achievement. The domains associated with this framework include: vision for learning, instructional program, curricular program, assessment program, communities of learning, resource acquisition and use, organizational culture, and social advocacy.

3 – The Essential Support Framework – Sebring et al. (2006) analyzed longitudinal student achievement data from the Chicago Public Schools to establish this framework. The Essential Supports Framework consists of the following domains: leadership, parent-community ties, professional capacity, student-centered learning environment, and ambitious curriculum (Hitt & Tucker, 2016).

More recent research by Hitt and Tucker (2016) synthesized the work of these previous studies to create a unified set of constructs for effective leader practices based on their analysis:

1. Establishing and conveying the mission and vision
2. Facilitating a high-quality learning experience for students

3. Building professional capacity
4. Sharing and distributing leadership
5. Building collaborative decision-making process
6. Connecting with external partners

Hitt and Tucker (2016) posit all of these constructs illustrate the complexity of school leadership, and a positive correlation with increased student achievement for leaders who effectively utilize them.

## **1.2 Preparing Leaders and Prior Experience**

In addition to all of the research on behaviors and dispositions of school leaders, there is a significant amount of research on the “whats and hows of preparation: which program elements influence preparedness, how to maximize these program components’ effectiveness, and how to continuously improve program design and rigor” (Perrone, 2019, p. 26). Interestingly enough, with all of the research on the constructs for effective school leaders and the frameworks for developing leaders, still more research is needed to understand in what ways some leaders are successful, and some are not. To understand more about effective school leaders, research teams have begun to explore how prior experience and prior roles influence the principal’s effectiveness as a path for gaining insight into improved recruitment and selection (Bowers & White, 2014; Hitt & Player, 2018; Muth et al., 2013), but the number of studies remains limited at this point.

It seems intuitive for school leaders to have experience as an effective classroom teacher and working with the adults or other stakeholders in the school community as a prerequisite for serving as a principal (Hitt & Player, 2018). Principals themselves have identified prior experience as being an important aspect of their ability to do their work as leaders (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011; Danzig et al., 2012). Research conducted by Sharratt and Fullan (2012)

reinforces this idea. They asked over 500 educators what leadership skills were necessary for a principal to lead efforts to improve student achievement.

In response, 45% responded that to lead with credibility, leaders must first model knowledge of classroom practice – assessment and instruction – what we call *know-ability*. Further, 33% said that the ability to inspire and mobilize others through clear communication of commitment was essential – what we call *mobilize-ability*. Finally, 21% said that knowing how to establish a culture of shared responsibility and accountability was crucial – what we call *sustain-ability* (Sharratt & Fullan, 2012, p. 157)

The outcomes of the survey support the leadership constructs generated from previous research. More importantly, the results of the survey from Sharratt and Fullan (2012) provides insight into the psyche of a sampling of the educators a principal will lead. Based on the results, the teachers believe it is important for the school leader to have instructional knowledge, be able to clearly communicate, and practice shared leadership.

While some of the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to be an effective leader are undoubtedly derived from learning in leadership preparation programs, much more is often acquired through lived experience and opportunities to lead others (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Hitt & Player, 2018; McClellan & Casey, 2015; Muth et al., 2013). Many leadership preparation programs require candidates to complete administrative fieldwork to facilitate learning and “stimulate changes in aspiring principals’ educational orientation, perspectives, concepts, language, and skills, all of which is essential to administrator development” (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004, p. 469). This aspect of the program gives aspiring school leaders the opportunity to begin to build capacity as a leader and continue to learn or evolve as a practitioner.



Research shows principal leadership is second only to the effectiveness of the teacher in its impact on student learning (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2008; Nettles & Herrington, 2007). In an effort to improve the effectiveness of school leaders and increase student achievement, there is a push for school districts and universities to collaborate or redesign their leadership development programs to include the knowledge, skills and dispositions suggested from initiatives by groups like the Wallace Foundation (2012), the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015) or research scholars in educational leadership such as Young (2015), Perrone and Tucker (2019). National and state standards have also been developed based on this research, yet some principals still lack the ability to effectively lead a school community and increase learning for students (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Donmoyer et al., 2012).

The onset of the age of accountability, coupled with the increased understanding of the principal's role in the creating positive outcomes in a school community has led to some school districts developing a more formalized system for the recruitment, selection, and development of school leaders that is grounded in leadership standards, as well as structured after the research on school systems that have effectively used leadership to drive school improvement (Barber et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Gates et al., 2019; Jensen et al., 2017). These comprehensive leadership development programs or principal pipelines include “components of recruitment, preparation, selection, induction, development, and evaluation of school leaders” (Korach & Cosner, 2017, p.266), and involve the school system partnering with principal preparation program providers to coordinate their efforts in leadership development (Hitt et al., 2012; Korach & Cosner, 2017). Early results of research conducted on such programs indicates comprehensive leadership development programs generate positive outcomes for multiple stakeholders in the school community, but more research is needed to understand the impact of

these systems on leadership development, as well as how and why they are effective if there is to be more consistency in the ability of school leaders.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

While there is considerable research on the knowledge, skills and dispositions, there has been very little research on the relationship between the prior experience or prior role of a principal and their ability to lead a school community. Many aspiring leaders either self-select, are encouraged by their principal because they believe the person would make a good administrator or study educational leadership as a means for attaining an advanced degree to increase their salary (Danzig et al., 2012; Myung et al., 2011; Farley-Ripple et al., 2012). There is a call by some scholars for more intentional recruitment and selection processes for the candidates of leadership development programs (Levine, 2005; Young et al., 2012) and a few are beginning to investigate the impact of prior experience and roles on the quality of school leaders (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Hitt & Player, 2018; McClellan & Casey, 2015). Some school districts and principal preparation programs are capitalizing on the development of partnerships to align their recruitment and selections processes in a principal pipeline to select candidates who have a track record of positively impacting student learning while working with the wider school community (Jensen et al., 2017; Klosterman et al., 2015; Turnbull et al., 2016; Young et al., 2012; Young, 2015).

Comprehensive leadership development programs offer an opportunity for school districts to be intricately involved in the development of their school leaders. By creating a principal pipeline, district leaders can partner with preparation programs to identify potential leaders early in their career, be a part of the selection process, and provide leadership experiences under the tutelage of experienced leaders in the context of the school community (Barber et al. 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Hitt et al., 2012; Jensen et al., 2017; Korach & Cosner; 2017).

This level of involvement provides the opportunity to create a diverse cohort of school leaders, gain deeper understanding of the strengths, or areas for growth, and base all the work in the leadership standards.

In this study I analyzed the human resource records of principals in one school district with a comprehensive leadership development program to assess if a relationship exists between their experience in prior roles as educators and their performance as a principal. The data from the 2018 - 2019 school year was collected for 216 principals using the district's data management systems. The principals in the sample population were identified after a review of the human resource records for the 216 principals revealed 54 who met the criteria of participating in at least two portions of the district's comprehensive leadership development program (see Appendix H); the Aspiring Principals Preparation Program (APPP, see Appendix K) and the New Principal Program (NPP, see Appendix L). Specifically, I examined the characteristics of the 54 principals and their experience in roles that provided them opportunities to demonstrate leadership with adults in their school and the wider school community. The school district has a robust data base on each of its school leaders which stores background information, a history of prior roles and performance evaluations, as well as information regarding the principal's scores in the five leadership competencies used to assess their performance after being appointed as a school leader (See Appendix E).

The specific characteristics of each principal collected for the study includes race, gender, years of experience, graduate school attended, prior roles as educators, and the written evaluation score from their principal supervisor. I also analyzed data from the leadership surveys of these principals during their tenure to ascertain the perception of the leader's ability by the staff in the school. I used the data collected to investigate if a relationship exists between the leader's having prior experience leading the wider school community in certain roles, (such as

instructional coach, intervention specialist, content area coach or assistant principal), and the principal's ability to lead effectively as defined by the school district's leadership competencies.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. What are the characteristics of principals in a school district with a comprehensive leadership development program?
2. Is there a relationship between a principal's leadership ability and their experience in prior roles they held as an educator in a school district with a comprehensive leadership development program?

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study is needed to examine the relationship of a principal's prior experience and prior roles to their effectiveness as school leader in a school district with a comprehensive leadership development system. This study contributes to the research on the recruitment and selection of candidates for leadership preparation programs whose experience indicates a potentially higher probability of effectively leading a school community. The study adds to the research on principals in the context of a school district with a comprehensive leadership development program and the understanding of how the dynamics or nuances of such a program may enhance leadership development. The study was conducted with the district's permission and the findings were shared with key stakeholders associated with the school district's office of Leadership Development, university partners and preparation programs. The findings may lead to refined recruitment and selection processes with a focus on candidates who demonstrate effectiveness working with the wider school community in prior leadership roles. It could also lead to more targeted and intentional professional development for school leaders in the future.

## 1.6 Research Design

This study employed descriptive statistics to assess the human resource records, performance evaluations, and leadership surveys completed by the teachers on each principal in the school district. These data, along with information on job history, determined the characteristics of the principals in the data set, provided context for the schools in the study and established scores for the leader's performance on the leadership competencies used by the district. This provided insight into the leader's ability to establish a generative culture for learning in the school and utilize the constructs associated with effective leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Hitt & Player, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2008; Murphy et al., 2006; Sebring et al., 2006).

Data from the 2018-2019 school year were collected for the principals using the school district's data management systems. Permission from the school district was obtained, and no principals or schools were identified in the study. All data were de-identified by the Director of Performance and Evaluation, remains anonymous, were password protected, and the password is known only by me. The data were stored on my personal computer, and a back-up set was stored on a thumb drive. The following data were collected and analyzed for the sample:

- Data to determine the characteristics of the principals including race, gender, year of experience, graduate school, prior roles, and school context.
- Each principal's written performance evaluation rating for the 2018-2019 school year.

The evaluation is completed by the principal supervisor using a rubric designed to assess the leader's competency in research-based practices and includes observation data (see Appendix E), Key Performance Indicators (KPI) measured by the school district (See Appendix F), and a staff survey of principal performance (see Appendix G). The

principal supervisor also considers the learning gains by students in the school's bottom quartile, and the performance of student's school-wide on state mandated tests.

- Data from the Leadership Survey (See Appendix G) completed by the school staff. Each of the survey questions is connected to the five research-based competencies designed for leadership development and assessment of the leader's knowledge skills and dispositions.
- Principal's years of experience in their prior roles as an educator. The categories for this study included experience as an assistant principal, intervention specialist, instructional coach, content area coach and classroom teacher.

There is research that suggests principals with the highest ratings on their performance evaluation and on their leadership survey will have experience in prior roles where they were able to lead their colleagues and community members to improve learning for students. Studies by Hitt and Player (2018) and Muth et al. (2013) found leaders with prior experience leading other adults was an indicator for success as principals.

### **1.7 Definitions of Key Terms**

Key Performance Indicators (KPI) – data identified by the school district to be significant indicators for assessing student growth and school improvement (See Appendix F) that are aligned with the district's strategic plan.

Leadership Survey – a survey completed by the staff at each school to assess their level of agreement on a Likert Scale as to the principal's knowledge, skills and dispositions based on the five leadership competencies used by the school district (see Appendix G).

Achievement Focus and Results Orientation (AFRO) – one of two competencies identified by the school district in their leadership standards for instructional leadership designed to assess a leader's ability to establish a sense of urgency for school improvement by setting challenging,

clearly defined goals and holds their self and others accountable for the academic performance of all students (See Appendix E).

Instructional Expertise (IE) – one of two competencies identified by the school district in their leadership standards for instructional leadership designed to assess a leader’s ability to ensure students master standards by aligning the curriculum, instructional strategies, assessments, and data to for improved student learning (see Appendix E).

Managing and Developing People (MDP) – this competency is identified by the school district in their leadership standards for human capital management and is designed to measure the leader’s ability to effectively recruit and develop their staff while maintaining the focus on the needs of the students (see Appendix E).

Culture and Relationship Building (CRB) – this competency is identified by the school district in their leadership standards for organizational and systems leadership and is designed to focus on their ability to establish collaborative relationships with all stakeholders while creating a positive and safe environment that fosters innovation (See Appendix E).

Problem Solving and Strategic Change Management (PSSCM) – this competency is identified by the school district in their leadership standards for organizational and systems leadership to assess the leader’s ability to use data to overcome obstacles, challenge the status quo, and identify alternative solutions that generate a culture of success for students and teachers (see Appendix E).

Principal Written Score – score determined by the principal supervisor using the Principal Rubric as the instrument to assess the principal’s performance based on observations, or qualitative data collected from stakeholders including the Leadership Survey completed by teachers (see Appendix E), Key Performance Indicators (see Appendix D), as well as an assessment of the principal’s actions as it relates to the instructional priorities of the school.

## **Roles in the School District**

Instructional Coach – the Teacher Talent Developer, and Instructional Mentor in the school district who worked with the faculty and staff to improve instructional practice through coaching, mentoring, and facilitating professional development.

Intervention Specialist – this term describes educators who worked with all stakeholders to assist students with modifications to their behavior or study habits to improve their standing (i.e., Behavior Specialist, Student Success Coach, Drop-out Prevention Specialist, Exceptional Student Education Specialist).

Content Area Coach – this describes the teachers who had the opportunity to work with the teachers, administrators, and students in content areas, such as, Literacy Coach, Math Coach, Reading Coach or Science Coach.

Teacher Leader – this term is used to summarize all the roles described where a teacher may have the opportunity to lead or interact with the wider school community (i.e., Instructional Coach, Intervention Specialist, Content Area Coach), with the exception of the assistant principal role.

### **1.9 Assumptions**

The following assumptions apply to this study:

1. All principals in the study met the criteria for membership in the administrative pool.
2. All principals meet the requirements for certification by the State of Florida.
3. Data collected from the district’s evaluation system are accurate and do not contain any clerical errors.

### **1.10 Delimitations**

This is delimited to the principals who were appointed to elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and K-8 schools. The study will not include principals of career centers, career technical schools, adult education centers or exceptional student education centers.



### **1.11 Limitations**

There are three important limitations for this study. First, qualitative data were not collected as part of the research, so the study is limited by the quantitative data collected from the school district's human resource records. Second, teachers were not calibrated or trained on the leadership competencies, or the rubric used to assess the principal's performance. Therefore, the study is limited by the teacher's ability to connect the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they have observed to the appropriate level of leadership competency when rating their principal. Finally, the school district is very large, and the sample population of the study involves 54 principals, each at a different school, with different contexts. There are eight principal supervisors, and while they calibrate regularly to align the application of the rubric to measure principal effectiveness, hermeneutic considerations must be acknowledged as the world views of the individuals involved in various aspects of the evaluation components attributed to the principal's competency could affect the principals overall rating. The lived experience of the principal supervisor, parents, students, and staff will affect their decisions about the principal's leadership ability. The principal supervisor uses climate surveys and leadership surveys from stakeholders as a resource, along with their observations of the principal's knowledge, skills and dispositions in their written evaluation. Student achievement data are considered as a portion of the principal's written score as well.

### **1.12 Background of the Researcher**

I am a father, a husband, a son, a brother, a teacher, and a learner. I was a band director for 13 years prior to getting a degree in educational leadership and accepting a position as an assistant principal. I love music. It is a huge part of who I am and why I went to college. I thought it was why I became a teacher. Nine years after reluctantly leaving the classroom to

serve young people as a school leader I realize it was the vehicle for inspiring my curiosity, my love of learning, and my desire to help others be successful.

My experience as a music student and a band teacher shaped my beliefs about how we learn. It helped me understand that we all learn at a different pace, we each have to experience learning in our own way, and everyone has talents they can contribute for the good of the community. I carry these lessons with me today and apply them in my life daily.

Being a music teacher was a natural fit for my epistemological beliefs about learning. There is a substantial amount of research to support the positive effect of learning music, but more importantly the benefits of participating in a musical ensemble. Research has shown being involved in music can improve a young person's reading comprehension, vocabulary, memory, motor skills, study habits, their ability to work in a team to solve problems (Silverstone, 2018). Music students are immersed in experiences that enhance their learning and prepares them for their future. I lived this research, and I am a product of the learning that comes from experiences associated with being a member of such an organization.

I believe knowledge can be acquired by observing and studying the world, but true learning happens when we have the opportunity interact in an environment or use the knowledge we have acquired through our studies. Each learner must be afforded the opportunity to construct meaning for themselves based on their experiences. This is the foundation of my educational philosophy and defines my view of learning. It is a big part of how I arrived at this topic for my study.

In 2008 I enrolled in a master's degree program at the urging of my principal to study educational leadership. I had no intention of leaving the classroom but needed a master's degree because she wanted me to be the department head. As I mentioned, I love music and I love helping young people be successful.

My learning in my master's degree program in educational leadership sparked my curiosity about the impact of a school leader on the culture and climate of a school, but ultimately what effect it has on student achievement. I was interested to see if it was possible to create the synergy we had in our band program in an entire school. So, I began applying for assistant principal positions. In 2010 I was appointed to my first assistant principal position. It gave me an opportunity to see if I could use my core values, the principles I used in my band program and what I learned in my university leadership development program to have a positive impact on young people's lives from outside the classroom. It was challenging and a valuable learning experience, but ultimately, it was gratifying to create a generative culture in the wider school community, just as I had done in my band programs.

Next, I served as the supervisor of leadership development programs for aspiring and new leaders in a very large school district. This was not a position I ever aspired to as a school leader, but upon reflection of my core values and my philosophical beliefs, it makes perfect sense. For four years, I was constantly reflecting on the support we provided our school leaders and looking for ways to help them be successful, so they could help teachers propel students to realize their own passion and potential. As an educator, I am always concerned with helping others and I have a sincere desire to improve education for everyone.

Currently, I serve as the principal for a middle school with just over 1,000 students, and 90 staff members in a suburban community just outside Tampa, Florida. My desire to help young people be successful brought me back to a school building, closer to the action, but it did not diminish my curiosity about why some principals are more successful than others at leading a school community.

It is important to have highly skilled leaders in our schools for our students. Over time, I have noticed some leaders are more successful than others despite the fact they are exposed to

the same professional development, particularly in our school district, where we have a comprehensive leadership development program. As a result, I have become very interested in trying to identify what are the factors that lead to some principals or assistant principals being more effective than others.

When I came across the research from Muth et al. (2013) and Hitt and Player (2018) it really piqued my interest. I looked for other studies that investigated the relationship between a leader's prior experience in certain roles and the effectiveness of a school leader, but I could not find any at the time. So, I decided it would be an interesting research project for me, particularly in light of my role in a school district with a comprehensive leadership development program.

In the last 40 years there has been a significant amount of research on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of effective school leaders. Constructs and standards have been created to guide a leader's practice and focus the curriculum in leadership preparation programs, yet we still experience considerable inconsistency in their ability to effectively lead a school community and improve student learning. As a learner and a teacher, this is frustrating.

This led to the focus on my inquiry into the relationship of a leader's prior experience and prior roles on their ability to create a generative culture for student learning. If we can understand more about the type of learning experiences or roles a principal should be exposed prior to becoming a school leader, then we can be more intentional about the recruitment and selection processes we have for the candidates in preparation programs. The school district has a substantial amount of data available to help us understand more about what makes an effective leader. This insight into the roles effective leaders held prior to becoming a principal, the training they received in the pipeline and the opportunity to assess if it has made a difference when compared to other principals in the school district can be valuable for the future success of principals and, ultimately, students.

### **1.13 Dissertation Overview**

In this study I examined the human resource records of principals in one school district who participated in a comprehensive leadership development program in order to ascertain the characteristics of the sample population and assess the relationship between prior experience and prior roles to their effectiveness as a leader. Chapter 1 presents the introduction, statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, research design, definition of key terms, assumptions, delimitations, limitations, and background of the researcher. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on principal characteristics, prior experience, the recruitment and selection of potential school leaders, the effectiveness of comprehensive leadership development programs, and research on the measures of effectiveness for principal performance. Chapter 3 includes the introduction, the research design, primary research questions, and describes the methods to be used for the data analysis, validation strategies, as well as the rationale for the appropriateness of the study. Chapter 4 focuses on the findings from the analysis of the descriptive statistics, and the regression analysis organized by research question. The first section includes the introduction, and research question 1, which presents data on the principal characteristics, and school context. The next section states research question 2 and consists of data from the performance evaluations, and the regression analysis on the relationship between the prior experience and prior roles to principal effectiveness. Chapter 5 includes an introduction, and the discussion of the major findings on principal characteristics, prior experience and prior roles, principal's years of experience, and comprehensive leadership development. The chapter concludes with implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and conclusions based on the results.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The recruitment and selection of a diverse group of high-quality leaders is essential for increasing student achievement but finding principals with the right combination of the knowledge, skills and dispositions to meet the complex demands is a challenge for school districts across the nation (Bartenan & Grissom, 2019; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Leithwood et al., 2004; Pont et al., 2008). The principal's ability to influence student achievement and the demands placed on school leaders through increased accountability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has intensified the search to find a diverse collection of qualified candidates with the resilience to lead a school (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019; Black et al., 2014; Danzig et al., 2012; Myung et al., 2011; Muth et al., 2013). In fact, "numerous sources concur that principals are the linchpins for school improvement" (Myung et al., p. 696, 2011) and if principals are to be adept at being a "building manager, politician, professional developer, fundraiser, organizational figurehead, chief negotiator, and part-time custodian" (Deal et al., pg. 4, 2009), then there should be a comprehensive system for recruitment, selection and development of these leaders (Cosner et al., 2015; Danzig et al., 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Gates, et al., 2014; Young, 2015; Young et al., 2012).

Educational scholars have long argued that leadership preparation programs need to seek out a diverse pool of candidates who have demonstrated an aptitude for working with adults and a track record of success with the wider school community (Bartenan & Grissom, 2019;

Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Hitt & Player, 2018; Levine, 2005; Meier et al., 2004; Muth et al., 2013; Sum et al., 2019). The identification and recruitment of potential school leaders should be “viewed as a part of the wider approach to leadership and talent management” (Sum et al., 2019, p. 225). Individuals identified as potential school leaders could then be mentored and developed by providing them with opportunities to work with their wider school community (Barber et al., 2010; Jensen et al., 2015; Sum et al., 2019). If the skills, knowledge and dispositions to effectively lead are acquired over time and through opportunities to learn the craft of leadership, then it makes sense for both, university and district leadership preparation programs to be intentional about assessing a candidate’s ability with a robust selection process and more to the point, recruit a diverse group of candidates with prior experience leading adults or the wider school community (Bartenan & Grissom, 2019; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Hitt & Player, 2018; Levine, 2005; Meier et al., 2004; Muth et al., 2013; Sum et al., 2019).

## **2.2 Organization of the Literature Review**

The literature review presents research in four areas: (a) principal characteristics; (b) prior experience and prior role; (c) alignment in recruitment and selection; (d) comprehensive leadership development; (e) measuring effectiveness.

### **2.2.1 Principal Characteristics**

Research shows the principal can impact the outcomes for students, teachers, and the school community through their ability to influence the learning conditions in the school, particularly as it pertains to hiring teachers (Bartenan & Grissom, 2019; Goff et al., 2018; Grissom et al., 2017; Meier et al., 2004). This is important, as a few studies demonstrate students of color benefit from having a teacher who shares their same race (D’Amico et al.,

2017; Dee, 2004; Egalite et al., 2015; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Grissom et al., 2017; Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Meier et al., 2004).

Bartenan and Grissom (2019) conducted research on teachers of color in Missouri and Tennessee to see if the principals race effected hiring, teacher turnover, and student achievement. The study was driven by four main questions:

- 1- What is the impact of a change in the race of a school's principal on the racial composition of its teaching staff?
- 2- To what extent are principals more or less likely to hire teachers of the same race?
- 3- To what extent are teachers more likely to stay in their schools when they work for a principal of the same race?
- 4- What effects do changes in principal race have on student achievement, either through teacher composition effects, or via other mechanisms?

(Bartenan & Grissom, 2019)

The results of the study show the race of the principal matters, in the context of both states, for the hiring and retention of teachers. A Black principal increases the probability of a new teacher being hired is Black by 5-7 percent and decreases the probability of a Black teacher changing schools, 2-5 percent (Bartenan & Grissom, 2019). This works out to a 3 percent increase in the number of Black teachers employed at a school with a Black principal, and means Black students are exposed to more Black teachers when the principal shares the same race (Bartenan & Grissom, 2019).

The findings indicated a link to an increase in math and reading achievement for Black students when their school had a Black principal (Bartenan & Grissom, 2019). This increase came after the principals first year at the school and continues to grow for math as the principal gains experience at the same school (Bartenan & Grissom, 2019). As with other



studies, the researchers found positive effects associated with the teachers, however, they also noted positive associations that were a result of other “mechanisms” (Bartenan & Grissom, 2019, p. 33) effected by the principal’s race above and beyond having a teacher who is the same race.

Bartenan and Grissom (2019) suggest this positive relationship could be a result of the principal’s influence over the culture, climate, and resource allocation, or further benefits of the effect of the “teacher-student race match on Black students’ educational attainment” (p.40) found to be a factor by Gershenson, et al. (2019). This is supported by a study completed by Grissom et al. (2017) that noted “schools with Black principals have significantly higher gifted representation among Black students” (p.416).

Meier et al. (2004) reported similar results in Texas, where schools with Hispanic principals had a greater percentage of Hispanic teachers. The Latinx students in the study demonstrated an increase in test scores, improved attendance, and increased enrollment in advanced courses when their school was led by Latinx administrators (Meier et al., 2004). They also noted Latinx students achieved “higher SAT scores and were more likely to score above the 1110 criterion on the college boards” (Meier et al., 2004, p. 43). While there is some clear evidence supporting the positive influence of principals associated with race, the results of studies related to other characteristics are less clear.

There is limited research on the influence that a principal’s gender has on student achievement or teacher outcomes. The studies that do exist have generated mixed results. Research by Bastian and Henry (2015) on principals in North Carolina, found no connection between student achievement and the gender of the principal, yet a study of principals in the state of Illinois did find increased learning gains for students in schools led by women principals except in the city of Chicago (Bowers & White, 2014).

A study by Brezicha and Fuller (2019), “found a positive and statistically significant relationship between a gender match and teachers’ trust in principals at the elementary and middle school levels” (p. 42). They also reported female teachers trust female principals more than the male teachers did at the same level (Brezicha & Fuller, 2019). These results were deemed inconclusive, as the relationship appeared to be dependent on the kinds of schools where the principal and teacher work, but a positive relationship was supported in at least one portion of their study (Brezicha & Fuller, 2019).

Grissom et al. (2012) report teacher turnover is 2 percentage points lower, and the teachers express higher job satisfaction, when the principals gender matches the teachers. In the same study, they discovered male teachers are more likely to leave a position when they work for a female principal (Grissom et al., 2012). In 2018, Husain et al. conducted a similar study of data collected on employees over a 40-year period and found males teachers are more likely to leave their position when they work for a female principal than their female peers who work for male principals. The number of conflicting studies means more research is needed to understand the effect of a principal’s gender on outcomes for teachers, students, and the school community.

The research on years of experience has produced mixed results as well. Two studies conducted on the total years of experience prior to being appointed a principal has shown little to no influence on student achievement or the principal’s performance ratings (Clark et al., 2009; Grissom et al., 2018), with the exception of the principals who have experience as an assistant principal. Bowers and White (2014) found a correlation between accelerated improvement in test scores for students on state exams in the state of Illinois when the principal had experience as an assistant principal prior to their appointment as a principal.

There are examples of research that have shown experienced principals realize increased growth in student achievement (Bastian & Henry 2015; Clark et al., 2009), but these results differ

as well. Bastian and Henry (2015) found “few significant experience returns in the early-career period, with more robust estimates for mid-to-late-career principals, and principals in middle grades reading” (p.625) in North Carolina, while Clark et al. (2009) revealed significance for principals in New York City who were early in their career.

Lastly, research completed by Knoeppel and Rhinehart (2008), discovered no relationship between experience as a principal and an increase in student achievement, rather increases were a result of training principals received on “standards-based reform, with a curriculum that focuses on the myriad roles of the principal” (p. 520). This further demonstrates the need for more research on years of experience prior to being appointed a principal and years of experience as a principal. This should be separated from experience at a school, and the length of a principal’s tenure at a school as well.

### **2.2.2 Prior Experience and Prior Roles**

Research on candidates in leadership preparation programs conducted by Muth et al., (2013) sought to predict “(1) who are most ready to engage in preparation, absorb the content of their studies, and be able and ready to use their knowledge and skills; (2) who are likely to express confidence in their leadership and feel competent to pursue administrative positions; and (3) who are apt to be successful in attaining a position within a short period following program completion” (p. 129). These questions were based on their observations of trends or variables with candidates at their own institutions. The variables that appeared to correlate from institution to institution included:

1 - 5 or more years of experience in education

2- Successful experience in leadership positions (teacher coach, lead teacher, or curriculum specialist)

3 – A graduate degree

4 – An expressed commitment to being a leader or school administrator

(Muth et al., 2013, p. 128)

The research team hypothesized graduates who met these criteria would be more likely to accept positions within two years of graduation and be successful administrators (Muth et al., 2013). Data sources for the study included 157 randomly selected files from three universities; Seattle University, University of Colorado-Denver, and University of Kentucky (Muth et al., 2013). The research team reviewed application forms, resumes, personal goal statements, and interview data.

The trends the research team identified were supported, but the results of the study were mixed across the institutions (Muth et al., 2013). At Seattle University, only prior experience as an instructional leader correlated to being an administrator, while the data on commitment held the strongest relationship at University of Colorado-Denver (Muth et al., 2013). The variables, prior instructional leadership and level of education had the strongest correlation at the University of Kentucky program. “Even though informal data have implied that teacher leadership, collaborative work with adults, and commitment to becoming a school leader are associated with taking leadership positions, the data here give only partial support of these hypotheses” (Muth et al., 2013, p. 144). Despite the mixed results of the study, Muth et al., (2013) assert the need to identify candidates “whose in-school experiences align well with long-term expectations for effective principal practice” (p. 146), as the best way to support high quality teaching to have an impact on improved learning outcomes.

The research of Kraft et al. (2018) on the subjective performance ratings of teachers by their principals reinforces the push to identify and develop the capacity of teachers as leaders early in their careers as a means of professional development. They noted the ratings provide a

“unique window into specific skills and productivity growth of teachers across all grade levels and subject areas, not just those in tested grades and subjects” (p. 30). The researchers found rapid improvement in teacher performance for at least the first ten years of their career and their “contributions to the school as whole improve substantially as they gain experience” (Kraft et al., 2018, p. 30). This research supports the potential of identifying future leaders and providing them with opportunities to develop their leadership capacity as a means of cultivating principals.

More recent research completed by Hitt and Player (2018) examined how the professional background of school leaders influenced their effectiveness as administrators. They conducted a factor analysis of items in the Principal Questionnaire of the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). The sample included 8,524 public school principals with a response rate of 90%.

The researchers identified six constructs for the study that represent effective leadership practices and they found that “experience as a teacher is more strongly correlated with effective leader practice than other types of experience” (Hitt & Player, 2018, p. 1) when using these constructs. They also examined the effect of prior role on leadership practice. Specifically, they were looking at roles that involved principals working with adults and leading students in “non-classroom activities” (Hitt & Player, 2018, p.11). The team’s data revealed “prior role, in conjunction with experience, has a stronger relationship with effective leader practice scores than does experience alone” (Hitt & Player, 2018, p. 11). The statistics used for the study revealed about two-thirds of the principals previously served as assistant principals, 42% as an athletic coach, 41% as a department coordinator, a little more than 20% had been curriculum specialists and less than 10% were formerly guidance counselors.

In terms of specific prior roles, we see that principals who had been assistant principals are higher in two domains (facilitating a high-quality learning experience

and building collaborative processes). Former department coordinators are associated with higher scores in two domains (building professional capacity and building collaborative processes), and former curriculum specialists associate with higher scores in three domains (building professional capacity, building collaborative processes, and connecting with external partners).

(Hitt & Player, 2018, p. 11)

Not one of the roles examined showed a correlation to increased scores across all six of the leadership constructs in the unified framework. Principals who formerly served as curriculum specialists, department heads and assistant principals did demonstrate strength in multiple domains (Hitt & Player, 2018). “Because prior roles are not mutually exclusive, we also tested for relationships between combinations of roles, but no combination was statistically significant at conventional levels” (Hitt & Player, 2018, p. 11).

Leaders who were formerly athletic coaches were only positively associated with distributive leadership and negatively associated with building capacity, while former guidance counselors were not positively associated with increased scores in any of the constructs (Hitt & Player, 2018). Overall, the research showed a more significant relationship for prior roles than for the total years of previous experience. The findings provide information for preparation programs to consider when selecting candidates and for school districts when hiring leaders.

The concept of previous experience being important is reinforced by Barber et al. (2010) in their study of high performing educational systems from all over the World.

They compared the leadership development programs in Alberta, England, the Netherlands, New York, New Zealand, Ontario, Singapore and Victoria (Barber et al., 2010). Each of the programs incorporates field experiences, project-based learning, collaboration, and mentoring into the development of potential leaders (Barber et al., 2010). In Singapore, teachers are identified

within the first 5 years of their career and potential leaders are placed on a “leadership track” (Barber et al., 2010, p. 11). The individuals placed on the leadership track are mentored and experience leadership roles during their teaching career prior to becoming a principal (Barber et al., 2010). Barber et al. (2010) found 48 percent of high-performing principals note early experience as a significant factor for becoming a school leader and “more than three-quarters of principals say either ‘being identified as a potential leader’ or ‘opportunities to take on leadership responsibility’ was a major contributor to their development, with a large proportion selecting both” (Barber et. al., 2010, p. 12).

In 2017, Jensen et al. conducted a similar study of high performing educational systems which included Ontario, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore. These educational systems employ a comprehensive leadership development program that includes “recruitment of promising candidates, rigorous initial training and ongoing training and support with opportunities for advancement” (Jensen et al., 2017, p. 1). Each of the systems develops their aspiring leaders by assigning specific roles and responsibilities for school improvement while they are teachers (Jensen et al., 2017).

They found “action learning” in each of these systems that required teacher leaders to collaborate and network to solve problems (Jensen et al., 2017, p. 1). “These programs maximize the opportunities for aspiring principals to engage meaningfully in their own development, learning in the context of actual day-to-day system needs” (Jensen et al., 2017, p. 2). Each of these systems gives their aspiring leaders experiences improving the curriculum and instructional practice of others in a school (Jensen et al., 2017). This model is supported by research that adult learners need activities combined with opportunities to collaborate, receive feedback and integrate their learning with previous knowledge or skills (Jensen et al., 2017). The approach of Ontario, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore to comprehensive leadership

development is instrumental the increase in student achievement seen by these school systems in the last 15 years (Jensen et al., 2017).

### **2.2.3 Pre-service Leader Recruitment and Selection**

One major critique of educational leadership programs is the exceedingly high admission rates and that low admission standards allow the programs to function as a way for universities and colleges of education to generate revenue (Black et al., 2007; Davis et al., 2017; Levine, 2005). This coupled with the significant increase in the number of institutions offering a master's degree in educational leadership generates concern over the quality of candidates from less selective preparation programs (Perrone, 2019). Studies by Perrone and Tucker (2018), Levine (2005) and Baker et al. (2007) expressed concerns about the number of new principal preparation programs, types of programs offering degrees, and the amount of program expansion. Black's study (2011) of 17 preparation programs across the state of Indiana reported an average acceptance rate of 93% for applicants, with only three programs reporting an acceptance rate below 90% and five of the programs accepting 100% of their candidates. Selection for the programs involved meeting minimum criteria and none of the programs appeared to have "selective admissions" (Black, 2011, p.9).

Research completed by Danzig et al., (2012) on principal preparation in found similar criteria for admission to programs. "Students usually completed an application, consisting of transcripts, a letter of interest and/or intent, resume or vita and letters of recommendation" (Danzig et al., 2012, p.31). The research discovered no evidence of screening processes or an assessment of leadership potential as a condition for acceptance into a program (Danzig et al., 2012). Based on comments from university faculty and research, the team found most, if not all, of the applicants were accepted into their program of choice (Danzig et al., 2012).



Many scholars, organizations and school leaders advocate for the selection of principal preparation program participants to include multiple measures during the process (Danzig et al., 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Young et al., 2012; Young, 2015). Meeting the minimum admission requirements for undergraduate and some master's degree programs might be acceptable, but selection for a principal preparation program should involve instruments designed to assess a candidate's dispositions, leadership ability and commitment to becoming a school leader (Cosner et al., 2015; Danzig et al., 2012; Gates et al., 2014; Young, 2015). School districts need to increase their role in recruitment and selection of potential leaders along with "providing structured and purposeful training and professional development for administratively certified teachers to bolster the principal pipeline" (Davis et al. 2017, p. 232) to meet the needs of the stakeholders within the context of their school district.

This is reinforced by research on the impact pre-service experiences and high-quality learning in preparation programs can have on student achievement (Cosner et al., 2015; Davis, & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Gates et al., 2014; Jensen et al., 2017; Leithwood et al., 2004; Turnbull et al., 2015). Focus on formal leadership preparation is a trend found in many countries around the world. Finland, China, Australia, and the United Kingdom have all developed certification and training programs to develop a leader's capacity to meet the demands of the principalship (Sum et al., 2019).

Research by Davis and Darling-Hammond (2012) summarizes features and characteristics of these programs to include "theories of adult learning, thematically integrated curricula, experiential learning through internships, problem-based instruction, and close partnerships with school districts" (Sum et al., 2019, p. 223). This has led to an increased number of university and district partnerships around principal training in which preparation programs see the district as their clients and connect their work to the specific needs of the

school district, the schools and the students, rather than individual teachers or principals (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Klosterman et al., 2015; Lochmiller et al., 2015). There are examples of this sort of partnership between school districts and universities.

In 2003 Denver Public Schools and the University of Denver partnered to create the Ritchie Program for School Leaders (Turnbull et al., 2015). The program was co-designed and co-led by personnel from the school district and the university. “Recruitment and admissions were carried out collaboratively; applicant’s data were shared with the district; the program’s project-based curriculum and the assessment of participants were aligned with the district’s leader standards - for which one of the original sources had been the Ritchie curriculum” (Turnbull et al., 2015, p. 31).

The need for collaboration between school districts and preparation programs is reinforced by the research of Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) on the eight “exemplary pre-service and in-service programs” (p. 2) that produce graduates with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to improve instruction, and build a generative school culture. The research team’s study noted that the universities coordinated the recruitment and selection of candidates for preparation programs with the school districts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). The programs in the study focused on enrolling candidates with “strong teaching and leadership skills who are committed to educational change” (Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 65). The candidates also showed a commitment to working with schools throughout their career (Darling-Hammond, 2007). “These candidates were committed to their communities and capable of becoming instructionally grounded, transformative leaders” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007, p. 182). The candidates in each of these programs underwent a targeted recruitment and selection process designed to get expert teachers committed to school leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007).

In San Diego, teachers who display potential for school leadership are nominated by district staff based on achievement and are also based on observations of the candidate's leading instruction with adults (Darling-Hammond, 2007). "Potential leaders are identified early in their careers and recruited into positions where they can develop their abilities to work with teachers; these positions can be instructional coaches, turnaround specialists, assistant principals, and finally the principalship" (Darling –Hammond et al., 2007, p. 66), just as they are in Singapore (Barber et al., 2010).

The eight "exemplary" (p. 2) programs studied by Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) appear to produce leaders with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be successful as school leaders. The preparation programs in the study included several research-based components in the development of potential school leaders. "To recruit teachers with a record of strong instructional practice and the ability to lead their colleagues, the pre-service programs use some innovative selection methods" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007, p. 66). As an example, one of the programs, Bank Street, applications to the program require reference letters from the candidate's principal, colleagues, and essay questions that are evaluated by individuals for leadership competency (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). The candidates who are invited to the second round of the process are observed in behavior-based interviews and role plays by a panel of university and district personnel on leadership competency (Darling-Hammond, 2007). This requires the candidate to draw on the skills and knowledge they acquired from their previous experience to be successful. These are examples of coordinated efforts between leadership development programs and school districts to get the right leaders in schools. This illustrates the potential of selecting leaders through a rigorous process designed to identify a candidate's knowledge, skills, and dispositions grounded in their experience as

educators, then develop them through a comprehensive partnership program (Barber et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Turnbull et al., 2015).

#### **2.2.4 Comprehensive Leadership Development**

While universities often develop aspiring school leaders, there is considerable research showing districts are a key factor in the quality of school leaders and there is a link between increased student achievement because of the initiatives that target school leaders through comprehensive leadership development programs (Gates et al., 2019; Herman et al., 2017; Jensen et al., 2017). In fact, there is substantial evidence of these leadership initiatives being drivers for school improvement. The study conducted by Barber et al. (2010) serves as one example, and research by Jensen et al. (2017) on the approach of Ontario, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore to leadership development as a driver for school improvement, serves as another example of the power a comprehensive approach to leader development can have on student achievement.

The Wallace Foundation's Principal Pipeline Initiative (PPI) is one attempt to align all the research in leadership development and is designed to produce a collaborative structure for university and districts to partner on the development of school leaders for the principalship (Anderson & Turnbull, 2016; Gates et al., 2019; Turnbull et al., 2015). In 2011 they provided grants to six urban school districts (the district for the study was one of them) to improve school leadership. Each of the school districts chosen for the initiative is among the 50 largest in the United States, serve more than 80,000 students, operates more than 130 schools, have a minority student population between 65 percent and 96 percent, and had already demonstrated a commitment to improving school leadership (Gates et al., 2019).

The participating districts were expected to develop partnerships with principal pre-service providers and develop or refine their "in-house principal preparation programs" (Gates et

al., 2019, p. 4). The initiative required the participating districts to build their pipelines based on the research around “leader-evaluation systems, principal preparation programs, strategic staff management, professional learning for principals and other school leaders, school leader working conditions, and broader school improvement efforts that have a leadership focus” (Gates et al., 2019, p. 1) while aligning their systems with the leadership standards (Gates et al., 2019; Turnbull et al., 2015). The expectations for each district outlined in the pipeline initiative include:

- Each school district developer revised their leader standards for professional practice and utilize those standards to guide pre-service preparation, selective hiring, leader placement, evaluation, and support.
- Pre-service preparation would be provided by one of the districts preparation program partners with district playing an integral part in the development of the curriculum and determining the components of the candidate’s clinical experience.
- Each district would revise their hiring and placement practices, using multiple stages, grounded in the leadership standards to hire and match principal candidates with school vacancies.
- Evaluation and support of principals would be aligned to the standards, occur regularly, and the data would be used to inform the support of the leader’s development.
- Develop a Leader Tracking System to collect data on the school leaders to assist with decision making in hiring and support of school leaders.

(Gates et al., 2019)

The six school districts involved in the initiative worked to improve the quality of their own pre-service programs and to effect improvements with their preparation program partners

(Turnbull et al., 2013). This includes requiring a long-term clinical experience for on-the-job training and aligning, both admission standards, and content of the program with the district's leadership competencies (Turnbull et al., 2016). The pre-service preparation offered by each pipeline district includes recruitment of potential principals, selection for pre-service programs based on leadership competencies, professional development, and on-the-job learning opportunities (Gates et al., 2019). Each district continued to enhance and adjust their pipeline throughout the course of the initiative by building on the learning as they progressed in the work (Turnbull et al., 2016).

The research of Gates et al. (2019) found the principal pipeline initiative is a feasible, affordable, effective, and sustainable way to improve student achievement by being purposeful in the selection, development and support of school leaders. "Our study provides compelling evidence that if districts approach these pipeline activities strategically, paying attention to each component and coherence of the efforts, they set up their newly placed principals for success" (Gates et al., 2019, p. xxv). The research team noted positive effects on student achievement and other factors for the school systems. These include:

- Schools in pipeline districts with a newly placed principal – either novice or transfer – outperformed comparison schools by 6.22 percentile points in reading and 2.87 percentile points in math after three years of receiving a new principal.
- All pipeline districts saw a significant effect on student achievement in math and reading, for all cohorts of new principals and across grade levels; elementary, middle and, for math, high schools.
- The positive effects were statistically significant for schools in the lowest quartile of student achievement.
- Pipeline districts saw nearly eight fewer losses for every 100 new principals after

- three years, compared to new principals in non-pipeline schools.
- To operate and enhance each districts pipeline cost less than 0.5 percent of their budgets, or about \$42 per pupil per year.

(Gates et al., 2019)

After utilizing regression analysis on the various aspects of the pipeline, researchers found no evidence that specific components of the initiative were responsible for the positive effects alone, but rather the result of the comprehensive approach to improve school leadership based on the research (Gates et al., 2019). “The entire package of PPI components appears to have worked as a cohesive whole. Much as it was designed to do” (Gates et al., 2019, p. 64). The research team’s analysis supports the theory that comprehensive leadership development efforts aligned with leadership standards are effective and improve outcomes for students (Barber et al., 2010; Gates et al., 2019; Jensen et al., 2017).

### **2.2.5 Measuring Effectiveness**

A school leader’s ability to create a generative learning environment and influence members of the school community, primarily teachers, is an essential part of impacting student achievement (Day et al., 2008; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Hitt & Player, 2018; Leithwood, 2012; Suppovitz et al., 2010). Scholars in educational leadership have identified “bundles of activities” (Leithwood, 2012, p. 5) or sets of leadership “practices” (Hitt & Tucker, 2016, p. 532) that influence student achievement (Hitt & Player, 2018; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2012; Murphy et al., 2006; Sebring et al., 2006), and have established frameworks to identify the specific practices that contribute to school effectiveness (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2012; Murphy et al., 2006; Robinson et al., 2009; Sebring et al., 2006).

This is important because it helps organize the various knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to be a school leader and provides a reference point for effective leader practice. “An

important connotation and implication of practice is that it can be considered the integration of a discrete set of actions (Leithwood, 2012) that can be improved with effort and commitment” (Hitt & Tucker, 2016, p. 532). The specific practices identified in the frameworks are a resource for those identifying and developing potential school leaders, but they also serve as a means to assess a leader’s competency and serve as a source for reflection (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2012; Murphy et al., 2006; Robinson et al., 2009; Sebring et al., 2006).

These frameworks for effective leadership are important as high stakes testing and policy initiatives like Race to the Top, No Child Left Behind and, most recently, Every Student Succeeds Act have led school districts to create evaluation systems to measure educator effectiveness, provide performance feedback, and establish criteria for competency (Clifford & Ross, 2012; Grissom et al., 2018; Kane & Staiger, 2012). Many of these systems incorporate multiple measures of the educator’s performance to determine their evaluation rating, such as, student achievement, climate surveys and scores from observations conducted by supervisors (Grissom et al., 2018; Harris, Ingle, & Rutledge, 2014; Polikoff, & Porter, 2014). Most of the literature on the validity, reliability and use of performance measures focuses on teacher evaluations (Condon & Clifford, 2010; Grissom et al., 2018; Grissom & Youngs, 2016; Porter et al., 2010), there has been little research on the assessment of principals despite laws being in place since 2010 requiring them to be completed in 36 states (Superville, 2014).

A recent study conducted by Grissom et al. (2018) examined the evaluation ratings of principals using data from the first 4 years of the implementation of the multiple measure administrator evaluation system in Tennessee, which was developed as part of the state’s reforms for the Race to the Top initiative (Grissom et al., 2018). In the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM), half of the administrator’s evaluation are based on ratings in specific practices provided by the school district, and the other half comes from measurements of achievement



(Grissom et al., 2018). Principal supervisors score school leaders using a rubric aligned with the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards, then the scores are combined with student achievement and other measures of effectiveness to assign overall ratings (Grissom et al., 2018). In this portion of the evaluation, 35% is based on school-wide student growth as measured by the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS), and 15% is based on additional measures of achievement determined by mutual agreement between the administrator and their evaluator. In addition to analyzing the evaluation data from the first 4 years of TEAM, the researchers accessed other administrative and survey data acquired from the Tennessee Department of Education (Grissom et al., 2018). This includes the Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) survey and the First To The Top (FTTT) survey to collect perceptions from school personnel about the quality of their school's leadership. Each of these components were examined for a relationship between growth in student achievement, ratings from personnel on leadership effectiveness and the ratings on a principal's leadership practice from principal supervisors (Grissom et al., 2018).

The researchers find that principal "supervisor's ratings are internally consistent, relatively stable over time, and predictive of other performance measures, such as student achievement growth and teacher's ratings of school leadership quality" (Grissom et al., 2018, p. 446). Analysis of the data does suggest rater's perception of the principal's overall job performance "drives the ratings" (p. 466) and that the raters do not differentiate between the leadership domains in any given year (Grissom et al., 2018). This may be due to rater bias, or the instrument does not allow for differentiation among constructs (Grissom et al., 2018).

The research team did note a positive correlation to principal experience, which is consistent with the conclusion that experience improves performance but acknowledges rater bias might be a factor as they may give high ratings to principals they have known longer

(Grissom et al., 2018). Grissom et al., (2018) also identify “significant associations” (p. 467) with principal’s ratings once they controlled for other principal characteristics, such as sex or race, and school context. The principals who lead schools with larger numbers of low-income students tend to have lower evaluation ratings (Grissom et al., 2018). The researchers also indicate ratings by principal supervisors, and growth in student achievement are positively associated, “which means that highly rated principals tend to work in schools with positive outcomes” (p. 467). More research is needed to determine if the differences in ratings are the result of biases in the rubric and the raters, or actual differences in the performance of the principals (Gill et al., 2016; Grissom et al., 2018). Although the subjective nature of the process or potential for bias must be acknowledged it does not mean the evaluations are not valid and cannot be used as a measure of effectiveness or for development of a leader’s capacity (Grissom et al., 2018; Kraft et al., 2018). Researchers studying subjective performance ratings assert that evaluators provide valuable information for the recipient that can lead to significant improvement in the individual’s capacity (Grissom et al., 2018; Kraft et al., 2018).

### **2.3 Conclusions**

The review of literature demonstrates a comprehensive approach to recruitment, selection and development of school leaders is a crucial aspect of providing principals with the ability to have a positive effect on student achievement, particularly with the current accountability measures in place (Barber et al., 2010; Grissom et al., 2018; Hitt & Player, 2018; Jensen et al., 2017). Recruitment has primarily been an informal process with candidates being accepted based on minimum criteria for admission to a preparation program and after being encouraged to seek a degree in educational leadership by their principal or a colleague (Danzig, 2012; Myung et al., 2011; Wallace Foundation, 2012). Research suggests, except in a small number of programs, candidate selection for a preparation program has too often amounted to little more

than meeting the admission criteria and that preparation programs might accept candidates as a source of revenue, rather than on the basis of skill and ability (Black, 2007; Black, 2011; Danzig et al., 2012).

Scholars of educational leadership have called upon preparation programs to employ “multiple, robust sources” (Young et al., 2012) when selecting candidates and they should be seeking diverse candidates with prior experience working with the wider school community (Barber et al., 2010; Bartenan & Grissom, 2019; Hitt and Player, 2018; Meier et al., 2004; Muth et al., 2013). Results of research on principal characteristics demonstrates race and gender are associated with a positive effect on outcomes for students and teachers of color when the principal is their same race (Bartenan & Grissom, 2019; Meier et al., 2004). Furthermore, research studies reviewed illustrate the impact a leader with the prior leadership experience and experience in certain educational roles can have on student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Hitt & Player, 2018; Muth et al., 2013) and according to Brown-Ferrigno and Muth (2004), candidates with more teaching experience display a greater level of maturity and commitment to the profession.

This lends credence to the argument that preparation programs should have recruitment and selection processes to assess critical attributes associated with effective leadership (Black et al., 2011; Cosner et al., 2015; Danzig et al., 2012; Gates et al., 2014; Muth et al., 2013) and these processes should be utilized as a solution for talent management (Jensen et al., 2017; Jensen et al., 2015; Sum et al., 2019). Identifying and mentoring teachers through leadership roles is noted as an important factor among high performing principals (Barber et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Jensen et al., 2017) as it provides them with a chance to assimilate information from experiential learning, and the feedback from a mentor (Jensen et al., 2015; Mitgang, 2012).

Furthermore, research calls for more direct involvement by school districts in the recruitment, selection and development of school leaders (Cosner et al., 2015; Gates et al., 2014; Young, 2015). This has led to the development of university and district partnerships to provide a more complete recruitment, selection, and development process for a diverse group of school leaders where preparation programs train the leaders for the contexts of the districts, their schools and the needs of the students in the school district (Davis et al., 2017, Klosterman et al., 2015; Lochmiller et al., 2015).

Using frameworks established through research, these comprehensive programs have shown improved outcomes for students in a variety of contexts in the United States and internationally (Barber et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Gates et al., 2019; Jensen et al., 2017; Turnbull et al., 2016; Turnbull et al., 2013). These coordinated efforts between leadership programs and school systems to get the right leaders illustrates the potential of selecting candidates through a rigorous process that seeks to identify an applicant's knowledge, skills, and dispositions through role plays, using scenarios to assess their decision making and engage their prior experience as educators. More research is needed to test the validity and reliability of the evaluations used for leadership effectiveness by principal supervisors. Educators need to conduct more studies to determine if the differences in ratings are the result of biases in the rubric and the raters, or actual differences in the performance of the principals (Gill et al., 2016; Grissom et al., 2018). All of this must be considered as we continue to strive to ensure the right leaders are in place as principals to lead school improvement.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODS**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This study included an analysis of the human resource records of principals in one school district with a comprehensive leadership development program to assess if a relationship existed between their experience in prior roles as educators and their performance as a principal. Specifically, I examined the characteristics of the principals and their experience in roles that provided them opportunities to demonstrate leadership with adults in their school and the wider school community. There is a lack of research in this area, but studies by Hitt and Player (2018) and Muth et al. (2013) found leaders with prior experience leading other adults was a predictor for success as a principal.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

This was a quantitative study using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations and total numbers) to assess the data collected for principals who have participated in at least two portions of the Principal Pipeline (see Appendix H). A regression analysis was also used to determine if a relationship exists between the principal's performance scores in the five leadership competencies measured by the school district as a framework for effective leadership and their experience in prior roles as educators (see Appendix F). The data from the 2018 - 2019 school year was collected for 216 principals using the district's data management systems. The principals in the sample population were identified after a review of the human resource records for the 216 principals in the school district. Analysis revealed 54

who met the criteria of participating in at least two portions of the district’s comprehensive leadership development program; the Aspiring Principals Preparation Program (APPP, see Appendix I) and the New Principals Program (NPP, see Appendix L). These two programs were designed to support the development of highly effective leaders as a result of the district’s participation in a grant to build their own principal pipeline.

The hypothesis was that the principals with the highest ratings on their performance evaluation and on their leadership survey would have experience in prior roles that afforded them the opportunity to work with teachers and stakeholders in the wider school community. The findings from this study were shared with key stakeholders associated with the school district’s leadership development staff, university partners and preparation programs. The findings may lead to refined recruitment and selection processes with a focus on candidates who possess leadership experience working with the wider school community.

### **3.3 Primary Research Questions**

#### Research Question

1. What are the characteristics of principals in a school district with a comprehensive leadership development program?
2. Is there a relationship between a principal’s leadership ability and their experience in prior roles they held as an educator in a school district with a comprehensive leadership development program?

### **3.4 Setting**

The school system is among the nation’s eighth largest school districts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018) with over 200,000 students. The schools include 142 K-5 elementary schools, 43 middle schools, 28 high schools, five K-8 schools, four career centers, and 49 charter schools. The school district has a robust leadership development program,

because of being selected to participate in a grant to build their own principal pipeline. The principal pipeline has four components (see Appendix H) and supports the leaders in the school district with programs designed for aspiring, new, and experienced leaders.

### **3.4.1 Principal Pipeline**

The four components of the program include: the Aspiring Leaders Program (ALP), a pre-service program for aspiring school leaders (see Appendix I), an New Assistant Principal Program (NAPP) for new school leaders (see Appendix J), the Aspiring Principals Preparation Program (APPP), a pre-service program for aspiring principals (see Appendix K), and the New Principal Program (NPP) for new principals (see Appendix L). Each new principal is assigned a coach for the first two years after their appointment to support their development while they are in the induction program. The four components of the principal pipeline were modeled after the research conducted by educational scholars (Barber et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Jensen et al., 2017) which has demonstrated successful school improvement through a focus on leadership development and was among the six programs studied by Gates et al. in 2019.

The state in which the district resides requires all school leaders to have a degree in educational leadership to serve as an administrator. It is important to note that the school district requires all aspiring leaders (teachers) to pass the district's administrative screening and complete the Aspiring Leaders Program (ALP) prior to being eligible to apply for administrative positions as a condition of the leadership development system (See Appendix I). External applicants must have a minimum of three years of experience as a school administrator to be exempt from the ALP program but must still pass the administrative screening.

The district also requires principals to have experience as an assistant principal and their principal certification prior to an appointment as a principal. Aspiring principals can earn their

principal certification in the Aspiring Principals Preparation Program (APPP), a two-year program certified by the state for principal certification offered by the school district but must pass a rigorous selection process to become a member of a cohort (see Appendix K).

Aspiring leaders and aspiring principals must complete an application and pass the school district's screening process to be considered for Aspiring Leaders Program and Aspiring Principals Preparation Program. Applicants for the Aspiring Principals Preparation Program must have a minimum of three years of experience as an assistant principal with ratings of *Highly Effective* or *Effective* each year to be eligible to apply for the two-year program. In addition, applicants for both programs must complete an application that includes historical information on previous job performance, write essays, participate in behavior-based interviews, complete a prioritization exercise, and submit two performance-based references from their supervisors. All components of the process are reviewed and assessed for competency using a rubric grounded in the five leadership competencies utilized by the district for school leaders.

The population for this study included principals from the elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and the K-8 schools. Each of the principals in the sample participated in the redesigned Aspiring Principals Preparation Program, New Principal Program and were assigned a principal coach as a result of the district's participation in the principal pipeline initiative. The district began their work on the pipeline in 2011, but the first cohort of school leaders to participate in the redesigned Aspiring Principals Preparation Program came in 2013.

### **3.4.2 Leader Development System**

As a condition of participation in the pipeline initiative, the district was required to create a Leader Development System (LDS) to consolidate information for each school leader into one system. This gives district staff access to each school leaders demographic information, educational background, prior experience, performance evaluation scores, and professional



development over the span of their career. This includes competency-based selections scores for entrance into the school district's pre-service programs (ALP, APPP) and the leader's exit scores after completing the programs. The Leader Development System is designed to ensure easy access to pertinent data that can be used for the development, and support of school leaders, but also succession planning. The information affords district leaders insight into the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of the leaders, and this information can be considered along with qualitative data when building leadership teams and making principal appointments.

### **3.4.3 Performance Evaluation**

The school district uses three domains that include five competencies based on the research for effective school leadership to evaluate the principal's performance (see Appendix E). Climate and perception surveys are also completed each year by teachers to be used as part of the principal's evaluation by the principal's supervisor. Thus, the following data were collected for the sample and analyzed:

- Human Resource records for each principal to ascertain years of experience, educational background, and prior roles as an educator. These included assistant principal, intervention specialist, instructional coach, content area coach and classroom teacher.
- Written evaluation data for each principal completed by their principal supervisor for the 2018 - 2019 school year.
- The results of the Leadership Survey completed by teachers (see Appendix F).
- Information regarding the participation by each principal in the components of the principal pipeline as a means of professional development. The program includes the Aspiring Leaders Academy, New Assistant Principals Program, Aspiring Principals

Preparation Program and New Principals Program to determine which principals will be in the sample population (see Appendix H).

#### **3.4.4 Prior Experience and Prior Roles**

Data were collected for school context, years of experience, and the roles principals held prior to their appointment as a principal. These roles include;

Instructional Coach – these are individuals who work with the faculty and staff to improve instructional practice through coaching, mentoring, and facilitating professional development for the purpose of improving student engagement and learning.

Intervention Specialist – this title describes educators who work with all stakeholders to assist students with modifications to their behavior or study habits to improve their standing (i.e., Behavior Specialist, Student Success Coach, Drop-out Prevention Specialist, Exceptional Student Education Specialist).

Content Area Coach – this describes the teachers who had the opportunity to work with the teachers, administrators, and students in content areas, such as, Literacy Coach, Math Coach, Reading Coach, Science Coach, Department Head or Subject Area Leader.

Teacher Leader – this title is used to summarize all the roles described where a teacher may have the opportunity to lead or interact with the wider school community (i.e., Instructional Coach, Intervention Specialist, Content Area Coach), but will not include the role of assistant principal.

Assistant Principal – a member of the school’s administrative team who works in tandem with the principal to set a vision for the school by creating a generative culture for learning focused on student success.

### 3.5 Data Collection

Data for the principals exists in the school district's data management system. Permission to use the data for the study was obtained from the school district and de-identified by the staff in Leadership Development. All data remains anonymous, and no schools or principals were identified in the study. The following data were collected and analyzed for the sample:

- Characteristics of the principals including race, gender, graduate school, and school context.
- Each principal's written performance evaluation rating for the 2018-2019 school year. The evaluation was completed by the principal supervisor using a rubric designed to assess the leader's competency in research-based practices and includes observation data, a staff survey of principal performance, and Key Performance Indicators (KPI) measured by the school district during the 2018-2019 school year (see Appendix F). The principal supervisor also considered the learning gains by students in the school's bottom quartile, and the performance of student's school-wide on state mandated tests.
- Data from the Leadership Survey completed by the school staff (see Appendix G). Each of the survey questions is connected to the five research-based competencies designed for leadership development and provide assessment of the leader's performance from the staff's perspective.
- Principal's experience in prior roles as an educator. The categories for this study include experience as an assistant principal, intervention specialist, instructional coach, content area coach and classroom teacher.

- The principal's years of experience prior to being appointed was collected for years of experience as a teacher and assistant principal.

The performance indicators considered in the data included the principal's performance evaluation from their supervisor in the five leadership competencies measured by the school district, years of experience, and prior roles as an educator. Positions designated as a teacher leader which afford principals opportunities to work with adults included positions such as, instructional coach, intervention specialist, content area coach, or serving as an assistant principal.

I also collected data from the leadership surveys of these principals during their tenure as a principal to assess the school staff's perception of their job performance in the five competencies. This offers insight into the leader's ability to establish a generative culture for learning in the school and utilize the constructs associated with effective leadership (Hitt & Player 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Leithwood et al., 2008). This chapter communicates the research question, the design, the setting, procedures for data collection, data analysis, validation strategies and limitations of the study.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

I collected data from the district's data management systems and analyzed data using descriptive statistics. I entered data into a Microsoft Excel file. In Chapter 4 I created charts and graphs to display data and share the outcomes of the regression analysis used to determine if any relationship exists between a principal's ability as leader and their experience in prior roles as an educator.

#### **3.6.1 Research Question 1**

What are the characteristics of principals in a school district with a comprehensive leadership development program? Data were collected and analyzed to determine the

characteristics of the principals in the school district, including gender, race, school context, university attended, years of experience as a classroom teacher, teacher leader (instructional coach, resource teacher, or specialist) and an assistant principal for each principal prior to becoming an administrator. The data were used to calculate the frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations and total numbers for a comparative analysis of the sample populations characteristics and principal performance on the school district's leadership competencies as rated on their performance evaluations.

### 3.6.2 Research Question 2

Is there a relationship between a principal's score in each leadership competency and their experience in prior roles they held as an educator in a school district with a comprehensive leadership development program? Using data from question one to serve as the variables I tested the relationship between the effective leadership in each of the five competencies, and their experience in prior roles. I included other variables for context, such as total years of experience prior to being appointed a principal, years of experience as a principal, the context of the schools they lead, which included grade level and socio-economic status. The data were examined to determine the relationship between leadership effectiveness in the five competencies measured by the school district, experience in prior roles and years of experience. The equation used to test this relationship was

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1Tch + \beta_2Ap + \beta_3Pr + \beta_4IC + \beta_5IS + \beta_6AC + \beta_7Title1 + \beta_8PrinMS + \beta_9PrinHS$$

where

- $Y$  is the leader's effectiveness score as determined by their performance evaluation,
- $\beta_1Tch$  is the total years of experience as a teacher, and/or teacher leader,
- $\beta_2Ap$  represents the total years of experience as an assistant principal,
- $\beta_3Pr$  is the total years of principal experience,

- $\beta_{4IC}$  (instructional coach)
- $\beta_{5IS}$  (intervention specialist),
- $\beta_{6AC}$  (content area coach),
- $\beta_{7Title1}$ , for socio-economic status,
- $\beta_{8PrinMS}$ , represents principals working at schools with students in grade 6 through 8,
- $\beta_{9PrinHS}$ , is principals working with students in grades 9 through 12.

The data were examined to determine the relationship between each factor and leadership effectiveness in the five competencies measured by the school district through the principal supervisor's evaluation and the leadership survey completed by the school staff.

### **3.7 Validation Strategies**

The data collected for each principal was reported and stored in the LDS and the district's human resource data management system. The data were verified by the principal and the principal supervisor prior to being uploaded into the system. The performance scores were reviewed by the employee after it was uploaded to the system. Reliability of the data may be impacted as it must be exported to Microsoft Excel to be analyzed by the researcher and de-identified by the Director of Performance and Evaluation, then reviewed by the Director of Leadership Development prior to it being released to me.

### **3.8 Limitations**

There are a few possible limitations for this study. Data for the sample population includes principals who had the opportunity to participate in some aspect of the principal pipeline as a result of the district's membership in the grant sponsored initiative. This means all the principals in the sample participated in at least some portion of the district's pipeline, but only a few completed all four components. All of them participated in the New Principals Program, the

newly designed Aspiring Principals Preparation Program and were assigned a principal coach during the first two years of their tenure as principals.

Hermeneutic considerations must be acknowledged in the evaluation of school leaders by panel members during the selection processes, various stages of the pipeline and by the supervisors of the principals during their performance evaluations. The lived experience or world views of the individuals completing the assessments of a leader's competency could influence their evaluation of the school leader's performance. The school utilizes rubrics based on the five competencies and key elements of leadership, but assessment of the leader's knowledge, skills and disposition are still based on the evaluator's interpretation of their data. The school district regularly calibrates with its principal supervisors to promote reliability, fidelity and validity in the evaluation process for its personnel.

Research completed by Grissom et al. (2018) on data from Tennessee's evaluation system found ratings to be "internally consistent, relatively stable over time, and predictive of other performance measures, such as student achievement growth and teachers' ratings of school leadership quality" (p. 446). Research reports that ratings may be biased based on school contexts, race, gender or other factors out of the principal's control (Gill et al., 2016; Grissom et al., 2018). The researchers found ratings appear to be based on the evaluator's perception of the principal's performance and they did not differentiate between the different domains for the evaluation in a particular year (Grissom et al., 2018). "Principals who score well on one domain, such as instructional leadership, tend also to score well on other domains" (Grissom et al., 2018, p. 466).

Although the subjective nature of the process or potential for bias must be acknowledged it does not mean the evaluations are not valid and cannot be used as a measure of effectiveness or for development of a leader's capacity. Research by Kraft et al. (2018) on the subjective performance ratings noted that evaluators provide valuable information for the recipient that can lead to significant improvement in the individual's capacity. The findings of Grissom et al. (2018) and

Kraft et al. (2018) are important to consider when reviewing the results of the research associated with this study. Many of the tools and components used for the principal's evaluations are similar in scope and the principal supervisor played a significant role in determining the leader's evaluation score. The principal supervisors regularly calibrate using the school district's rubric for principal competency, but individual interpretation must be considered when reading data. This is one of the reasons why the performance ratings for the leadership survey completed by the school staff were included in the study. The ratings by the school staff provides valuable insight from their perspective in regard to the principal's ability, but also serve as a resource for testing the validity of the performance evaluation.

Finally, I currently serve as the principal of a middle school but served as the Supervisor of Principal Pipeline for 4 years just prior to my appointment, and while any potential bias was reduced by the design of the study, I utilized the staff in Research and Evaluation to review the data and findings to assess any potential bias in the variables selected or the interpretation of the findings. These individuals are not affiliated with the Leadership Development office but are familiar with the policies and the evaluation system in the school district. I also used the Director of Leadership Development to review the results of the study.

### **3.9 Chapter Summary**

Chapter 3 described the methods used to examine the performance effectiveness of the principals in one school district and the correlation to their previous experience as educators. This chapter outlined the research questions, the design, the setting, and procedures for data collection. The population of interest for the study, and data collection were described, along with the methods for analysis. The validations strategies and limitations for the study were described as well.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I present the findings of the research for my study on principals in one school district with a comprehensive leadership development program. The purpose of the study was to determine if a relationship exists between a principal's effectiveness as a school leader, and their years of experience or the roles they held as educators prior to being appointed to their first principalship. The records of 216 principals were reviewed to determine which of those leaders serving in the 2018-2019 school year had completed the school district's Aspiring Principals Preparation Program (APPP) to earn their principal certification, participated in the New Principals Program (NPP), and were supported by a Principal Coach during the first two years of their tenure as principals. Fifty-four principals met the criteria of completing at least two phases of district's comprehensive leadership development program and made up the sample population for the study.

The first research question focuses on the characteristics of the principals in the sample population. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the sample, their previous experience and establish their effectiveness as school leaders based on performance evaluations. The findings presented on Table 1 includes demographic information (race, gender), and previous experience (graduate school, prior roles, years of experience). The findings for school context (school level, Title 1, Non-title 1) are presented on Table 2. This established important information about the principals, and the context of the schools they served as leaders.

Research question two examines if a relationship exists between the prior experience or prior roles and the principal's performance. The second part of the study included an analysis of performance evaluation data from the sample populations principal supervisor and the staff at each principal's school. Table 3 includes the mean written evaluation score and the average score for each leadership competency received from the principal supervisor is reported for each of the prior roles held by the principals in the sample. The mean evaluation scores on the district's leadership survey from the school staff for each of the prior roles held by these principals is also presented on Table 3 and provides another perspective on the principal's effectiveness. The findings for the comparative analysis are organized by written evaluation score, leadership competencies, and the leadership survey.

The performance data provided an opportunity to conduct a comparative analysis of the principals in the sample but was also used to conduct a regression analysis to test for a statistically significant relationship between the principal's performance scores, years of experience, and their prior roles as educators. Table 4 presents the results of the regression analysis for the relationship between each variable, and years of experience or prior roles. The findings are discussed for each variable, written evaluation score, leadership competencies, and leadership survey

#### **4.2 Research Question 1**

*What are the characteristics of principals in a school district with a comprehensive leadership development program?*

#### **4.3 Principal Characteristics**

Table 1 presents the characteristics for the principals in the sample population, including race, gender, education, and the prior roles of each principal. This table also includes the average for years of experience for each of these characteristics.

**Table 1**

*Race, Gender, School Level, Graduate School, and Prior Roles associated with average years for the years of experience prior to becoming a principal along with the average written score for each group*

Variable	N = 54	%	Mean Years
Ethnicity			
Black	12	22.22	15.67
White	32	59.26	17.83
Hispanic	10	18.52	13.95
Gender			
Male	17	31.48	16.65
Female	37	68.52	16.62
School Level			
Elementary School	37	68.52	16.03
Middle School	9	16.67	19.11
High School	8	14.81	16.62
Graduate School			
University of South Florida	29	53.70	16.67
Nova Southeastern University	13	24.10	16.42
Other University	12	22.20	16.75
Prior Roles			
Classroom Teacher	30	55.60	16.12
Instructional Coach	8	14.81	14.72
Intervention Specialist	17	31.48	17.85
Content Area Coach	7	12.96	15.93
Assistant Principal	54	100	16.63

#### **4.3.1 Race**

The majority of the principals (32) in the population were White (59.2%), 12 of the principals were Black (22.2%) and 10 were Hispanic (18.6%). The White principals had an average of 17.83 years of experience prior to being appointed a principal, while the average years of experience for Black (15.67) and Hispanic (13.95) principals were slightly lower.

Most principals in the study were White (59.26%), but the sample population in this study is considerably more diverse than the population of principals across the nation. The percentage of Black (22.22%) and Hispanic (18.52%) principals in the study were double the national average reported by National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2018. The most recent School and Staff Survey (SASS) from the NCES reports White principals represent 77.7% of principals in the United States with Black (10.5%) and Hispanic (8.9%) principals being a significantly smaller percentage of the total population of principals (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

The sample population of principals is also more diverse racially than the total population of principals from across the school district. The district wide average, which includes principals appointed prior to the implementation of the principal pipeline, is more closely related to the national norms. Analysis of the total population of principals exposed a smaller percentage of Black (15.6%), and Hispanic (12.9%) principals while White principals accounted for 70%. This represents a significant difference from the percentages of principals selected through the principal pipeline.

It is interesting to note that a study of eight exemplary programs, which have similar components to the program in this school district, reported 63% of principals were White, and 37% were “members of a racial/ethnic minority group” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007, p. 65). The total Black and Hispanic population of the study is similar to the sample population of this study (40.74%). This falls short of meeting the demographics for the student population of the district in the study, where Black and Hispanic students account for two-thirds of all students enrolled in school but represents greater diversity than the statistics for principals across the nation and falls in line with the practice established by other comprehensive leadership development programs. Like this study, Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) found that Black and Hispanic candidates in these programs had fewer years of experience than their White peers.

### 4.3.2 Gender

Female principals in the sample population outnumber the males 2 to 1. Males represent 31.48% (17) of the principals in the sample and females account for 68.52% (37) in the group. The two groups have similar averages in terms of years of experience prior to being appointed a principal. The male principals averaged 16.65 years and the females had a 16.62 average.

The gender characteristics of the principals for the entire school district is similar to the findings for the sample population in the study. Females represented the majority (67.7%) of the total population of principals in the school district. The gender characteristics of the sample population and the total population of principals in the school district signify a notable difference to national statistics as it relates to gender of principals.

Analysis of the data for the sample population shows a little over two-thirds (68.52%) of the principals in this study were females while males represent 31.48% of the group. The proportion of female to male principals (2 to 1) in the study represent a ratio more closely aligned to the 3 to 1 ratio for gender in the total population of teachers nationwide than the statistics reported from the SASS for principals (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). This falls in line with the data reported by Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) on programs like the comprehensive leadership development program in in the study, where they found 73% of program participants were women (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007).

In 2018, the NCES reported 76% of teachers were female, but only accounted for 53.7% of principals. Nationwide, males only account for 24% of teachers, but 46.3% of all principals. The principals in the study who completed the comprehensive leadership development program and were then appointed as principals in the study district represent a substantial deviation from the norm with regards to gender identity.

### **4.3.3 School Level**

37 of the principals in the data set were elementary principals (68.52%), 9 were middle school principals (16.67%), and 8 were from the high school level (14.81%). The average years of experience prior to being appointed an elementary principal was 16.03 years, and 16.62 years for high school principals, while the middle school principals had a much higher average at 19.11 years.

The proportion of principals in the sample population at each level is similar to the distribution for the total numbers of schools in the school district. The mean for years of experience for the sample at each level remains considerably larger than the average years of experience for principals at similar schools nationally, where elementary principals average 11.3 years, and secondary principals average 11.1 years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). It also exceeds the 13.4 years of experience reported by Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) in a study conducted on eight exemplary leadership development programs similar to the one in the study and the principals in the research by Hitt and Player (2018) who averaged 14 years of experience.

### **4.3.4 Graduate School**

All 54 principals in the study earned a graduate degree in educational leadership from an accredited institution prior to becoming a principal. Nationally, 1.8% of principals were reported as having a bachelor's degree or less on the SASS survey (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). All the other principals reported by NCES (2018) had a master's degree (61.8%), a specialist degree (25.9%) or a doctorate degree (10.5%).

Twenty-nine principals (53.7%) in the sample population attended the University of South Florida (USF), 13 (24.1%) attended Nova Southeastern University (NSU), and 12 (22.2%) of the principals attended other universities. The other universities did not have enough graduates in

the sample to create a cohort for statistical significance, so they were considered together as a group. The graduate schools in this group include, University of Florida (3), University of Tampa (1), National Louis University (1), Saint Peters College (1), American Intercontinental University (1), Walden University (1), and three graduate schools marked as “Other” in the human resource records.

The number of principals from USF represent a substantial portion of the sample population in this study with NSU being the next largest group. Both universities are among the seven university partners who work closely with the leadership development staff to align their curriculum with the standards used to guide leadership practice in the school district. The mean years of experience for the principals was similar for all institutions (see Table 1).

#### **4.3.5 Prior Roles**

All the principals in the sample population served as assistant principals prior to becoming a principal (see Table 1). The principals who served as classroom teachers only (30), prior to becoming an assistant principal, and eventually a principal, is the second largest portion of the sample, accounting for 55.6% of the group. Principals who served as intervention specialists (17), in addition to an assistant principal, and classroom teacher, represent 31.48% of the sample population in the study. The principals (8) who served as instructional coaches made up 14.8% of the sample population, while the 7 principals who had experience as content coaches were 12.9% of the group. It is important to note the sample population contains 3 principals who never served as classroom teachers, but did serve as assistant principals, and in at least one of the other roles in the study. These 3 principals are not treated as a separate variable since their data is already included for the roles they held prior to being appointed as a principal.

It is significant that 100% of the principals in the sample population served as assistant principals prior to being appointed to their principalship. A recent study by Hitt and Player

(2018) using data from the 2011-2012 SASS found only 73.8% of principals had previously served as an assistant principal. In 2007, a study of comprehensive leadership development programs completed by Darling-Hammond et al. noted 68.2% of the principals in their study had served as an assistant principal or program director prior to their appointment.

The study by Hitt and Player (2018) and Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) also considered other prior roles that afforded principals the opportunity to work with the wider school community. The titles for the prior roles differ from those in this study but are comprised of similar job descriptions and similar percentages for teacher leader positions held by the principals with the exception of Athletic Coach or Department Coordinator. Any experience as an Athletic Coach or Department Coordinator is not known for the sample population of this study. The principals in the study by Hitt and Player (2018) had previously served as Curriculum Specialists (25.9%), Department Coordinators (40.4%), Athletic Coaches (35.9%) and Guidance Counselors (5.1%). The percentages for the prior roles of principals in the research conducted on the eight exemplary programs had similar composition in terms of the previous roles held by the principals, apart from Athletic Coaches, who only accounted for 14.3% of the school leaders in the study (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007).

The characteristics of the principals provides valuable information when considering the effectiveness of school leaders. It is also important to understand the context of the school district and the schools where the principals serve their community. Research has shown context of the school matters when considering a leader's effectiveness (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011; Grissom et al., 2018; Grissom & Loeb, 2017; Grissom et al., 2015; Lochmiller et al., 2015).



**Table 2**

*Title 1 schools at each level including the percentage of students who meet the criteria for ESE, ELL, FRL status, and the average years of experience prior to being appointed a principal*

Variable	N = 54	%	ESE	ELL	FRL	Mean Years
Title 1						
Elementary School	29	53.70	16.55	20.03	88.46	14.39
Middle School	4	7.41	17.93	16.10	86.95	17.00
High School	7	12.96	13.20	10.07	72.00	17.57

#### **4.4 School context for the sample**

Table 2 presents the demographic data for the students attending the schools of the principals in the sample. I collected data for each school associated with each principal during the 2018-2019 school year.

##### **4.4.1 Title 1**

The elementary schools account for 53.7% of the Title 1 schools with 29 in the sample. The elementary schools had student populations that averaged 16.55% ESE, 20.03% ELL, and 88.46% FRL. The mean years of experience for the elementary principals in the sample population at Title 1 schools was 14.39. Seven of the high school principals worked at Title 1 schools where the student population averaged 13.2% ESE, 10.07% ELL, and 72% FRL. High School principals at Title 1 schools had the highest average for years of experience (17.57), while the middle school principals (4) had the second highest years of experience with a mean of 17.00. The middle schools had student populations that averaged 17.93% ESE, and 16.10% ELL, with a FRL percentage of 86.95%.

As a comparison, the elementary schools (8) that were not Title 1 had a similar average population of ESE students (13.34%), but a significantly smaller percentage of ELL (5.5%), and FRL (36.41%). This sample of elementary principals not at a Title 1 school had a much higher average in years of experience (21.93) than their peers at a Title 1 school. The five non-title 1

middle schools all had lower percentages in their ESE (11.1%), ELL (4.88%), and FRL (51.54%) populations than the Title 1 schools. The principals averaged more years of experience prior to being appointed than their peers (20.8). There was only one high school in the sample that was not a Title 1 school, so no comparison data is reported.

The district average for ESE students was 14.4%, and ELL was 11.1%, while 41% of students across the school system used FRL (Florida Department of Education, n.d.). These percentages are more closely related to the national averages than those in the sample population of the study. According to NCES (2018), the national average for ESE students was 14.1%, ELL students account for 10.1% of the school age population, and 52.6% of students are enrolled in FRL.

Nationally, 28.8% of elementary schools and 16.6% of secondary schools had FRL of 75% or higher. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The sample population of this study has a much larger percentage of schools with a greater percentage qualifying for FRL (See Table 2). The percentage of secondary schools in my study is smaller than the national average by NCES (2018). The NCES reported the average ELL population in elementary schools across the nation was 10.67% and secondary schools was 4.5% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Most schools in the sample population have higher percentages in each of these categories than the district and national averages.

#### **4.5 Research Question 2**

*Is there a relationship between a principal's written evaluation score, and their years of experience or their experience in prior roles as an educator in a school district with a comprehensive leadership development program?*

The next portion of the findings includes the results from the analysis of performance evaluation data from their principal supervisor and the staff at each principal's school. The mean written evaluation score and the average score for each leadership competency received from the

principal supervisor is reported for each of the prior roles held by the principal, as well as the mean evaluation scores on the leadership survey. Descriptive statistics of the performance data provided was used to conduct comparative analysis of the principals in the sample, and to complete a regression analysis to test for a statistically significant relationship between the principal's performance scores, years of experience, and their prior roles as educators.

#### **4.6 Performance Evaluation**

Table 3 presents the mean total written evaluation score for each of the roles principals in the sample held prior to being appointed a principal. The table also displays a breakdown of the principal's evaluation in each competency as it relates to the prior roles and the average scores from the Leadership Survey completed by the staff at their school for each of the prior roles.

##### **4.6.1 Written Evaluation Score**

The total score possible on the principal's written evaluation is 60 points. The mean for the total population of principals in the school district for 2018-2019 was 44.46. Principals in the sample population who previously served as a Content Area Coach and/or Instructional Coach had average scores above the district mean. The mean score for the 7 principals who served as a Content Area Coach represents the highest average (45.38), with those serving as an Instructional Coach (8) previously averaging 45.10, and the 30 who were classroom teachers only averaged 44.05. The principals who previously served as Intervention Specialists (17) had the lowest average (43.94) of the roles in the sample. The mean for the 30 leaders who served as a classroom teacher and an assistant principal was 44.05, while the mean for the 24 leaders who also served in other roles with an opportunity to work with the wider school community was higher at 44.39. All the principals in the sample served as an assistant principal prior to being appointed to lead a school.

**Table 3**

*Mean score for the written evaluation, Leadership Competencies, and the Leadership Survey completed by the school staff for each role held prior to being appointed a principal 2018 - 2019 (N=54; 60 points; 4 points)*

Variable	Classroom Teacher (30)	Instructional Coach (8)	Intervention Specialist (17)	Content Area Coach (7)
Written Evaluation Score	44.05	45.10	43.94	45.38
Leadership Competencies	2.12	2.28	2.19	2.21
AFRO	2.11	2.38	2.14	2.25
IE	2.18	2.13	2.21	2.24
MDP	2.31	2.32	2.21	2.29
CRB	2.21	2.25	2.20	2.34
PSSCM				
Leadership Survey				
LSQ1 (AFRO)	3.33	3.61	3.38	3.58
LSQ2 (IE)	3.25	3.49	3.30	3.50
LSQ3 (MDP)	3.09	3.46	3.17	3.48
LSQ4 (MDP)	3.10	3.47	3.18	3.43
LSQ5 (MDP)	3.20	3.46	3.24	3.46
LSQ6 (MDP)	3.08	3.26	3.11	3.35
LSQ7 (CRB)	3.04	3.28	3.21	3.31
LSQ8 (CRB)	3.00	3.31	3.16	3.38
LSQ9 (PSSCM)	3.19	3.48	3.27	3.44
LSQ10 (PSSCM)	3.14	3.43	3.21	3.47

#### **4.6.2 Leadership Competencies**

The total score possible on each one of the competencies is 4 points. The principals who served in the Instructional Coach (8) role prior to becoming a principal had the highest average in three out of the five competencies (see Appendix B) measured by the school district (Achievement Focus and Results Orientation, Instructional Expertise, Culture and Relationship Building), the second highest score in Problem-solving and Strategic Change Management, and the lowest average in Managing and Developing People. Principals in the sample who served as a Content Area Coach had the highest average in two competencies

(Managing and Developing People, Problem-solving and Strategic Change Management) and the second highest average in Instructional Expertise. Content Area Coaches average score for the competency, Culture and Relationship Building (2.29), was marginally lower than that of the Instructional Coach (2.32) and Classroom Teacher (2.31). The principals in the sample who served as Intervention Specialists or those who served as a Classroom Teacher only, did not have the highest score in any of the five competencies measured by the district. Overall, principals who had experience as teacher leader had the highest average score in each of the five competencies when compared with the principals who had served as classroom teacher only prior to becoming an administrator.

#### **4.6.3 Leadership Survey**

The total score possible on each one of the competencies is 4 points. Content Area Coaches (7) had the highest average score on 6 out of the 10 questions on the leadership survey completed by the school staff (see Table 3). The competencies (see Appendix B) associated with these questions include Instructional Expertise (LSQ2), Managing and Developing People (LSQ3, LSQ6), Culture and Relationship Building (LSQ7, LSQ8), and Problem-solving and Strategic Change Management (LSQ10). These principals had the second highest average on three of the other four questions (LSQ1, LSQ4, LSQ9), and they tied for the highest average score with Instructional Coaches on LSQ5 (3.46), which is associated with the competency Managing and Developing People. The eight Instructional Coaches in the sample had the highest average scores on three of the questions in the survey associated with the competency, Achievement Focus and Results Orientation (LSQ1), Managing and Developing People (LSQ4), and Problem-solving and Strategic Change Management (LSQ10). Principals who served as Intervention Specialists had the third highest average on every question in the survey and the principals who served as Classroom Teachers (only) had the lowest score on each question.

Analysis of the data suggests principals with the prior experience as an instructional leader are more effective as a school leader. The role of Content Area Coach (45.38) and Instructional Coach (45.10) had the highest averages on the written evaluations, the leadership competencies, and the leadership survey in the sample population. Principals who served in these roles also had a higher average on the written evaluation than the average for the total population of principals (44.46) in the school district.

The study by Hitt and Player (2018) validates the data presented here, they found 18 statistically significant relationships between prior roles and effective leadership practices. They stated prior roles “in conjunction with previous experience, has a stronger relationship with effective leader practice scores than does experience alone” (Hitt & Player, 2018, p. 11). This supports the findings from this study as principals who served as a Content Area Coach and/or an Instructional Coach have a higher average on all the performance indicators than those principals who served as Classroom Teachers and Intervention Specialists.

What it does not explain is why the Intervention Specialists had the lowest average on the written evaluation and were below the mean for all 216 principals district wide, although Hitt and Player (2018) did have similar findings in their study. The researchers noted former guidance counselors were not associated with increased scores in any of the leadership practices in their study (Hitt & Player, 2018). Former guidance counselors are one of the roles included in the Intervention Specialists for this study, along with Dropout Prevention Specialists, and Student Success Coach. Like this study, they also found leaders who served as assistant principals, department coordinators or curriculum specialists scored higher in multiple domains associated with the effective leader practices in their study, facilitating a high-quality learning experience, building collaborative processes, building professional capacity, and connecting with external partners (Hitt & Player, 2018). All the

principals in the sample population of this study served as an assistant principal prior to being appointed a principal.

#### 4.7 Relationship between a Principal’s Evaluation and Years of Experience or Prior Roles

Table 4 presents the results of the regression analysis completed to test for each factors relationship to the variables; principal’s written evaluation score, score in each of the five competencies measured by the school district (see Appendix B) from their principal supervisor, and the average score on the leadership survey (see Appendix D) rated by their school staff.

**Table 4**

*Statistical significance for the average scores for each variable (Written Evaluation Score, Leadership Competencies, Leadership Survey Questions), and years of experience or prior roles held by the sample.*

Variable	Intercept Value	Teacher Years (n=54)	AP Years (n=54)	Principal Years (n=54)	Instructional Coach (n=8)	Intervention Specialist (n=17)	Content Area Coach (n=7)	Adjusted R-squared
Written Evaluation Score	45.36	-0.13589	-0.04505	1.27111*	-0.44985	-0.20559	-1.76203	0.0979
Leadership Competencies								
AFRO	2.09	-0.00579	0.01132	0.09020	-0.08514	-0.07232	-0.02507	0.0850
IE	2.35	-0.00516	-0.00859	0.09917	-0.18956	-0.05715	-0.01311	0.1229
MDP	2.05	-0.00508	0.01119	0.05842	0.010330	-0.03089	-0.13608	-0.0191
CRB	2.57	-0.00746	-0.03232	0.01849	-0.08212	0.07150	-0.03853	-0.0383
PSSCM	2.25	-0.01029	0.01387	0.09096	0.03292	-0.02059	-0.18224	0.1727
Leadership Survey								
LSQ1	3.88	-0.00475	-0.02971	0.04149	-0.09272	-0.08440	-0.15166	-0.0361
LSQ2	3.93	-0.00644	-0.04898	0.05374	-0.14458	-0.11932	-0.03381	0.0597
LSQ3	3.79	-0.01112	-0.04220	0.08637	-0.08526	-0.16204	-0.25671	0.0415
LSQ4	3.86	-0.00976	-0.04236	0.05463	-0.03476	-0.16157	-0.23703	0.0258
LSQ5	3.72	-0.01028	-0.03512	0.08159	-0.02734	-0.17270	-0.06045	0.0493
LSQ6	3.68	-0.00514	-0.04366	0.07575	-0.01373	-0.16382	-0.17968	0.0046
LSQ7	3.77	-0.00316	-0.06521	0.07282	-0.05030	-0.25374	-0.04681	0.0106
LSQ8	3.93	-0.00481	-0.06368	0.04911	-0.12945	-0.21972	-0.14354	-0.0022
LSQ9	3.72	-0.00402	-0.03027	0.05971	-0.11915	-0.16169	-0.06540	-0.0203
LSQ10	3.85	-0.00792	-0.04280	0.06290	-0.05042	-0.17689	-0.17835	-0.0095

\*Significant at alpha = .05.

#### **4.7.1 Written Evaluation Score**

The total score possible on the principal's written evaluation is 60 points. The only characteristic to show a positive relationship in the score on the principal's evaluation was "Principal Years". The regression analysis indicated an increase of 1.27111 points per year of experience as a principal. All of the other factors indicated a negative relationship to the written evaluation score. The expected mean for the sample was 45.36 as indicated by the y intercept.

#### **4.7.2 Leadership Competencies**

The total score possible on each one of the competencies is 4 points. The regression analysis did show a positive relationship between four of the factors in the equation when the five leadership competencies were used as the variable. Only "Principal Years" indicated a statistically significant positive relationship to all five of the leadership competencies for each year of experience as a principal. A few of the factors did show a positive relationship, although none of them were statistically significant in the regression analysis.

Years of experience as an assistant principal showed a relationship to a small increase to the principal's score in three of the five competencies (Achievement Focus and Results Orientation, Managing and Developing People, and Problem Solving and Strategic Change Management). The role of instructional coach had a positive relationship to two of the competencies, (Managing and Developing People, and Problem Solving and Strategic Change Management), while intervention specialist indicated an increase in score for Culture and Relationship Building. Two factors, "Teacher Years", and "Content Area Coach", did not show a positive relationship in any of the leadership competencies as rated by their principal supervisor.

#### **4.7.3 Leadership Survey**

The total score possible on each one of the competencies is 4 points. Each the 10 questions on the leadership survey associated with one of the five competencies in the school district was



used as a variable to test their relationship to the factors in the equation. Only the factor “Principal Years” showed a positive relationship to all 10 of the questions in the survey. All the other factors in the equation showed a negative relationship to each of the 10 questions in the survey completed by the staff at each principal’s school. The expected means for the 10 questions were between 3.68 and 3.93. Each principal can earn a score between 1 and 4 points from the staff for each of the questions on the survey.

“Principals Years” (see Table 4) shows a positive relationship to the principal’s written evaluation from their supervisor, the leadership competencies, and the leadership survey completed by their staff. The research on whether a principal’s effectiveness increases with their years of experience has been explored in multiple studies and has mixed results. Studies by Brewer (1993), Dhuey and Smith, (2012) suggested there was no relationship between years of experience and the principal’s effectiveness as a school leader, while some more recent studies imply there is a connection between the two, particularly for principals who are new to the role (Bastian & Henry, 2015; Branch et al., 2012; Bowers & White, 2014; Clark et al., 2009; Eberts & Stone, 1988). Additionally, two studies found that the length of the principal’s tenure at a school had a positive effect on student achievement (Handa et al., 2010; Miller, 2013).

Years of experience was also a significant factor in the study conducted by Hitt and Player (2018) when they examined the relationship to effective leader practices. The principals in their study had an average of 14 years of teaching experience, nine years of principal experience, and “slightly more than five years” (p. 9) as the principal of a school (Hitt & Player, 2018). “Building professional capacity” was positively associated with years of experience as a principal, and “Establishing and Conveying a Vision” was positively associated with total years at one school (Hitt & Player, 2018, p. 11).

It is important to note the regression analysis indicated a negative R-squared value of two leadership competencies (Managing and Developing People, Culture and Relationship Building), and four of the questions from the leadership survey (LSQ1, LSQ8, LSQ9, LSQ10) completed by the staff, so the results should be viewed with caution. This does not necessarily change the significance of “Principal Years” as it this remained consistent in other models run for the study and could be due to the small sample size.

#### **4.8 Summary of Major Findings**

The characteristics of the 54 principals in the study present some interesting statistical differences when compared with their peers in their school district and across the nation. Analysis of the data reveals a more diverse population of principals with more years of experience prior to being appointed to lead a school. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of the performance evaluations of the group seems to indicate prior roles do have an impact on a principal’s effectiveness, but only the principal’s years of experience had a statistically significant relationship after the regression analysis.

White principals in the study represent the majority in the sample population (59.2%), but this is considerably lower than the national average (78%) and the percentage of White (70%) principals district wide. Black (22.22%) and Hispanic (18.52%) principals in the study were double the national average (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The increased representation remained consistent when considering all principals in the school district as well. When considering all the principals in study district, Black principals represent 15.6%, while Hispanic principals account for 12.9%.

The gender characteristics of the sample population reveal a notable difference to national statistics as well. Nationally, male educators represent the 46.3% of principals despite accounting for only 24% of teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Females make up a

little over two-thirds of the principals in the sample population of the study, and the total population of principals in the school district. This ratio of females to males is more closely related to the national statistics for the proportions associated with the total population of the work force in education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The demographics represented in the study are similar to those found in earlier research conducted on eight comprehensive leadership development programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007).

The principals in the study all averaged more years of experience than their national counterparts. The Black (15.67) and Hispanic (13.95) principals in the sample population had slightly fewer years of experience than their White peers (17.83), although they still had more prior years of experience than the national average of 11.3 years reported from the SASS by the NCES (2018) for principals across the nation. Female principals in the study had a slightly lower mean for years of experience (16.62) than the male principals (16.65). Nationally, prior experience for male (10.3) principals is less than the average for female principals, with 12.2 years of experience prior to being appointed to lead a school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Furthermore, a comparative analysis of performance evaluations for the sample population using descriptive statistics suggests there is a connection between a school leader's effectiveness and the prior roles they held before being appointed as a principal. The principals who held positions that provided them with an opportunity to work with the adults in the wider school community had higher scores on the performance evaluations completed by their principal supervisor and the staff at their school, than the leaders who only had experience as a classroom teacher prior to being appointed an assistant principal, and then a principal (see Table 3). This held true when compared to their peers in the study, and the total population of principals in the school district. The only exception was for the intervention specialists, who averaged slightly

lower scores than the classroom teachers from their principal supervisor in the leadership competencies for Culture and Relationship Building, and Problem-solving and Strategic Change Management. Similar results were noted from the research conducted by Hitt and Player (2018).

The regression analysis on the data to assess the relationship between prior roles, and the performance evaluation scores of the principals only found a statistically significant relationship for “Principal Years” (see Table 4). A positive relationship was indicated for each of the factors associated with the performance evaluation; written evaluation score, the five leadership competencies, and all 10 of the competencies associated with the leadership survey completed by the staff. There were some positive relationships connected to other roles, but none of them were statistically significant. These findings are supported by prior research that found a positive correlation between a principal’s years of experience and their tenure at a school (Bastian & Henry, 2015; Bowers & White, 2014; Branch et al., 2012; Clark et al., 2009; Eberts & Stone, 1988; Handa et al., 2010; Miller 2013).

#### **4.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the data organized by the research questions for the study and provides a comparison to national norms or recent studies. Tables were used to present the data graphically to establish the characteristics of the principals in the sample and evaluate any relationship between a principal’s years of experience or prior roles to their evaluations as a school leader from their principal supervisor and their staff. Chapter five will include the discussions related to the findings, identify implications of the study, make recommendations for future research, and present conclusions.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to determine if a relationship exists between a principal's effectiveness as a school leader, and their years of experience or the roles they held as educators prior to being appointed to their first principalship. The research focused on 54 principals who completed at least two portions of the district's leadership development program. The sample population earned their principal certification by completing the district's Aspiring Principals Preparation Program, participated in the New Principals Program, and had a Principal Coach assigned to them during their first two years as principal.

In chapter 5 I discuss the findings in four areas: (a) principal characteristics; (b) prior experience and prior roles; (c) principal's years of experience; (d) comprehensive leadership development. This will include connections to prior research that demonstrate the potential influence of these findings on delivering positive outcomes for students, teachers and overall school improvement. The final portion of the chapter will discuss implications for the practice of district leaders, universities, and principal preparation programs along with suggestions for future research by educational scholars.

#### **5.2 Discussion of Major Findings**

My analysis revealed the principals in the sample population were a more racially diverse group than their peers not exposed to the principal pipeline in the school district, but also from

across the United States in multiple characteristics (race, gender, years of experience) when compared to national statistics. Second, a comparative analysis of the descriptive statistics associated with the evaluation scores shows higher averages for the principals who served as instructional coaches, or content area coaches than their peers who were intervention specialists or classroom teachers (only). These same principals had a higher average written evaluation score from their principal supervisor when compared with the average for the total population of principals in the school district. Next, the regression analysis conducted indicates a statistically significant relationship between the principal's years of experience and the evaluation scores received from the principal supervisor. Finally, the comprehensive leadership development program in the study district is potentially creating conditions for improved outcomes through its effect on the recruitment, selection, and development of school leaders.

### **5.3 Principal Characteristics – Race**

The sample population of principals in the study were more racially diverse than their peers from across the nation, and when compared to the total population of principals in their school district. The percentage of Black (22.2%) and Hispanic (18.6%) principals was double the representation nationally, where White principals represent 78% of the total population, Black principals 11%, and Hispanics account for 9% of all principals. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). District wide, including principals who were appointed prior to the implementation of the principal pipeline, Black (15.6%) and Hispanic (12.9%) principals accounted for a smaller portion of the total population.

The diversity of the principals in the study more closely corresponds to the population of students in the schools. In the 2018-2019 school year the percentage of the total population of students by race was Black 21%, Hispanic 37.1%, and White 32.9% (Florida Department of

Education, 2019). Although a gap remains between the percentage of students of color and the percentage of principals, the study district has narrowed the gap with the leaders selected through the principal pipeline and has a more racially diverse group of principals leading their schools. This is important, as studies have shown positive outcomes for students and teachers when the principal shares their race (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019; Meier et al., 2004).

### **5.3.1 Influence on Student Achievement**

Student achievement data was not collected for this study, but it is still important to acknowledge the positive effects of having Black and Hispanic principals leading schools, particularly since the sample population in this study was double the national average. Meier et al. (2004) documented Latinx students in Texas achieved higher scores, had improved attendance, and experienced increased enrollment in advanced courses when their school was led by Latinx administrators. In 2019, Bartanen and Grissom found that Black students had higher achievement scores in math and were less likely to be subjected to in-school suspension when their school had a Black principal. Another study noted an increase in Black students receiving gifted services when their principal shared their race, with no statistically significant difference on the participation rates for White or Hispanic students (Grissom et al., 2017).

Some of the positive aspects of the relationship between student achievement and principal race is attributed to an increase in the percentage of teachers who, like the principals, share the same race as the students (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019; Meier et al., 2004). This does not diminish the importance of having Black and Hispanic principals to lead our schools. In fact, it is more critical. A principal's influence on the learning environment is well documented and has been codified in the leadership constructs developed over the last two decades. One of the principals most powerful tools is their ability to create a generative learning environment that

increases student achievement through recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers who share their vision.

### **5.3.2 Influence on Teacher Recruitment and Retention**

Studies by Meier et al. (2004) and Bartanen and Grissom (2019) found the racial composition of the teaching staff changed based on whether the principal was Black, White, or Latinx. Multiple studies determined Black principals were more likely to hire teachers of color than their White peers (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019; D'Amico et al., 2017; Goff et al., 2018). In 2019, a study by Bartanen and Grissom analyzed longitudinal data from Missouri and Tennessee, they noted an average increase of 3 percent in the number of Black teachers employed at a school with a Black principal, and roughly the same decrease in percentage when the principal is White after a Black principal's tenure ended. Meier et al. (2004) reported similar results in Texas, where schools with Hispanic principals had a greater percentage of Hispanic teachers. It is imperative to keep in mind that appointing Black and Hispanic principals does not only create a more diverse faculty, it also has a positive effect on the culture of the school.

In a study by Grissom and Keiser (2011), Black teachers who worked for a principal that shared their race reported greater job satisfaction, feelings of support, encouragement, and recognition of their work. They also discovered teacher turnover decreased by 4 percent when their principal is the same race (Grissom & Keiser, 2011), and research by Kalogrides et al. (2012) determined Black and Hispanic teachers are assigned higher-achieving students when their school is led by a principal who shared their race. Each of these factors influences the culture of a school's learning environment and, ultimately, influences student achievement. This is tremendously important if we wish to close the achievement gaps that exist between students of color, and their White peers.



Other studies have established positive outcomes for students and teachers of color when they do not share the same race as their principal (Grissom et al., 2017). There is also evidence of White principals, specifically, creating equitable learning environments for students of color and promoting a culturally relevant curriculum. These principals improved learning for students of color by being purposeful about engaging their staff in discussions on racial issues, having them critically analyze data by race, and engaging the staff in reflection on possible reasons for the disparities they uncover in the data (Theoharis and Haddix, 2011).

#### **5.4 Principal Characteristic - Gender**

The gender characteristics of the sample population reveal a notable difference to national statistics as well. Women make up a little over two-thirds (68.52%) of the principals in the study (see Table 1). This ratio of women to men is more closely related to the national norms for the proportions associated with the total population of the work force in education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Women account for 76% of all educators in the United States, but only make up 53.7% of principals. Nationally, male educators represent the 46.3% of principals despite accounting for only 24% of teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Greater representation of women appointed to principalships is important because they account for much of the work force in education overall, so it makes sense that the number of women principals would be greater; there should be a deeper pool of talent for recruitment and hiring.

##### **5.4.1 Influence on Student Achievement**

While it does seem intuitive that a relationship would exist between principal gender and their ability to influence students to improve learning outcomes, the research on the effects of a principal's gender on student achievement is very limited. One study by Bastian and Henry

(2015) on principals in North Carolina, found no connection between student achievement and the gender of the principal. However, another study of principals in the state of Illinois did find increased learning gains for students in schools led by women principals except in the city of Chicago (Bowers & White, 2014). More research is needed to ascertain if a connection exists between student learning and the gender of the principal, although it is easy to imagine that the positive correlations demonstrated with the studies on race could be found for gender as well.

#### **5.4.2 Influence on Teacher Recruitment and Retention**

There is limited research on how the principals gender effects outcomes for teachers, but there are some interesting findings, with mixed results, that should be mentioned here as we consider the gender characteristics of the sample population in this study. When the teacher and the principal share the same gender, researchers noted teacher turnover was 2 percentage points lower, job satisfaction was higher, and teachers had increased trust in their principals (Brezicha & Fuller, 2019; Grissom et al., 2012). Sharing gender identity seems to have some potential negative effects as well. A study by Husain et al. (2018) determined male teachers are more likely to leave schools with female principals, while female teachers do not show the same propensity to leave when they work for a male principal. Although a study of VAL-ED (Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education) ratings concluded that, on average, teachers do not rate principals differently based on gender (Goff et al., 2014), it is important to understand the potential ramifications of the sample population in this study.

#### **5.5 Principal Characteristics – Prior Years of Experience**

The average for years of experience prior to being appointed a principal for the leaders in the sample population of the study (16.3) is much greater than the average for other principals across the nation (11.3) in this same year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The

16.3 average for years of experience is also greater than the 14 years of experience reported in a study by Hitt and Player (2018), and the 13.4 years of experience in a study by Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) on eight leadership development programs similar to the one in this study. As with other studies (Clark et al., 2009; Grissom et al., 2018), the regression analysis found no statistically significant relationship between years of experience in prior roles and the performance ratings (see Table 3).

### **5.5.1 Influence on Student Achievement**

The research on the total years of experience prior to being appointed a principal so far has shown little to no influence on student achievement or the principal's performance ratings (Clark et al., 2009; Grissom et al., 2018), except for those principals who have experience as an assistant principal. A study by Bowers and White (2014) did find a correlation between accelerated improvement in test scores for students on state exams when the principal had experience as an assistant principal. Although not statistically significant, the regression analysis in this study supported the previous research (see Table 3), with "Teacher Years" showing a slightly negative relationship to each of the principal's performance ratings from the principal supervisor, and the staff at their school, while "AP Years" had a slightly positive relationship to three of the leadership competencies measured by the district in the study (Achievement Focus and Results Orientation, Managing and Developing People, Problem-solving and Strategic Change Management), but a slightly negative correlation to all the other performance indicators in the leadership survey (see Table 3).

### **5.6 Prior Experience and Prior Roles**

Multiple studies have shown the principal's instructional knowledge, ability to coach or support their staff, effectively put systems in place and think strategically matter (Darling-

Hammond et al., 2007; Davis et al., 2017; Grissom & Loeb, 2017; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2012; Muth et al., 2013; Sebastian et al., 2017). So, it makes sense that principals who had the opportunity to practice the craft of leadership, and refine their knowledge, skills and dispositions to serve as an instructional leader, building manager, professional developer, politician, and advocate for every member of their school community would be more adept in their role. The findings in this study demonstrate positive outcomes for principals who served as a Content Area Coach and/or Instructional Coach. Principals who served in these positions prior to becoming an administrator (including assistant principal) had higher average scores on their performance evaluations than their peers. This experience serving as an instructional leader as a teacher becomes more important considering all the principals in the study served as an assistant principal prior to their appointment.

### **5.6.1 Influence of Prior Experience as a Teacher Leader**

Analysis of the descriptive statistics indicated principals who had the opportunity to serve as an instructional leader received higher performance ratings overall than their peers who did not serve in those roles (see Table 3). Principals who previously served as an instructional coach (45.10) or content area coach (45.38) had the two highest average scores for the written evaluation, while intervention specialists (43.94) had a slightly lower score than the principals who served as classroom teachers (44.05) prior to becoming an administrator. The instructional coaches had the highest average score on three of the leadership competencies from their principal supervisor (Achievement Focus and Results Orientation, Instructional Expertise, Culture and Relationship Building) and (see Table 3) the content area coaches held the highest average score on the other two (Managing and Developing People, Problem Solving and Strategic Change Management).

Intervention specialists, instructional coaches, and content area coaches all had higher average scores than the principals who only had experience as classroom teachers on every leadership competency measured in the leadership survey. Furthermore, principals who served as an instructional coach, or content area coach outscored their peers who served as a classroom teacher (only) prior to being appointed an assistant principal by as much 10% in the competency Managing and Developing People, and Culture and Relationship Building. These two competencies together imply principals who served in these two roles are more adept at creating a positive learning environment where relationships and individual expertise are leveraged to enhance the learning environment through an inclusive process encompassing all stakeholder voices.

For this study, no qualitative data was collected to assess the claim that the instructional coaches or content area coaches had more opportunities to practice these skills, but it is likely given the dynamics of the daily operation of a school and the roles in which they served their school community. It is easy to imagine they spent substantially more time focused on improving outcomes for students by providing professional development or coaching teachers to enhance the instructional practice than their counterparts. The evidence from the performance scores suggests a prior role that afforded the principal opportunities to interact with a larger cross section of stakeholders correlates with more effective leadership practice. This should translate to improved student achievement and overall school improvement.

### **5.6.2 Influence of Prior Experience on Student Achievement**

Student achievement data was not collected as part of this study, so it is not known if the performance scores associated with experience in prior roles as a teacher leader translates to an increase in student achievement for our sample population. However, given what is known from

previous research about the influence a principal has on the learning conditions in the school and indirect effects through the work they do with their staff (Davis et al., 2017; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2008; Sebastian et al., 2017), it makes sense that principals with higher scores on their performance evaluations could generate increased student achievement, and school improvement. Analysis of the descriptive statistics for the leadership survey completed by the school staff indicates the principals who previously served as teacher leaders are more effective leaders, which could coincide with improved learning outcomes for students.

### **5.6.3 Influence of Assistant Principal Experience on Student Achievement**

Research has demonstrated positive outcomes connected to experience as an assistant principal. A study completed by Bowers and White (2014) on principals in the state of Illinois found school leaders with experience as an assistant principal generated improved student achievement more quickly on state tests than their peers who did not serve as assistant principals. Two more recent studies determined principals that served as assistant principals in high performing schools or were exposed to high performing principals were more successful based on analyzing student achievement data and the principal's performance ratings (Bastian & Henry, 2015; Grissom et al., 2020). In addition, there is considerable research supporting the need for aspiring principals to engage in leadership experiences designed to help them acclimate to the demands of the role and be mentored by a high performing principal (Barber et al., 2010; Cosner et al, 2015; Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Jensen et al., 2017; Muth et al., 2013; Turnbull et al., 2015).

It is noteworthy that all of the principals in the study served as an assistant principal prior to being appointed a principal and had an average of 6.68 years of experience. The shortest

tenure as an assistant principal in the sample population was 4 years, and the longest was 10 years. The study conducted by Hitt and Player (2018) using data from the 2011-2012 SASS found only 73.8% of principals had served as assistant principals and Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) reported 68.2% of principals in a study of programs similar to the one in this research had assistant principal experience. The time spent as an assistant principal affords these leaders an opportunity to work with the adults in a school and learn the craft of leading a school. For the sample population in this study, the regression analysis did show a positive relationship to three of the leadership competencies measured by school district in the study (see Table 3), Achievement Focus and Results Orientation, Managing and Developing People, and Problem Solving and Strategic Change Management. All this evidence indicates there are positive outcomes associated with experience as an assistant principal.

Specifically, experience as an assistant principal gives aspiring principals an opportunity to serve as an instructional leader, practice managing the building or developing systems for school improvement, and work with the wider school community to build the capacity of the stakeholders in context (Barnett et al., 2012; Bowers, & White, 2014; Clark et al., 2009; Kwan, 2009). While all the assistant principals may not have exactly the same experience depending on factors such as, school context, mentoring, and the number of years in the role; it is important to acknowledge all of the principals in this study had this experience as we consider the results of the findings for each of the prior roles. This experience very likely influenced their ability to lead a school as a principal.

### **5.7 Principal's Years of Experience**

Years of experience as a principal proved to have a statistically significant relationship to performance ratings from the principal's supervisor, increasing an average of 1.27 points for

each year of experience (see Table 4). It is also noteworthy that the regression analysis of the performance ratings from the school staff on the Leadership Survey, although not statistically significant, indicated a slight increase in the principal's ratings for each year of experience. This is important because it shows alignment from the perspective of two different stakeholders in the school community in regard to principal's effectiveness and their experience.

What is not known is whether this increase was solely associated with their years of experience or if this increase was associated with the length of their tenure at their school. It is likely these increases are a combination of both circumstances as principals effect outcomes through the work they do to set the conditions for learning and establishing a generative environment (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Day et al., 2008; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hitt & Player, 2018; Leithwood, 2012; Seashore Louis et al., 2010; Suppovitz et al., 2010). The increases in performance ratings from the principal supervisor and the school staff suggest experience matters.

### **5.7.1 Influence of Principal's Years on Student Achievement**

The findings in previous studies have shown principal experience can have a positive relationship with student achievement and the principal's performance ratings because of two factors; experience as a principal, and tenure at a school (Bastian & Henry, 2015; Branch et al., 2012; Clark et al., 2009; Dhuey & Smith, 2012; Eberts & Stone, 1988; Handa et al., 2010; Miller, 2013; White & Bowers, 2011). The study by Bowers and White (2014) noted principals with 2-5 years of experience had "significant association with growth" (p.12) in proficiency on state exams, and principals in their first year did not appear to be associated with an increase in student achievement. This is pertinent to this study, as the principals in the sample population all have between one to five years of experience as a principal. However, it is not known what



affect the sample population had on the student achievement at the school since the data was not collected as part of the study. Based on the previous research (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2008; Seashore Louis et al., 2010; Sebastian et al., 2017), and the leadership standards utilized by the school district (see Appendix B), it seems possible increased performance ratings for the principals would correlate with improved outcomes for students, teachers, and the school.

### **5.8 Comprehensive Leadership Development**

The sample populations participation in the comprehensive leadership development program employed by the school district in this research undoubtedly had an impact on the principals in the study. First, on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of these leaders. It is likely the effect of the participation in the program varied from individual to individual based on their own previous experience, still many studies support the notion that the program would have an impact on their capacity to lead in a complex school environment, and increase student achievement (Cosner et al., 2015; Davis, & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Gates et al., 2014; Jensen et al., 2017; Sum et al., 2019; Turnbull et al., 2015). The program components designed to support leaders through intentional professional development, mentoring, and regular opportunities to reflect during their tenure have been shown to improve outcomes when compared to principals at similar stages, and working in similar contexts, but are not participating in a comprehensive leadership development program (Gates et al., 2019). Even though the descriptive statistics of the performance ratings show higher scores for principals who served as an instructional coach, or content area coach, it is important to consider that the program components may have mitigated some of the differences in experience for those leaders who did not serve in these roles prior to their appointment. This may explain why the regression

analysis did not establish a statistically significant relationship to the prior roles of instructional coach or content area coach despite the descriptive statistics revealing meaningful differences in the performance scores for principals with experience as a teacher leader, and those that served as a classroom teacher (only) prior to becoming an assistant principal. More research is needed to understand the power of the program, its influence over all aspects of school leadership, and results generated in student achievement levels.

### **5.8.1 Influence of Comprehensive Leadership Development on Principal**

#### **Characteristics**

The results of the findings suggest the school district's comprehensive leadership development program had an impact on the characteristics of the sample population in this study. The principals in the study were more racially diverse, gender was more representative of the total population of educators, and the leaders had more years of experience when compared with their peers from across the nation (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Expectations for districts participating in the principal pipeline initiative were that they would recruit, and select school leaders utilizing leadership standards, strategic staff management, and based on the best practices founded in research for school improvement (Gates et al., 2019; Turnbull et al., 2015).

The absence of qualitative data makes it difficult to assess the intentionality the school districts efforts, but analysis of the descriptive statistics on the characteristics of the principals suggests there was an effort to adhere to research in regards leaders who participated in the comprehensive leadership development program. This is evident in the results associated with race, and years of experience, particularly considering all principals serve as assistant principals prior to their appointment. Not only are the principals in the study more racially diverse than

their peers nationally, but they also average 5 more years of experience.

The representation of Black (22.22%) and Hispanic (18.52%) principals appointed since the implementation of the pipeline has increased in this school district. A review of racial representation of the 162 principals who were not included in the study is more closely related to the national norms. The Black (13.8%) and Hispanic (11.9%) principals in the group is substantially lower than the percentages associated with principals selected to participate in the pipeline. Based on previous research, it seems likely that the diversity of the principals would generate positive outcomes for students and school improvement (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019; Brezicha & Fuller, 2019; Clark et al., 2009; Davis et al., 2017; Grissom et al., 2018; Grissom et al., 2012; Meier et al., 2004). Black and Hispanic students experience greater access to advanced courses and demonstrate increases in student achievement when the principal of the school shares the same race as them (Grissom & Bartenan, 2018; Meier et al., 2004), without diminishing the opportunities for White students. This bodes well for the students in this school district, and the function of the leadership development program.

Some of the increase in the sample populations average for years of experience may be explained by the participation in the principal pipeline. Each of the leaders in school district was required to serve at least 3 years as an assistant principal before they were eligible to apply for the Aspiring Principals Preparation Program (APPP). The program employs a research based selective hiring process, and the APPP is a two-year program (see Appendix K). This means each of the principals spent at least 5 years as an assistant principal prior to their appointment, and analysis of the data shows the average for the sample population was 6.68 years as an assistant principal.

Research indicates this time is crucial for aspiring principals to develop their capacity as leaders (Barnett et al., 2012; Bowers & White, 2014, and serves as an apprenticeship under the tutelage of their assistant principal mentor, and their principal (Browne-Ferrigno et al., 2015; Browne-Ferrigno, & Muth, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). The support by experienced leaders, and time to engage in job-embedded learning is designed to provide aspiring principals with the time to reflect and improve their ability as a school leader prior to being appointed to their first principalship. The systems designed into a program such as a principal pipeline, are grounded in the research and set up to mitigate differences in the ability of leaders in an effort to bring consistency to school leadership. More research is needed to ascertain the intentionality of the efforts in this school district to leverage the research on principal characteristics, and the time as an assistant principal for school improvement.

### **5.8.2 Influence of Comprehensive Leadership Development on Student Achievement**

Even though student achievement data was not collected for this study, it is important to acknowledge that research suggests the components associated with the district's comprehensive leadership development program likely influenced student achievement through the recruitment, selection, development, and support of the principals (Barber et al., 2010; Gates et al., 2019; Jensen, 2017). A recent study conducted by Gates et al. (2019) on six school districts who were selected to participate in the Principal Pipeline Initiative (PPI), which this district was one of the participants, documented increased student achievement for schools where the principal participated in a comprehensive leadership development program. The schools with principals who participated in the program outperformed comparison schools by 6.22 percentile points in reading and 2.87 percentile points in math

after three years (Gates et al., 2019). Furthermore, when assessing if a specific program component was connected to the improved outcomes for students, the research team determined the benefits were a result of the comprehensive approach to improve school leadership grounded in the research (Gates et al., 2019).

## **5.9 Implications for Practice**

Expectations for the modern-day principal require them to meet high standards for student achievement while maintaining a positive climate and culture inclusive of all stakeholder voices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2004; Sebastian et al., 2017). This is a complex and demanding endeavor that involves serving as an instructional leader, professional developer, building manager, and an advocate for their school community (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Deal et al., 2009; Grissom et al., 2020; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2008; Sebastian et al., 2017). Principals need to be adept at the technical aspects of running a successful school, and the nuances of successfully navigating the interpersonal dynamics of leading an organization where the outcomes matter (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Deal et al., 2009; Grissom et al., 2020; Hitt & Tucker, 2016).

With so much at stake for the students in our schools, and since we know the principal's influence on learning is second only to classroom instruction (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2008; Nettles & Herrington, 2007), it is imperative to gain explicit knowledge about why some principals are more effective than others. This study examined the human resource records of one school district with a comprehensive leadership development program to determine the characteristics of the principals, then assess if a relationship exists between a principal's ability to lead a school community, and their prior roles or prior experience.

The findings from the study indicate experience matters, both, in terms of the number of years, and the roles principals serve in prior to being appointed as the leader of a school.

Analysis of the characteristics for the sample population reveal a group of principals who are more racially diverse, and average 5 more years of experience than their peers from across the nation. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest this is a result of the systems associated with principal pipelines, and that comprehensive leadership development programs have the potential to influence multiple facets of school leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Gates et al., 2019). These findings have implications for the recruitment, selection, development, and support of effective principals who can create the sort of generative learning environment where teachers and students can flourish.

#### **5.10 Districts Should Focus on Instructional Leadership when Seeking Future Principals**

First, school districts and principal preparation programs need to be intentional about seeking candidates with experience leading adults in the wider school community with a focus on instruction when considering aspiring principals. Analysis of the descriptive statistics in this study revealed higher scores on performance evaluations from the school staff and the principal supervisor for principals who served as an instructional coach or content area coach. The connection to experience in prior roles was reinforced by the regression analysis, which indicated a positive relationship in two domains for the principals who served as an instructional coach prior to their appointment and three of the leadership domains measured by the school district for years of experience as an assistant principal. Neither of the latter relationships were determined to be statistically significant, but they are important indicators of the positive effect prior experience can have on a principal's leadership ability.

The results in this study and the research by Hitt & Player (2018), suggest principals with prior experience in roles focused on improving teaching and learning exhibit a greater capacity to lead effectively than their peers. These positions require instructional expertise and create opportunities to engage the various stakeholders in projects and activities to facilitate improvement. In both roles, the principals generated higher scores in leadership domains linked to facilitating high quality learning, building the professional capacity of the staff, establishing collaborative processes, and connecting with stakeholders (Hitt & Player, 2018). The findings validate a positive link between prior roles designed to improve teaching and learning. District leaders, and principal preparation program providers need to capitalize on this research and use it for school improvement. This finding generates implications for the recruitment, and selection of school leaders that must be considered by school districts and principal preparation programs.

#### **5.10.1 Recruitment of Potential Principals**

School districts should partner with principal preparation programs to create systems designed to recruit a diverse pool of potential principals early in their career. These future leaders should either be serving their school as instructional leaders or given opportunities to gain experience. This partnership will facilitate collaboration and a chance to be purposeful about cultivating aspiring school leaders with job-embedded learning activities designed to provide them with meaningful experiences for instructional leadership. As prior research suggests, this should enhance their knowledge, skills, and dispositions prior to being appointed an assistant principal or principal and enhance their effectiveness as a school leader (Barber et al., 2010; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2013; Jensen et al., 2017; Korach & Cosner, 2017).

This is crucial, as the performance evaluations of principals in this study suggests experience with instructional leadership has a positive effect on leadership ability over and above leadership positions that do not afford individuals the same opportunity. Considering all the principals in this study served as an assistant principal prior to being appointed a principal, it implies serving as a teacher leader with a focus on instructional improvement is an important factor in a principal's ability to lead a school. School districts need to leverage this knowledge to create a system for identifying a diverse pool of educators with experience as instructional leaders.

Two other studies on high performing educational systems discovered a focus on developing effective instructional leadership as a driving force for school improvement. These school systems implemented programs to ensure their leaders were capable of meeting the demands of the principalship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Barber et al., 2010; Jensen, 2017). Specifically, in Singapore, potential leaders were identified within the first 5 years of their career and placed on a "leadership track" (Barber et al., 2010, p. 11), where they collaborate with other educators, are mentored by experienced leaders, and exposed to field experiences designed to enhance their ability to work with the wider school community (Barber et al., 2010). In a survey of the leaders in the study, 48 percent of the principals in the study indicated early experience as a factor for becoming a school leader (Barber et al., 2010). Jensen et al. (2017) noted these educational systems used "action learning" (p.1) that required teacher leaders to engage in their own development as they experience making improvements to the curriculum, and the instructional practice of other teachers. This provides these aspiring leaders with the time to assimilate the learning from their experiences (Jensen et al., 2017; Mitgang, 2012). This approach to



leadership development was a catalyst for the increase in student achievement experienced by these educational systems in the last 15 years (Jensen et al., 2017).

### **5.10.2 Rigorous Selection Process**

In addition to early identification of diverse pool of potential principals, and a robust set of leadership experiences, it is imperative that school districts and leadership development programs work together to design rigorous selection processes to assess candidates for the critical attributes associated with effective leadership (Black et al., 2014; Cosner et al., 2015; Danzig et al., 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Gates et al., 2014; Hitt et al., 2012; Muth et al., 2013). The selection process should draw on multiple sources when evaluating a candidate's knowledge, skills and dispositions as a leader (Black et al., 2014; Cosner et al., 2015; Hitt et al., 2012; Young et al., 2012), and require the candidates to demonstrate their leadership competency. By partnering with universities and preparation program providers, school districts can ensure the selection of a diverse group of future principals who have prior experience as an instructional leader, express an affinity for the work, and demonstrate an understanding of the contexts in which they will serve their community (Hitt & Player, 2018; Hitt et al., 2012; Korach & Cosner, 2017; Muth et al, 2013). Research has demonstrated this can have a positive impact on the culture, climate, and student achievement (Bartenan & Grissom, 2018; Grissom, 2011, Meier et al., 2004).

One example from an “exemplary” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007, p. 2) leadership development program, Bank Street, the first step in the application process requires reference letters for each candidate from their principal, and their colleagues. Each candidate must also answer essay questions which are evaluated for leadership competency (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). The candidates invited to the second round of the selection process participate in

behavior-based interviews, and role plays where their knowledge, skills, and dispositions are assessed by a panel of school district and university personnel (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). This is an example of the sort of collaboration needed to assess a candidate's leadership ability, grounded in their experience as educators, and will serve as a foundation to continue to foster their growth as school leaders while they earn their degree.

### **5.11 Districts Should Partner with Preparation Programs for Recruitment, Selection, Development, and Support of Future Principals**

The findings from this study suggest the systems within the school district's principal pipeline had an impact on the characteristics of the principals in the sample population (race, gender, years of experience), shaped their timeline and influenced their experience as aspiring principals. There is a significant amount of research demonstrating school districts can be a major influence on the quality of principals, and these initiatives have been shown to produce positive outcomes for students and teachers (Barber et al., 2010; Gates et al., 2019; Herman et al., 2017; Jensen et al., 2017). When a school district is an integral part of the recruitment, selection, development, and support of aspiring principals it affords them an opportunity to coordinate theoretical concepts with job-embedded learning grounded in leadership standards and professional development in context (Hitt et al., 2012, Korach & Cosner, 2017). It also allows them to develop a profile of each leader and acquire intimate knowledge about their strengths or areas for development so they may support the leader. This information is crucial as hiring managers consider placement on a leadership team or consider the needs of the schools in their district. All these components have an effect on the climate, and culture of a school community, which ultimately effects student achievement.

### **5.11.1 Racial Diversity**

The principals in the study were significantly more racially diverse than their peers nationally, (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), and the principals within the same school district who were not selected through the Aspiring Principals Preparation Program (APPP) associated with the pipeline. This is important, research has shown improved outcomes for students and teachers when they share the same race as their principal (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019; Grissom & Keiser, 2011; Meier et al., 2004). This can be an important aspect of school improvement if educational leaders wish to continue to increase student achievement as the population of the United States becomes more racially diverse (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). This also further demonstrates the potential influence a comprehensive leadership development program can have on talent management, which can impact the overall culture, climate, and achievement of a school (Bartenan & Grissom, 2018; Grissom, 2011; Meier et al., 2004).

### **5.11.2 Assistant Principal Experience**

All the principals in the study served as assistant principals and the regression analysis did indicate a positive relationship to this experience on the principals' performance evaluations. The sample population averaged 6.68 years of experience as an assistant principal prior to being appointed a principal. This is a result of conditions set forth in the school district's pipeline, requiring a minimum of three years of experience as an assistant principal before they can apply for the PNPP, and then two years to complete the program. This is the sort of mechanism that presents an opportunity for district leaders to influence the leadership ability of the principals in the schools, and create positive outcomes for their students, teachers, and community. This time

as an assistant principal affords aspiring principals a chance to enhance their knowledge and skills as an instructional leader (Brown-Ferrigno, 2003; Brown-Ferrigno & Muth, 2013).

The findings in this study indicate positive associations with experience as an assistant principal in three of the leadership competencies measured by the district in the study (Achievement Focus and Results Orientation, Managing and Developing People, Problem Solving and Strategic Change Management), and previous research has shown a positive impact on student achievement (Bowers & White, 2014). The results of previous research on experience as an assistant principal demonstrates positive outcomes associated with culture, climate, and student achievement (Bastian & Henry, 2015; Bowers & White, 2014; Grissom et al., 2020; Grissom et al., 2012; Hitt & Player, 2018). This is another example of the impact a comprehensive approach to leadership development can have on the leadership ability of principals.

### **5.12 Districts Should Capitalize on the Potential of Comprehensive Leadership Development**

The regression analysis found a statistically significant increase of 1.27 points for each year of experience as a principal, and “Principal Years” also showed a positive relationship in all of the competencies measured on the leadership survey by the school staff, although the regression analysis did not show a statistically significant relationship. These findings are still important, as previous studies have also shown positive outcomes associated with a principal’s years of experience and their tenure at a school (Bastian & Henry, 2015; Branch et al., 2012; Clark et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2013; White & Bowers). In this study, it is not clear if this increase is due to years of experience or the length of the principal’s tenure at their school, but this does not diminish the potential impact of implementing a comprehensive leadership

development program for school districts. In fact, the power of the program lies in the stability research has shown principal pipelines generate for school districts.

Research by Gates et al. (2019) found school districts with a principal pipeline had a decrease in the loss of new principals over a three-year period and noted a positive effect in student achievement. This was statistically significant for schools in the bottom quartile of student achievement (Gates et al., 2019). This is yet another example of the potential impact a system for comprehensive leadership development can have on the culture, climate, and student achievement for a school district.

### **5.13 Recommendations for Future Research**

The analysis of the principals in the sample population for the study reveals a group of principals who are more racially diverse, have more years of experience, and have a higher percentage of women than their peers from across the nation. It also indicates that experience matters, both, in terms of the number of years, and the roles principals serve in prior to being appointed as the leader of a school. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that comprehensive leadership development programs influence multiple facets of school leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Gates et al., 2019), but more research is needed to understand to what extent the program impacts the principal characteristics, the principal's ability to lead their school, and the influence on student achievement. Below I provide generative questions for future research.

#### **5.13.1 What is the impact of comprehensive leadership development in one school district?**

The human resource records collected on 216 principals in one school gives district

leaders, principal preparation programs and educational scholars the ability to understand more about the effect of comprehensive leadership development on the knowledge, skills and dispositions of principals. Using the data here, the principals could be divided into two groups; the 54 principals who participated in the school district's program (and were the sample population for this study), and the 162 principals who did not matriculate through the pipeline.

Using descriptive statistics to determine the characteristics of the principals, a comparative analysis could be conducted on the two groups to determine similarities and differences between the principals who participated in the principal pipeline and those principals who were not exposed to the components of the program. Some important questions to be answered include:

1. What are the characteristics of the principals in the two groups?
2. Has the recruitment, and selection processes associated with the pipeline had an effect on the characteristics of the principals?
3. What were the prior roles held by the principals in each group?
4. Are there differences in the performance ratings between the two groups of principals?

This study could deliver interesting results to be used by school districts, and principal preparation programs to understand more about the overall effect of comprehensive leadership development programs. Furthermore, researchers should employ mixed methods to gather qualitative data to inform the analysis of the quantitative data collected on the principals. The qualitative data will supply the first-person perspective on the how and why, while the quantitative data will help test the validity and relationships of the qualitative information. This information could be particularly beneficial as district leaders and preparation program providers

consider ways to enhance leader development and find ways to generate growth once principals have completed the program.

### **5.13.2 What effect did experience as a teacher leader have on student achievement?**

Research demonstrates that principals with experience leading the wider school community as an assistant principal produce accelerated improvements for students on state tests (Bowers & White, 2014), but we do not know how this correlates to experience as a teacher leader. Since all of the principals in this study served as assistant principals prior to becoming a principal, a unique opportunity exists to see if prior experience as a teacher leader has an effect on student achievement over and above experience as an assistant principal. The performance ratings from the principal supervisor, and the school staff in this study suggests there is a positive relationship but collecting the student achievement data for each of these principals could generate answers and inform decision making about principals in the future.

### **5.13.3 Has the diversity of the principals in the program improved outcomes?**

Research has shown positive outcomes for students and teachers when they share the same race as the principal of their school (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019; D'Amico et al., 2017; Grissom & Keiser, 2011; Kalogrides et al., 2012; Meier et al., 2004). Analysis of the data for this study revealed the sample population was a more diverse group than principals from across the nation. Specifically, the percentage of Black and Hispanic principals was double the percentage of their peers. Student achievement data, and personnel information for the staff at each principal's school was not collected for this study, but this is important to investigate because it has implications for student achievement, the quality of teachers, and teacher retention. Future research on the sample population from this study could be conducted to assess

if the diversity of principals generated positive outcomes for the Black and Hispanic students in the schools, or if it influenced personnel at the school site.

#### **5.13.4 How have each of the university partners impacted the leadership of the principals who attended their graduate school?**

An opportunity exists to learn more about the impact of university partnerships, and potentially improve leadership development. Research by Darling-Hammond et al. (2007), Turnbull et al. (2015), and Jensen et al. (2017) demonstrated intensive partnerships between school districts and universities can generate significant school improvement. The data on the graduate schools attended by the principals (54) in the sample population indicated the majority of the principals graduated from the University of South Florida (53.7%), and 24.1% graduating from Nova Southeastern University, with the remaining 22.2% coming from nine different institutions. The data in this study could be used to examine if there is a relationship between the principal's performance scores, and the universities the principals attended for graduate school. The research could be a powerful way to explore the readiness of candidates, the curriculum at each school, and the depth of the partnership with each university as a means for improving outcomes, particularly as it relates to student achievement.

It would also be particularly interesting to investigate the impact of the university programs on principal performance given the amount of time that passed before the principals were appointed to a lead a school. The sample population of this study averaged 6.68 years of experience as an assistant principal, with some of the principals going as long as 10 years before being appointed to a principalship. This could produce some interesting findings in regard to the influence of principal preparation programs.



Additionally, a comparative analysis could be completed with the 176 principals from the human resource records who did not participate in the district's pipeline program. This would afford researchers a chance to evaluate the partnership with each of the universities and examine the influence on the principal's performance ratings, and leadership ability in the school district since the inception of the principal pipeline. It could lead to a refined curriculum, improved systems for recruitment and selection, as well as more collaborative relationships with each of the university partners.

#### **5.13.5 Which is a more significant factor for principals- years of experience, or length of tenure?**

Next, the regression analysis found a statistically significant relationship to the number of years as a principal for the sample population in the study. Prior research has established this can be a result of years of experience, and tenure at a school (Bastian & Henry, 2015; Bowers & White, 2014; Branch et al., 2012; Clark et al., 2009; Dhuey & Smith, 2012; Handa et al., 2010; Miller 2013; White & Bowers, 2011). A survey of the principal supervisors, and the school staff could help us gain a more detailed understanding of the increased scores associated with the sample populations performance ratings. Questions designed to assess whether the increases are associated with experience as a principal, or the length of tenure would help us better understand the results, and impact future decision making in regard to principal appointments. It would be interesting to survey the principals as well, to inform the research from their perspective, and assess if there is any correlation to the answers from the principal supervisors and school staff.

Data collected in this study on each principal's performance rating could then be dissected to establish the length of each principal's tenure at their school for the 2018-2019 school year. This information combined with qualitative data, then be analyzed to determine if

any trends exist and provide more clarity about whether the principals performance scores were related to prior experience as an educator, knowledge gained as a principal or the length of the principal's tenure at the school.

#### **5.13.6 Which is a more significant factor in performance scores – technical or relational aspects of leadership?**

The analysis of the performance evaluations in this study provide insight into the skills and abilities of these principals, but what is not known is how much the technical versus the relational aspects of leadership influenced the ratings for each principal. Future studies on previous experience or prior roles should employ mixed methods and use qualitative measures to gain clarity about the intersection between the performance scores, and the first-person perspective of the various stakeholders in the school community. Qualitative data from the principal supervisor, teachers, students, community members, and most importantly, the principals themselves, will deliver valuable insight into how the knowledge, skills and dispositions converge in the principal's daily work, and why, the principals earned their ratings from the individual's perspective. All this information from the various stakeholders, including the principals in the study, should offer information for educational scholars, school districts and principal preparation programs that can be used to improve the preparation of school leaders with a stable, well-funded, comprehensive leadership development strategy.

#### **5.13.7 Longitudinal Study**

Finally, scholars have called for longitudinal studies on leadership development (Day et al., 2009; Korach & Cosner; 2017), and in fact, Day et al., contend that if the “focus of the study is development, the most appropriate research design is longitudinal” (p.43). Gathering quantitative and qualitative data throughout a leader's development and after their appointment

as a principal should generate a powerful set of data to inform the development of school leaders for the future. A number of school districts across the nation have implemented comprehensive leadership development programs, and as a result, are already working closely with universities to improve the practice of school leaders. These school districts, principal preparation programs, and universities have a prime opportunity to significantly impact what is known about leadership development.

#### **5.14 Concluding Reflection**

I began this study eager to contribute solutions to a perennial problem for school districts around the nation; why are some principals more effective than others? Specifically, I wanted to investigate if a relationship exists between prior experience in certain roles as an educator and a principal's performance as a school leader. I used the context of a school district with a comprehensive leadership development program in hopes of shedding some light on the differences in leadership ability, particularly when the principals have been exposed to a research-based program designed to deliver a coherent system for the recruitment, selection, development, and support of high-quality leaders grounded in the leadership standards. At the conclusion of the study, I leave with two big takeaways:

- (1) Prior experience as an instructional leader, working with the wider school community, is important aspect of leadership development for aspiring principals.
- (2) Comprehensive leadership development programs offer the best opportunity to bring consistency to the ability of principals to navigate the complexity of serving as the leader of a school community.

It is time for district leaders to take advantage of the research over the last decade (Barber et al. 2010; Gates et al., 2019; Jensen et al., 2017) to create a system that will improve leadership

in the communities they serve and bring school improvement. They could reap significant benefits just by establishing partnerships with universities and preparation program providers to collaborate on the recruitment and selection of candidates (Black et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Turnbull et al., 2015). This would help them identify aspiring leaders with an affinity for school leadership, generate a diverse pool of potential principals, and would create a vehicle for supporting the development of these leaders with experienced administrators engaging them in job-embedded learning activities designed for instructional improvement (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Day et al., 2009) during their time in graduate school. This is a very important, as it delivers an opportunity to assimilate learning, and reflect on their experiences (Day et al., 2009; McClellan & Casey, 2015) while they work with the wider school community in context (Bowers & White, 2014; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Hitt & Player, 2018; Korach & Cosner, 2017).

By working closely with universities and preparation program providers, the increased knowledge of individual leaders from pre-service could be used to inform placement on an administrative team. While the new leader is in-service (assistant principal, principal), the school districts can customize learning for the professional development and support of the leader throughout their career (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Day et al., 2009; Hitt et al., 2012). Based on the findings in this research, and prior studies, this should bring about more effective practice, and positive outcomes for students, teachers, and the school community (Bowers & White, 2014; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Gates et al., 2019; Hitt & Player, 2018).

A considerable amount of research demonstrates the powerful influence a principal has on the student achievement in a school, and the complexity of the job (Davis et al., 2017; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2008; Nichols et al., 2012; Sebastian et

al., 2017). It is time for district leaders to be more actively involved in the identification, recruitment, selection, development, and support of principals. They can no longer leave the work of leadership development to other individuals or institutions without their input. The role of the principal is simply too important to the success of teachers, students, schools, and the community.

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## APPENDICES



**Appendix A: University of South Florida IRB Approval Letter**



**NOT HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH DETERMINATION**

November 13, 2020

Gregory Basham  
3325 Manor Cove Cir  
Tampa, FL 33629

Dear Mr. Basham:

On 11/11/2020, the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

<b>IRB ID:</b>	STUDY001714
<b>Title:</b>	Relationship of prior experience and prior role as educator to the effectiveness of a principal

The IRB determined that the proposed activity does not constitute research involving human subjects as defined by DHHS and FDA regulations.

IRB review and approval is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities constitute human subjects research, please submit a new application to the IRB for a determination.

While not requiring IRB approval and oversight, your project activities should be conducted in a manner that is consistent with the ethical principles of your profession. If this project is program evaluation or quality improvement, do not refer to the project as research and do not include the assigned IRB ID or IRB contact information in the consent document or any resulting publications or presentations.

Sincerely,


Various Menzel  
IRB Research Compliance Administrator

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**Institutional Review Boards / Research Integrity & Compliance**  
FWA No. 00001669  
University of South Florida / 3702 Spectrum Blvd., Suite 165 / Tampa, FL 33612 / 813-974-5638

**Figure A1.** Letter from Institutional Review Board stating approval is not required for the study.

## Appendix B: School District Approval Letter

School Board	 <b>PUBLIC SCHOOLS</b> Preparing Students for Life	Superintendent of Schools Deputy Superintendent, Instruction Deputy Superintendent, Operations Acting Chief of Schools, Administration General Manager Office of Strategy Management
<p>April 10, 2020</p> <p>Greg Basham</p> <p>Dear Greg Basham:</p> <p>The _____ County Public School district has agreed to participate in your research proposal, <i>Relationship of Prior Experience and Prior Role as an Educator to the leadership effectiveness as a Principal</i>. A copy of this letter <b><u>MUST</u></b> be available to all participants to assure them your research has been approved by the district. <b>Your approval number is RR1920-49. You must refer to this number in all correspondence.</b> Approval is given for your research under the following conditions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) _____ Assistant Superintendent of Leadership, Professional Development, and School Transformation, will be your point of contact. All research activities must go through and be approved by _____ You may contact _____ at her district email,</li><li>2) Confidentiality must be assured for all. That is, <b><u>ALL DATA MUST BE AGGREGATED SUCH THAT THE PARTICIPANTS CANNOT BE IDENTIFIED.</u></b> Participants include the district, principals, administrators, teachers, support personnel, students and parents.</li><li>3) Any data <b><u>MUST</u></b> be <b><u>DESTROYED</u></b> when the project has been completed.</li><li>4) Since you are an employee of the _____ County Public Schools, all work related to this research <b>must be done outside your normal working hours</b> unless your administrator believes the research is a function of your position.</li><li>5) If this work is <b><u>not part of your job, you cannot use the school mail or email system</u></b> to send or receive any documents.</li><li>6) Research approval does not constitute the use of the district's equipment, software, email, or district mail service. In addition, requests that result in extra work by the district such as data analysis, programming or assisting with electronic surveys, may have a cost borne by the researcher.</li></ol>		

**Figure B1.** Letter outlining conditions of the research approval.

Page 2

- 7) This approval WILL EXPIRE ON 06/30/2020. You will have to contact us at that time if you feel your research approval should be extended.
- 8) Prior to presenting your research at any conferences or submitting it to any publications, our office must approve your proposed presentation/publication.
- 9) A copy of your research findings must be submitted to this department and for our files.

Good luck with your endeavor. If you have any questions, please advise.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Julie McLeod".

Julie McLeod, Manager  
Strategic Data and Evaluation  
Office of Strategy Management

JM/kw

**Figure B1. (Continued)**

## Appendix C: Permission to Publish

Tue 27/07/2021 15:14

To: Gregory Basham

Hi,

You get that approval from me 😊 Based upon what I read and the changes you've made, I see no reason why you would not be able to publish your findings. I, therefore, wish you the best of luck. Please keep me posted as you submit.

Respectfully,

*Kimberly A.*

*Ph.D.*

Coordinator

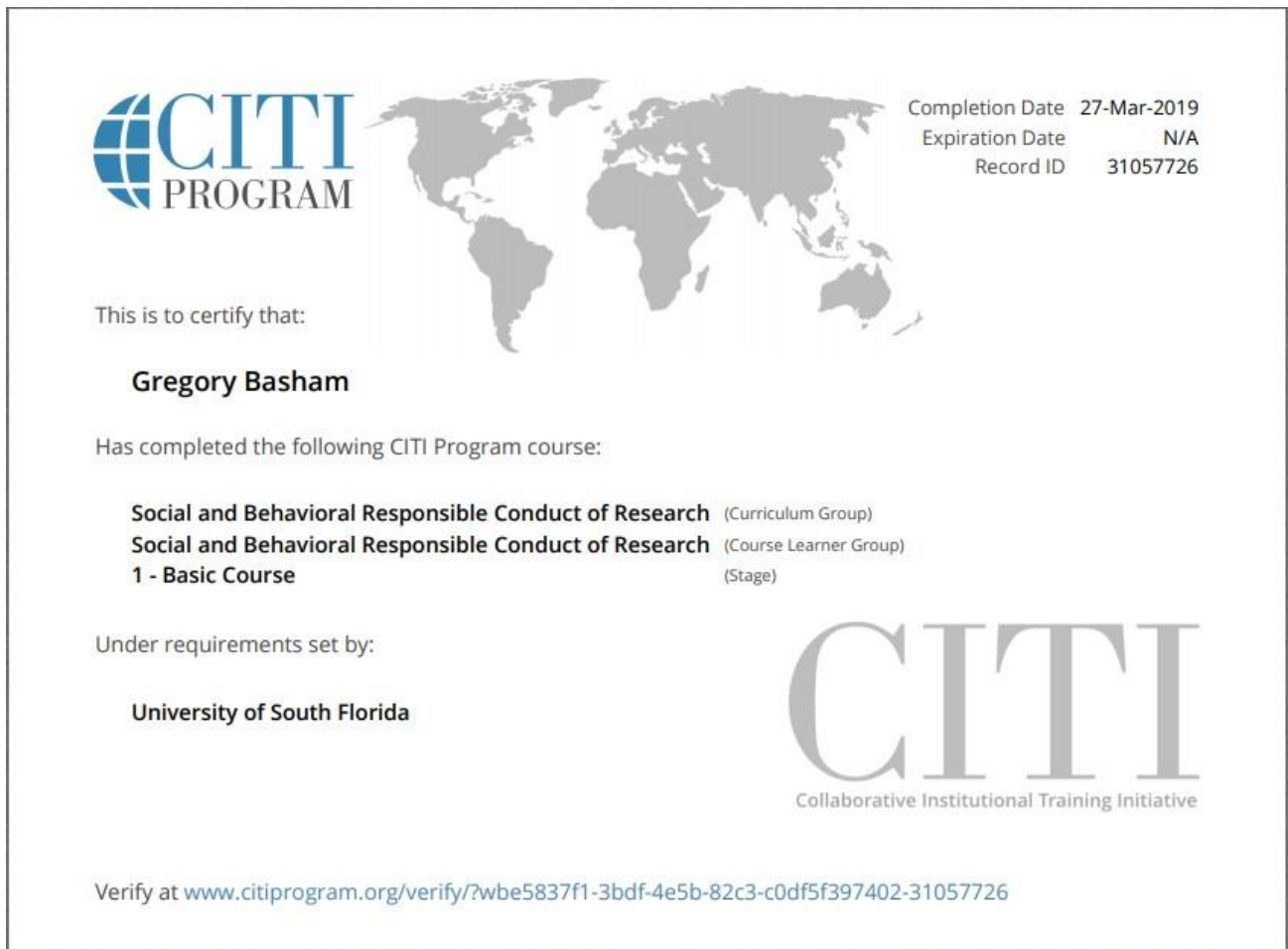
Research and Evaluation

County Public Schools

...

**Figure C1.** Email confirming permission to publish.

**Appendix D: CITI Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research**



The image shows a CITI Program certification certificate. It features the CITI PROGRAM logo on the left, a world map in the background, and a table of completion details on the right. The certificate certifies Gregory Basham for completing the 'Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research 1 - Basic Course'. It also lists the institution as the University of South Florida and provides a verification URL at the bottom.

Completion Date	27-Mar-2019
Expiration Date	N/A
Record ID	31057726

This is to certify that:

**Gregory Basham**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

**Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research** (Curriculum Group)  
**Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research** (Course Learner Group)  
**1 - Basic Course** (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

**University of South Florida**

Verify at [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wbe5837f1-3bdf-4e5b-82c3-c0df5f397402-31057726](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wbe5837f1-3bdf-4e5b-82c3-c0df5f397402-31057726)

**Figure D1.** CITI Program Certification.

# School Leadership Framework

## Five Core Competencies for School Leaders

### DOMAIN – Instructional Leadership

#### Achievement Focus and Results Orientation

- Holds self and others accountable for high academic achievement of all students.
- Creates and communicates a clear, compelling vision of high academic achievement and inspires others to fulfill the vision by gaining buy-in and commitment.
- Sets challenging goals. Demonstrates persistence and overcomes obstacles to achieve goals.
- Exhibits a commitment to equity and creates a sense of urgency to close achievement gaps and prepare all students for college and career success.

#### Instructional Expertise

- Conducts high-quality classroom observations, identifies effective teaching practice, and understands pedagogy that results in improved student learning.
- Uses data to differentiate instructional support and interventions. Supports teachers in using data to differentiate instruction.
- Ensures students master standards by aligning curriculum, instructional strategies and assessments.

Figure E1. The five core competencies used by the school district as leadership standards.

## **DOMAIN – Human Capital Management**

- Provides clear expectations for staff performance and communicates success and needed improvements regularly.
- Uses multiple methods to evaluate teacher and staff effectiveness and provides timely, targeted and actionable feedback.
- Uses student and observation data to plan and target job-embedded and professional development and support for teachers.
- Effectively identifies high and low performers, retains high performers, and develops or exits low performers.
- Distributes and develops staff leadership and builds teacher teams able to advance teaching and learning.
- Exhibits effective recruitment, interviewing and selection skills that lead to quality hiring decisions.
- Effectively assigns teachers to classes and provides quality onboarding experiences for new teachers.

### **Managing and Developing People**

## **DOMAIN – Organizational Leadership**

- Establishes collaborative relationships with internal and external stakeholders to achieve objectives.
- Creates a positive and safe environment for teachers, students, and the community.
- Resolves conflict in a direct but constructive manner, seeking “win-win” solutions.
- Embraces diverse viewpoints and solicits stakeholder in decision-making.
- Communicates effectively with all stakeholders.
- Motivates, inspires, and moves other adults toward ownership and action.
- Regularly reflects, accurately assesses own strengths and growth areas, and seeks feedback and professional development to improve.

### **Culture and Relationship Building**

- Collects, analyzes, and uses multiple forms of data to make decisions.
- Identifies problems, analyzes root causes and develops effective strategies to resolve issues.

### **Problem Solving and Strategic Change Management**

- Develops and implements effective action plans and adapts to changing circumstances.
- Proactively plans and creates systems to accomplish school-wide goals.
- Builds buy-in from diverse stakeholders and overcomes resistance to advance school improvement.

Figure E1. (Continued)

## Appendix F: Key Performance Indicators

### Key Performance Indicators

School:	OBJECTIVE	MEASURE	2017-2018 Results	Target 2018-2019	2018-2019 Results	Target 2019-2020
Graduation Rate	KG Reading Readiness	Percentage of students who are "ready" for kindergarten	Fall 2018: *	Fall 2019: *	Fall 2019:	Fall 2020:
	Grade 3 ELA	Percentage of 3rd grade students who earn a Level 3 or higher				
	Attendance	Percentage of students with attendance $\geq$ 90%				
	Behavior	Percentage of students with zero suspensions				
	Course Performance	Percentage of students who passed all core ELA & math courses (grades 6-9)				
	9th Grade GPA	Percentage of 9th grade students with a cumulative state GPA of 2.0 or higher				
	Graduation Requirements	Percentage of students meeting the ELA/reading grad requirement				
	Graduation Rate	Percentage of students meeting the Algebra I grad requirement				
		Percentage of students who graduate within 4 years				
		Percentage of students reporting, "I am proud to attend this school"				
Building Strong Culture & Relationships	Customer Satisfaction	Percentage of support staff reporting, "I would recommend this school to others"				
		Percentage of parents reporting, "I would recommend this school to others"				
		Percentage of students reporting, "I feel safe at my school"				
	Safety	Percentage of parents reporting, "The school is safe"				
		Percentage of support staff reporting, "I feel safe at this school"				
		Percentage of students reporting, "Bullying is addressed at my school"				
		Percentage of instructional staff reporting "There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school."				
	Collaboration	Percentage of students reporting, "Students at this school treat each other with respect"				
		Percentage of parents reporting, "I am treated as a partner in shared decisions that affect my student"				
	Student-Centered Education	Percentage of students reporting, "My teachers help me set goals for my classes"				
	Percentage of students reporting, "My teachers help me stay on track to reach my goals"					
Student-Connectedness	Percentage of students reporting, "There are many ways to be involved in school activities, clubs, and events"					

**Figure F1.** Example of Key Performance Indicators used a part of the Principals Performance Evaluation.



Key Performance Indicators (continued)

GOAL AREA	OBJECTIVE	MEASURE	2017-18 Results	Target 2018-19	2018-19 Results	Target 2019-20
Communication	Family Engagement	Percentage of parents responding positively on the communication section of parent survey				
	Student Communication	Percentage of students reporting, "My teachers keep me informed about my progress"				

School Grade Data

GOAL AREA	OBJECTIVE	MEASURE	2017-18 Results	Target 2018-19	2018-19 Results	Target 2019-20
School Grade	ELA	Percentage of students scoring a Level 3 or higher				
	Math	Percentage of students scoring a Level 3 or higher				
	Science	Percentage of students scoring a Level 3 or higher				
	Social Studies	Percentage of students scoring a Level 3 or higher (MS Civics & HS US History)				
	ELA	Percentage of students achieving a learning gain from prior year to current year in ELA				
	Math	Percentage of students achieving a learning gain from prior year to current year in math				
	ELA	Percentage of lowest performing students achieving a learning gain in ELA				
	Math	Percentage of lowest performing students achieving a learning gain in math				
	MS Acceleration	Percentage of students passing HS math EOC or Industry Certification				
	College & Career Acceleration**	Percentage of graduates earning acceleration				
Totals	Total number of points earned by all components					
	Number of components for school grade					
	Total number points /Number components					
Acceleration	Number of industry certifications earned					
	Number of AP exams passed					
	Number of Dual Enrollment courses passed					
	Number of IB exams passed					

Figure F1. (Continued)

## Appendix G: Leadership Survey

### Leadership Survey

Employee Name:  
 Employee ID:  
 Evaluated Site Number:

Survey Prompt	Ratings					Average Rating
	Strongly Agree (4 points)	Agree (3 points)	Disagree (2 points)	Strongly Disagree (1 point)	Total	
Holds self and others accountable for the achievement of all students. <i>(Achievement Focus and Results Orientation)</i>						
Identifies effective teaching practices that result in student learning. <i>(Instructional Expertise)</i>						
Regularly communicates clear expectations for staff performance. <i>(Managing and Developing People)</i>						
Provides targeted, timely, and actionable feedback related to teacher and staff performance. <i>(Managing and Developing People)</i>						
Supports and facilitates ongoing, targeted professional development to strengthen instructional practice. <i>(Managing and Developing People)</i>						
Distributes and develops staff leadership and builds teacher teams able to advance teaching and learning. <i>(Managing and Developing People)</i>						
Establishes collaborative relationships with all stakeholders. <i>(Culture and Relationship Building)</i>						
Communicates effectively with all stakeholders. <i>(Culture and Relationship Building)</i>						
Uses multiple forms of data to make decisions. <i>(Problem Solving and Strategic Change Management)</i>						
Proactively plans and creates systems to accomplish goals and objectives. <i>(Problem Solving and Strategic Change Management)</i>						

Figure G1. Survey completed by the school staff for the principal’s performance evaluation.

## Appendix H: Journey to the Principalship

# Pathway to the Principalship

### Apply to the Program

When a teacher with a master's degree in Education Leadership wants to pursue a school leadership role within the district, they apply, screen, and are accepted into the **Aspiring Leaders Program**.

### Step 1 - Aspiring Leaders Program

Over six months, aspiring school leaders are **provided with the tools, training, and job-embedded learning** to enhance their practice and become a successful Assistant Principal.

### Step 2 – New Assistant Principal Program

After being appointed an Assistant Principal, new leaders are **paired with a trained mentor and attend professional development sessions** focused on the five core competencies over a two-year period.

### Step 3 – Aspiring Principals Preparation Program

After three years, an Assistant Principal can apply for the Aspiring Principals Preparation Program. The program includes professional development designed to enhance the leaders practice in the five core competencies and incorporate **hands-on experience relevant to a principal role**. Participants are mentored by their principal and bi-weekly meetings with their principal coach further guides their journey.

### Step 4 – New Principals Program

After being appointed the new leader is assigned a **principal coach who meets with them weekly** for the first year of principalship. New principals attend six workshops throughout their first year with their peers and trained leadership coaches. These sessions are designed to **support the leaders transition** to the role.

*Figure H1.* The four components of the pipeline school leaders must complete as part of the program.

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# Aspiring Leaders Program

The Aspiring Leaders Program (ALP) is the first step in the journey to become a principal. Aspiring leaders must apply for and be accepted into the program. To be eligible, candidates must have an Educational Leadership degree and at least three years of effective teaching experience.

This six-month program is designed to prepare teachers to be successful assistant principals with a combination of professional development sessions and experiential learning designed to enhance their leadership ability. Aspiring Leaders Program participants engage in professional development courses that include both leadership and technical training aligned with state leadership standards and the school district's leadership competencies. The program is designed to prepare future school leaders to effectively serve as *instructional leaders, managers of human capital and organizational leaders*.

## **The Aspiring Leaders Program includes:**

Introduction to the role of Assistant Principal

10 sessions designed to develop the core competencies

Mentoring and support from the participants principal and assistant principal

Job embedded learning activities

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## **Shadowing Experienced School Leaders**

This includes eight hours of shadowing with highly effective principals and assistant principals. The process is designed to enable future school leaders to step out of the classroom and observe leadership skills in action and serve as an opportunity to gain a broader understanding of what school administration really looks like in a typical school day. The participants use a competency-based reflection form to capture their thoughts and observations of the school leaders applying leadership standards in action.

Upon entering the Aspiring Leaders Program, each participant reflects on their level of competency based on the feedback from the screening process and learns about their strengths, as well as identified areas for growth and improvement. Participants set goals to achieve during the program and refer to them throughout the six months to benchmark progress.

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*Figure II.* Description of the Aspiring Leaders Program.

# New Assistant Principal Program

The New Assistant Principal Program (NAPP) is the second formal step along the Principal Pipeline, which is designed to help identify, recruit and train future school leaders. After completing the Aspiring Leaders Program, candidates are eligible to become an assistant principal. After being appointed an assistant principal, new leaders are immediately placed in the New Assistant Principals Program. The New Assistant Principal Program involves *job-embedded learning activities* and places a heavy emphasis on *collaboration with a highly trained assistant principal mentor* who has proven experience and success as a school leader.

Participants meet with their school's principal to write two competency-based goals that serve to focus their growth for the upcoming school year. The induction program provides development in both leadership and technical skills with the overall goal of developing leaders who can positively impact student learning.

## NEW ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL PROGRAM INCLUDES:

12 Professional Development Session over Two Years

Mentoring from a trained Assistant Principal Mentor

### Mentoring

New Assistant Principal Program participants are assigned an experienced assistant principal mentor. These experienced and highly effective school leaders are assigned to new assistant principals to support their development in their new role. Assistant principals have regular contact with their mentor and participate in collaborative coaching sessions. Mentors serve as a thought partner and help their mentees develop the best solutions and making a difference for teachers, students, and community.

After completing the New Assistant Principal Program and serving a minimum of three years as an assistant principal, aspiring leaders are eligible to apply for the Aspiring Principals Preparation Program, the next step in the principal pipeline.

**Figure J1.** Description of the New Assistant Principal Program.

## Appendix K: Aspiring Principals Preparation Program Overview

# Aspiring Principals Preparation Program

The Aspiring Principals Preparation Program (APPP) program is a pre-service program designed to train aspiring principals. After completing the Aspiring Leaders Program, the New Assistant Principal Program, and serving a minimum of three years as an assistant principal, aspiring principals are eligible to apply for the Aspiring Principals Preparation Program.

The program is delivered over two years and is designed to further develop the leadership capacity of aspiring principals and earn their principal certification. These leaders participate in highly collaborative sessions on how to create positive school culture to positively impact teacher and student performance. The program involves *experiential learning activities* that are aligned to state leadership standards and the school district's principal competencies.

### *Aspiring Principals Preparation Program includes:*

6 sessions in year 1 and year 2

Key topic sessions that address the support functions of a principal, such as budgeting and operations

Four required courses designed to develop the five core competencies

Mentoring by their current school principal

Monthly coaching during Year Two from a District-trained, experienced principal coach

Year 1 - Action Research Project focused on student culture and equity

Year 2 - Principal Entry Plan Exit Activity

### MENTORING AND COACHING

A focus of the Aspiring Principals Preparation Program, participants are mentored by their school principal to provide ongoing support and feedback of action learning activities during both years. In Year Two, participants meet monthly with an experienced principal coach who supports their development through reflection of their leadership experiences and development of a Principal Entry Plan. The relationship with the principal coach continues as assistant principals transition to the role of principal and enter the New Principal Program.

**Figure K1.** Description of the Aspiring Principals Preparation Program.

## Appendix L: New Principal Program Overview

# New Principal Program

The **New Principal Program (NPP)** is the final stage in the journey. After completing the Aspiring Leaders Program, the New Assistant Principal Program, and successfully exiting the Aspiring Principals Preparation Program, candidates are eligible to become a principal. Upon appointment as a principal, participants immediately enter a two-year designed to support their development as a school leader.

The New Principal Program utilizes *job-embedded, experiential learning* and places a heavy emphasis on *weekly collaboration with a principal coach*, who has experienced substantial success as a principal and now, is solely dedicated to coaching. The New Principal Program is aligned to state leadership standards and the school district's five core competencies.

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### New Principal Induction Program includes:

- Support for Principal Entry and Transition
- Six full days of professional development in Year 1
- Six Half days of professional development in Year 2
- Support from a trained, experienced Principal Coach

### Coaching and on the Job Support

During the New Principal Program, new principals meet weekly in year one and biweekly in year two with a certified principal coach. This is designed to support their continued growth toward becoming effective school leaders through reflection and collaboration. These coaches are fully released leaders, who are experienced and have a proven track record for success.

**Figure L1.** Description of the New Principal Program.