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A Case Study on Principal Selection Practices and Preparedness of Assistant Principals for
Principal Selection Processes

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DOCTORAL COMMITTEE

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A Case Study on Principal Selection Practices and Preparedness of Assistant Principals for Principal Selection Processes

Joshua Work, DOL

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ABSTRACT

Historically, the role of the assistant principal has served as a stepping-stone to the principalship. However, research has shown that the assistant principalship may not serve as an effective training ground for the principalship. Given that the role of the principal has evolved while the role of the assistant principal has remained stagnant, this raises questions about the preparedness of assistant principals for the selection and hiring process of becoming a principal and transitioning effectively into the principalship.

This qualitative case study investigated the selection procedures and criteria used during the principal selection processes for a Mid-Atlantic, suburban school district. This study incorporated the perceptions and experiences of eight district leaders on how they viewed the preparedness of assistant principals for their organization's principal selection processes. The intended significance of the study was to add to the limited research on principal selection processes and the preparedness of assistant principals for principal selection processes.

The key themes discovered from the data included: (a) overview of the application process, (b) the idea of "fit", (c) local issues, (d) training, (e) internal and external candidates, (f) implicit bias, and (g) recommendations. Additional sub-themes discovered in the interview data included the roles between the principal and assistant principal, the "natural cut-off" phenomenon during the interview stage, the influence of "principal-makers" on assistant

principal preparation, the number of candidates, home-grown leaders, and the reliance of intuition by decision-makers during principal selection processes.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

Historically, the role of the assistant principal has served as a stepping-stone to the principalship (Chan, Webb, & Bowen, 2003; Hartzell, Williams, & Nelson, 1995; Marshall, 1992; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993; Winter & Partenheimer, 2002). However, research has shown that the assistant principalship may not serve as an effective training ground for the principalship (Koru, 1993; Kwan, 2009; Mertz, 2006; Webb & Vulliamy, 1995). The administrative responsibilities of the assistant principal and principal have traditionally been different (Chan et al., 2003; Kelly, 1987; Panyako & Rorie, 1987). According to Crow (2006), the role of the principal has had “increased accountability and public scrutiny, [which] has added to the complexity of the principal’s job, requiring principals to be entrepreneurial, to be more focused on student outcomes and instructional processes, and to be more connected with their communities” (p. 316). Conversely, Sun (2012) reported that the daily duties performed by assistant principals in 2010 did not differ much from the daily duties performed in 1994. Of all the daily duties performed by assistant principals—discipline and attendance consumed the majority of their time each day (Glanz, 1994; Sun, 2012).

While the role of the principal has changed dramatically over the past few decades (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Levine, 2005; Rousmaniere, 2013), the common duties of assistant principals have changed little over the last forty years (Hausman, Nebeker, McCreary, & Donaldson, 2002; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012; Reed & Himmler, 1985; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). According to Kelly (1987), the assumption that the assistant principalship provides sufficient training for the principalship is a “myth of education” (p. 12). Given that the role of the principal has evolved while the role of the assistant principal has remained stagnant,

this raises questions about the preparedness of assistant principals for the selection and hiring process for becoming a principal and transitioning smoothly into the principalship.

Selection criteria and procedures for principal positions have varied significantly (Baron, 1990), and are dependent upon the local issues of a school district (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983). Greene (1954) researched elementary school principal selection in the United States and believed that as the role of the principal transformed over time, it would bring new methods of principal selection. However, principal selection procedures have remained largely unchanged for several decades (McIntyre, 1974; Wendel & Breed, 1988). Baltzell and Dentler (1983) undertook what they believed to be the “...first national effort to inquire into the means by which school districts choose leaders” (p. 1) and reported several problematic selection procedures including: non-specific vacancy announcements, limited outreach, lack of psychometrics in selection procedures, small volume of applicants, and a reliance on “fit” for an open position. Researchers have continued to note problematic selection practices that school districts are using when hiring for an open principalship position (Anderson, 1991; Baron, 1990; Blackmore, Thomson, & Barty, 2006; Cornett, 1983; Gronn & Lacey, 2006; Hammond, Muffs, & Sciasca, 2001; Kwan & Walker, 2009; Parkay & Armstrong, 1987; Rammer, 2007; White & White, 1998).

Furthermore, research has shown that the quality of applicants for the principalship is steadily declining across the nation (Bloom & Krovetz, 2001; Donaldson, Bowe, Mackenzie, & Marnik, 2004; McCreight, 2001). Many assistant principals have reported not having enough training to prepare them for a smooth transition to the role of principal (Chan et al., 2003; Hartzell et al., 1995; Kelly, 1987). According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2017), “many school districts across the country are facing a teacher and principal shortage that requires immediate attention and careful long-term planning” (p. 2).

Problem Statement

Although the role of the principal has transformed over the past few decades, the role of the assistant principal has remained mostly unchanged for the past forty years (Hausman et al., 2002; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Reed & Himmler, 1985; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). This raises questions about the preparedness of assistant principals for the selection and hiring process for becoming a principal and transitioning seamlessly into the principalship. Additionally, school districts may find difficulty in forecasting, creating, and sustaining an effective succession plan for principal positions.

Across the United States, school districts are reporting shortages of highly qualified candidates for principalships (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Research continues to show that the position of assistant principal may not serve as an effective role for preparing to be a principal (Koru, 1993; Kwan, 2009; Mertz, 2006; Webb & Vulliamy, 1995), even though it has been considered a stepping-stone to the principalship. Furthermore, the role of the assistant principal continues to be underrepresented in literature and research (Glanz, 1994; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Ribbins, 1997). Given these findings, one might indicate that assistant principals are not prepared for the role of principals, let alone the principal selection process. How then are successful principal candidates selected? Few researchers have asked district leaders to reflect on their organization's principal selection process and how they view the preparedness of assistant principals for the selection process. School districts will continue to hire principals; however, what procedures ensure that they are selecting the best candidate? This study intended to contribute to the limited body of research by gathering experiences from district leaders about principal selection to apprise district policies and preparedness practices for assistant principals.

Purpose and Scope

This study investigated the selection procedures and criteria used during the principal selection processes of a Mid-Atlantic, suburban school district. Additionally, this study concentrated on the perceptions and experiences of district leaders about how they viewed the preparedness of assistant principals for their organization's principal selection process. Also, the study sought to increase district leaders' understanding of current principal selection practices and generate data to inform leadership development strategies regarding assistant principal preparedness for principal selection processes.

Significance of the Study

This study will add to the limited research on principal selection processes and the preparedness of assistant principals for principal selection processes. Selecting a principal is one of the most important decisions for school districts (Retelle, 2010), as research shows that effective principals can lead their schools to high student achievement (Hallinger, Lee, & Ko, 2014; Mizell, 2010; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003).

There continues to be the "unresolved logical contradiction" as described by Baltzell and Dentler (1983, p. 5) regarding the importance of the principal role not reflecting district efforts during selection processes. Little continues to be known about how or why a candidate for a principalship is selected, and principal selection research is dominated with anecdotal, unpublished procedures (Schmitt & Schechtman, 1990; Hooker, 2000; Blackmore et al., 2006; Kwan & Walker, 2009). Understanding leadership succession planning and role socialization as a principal, beginning with the selection process, is imperative for organizational success in school districts. Schein (1987) indicates that the pace and success rates of socialization within an

organization have lasting impacts on the organization's culture. The selection criteria and procedures are important for district leaders to understand as principals may "draw their sense of mission in a significant degree from their selection experiences" (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983, p. 16). In terms of succession planning, the transition year from assistant principal to principal is critical in setting attitudes, confidence levels, values, and subsequent perceptions of his/her administrative career (Berlew & Hall, 1966; Buchanan, 1974).

Principal succession planning is important for school districts to consider as annual principal turnover rates throughout the United States range from 15%-30% each year (DeAngelis & White, 2011; Fuller & Young, 2009; Loeb, Kalogrides, & Horng, 2010). Principal retention is also an area of concern for school districts as approximately 18,000 school principals nationwide leave their jobs each year (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). The annual turnover rates for principals may be connected to the high turnover rates that principals experience within their first few years as instructional leaders. According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2016), "The average principal now spends only two to three years in each school. In fact, nearly 50% of new principals leave by their third year in the profession" (para. 1). Succession planning for principalships may demand further consideration from school districts as the profession is projected to grow over the next decade. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) reports that employment for K-12 school principals is projected to grow 8% between 2016 to 2026. Principal turnover and retention rates may influence the selection practices, and succession planning of school districts as the professional role is projected to grow across the United States.

Local school districts in Maryland continue to report an increase in the projected need of school principals to replace those who are leaving the profession. From 2013 to 2016, the

Table 1

Staffing Projections of Local School Systems in Maryland for School Principals

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Projected Number of Principals Needed	77	83	100	139	151

Note: Adapted from “Principal Supply and Non-classroom Supply” Dashboards by Maryland State Department of Education (2016), retrieved from <https://mldscenter.maryland.gov/p12Dashboards.html>

projected need for school principals to fill positions in Maryland steadily increased (Table 1).

Additionally, the supply of graduates from Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) in Maryland completing principal/administrator programs has been steadily decreasing since 2012 (Maryland Department of Education, 2016).

The decrease in the supply of graduates and an increase in projected need of principals may create challenges for school districts across Maryland in terms of principal succession planning. Aside from the decrease in the supply of graduates within Maryland, it is important to note that across the United States, research shows that one fundamental problem of filling principal vacancies is not about quantity, it is about finding quality applicants (Mitgang, 2003).

Another intent of this study was to add to the limited body of research on assistant principals. The position of assistant principal has been under-researched (Glanz, 1994; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Ribbins, 1997) and is “generally ignored” in the professional literature (Marshall & Hooley, 2006, p. 52). This study contributed to the research on principal selection processes and the preparedness of assistant principals for principal selection processes. These insights may provide an understanding of the natural progression of assistant principals to principals, as “it is imperative that district leaders identify and promote assistant principals who will be effective principals” (Retelle, 2010, p. 1). This study may also be useful to district leaders by providing data to inform leadership development strategies regarding assistant principal preparedness for principal selection processes.

Theoretical Framework

Principal selection criteria and procedures vary significantly (Baron, 1990) and are dependent upon the local issues of a school district (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983). Kwan and Walker (2009) state that little is known about why or how a candidate is selected for a principalship. The purpose of this study was to investigate the selection procedures and criteria used during the principal selection processes for a Mid-Atlantic, suburban school district. The guiding framework for this study was the decision-making theory of Stanovich and West (2000). Decision-making theorists have generally agreed on the idea that people use one of two cognitive processes when making a decision. Stanovich and West (2000) proposed the two cognitive processes of System 1 and System 2. This framework guided the investigation on why or how certain assistant principals are selected during the hiring process for the principalship.

The cognitive operations of System 1 are fast, effortless, associative, emotionally charged, governed by habit, and can be difficult to control (Kahneman, 2003). The operations of System 2 are slower, deliberative, controlled, and potentially rule-governed (Evans, 2008). System 1 and System 2 operations are closely tied to hiring and application decisions as district leaders may use a combination of rapid/low effort and slower/deliberative decision processes when selecting principal candidates. With this two-stage approach, decision-making researchers have identified several cognitive, motivational, and contextual factors that influence hiring and application choices (Boiney, Kennedy, & Nye, 1997; Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Chinander & Schweitzer, 2003; Hsee, Blount, Loewenstein, & Bazerman, 1999; Synder & Swann, 1978; Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). This study used the framework of System 1 and System 2 decision-making to explore the decision-making processes of the school system decision-makers who select assistant principals to principalship positions.

Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to understand current principal selection practices and preparedness of assistant principals as reported by district leaders. Specifically, I sought an understanding of how district leaders viewed the preparedness of assistant principals for principal selection processes. This study utilized a phenomenological qualitative approach in order to identify, understand, and analyze, “the underlying meaning of the statements to develop themes about and descriptions of the phenomenon” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2009, p. 239).

Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews with district leaders including central office staff and school-based administrators. Purposeful sampling with district leaders was used to select interview participants (Creswell, 2019). Semi-structured interviews were scheduled with individuals who had experience participating in principal selection panels for the school district of this case study. I conducted eight face-to-face interviews in order to provide a general view of selection practices from the organization at the focus of this case study. Interview questions were designed to gain insights from participants related to the research questions (Appendix A).

The interviews were transcribed and coded, and themes were identified as they emerged related to the research questions. Each participant was provided a written letter of consent, confidentiality agreement, and an explanation of the study before being interviewed (Appendix B). Participants for the interviews were selected based on purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2019), and follow-up interviews were scheduled using chain-sampling (Patton, 1990). This sampling method was selected to deliberately interview individuals with knowledge of the principal selection process for the organization at the center of this study. I utilized chain-sampling

(Patton, 1990) to identify participants who knew people or cases that were information-rich related to the research topic.

Research Questions

The following research question and sub-questions focused this study:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of district leaders regarding the principal selection process?
 - 1a: What selection criteria and procedures do district leaders report?
 - 1b: What factors influence selection criteria and procedures as reported by district leaders?
 - 1c: How do district leaders view the preparedness of assistant principals for the principal selection criteria and procedures?

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, I confined the scope of the study to a single school district, which limits the generalizability of the results to the broader population of school districts. However, the results of this study are somewhat generalizable to districts which use similar selection criteria and procedures. This study only addressed the views of district leaders from the school district at the center of this case study and therefore does not represent the views of all participants involved in the interview process— the phenomenon being researched. Additionally, I only conducted eight interviews, which may influence the saturation of the constructs being studied. However, the vibrant nature of the qualitative data from this study may provide valuable information to district leaders about their organization's principal selection processes and the preparedness of assistant principals for the principalship.

It is important to note that I, the researcher, served as an assistant principal throughout this study. Additionally, I aspire to become a principal in the future, and this may entail navigating a principal selection process. Therefore, my positionality within the social constructs under investigation is important to note (Merriam et al., 2001). Due to my perspective of the constructs, the study and findings may unconsciously include bias. Merriam (1998) summarizes the concept of researcher positionality and final interpretations:

The researcher brings a construction of reality to the research situation, which interacts with other people's constructions or interpretations of the phenomenon being studied.

The final product of this type of study is yet another interpretation by the researcher of others' views filtered through his or her own. (p. 22)

My own views of instructional leadership are influenced by my professional experiences in the public sector and prior military service. Before becoming a classroom teacher, I was a section leader in the United States Marine Corps Reserve. The leadership styles and succession planning that I experienced during my ten years of military service significantly shaped my views of instructional leadership. Organizational values such as honor, courage, and commitment continue to be a foundation for my leadership style.

Additionally, leading by example and being responsible for "training up" the next generation of leaders are standards from the military that have shaped my views on succession planning in the field of education. As a classroom teacher, I remember a former assistant principal asking me about my future and sharing that he believed that I should explore becoming a school administrator. After five years as a teacher, I applied to be an assistant principal and was selected to be an administrator at the middle school level. My experience as an assistant principal with aspirations of becoming a principal has influenced my views on succession planning and

selection practices. Specifically, I see selection practices as one critical step in succession planning for the achievement of any school organization. However, as a researcher, I needed to ensure that my views did not influence the views of my participants. In order to mitigate the prospect of unconscious bias, I “bracketed” my knowledge and experience related to the constructs of the study. Bracketing was utilized to address the effects of preconception and not “overwhelm the perspectives of the participants” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2009, p. 287).

One key limitation of qualitative studies and purposeful sampling is “key informant bias” (Pelto & Pelto, 1975, p. 7). This study relied on a relatively small number of informants to provide interview data. Although these informants were purposefully selected, there is no guarantee that their views represent the entire group of district leaders. Specifically, key informant bias is described as the sample assuming greater uniformity than actually exists within the group as a whole (Poggie, 1972). Although these limitations do exist, qualitative samples tend to be purposeful (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). This is usually due to the small sample size of qualitative research and the selection of individuals who are critical in providing insight into the theories being testing in the study (Creswell, 2019).

Operational Definitions

Assistant Principal: Refers to the job or role within a school that is designated to fulfill leadership requirements, coordination of daily operations, and supervision of the school program as instructed by the principal (Sun, 2012).

Candidate: For this study, the term “candidate” will reflect an individual who is currently an assistant principal applying to be a principal.

Decision-Making Theory: The concept of how or why individuals make certain decisions under a particular set of factors including cognitive, motivational, and contextual factors (Larrick, 2009).

Fit: The “interpersonal perceptions of a candidate’s physical presence, projection of a certain self-confidence and assertiveness, and embodiment of community values and methods of operation” (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983, p. 7).

Normalized principal identity: The concept suggested by Blackmore et al. (2006) that principals are selected to match the local characteristics of current principals.

Selection: Selection refers to the process by which an organization identifies applicants with the necessary knowledge and characteristics to achieve the goals of the organization (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2010).

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters: Chapter 1) Introduction; Chapter 2) Literature Review; Chapter 3) Research Methodology; Chapter 4) Results and Analysis; Chapter 5) Discussion. Chapter 1 includes the background information, statement of the research problem, purpose and scope, the significance of the study, research methodology, theoretical framework, research questions, limitations, and operational definitions. Chapter 2 is a literature review of the role of the assistant principal, the role of the principal, theoretical perspective, principal selection criteria, and principal selection practices. Chapter 3 defines the proposed research methodology including the research design, data collection, interview participants, data analysis, validity, reliability, ethical issues, and the role of the researcher. Chapter 4 includes the results and

analysis of the study. Chapter 5 includes a discussion, implications for practice, implications for research, and conclusion.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review examines the role of the assistant principal, the role of the principal, theoretical considerations, preparation for the principalship, and principal selection practices. The purpose of reviewing the role of the assistant principal is to gain an understanding of how the position prepares candidates for the principal selection criteria and procedures. The role of the principal was surveyed to determine how the role of the assistant principal aligned with the principalship. Decision-making theories were used as a framework to gain an understanding of decisions made by interviewers regarding candidate selection and leadership succession practices. The literature review is organized into the following categories: the role of the assistant principal, the role of the principal, theoretical considerations, principal selection practices, preparation for the principalship, and a summary.

Role of Assistant Principal

The assistant principalship is a significant entry point into the field of school administration and is often viewed as a stepping-stone to the principalship (Daresh & Voss, 2001). Assistant principals should have the opportunity to develop and demonstrate the skills necessary to manage schools as instructional leaders through their daily responsibilities (Marshall, Mitchell, & Gross, 1990). Unfortunately, research has shown that the role of the assistant principal may not prepare individuals for the role of principal (Koru, 1993; Kwan, 2009; Mertz, 2006; Webb & Vulliamy, 1995). Furthermore, the position of assistant principal has been underutilized and under-researched (Austin & Brown, 1970; Glanz, 1994; Harvey, 1994; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Ribbins, 1997).

It is important to understand how the position of assistant principal has evolved in order to explore how the role has prepared assistant principals to assume principalships. In 1920, the National Organization of Elementary School Principals was founded. According to Goldman (1966), this organization may have been created to help generate professional interest in the role of principal throughout America. From 1920 to 1930, the number of principals in the United States doubled, and new administrative positions were added to help assist the principal in daily operations. The position of “general supervisor” was created to assist the principal with the following duties: attendance reports, collecting data, and coordinating events (Glanz, 2004). The role of the general supervisor eventually became known as “assistant principal” during the 1940s and early 1950s (Glanz, 2004). However, the role was seen as an advisor to the principal with little or no formal authority in the school.

The common duties of assistant principals have changed little over the last sixty years (Hausman et al., 2002; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Reed & Himmler, 1985; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). Additionally, there is no clear definition of the role and responsibilities of an assistant principal (Weller & Weller, 2002). Absent a clear definition of the role, the responsibilities of assistant principals are dependent on the delegation of duties by the district and the principals. The lack of a definitive role and job descriptions varying between schools in the same school district may present a challenge for school districts in preparing the next generation of principals. Despite the variation in job responsibilities, several tasks have traditionally characterized the daily routines of an assistant principal.

The first nation-wide study of assistant principals was conducted in the 1970s by Austin and Brown in partnership with the National Association of Elementary School Principals. The study surveyed 1,270 assistant principals regarding the role and function of assistant principals in

schools. The majority of assistant principals involved in the study spent their time on attendance and discipline (Austin & Brown, 1970). Stoner and Voorhies (1981) surveyed school administrators and teachers in Indiana to determine the role and function of the assistant principal. The respondents agreed that the roles currently performed by assistant principals mostly involved school discipline and attendance problems. Pellicer, Anderson, Keefe, Kelley, and McCleary (1988) conducted a longitudinal comparison of the role and function of school administrators as reported by Austin and Brown (1970). From 1970 to 1987, the role of the assistant principal had largely remained the same while there was a slight change in the role of the principal (Pellicer et al., 1988). One key difference in the findings was that assistant principals had seen an increase in the time allocated for teacher selection and evaluation (Pellicer et al., 1988).

The role of the assistant principal can be ambiguous and lack role clarity based on the duties assigned by the principal (Black, 1980). Scoggins and Bishop (1993) synthesized the work of 26 authors who studied the duties and responsibilities of assistant principals. According to Scoggins and Bishop (1993):

While there is no conclusive evidence that there is a set of duties and responsibilities for the assistant principal, these authors reported 20 duties common to the assistant principal. These duties include discipline, attendance, student activities, staff support and evaluation, building supervision, guidance, co-curricular activities, athletics, community agencies, master schedules, fill in for principal, building operations, budget, reports, transportation, curriculum, communications, cafeteria, school calendar, and lock and lockers. (p. 40)

Of the 20 duties reported, discipline was rated as the most common duty performed, with attendance being the second most common. Koru (1993) reported that assistant principals have limited access to the area of instructional leadership due to a heightened focus on conflict resolution. Koru concludes that the role of the assistant principal may not prepare an individual for the role of the principal.

Glanz (1994) surveyed nearly 200 New York City assistant principals in order to determine what duties assistant principals ideally should perform as compared to actual duties. Glanz reported that over 90% of the respondents indicated their main duties included discipline, parental complaints, lunch duty, substitute teacher coverage, and administrative paperwork. Glanz found that the duties and responsibilities of assistant principals differ from those of principals. Therefore, both Glanz (1994) and Koru (1993) indicate that the role of the assistant principal does not provide an effective training ground for becoming a principal.

Mertz (2000) conducted a study consisting of interviews with high school assistant principals and determined their various daily responsibilities and duties as follows:

Discipline, parking, athletics, lockers, dances, plays and other school events, open houses, new teacher support, intern supervision, graduation, liaison to other organizations or agencies, cafeteria duty, hall monitoring, state reporting records, special projects (e.g., accreditation, school improvement plans), going to meetings outside the building. (p. 6)

Of all of the duties assigned to the assistant principals, discipline consumed the majority of their time each day. The responsibilities for assistant principals seemed to focus on “organizational maintenance” (Marshall, 1992, p. 38) and tended to include a narrow scope of responsibilities that lacked overlapping systems required of instructional leaders.

Sun (2012) employed a Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient for the duties reported by Glanz (1994). Her findings confirmed that the daily duties performed by assistant principals in 2010 did not differ much from the daily duties performed in 1994. One key difference between Sun (2012) and Glanz (1994) was the qualitative data collected by Sun through 10 face to face interviews. One respondent shared that his role as an assistant principal had “strengthened his qualifications and abilities for the principal position while he was an assistant principal” (Sun, 2012, p. 168). However, most assistant principals believe that they do not receive enough training to prepare them to move easily into the principalship (Chan et al., 2003; Hartzell et al., 1995; Kelly, 1987). Furthermore, the quality of applicants for the principalship is steadily declining across the United States (Bloom & Krovetz, 2001; McCreight, 2001; Whitaker, 2001; Winter & Partenheimer, 2002). Despite these findings, Marshall, Mitchell, Gross, and Scott (1992) indicate, “the assistant principalship is a major recruitment position for the principalship and other administrative positions” (p. 80). It is important for researchers to understand the role of the principal and how best to prepare assistant principals to become principals.

Role of Principal

In the past, the majority of a principal’s day was filled with managerial duties (Erway, 2006). Although the role did include aspects of curriculum and instruction, the main responsibilities included daily operations, school maintenance, personnel, and communication with parents. However, beginning in the 1990s, there was a push in America for education reform (Collard, 2004). In 1994, Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) significantly revised elements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 in an effort to coordinate federal and state resources to improve student achievement. In 1996, the Interstate

School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards were released by the Council of Chief State School Officers to help guide leadership policy and improve school leadership preparation programs. Each of the six ISLCC standards included knowledge necessary for the standard, the dispositions needed to accomplish the standard, and performance indicators that could be observed in order to meet the standard criteria.

In 2002, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) ushered in a new era of school and state accountability. NCLB increased accountability on principals and thus on school systems by mandating punitive measures and corrective actions if schools failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals for student achievement based on standardized testing. The increased burden to meet AYP goals pressed states to focus on leadership reform in order to improve schools and student achievement. The ISLLC standards were revised in 2008 to further improve leadership policy, embrace principals as instructional leaders in their schools, and to promote success for every student.

The role of the principal has become more complex and has changed dramatically over the past few decades (Bredeson, 1993; Cooley & Shen, 2003; Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Levine, 2005; Rousmaniere, 2013). Recent federal education reform continues to increase scrutiny on principals. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) not only reauthorized ESEA of 1965 but refocused national efforts on student achievement and school accountability. In addition to ESSA of 2015, the next iteration of standards for educational leaders, the Professional Standards for Educational Leadership (PSEL), were released in October of 2015. The PSEL of 2015 is a model of professional standards of effective educational leaders. Although the standards do not prescribe specific actions, they can be used as a framework for states and school districts to develop leadership preparation programs and to identify the skills required of effective school

leaders (Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, 2016). Table 2 displays the significant differences between the ISLCC of 2008 and PSEL of 2015 in regards to district expectations of school administrators. The changing roles and expectations of district leaders raise questions about how future leaders are being prepared to transition into their new roles.

Table 2

Crosswalk of ISLCC & PSEL Standards

ISLCC 2008	PSEL 2015
Standard 1: Vision	Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Core Values Standard 10: School Improvement
Standard 2: School Culture and Instructional Program	Standard 4: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Standard 5: Community of Care and Support for Students Standard 6: Professional Capacity of School Personnel Standard 7: Professional Community for Teachers and Staff
Standard 3: Operations, Management, and Resources	Standard 5: Community of Care and Support for Students Standard 6: Professional Capacity of School Personnel Standard 9: Operations and Management
Standard 4: Collaboration with Faculty and Community	Standard 8: Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community
Standard 5: Ethics	Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
Standard 6: Political, Social, Legal, Cultural Context	Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness Standard 8: Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community

Note: Adapted from The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) 2015 and the Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards 2008: A Crosswalk, by Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, retrieved from https://gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/PSEL_ISLLC_Crosswalk.pdf

The level of accountability under ESSA of 2015 has increased pressure on school districts to select principals who have the leadership skills needed to lead schools. Research has identified 21 areas of responsibility for contemporary principals and school leadership that has the strongest correlation with student achievement (Waters et al., 2003). Beyond student achievement, effective school leadership is a key factor in “changing, improving, and maintaining successful schools” (Retelle, 2010, p. 1).

Principals are also responsible for community issues (Whitaker, 2003), teacher working conditions (Waters et al., 2003), and retaining talented teachers (DeAngelis, Peddle, Trott, & Bergeron, 2002). The complex and relentless responsibilities of the role have led to a high turnover rate nationwide, which school districts must be prepared to address (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015; West, Peck, & Reitzug, 2010). Additionally, the principalship has become increasingly complex with increased accountability for student achievement, instructional leadership, and responsible management (Lortie, 2009; Ervay, 2006). Some researchers have suggested that the daily responsibilities of a principal can be observed as an art form rather than a specific set of skills and knowledge (Sarason, 1999). Principals are now seen as “an organizational architect, social architect, educator, and moral agent” (Murphy, 1998, p. 16). Andrews and Ridenour (2006) suggest that contemporary principals must have knowledge of cultural proficiency and gender discrimination to effectively lead schools serving children from diverse backgrounds.

Selection criteria and procedures for principal selection are important because schools are complex organizations and require strong leadership (Cornett, 1983). Selection criteria and hiring procedures utilized by school districts must be effective in order to ensure the best candidates are selected to lead schools (Wendel & Breed, 1988). This is important as most new

principals are often "...bombarded with all the responsibilities that a veteran principal has" (Crow, 2006, p. 318). According to Crow:

Principals in most schools in the United States now encounter a vastly different and more challenging organizational setting, which demands community support in social, mental, and health services; professional development for principals and teachers in cultural sensitivity and learning styles; instructional monitoring and support for new kinds of educational services, and a commitment to ensuring that all students learn. (2006, p. 315)

Day (2000) reports that effective leadership is developed through practice over time. Considering that the duties and responsibilities of assistant principals do not provide appropriate training for assuming a principalship (Glanz, 1994), it is important for school districts to reflect on current principal preparation and selection practices.

Parkay and Armstrong (1987) suggest, "district officials in charge of hiring believe they have a well thought out process for selecting administrators, however, this is not often the case" (p. 163). Researchers generally agree that principal selection practices lack specific criteria, formal assessment procedures, vary by school districts, and are not predictive of principal performance (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Baron, 1990; Blackmore et al., 2006; Hooker, 2000; Rammer, 2007).

Theoretical Considerations

Selecting a principal is one of the most important decisions for school districts (Retelle, 2010) yet, principal selection literature continues to be, "anecdotal, unpublished, and atheoretical" (Hooker, 2000, p. 183). Research on principal selection has been dominated by the perspective of district superintendents (Hooker, 2000; Rammer, 2007) and the perspective of unsuccessful candidates (Blackmore et al., 2006; Gronn & Lacey, 2004). The focus of this study

is based on the perspective of district leaders involved in the decision-making process of principal selection.

Decision-Making Theory

Decision-making is one of the most complex human behaviors to understand as “no decision process can guarantee a perfect outcome. Humans are not omniscient” (Larrick, 2009, p. 460). Many internal and external factors contribute to the decision-making process including personality, past experiences, situational factors, biases, and expected outcome. For this study, this portion of the review will focus on decision-making research and the factors that may influence the exchange of information between applicants and interviewers.

Decision-making theory includes the concepts of intuition and reasoning. Kahneman, Tversky, and Slovic (1982) explored the heuristics that people use, and general biases employed when making judgments. This research contributed to the concept of prospect theory; the idea of choices made under risk and loss aversion in a riskless choice situation (Tversky & Kahneman, 1991; Tversky & Kahneman, 1992). The idea of choice and decision-making relates to the guiding concept that “most judgments and most choices are made intuitively; the rules that govern intuition are generally similar to the rules of perception” (Kahneman, 2003, p. 1450). Research on the distinction between perception, intuition, and reasoning has led to a discussion on the theory of decision-making.

Decision theorists generally agree on the idea that people use a dual-process approach for making decisions: (a) rapid/unconscious; (b) slower/deliberate. Stanovich and West (2000) proposed the two cognitive processes of System 1 and System 2 thinking that people rely on when making a decision. The cognitive operations of System 1 are fast, effortless, associative, emotionally charged, governed by habit, and can be difficult to control (Kahneman, 2003).

System 1 thinking generates initial impressions that are a result of automatic operations from an individual's perception. The operations of System 2 are slower, deliberative, controlled, and potentially rule-governed (Evans, 2008). Thus, System 2 is related to judgments that are intentional because of effortful thinking.

The deliberate nature of System 2 thinking generally monitors or attempts to filter the automatic, perceptual based thinking of System 1. Screening, interviewing, and employment decisions from district leaders may use a combination of rapid/low effort and slower/deliberative decision processes when selecting principal candidates. With this two-stage approach, decision-making researchers have identified several cognitive, motivational, and contextual factors that influence hiring and application choices (Boiney et al., 1997; Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Chinander & Schweitzer, 2003; Hsee et al., 1999; Synder & Swann, 1978; Tversky & Kahneman, 1981).

Cognitive factors. During interview processes, decision-makers may use a sequential, two-step process when screening applicants. Screeners will quickly eliminate unsuitable candidates who fail to meet the basic requirements of the vacancy posting and instead concentrate efforts on those who remain (Payne, Bettman, & Johnson, 1988; Svenson, 1992). This two-step process of quickly screening out applicants relates to System 1 thinking while the conscious effort to focus on those selected for interviews requires System 2 thinking—the process of deliberate and critical thinking to focus on certain candidates.

Interviewers may also experience cognitive differentiation and consolidation (Svenson, 1992) when faced with multiple candidates to interview or select for employment. The differentiation and consolidation theoretical framework suggests that interviewers experience both pre and post-decision-making processes in order to harmonize themselves with the decision

made. Differentiation accounts for the active, cognitive process of selecting one candidate over another. The pool of applicants or candidates is consciously compared, evaluated, and differentiated from one another.

Tversky and Kahneman (1974) suggest that people utilize several mental shortcuts to evaluate alternatives such as comparing candidates to current employees. This aligns with the concept of “fit” (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Cable & Judge, 1997), the normalized principal identity suggested by Blackmore et al. (2006), and the concept of “cloning” principals through constant selection practices (Gronn & Lacey, 2006). Kanter (1977) refers to the process of cloning as homosocial reproduction in which selection processes contribute to the homogeneity of principals in the local school district. Essed and Goldberg (2002) define homosocial reproduction as “the reproduction of the systems of preference for sameness shaped by real or imagined kinhood . . . producing more of the same at the same time as well as more of the same across time” (p. 1076-1077). Principals within a school district may demonstrate similarity to one another as a result of common professional experiences, thus operating from a common set of assumptions, beliefs, knowledge, and experiences (Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

Dougherty, Turban, and Callender (1994) suggest that interviewers may form initial impressions of candidates based on application materials and then elicit information during the interview to confirm initial impressions. Chinander and Schweitzer (2003) found that resume screeners may consider the length of an applicant’s resume quickly to evaluate the quality of the applicant. Research by Synder and Swann (1978) supports that people tend to look for confirmatory information which aligns with their beliefs rather than to seek information to test their beliefs. Confirmatory bias may influence principal selection processes when selection

members seek information which “screens in” a favored candidate rather than evaluating the candidate scrupulously.

Svenson (1992) suggests that the cognitive decision-making process does not end at the moment of decision; however, when the individual is able to consolidate their decision in the future. According to Svenson (1992):

Both differentiation and consolidation are driven by the fact that through experience with the predictability of the future, a decision maker has learned to prepare for threats against the chosen alternatives. The further this alternative has been differentiated and consolidated, the less the risk of post-decision ambiguity, regret or decision reversal. (p. 143)

The consolidation process allows the interviewer to evaluate their decisions of selecting a candidate over the alternatives. Ross, McFarland, and Fletcher (1981) reported that people would change their memories of past behaviors in order to align them with their current attitudes. Therefore, post-interview decision-making consolidation may cause interviewers to alter their memories of why certain candidates were selected and why others were not based on their current attitudes or beliefs.

Motivational Factors. Decision-makers can be influenced by their individual goals or organizational goals when screening, interviewing, and hiring a candidate. Specifically, interviewers may have the desire to hire a principal with potential rather than an incumbent with a steady performance record. Motivational factors also include elements of decision-making consolidation as interviewers may hold a desire to avoid disappointment with a decision and strive to experience happiness with their selection (Mellers, 2000). Boiney et al. (1997) indicate

that people who may be motivated to support a specific conclusion tend to adopt processing strategies that yield the conclusion. This deviation from normative theory may relate to the concept of decision-makers selecting candidates that “fit” the normalized principal identity.

Blackmore and Barty (2004) state:

Selection has the tendency to become more of a ‘reproduction’ model, in which those who do not fit a ‘normalized principal identity’ are excluded. That which is known or familiar or homosociability – the selection of people like oneself. The notion of merit selection has over time taken on different nuances and practices, and in so doing succumbed to reliance on pre-conceived ideas of what they are looking for when they select a principal. (p. 8)

These motivational factors may influence the decision-making abilities and processes used by interviewers when selecting principal candidates. The idea of training interviewers (Dougherty, Ebert, & Callender, 1986), setting goals to help form accurate impressions (Neuberg, 1989), and holding them accountable for their selections (Mero, Motowidlo, & Anna, 2003), may be methods to improve interviewers’ accuracy.

Contextual Factors. An interviewer’s decision may be influenced by the conditions, circumstances, and/or experiences under which the decision is made. Examples of contextual factors include how many candidates apply, how many openings are available, strong or weak qualifications, and the impact of hiring on the school district’s subsequent principal transfers. The timing of the decision may also influence the decision-making processes (Russo, & Schoemaker, 1990) when evaluating candidates.

The order of candidates and evaluations can also influence decision-making and applicant selection. Murdock (1962) reported that the order of exposure to stimuli could influence an

individual's memory; the serial position or primacy/recency effect may influence an individual's impressions. Therefore, a candidate's selection or a chance at employment could be influenced by merely the order in which the candidate was interviewed as compared to the alternatives. Additionally, contextual factors such as evaluating candidates sequentially or comparing alternatives at the same time can affect an interviewer's decision-making (Huber, Northcraft, & Neale, 1990).

Another aspect of decision-making that may influence principal selection practices is organizational behavior called the Abilene Paradox (Harvey, 1988). This concept relates to a situation where every group member disagrees with the group choice; however, no group member voices disagreement. The self-censoring of each group member may lead to a poor group decision because no one realized that conflict existed with the decision. Relating to the Abilene Paradox is the decision-making phenomenon called groupthink. Groupthink (Janis, 1982) is when conflict is avoided or actively suppressed by group members to preserve harmony within the group. Groupthink may influence principal selection practices when decision-makers refrain from sharing their own thoughts or opinions should they disagree with the leader of the group or other group members. Research has shown that engaging in conflict-resolution stimulates innovative thinking and leads to better group decisions (Okhuysen & Bechky, 2009). However, without conflict, decision-makers may continue to select principal candidates who fit the normalized principal identity (Blackmore & Barty, 2004) for the local district or select the same type of candidate over time (Essed & Goldberg, 2002).

Use of Interviews

Although several factors can affect the decision-making abilities and processes of interviewers, interviews are the most common selection procedure used across a wide range of

industries (Bureau of National Affairs, 1988; Dipboye, 1992). Furthermore, principal selection literature has shown that interviews are the most common method utilized during principal selection processes (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Kwan, 2009; Rammer, 2007; Schmitt & Schechtman, 1990; Walker & Kwan, 2012; Wendel & Breed, 1988). Baltzell and Dentler (1983) state that interview processes vary by school district and that interview questions range from sensibly constructed to carefree by selection members:

The substance of questions is usually quite general...Interviewers use questions not so much to get the right answers, as to test the interviewee's reflexes in the areas of poise, confidence, self-presentation, and fit with the local image of what a principal should be.
(p. 11)

Additional concerns include that interview questions have few criteria for scoring answers and that even well-developed questions have not been psychometrically evaluated. Principal selection literature also includes research noting the low validity and reliability of interviews (Wendel & Breed, 1988). Recent research by Walker and Kwan (2012) suggests that interviews are the most common method of selection despite the factors which may influence the hiring process. As some interview formats are better than others, structured interview practices tend to be a better predictor of job performance than unstructured interviews (McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt, & Maurer, 1994).

Principal Succession

Research on succession planning in public education or on principal succession planning is limited. Fink and Brayman (2006) explained that literature on succession planning from non-education sources includes goal setting, recruitment, accountability, and leadership development, "Yet in the public sector and particularly in education, leadership succession appears to be more

serendipitous” (p. 68). Recent research suggests that most school districts do not use or focus on succession planning as a part of the overall district improvement process (Peters-Hawkins, Reed, & Kingsberry, 2017). This is noteworthy as research on school leadership has shown that principals have an impact on school performance and student achievement (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Additionally, Fink and Brayman (2006) indicate that unplanned principal succession results in a negative effect on school performance.

Principal succession planning and development of current assistant principals are important to the overall success of a school district. As the assistant principal is the “most common career path followed to acquire the position of principal” (Busch, MacNeil, & Baraniuk, 2012, p. 36), it would seem that school districts could benefit from developing current assistant principals in terms of succession planning. Myung, Loeb, and Horng (2011) suggest that succession planning assists organizations in effectively identifying and promoting individuals who demonstrate the abilities to be effective leaders. Schmidt-Davis and Bottoms (2011) describes that schools require effective principals and that succession planning “puts districts in charge of events and in charge of its future” (p. 1)

Principal Selection

Hargreaves (2005) states, “One of the most significant events in the life of a school is a change in its leadership” (p. 163). Selecting a new principal can significantly influence the school environment and student achievement (Clifford, 2010). Selecting the wrong individual can have widespread negative impacts on students, teachers, and the community (Knuth & Banks, 2006). Hiring a principal can have powerful and widespread symbolic value (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983) and as a result, “...is one of the most important decisions that superintendents and school boards undertake” (Retelle, 2010, p. 1).

Principal recruitment and selection have become a national crisis according to some researchers (Bowles, 1990; Fenwick, 2000; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Many school districts struggle with recruiting quality candidates to fill open principal positions (Farkas, Johnson, Foleno, Duffett, & Foley, 2000). Furthermore, the quality of candidates for principal positions is declining (Bloom & Krovetz, 2001; Donaldson, Bowe, Mackenzie, & Marnick, 2004). This issue may be even more complicated as principal selection procedures have not notably changed in several decades (Doyle & Locke, 2014).

Current Hiring Practices

Principal selection practices vary at the local level (Cornett, 1983), lack systemic application (Schmitt & Schechtman, 1990), and have been described as “complex and cumbersome” (D’Arbon, Duignan, & Duncan, 2002, p. 473). Among principal selection approaches, there seems to be a continued reliance on the principal selection processes (Appendix C) as described by Baltzell and Dentler (1983). Recent research on current principal hiring procedures demonstrates a need for school districts to reexamine their hiring practices (Kottkamp, 2011; Palmer, 2016). This research has revealed current procedures to include: developing job descriptions, advertising, screening, identifying candidates to interview, checking references, interviewing, selecting candidates for employment, and notifying unsuccessful candidates (Rebore, 2012; Smith, 2009; Spanneut, 2007; Webb & Norton, 2009; Whaley, 2002).

Little continues to be known about the effectiveness of these selection practices; gaps have been noted in research as to how or why certain candidates are selected, and others are not (Hooker, 2000). These traditional selection methods have shown to have a low predictive validity for future performance (Hogan & Zenke, 1986; MacBeath, Oduro, Jacka, & Hobby, 2006; Wendel & Breed, 1988). Furthermore, selection practices can also be ineffective,

subjective, biased, and actually prevent the best candidate from being hired (Anderson, 1991; Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Blackmore et al., 2006; Parkay & Armstrong, 1987; Walker & Kwan, 2012). Research suggests that school districts may exhibit some of the following practices during principal selection: failing to understand the role of the selection committee (Clifford, 2010; Spanneut, 2007); ignoring relevant employment data (Schlueter & Walker, 2008); and lacking systemic procedures to ensure the best candidate is selected (Wendel & Breed, 1988). Given that the focus of this study is on perceptions and experiences of district leaders on principal selection procedures, the review will now focus on the hiring practices described by Baltzell and Dentler (1983): vacancy announcement, selection criteria, forming applicant pool, screening, interviewing, and employment decision. Performance assessments/tasks were mentioned in selection processes by Baltzell and Dentler (1983) and have been seen in subsequent research. Therefore, performance assessment/tasks were included in this section of the review as a principal selection procedure.

Vacancy Announcement. The principal selection process typically begins with the posting of a vacancy by a school district. Baltzell and Dentler (1983) found that most vacancy announcements coincide with the flow of the school year and “openings created by resignations, retirements, deaths, dismissals, or reassignments” (p. 4). Most school districts utilize non-specific vacancy announcements that are typically limited to the local geographic area. Interestingly, vacancy postings may cause a domino effect for current principals as district leaders must balance the decision to hire and transfer school leaders.

According to Baltzell and Dentler (1983), vacancy announcements are “...very limited in outreach; the specific openings are seldom clearly identified, and the volume of applicants is often small compared with the number of applicants who have certificates” (p. 5). The generic

vacancy announcement may also influence applicants, as they may not be able to gauge their current skills to the vacant position. Therefore, the vacancy stage of principal selection may not correspond with the importance of finding the most appropriate candidate for the principal position.

Selection Criteria. Selection criteria are described as “the qualifications required for eligibility as a candidate” rather than how candidates are appraised later in the selection process (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983, p. 5). The criteria are typically cited in the vacancy announcement to include required qualifications (e.g., education, state certification) and preferred qualifications (e.g., experience, additional certifications, skills).

Baltzell and Dentler (1983) found that selection criteria are efficient yet superficial. For example, the generic vacancy announcement and lack of specific selection criteria create a situation where “...the opportunity to channel applicants through a well-defined and narrow gate of eligibility is sacrificed, and the burdens of narrowing the flow are shouldered at great expense later on” (Baltzell & Dentler, p. 6). Additionally, the lack of specific selection criteria may lead decision-makers to rely on “fit” during hiring processes.

Forming Applicant Pool. The process of forming the applicant pool typically results in a list of local candidates who have been applying to be a principal for several years (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983). Self-selection or “tapping” by district leaders are a part of the process of forming the applicant pool. Depending on local contextual issues, long-term candidates may be a part of the applicant pool several times due to having the generic criteria as stated in the vacancy announcement. Other candidates may have been “tapped” (Myung et al., 2011) by district leaders and encouraged to apply for principalship. Baltzell and Dentler (1983) also reported common applicant pool practices such as outside recruitment, internships, or published grooming

processes. However, their research also suggests that even in a well-mixed applicant pool, there may only be three or four applicants with a real chance at the position.

Screening. According to Baltzell and Dentler (1983), “screening typically involves two or three steps, which increase steadily in importance” (p. 9). These steps include paper screening, interviews, and final recommendations to the district superintendent. Paper screening is an integral part of the hiring process as it ensures that applicants have the minimum qualifications and requirements for the position (Rebore, 2012). Although Baltzell and Dentler (1983) included interviewing in the screening process, recent research on principal selection processes documents the interview as a separate step in the hiring process (Rebore, 2012; Smith, 2009; Spanneut, 2007; Webb & Norton, 2009). For this study, I separated the screening process from the interview as this aligns with the recent literature on principal hiring practices.

Interview. Researchers agree that interviews are the most common method and the most widely used decision-making step in the selection process (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Rammer, 2007; Spanneut, 2007; Walker & Kwan, 2012). Although school districts utilize a variety of interview processes when selecting a principal (Haberman, 1999), the interview step continues to hold great symbolic value in legitimizing candidate selection (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983). The interview step is important as it allows the opportunity to assess the candidate’s image, communication skills, and overall educational philosophy (Hooker, 2000; Rammer 2007).

Baltzell and Dentler (1983) assert the importance of the interview cannot be overstated despite their concerns about the overall predictive value:

With respect to merit, the importance springs from the view of the interview as an examination. The candidate must display to others the ability to ‘think on his feet’ and to communicate well orally. These are widely believed to be relevant indicators of

leadership ability because leadership is directly associated with the criterion of social perceptions of the visual and oral presentation of self. Where subsequent events disclose the choice was poor, selectors assume that their perceptual discernment was faulty, rather than the criteria process itself. (p. 11)

Baltzell and Dentler reported that each school district in their research had experienced disappointment by at least one candidate who “interviewed superbly and later performed very poorly on the job” (1983, p. 11). From this concern grew the suggestion of including performance assessments and tasks in the screening processes.

Performance Assessments/Tasks. Based on the limitations of interview processes, school districts have implemented performance assessments or tasks during the principal hiring process. These tasks may include analyzing school data, personnel issues, scheduling, or daily operations that school principals may face once hired. Turnbull, Anderson, Riley, MacFarlane, and Aladjem (2016) examined six large school districts and determined that these districts used several stages of “security and assessment to develop a future pool of high-quality candidates to fill principal vacancies as they arose. By 2015, all districts required aspiring candidates to engage in practical demonstrations of their skills, typically with simulated scenarios” (p. iii). However, there has been limited research on how these performance tasks lead to subsequent job success as a principal (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004).

Employment Decision. Superintendents take into account the recommendations from the screening committee members and are the chief employment decision-maker (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983). In several school districts, the superintendent uses shared decision-making and mobilizes senior leaders to finalize position approvals (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Hooker, 2000). Several contextual factors can influence a superintendent’s decision to hire a candidate, including

promoting staff such as an assistant principal, creating a new administrative team, allowing a current principal to move schools for political reasons, responding to community needs, or professional development (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983). Additionally, Baltzell and Dentler state:

In other words, the decision to appoint a principal is not independent of other considerations. The importance of this reality cannot be overstated. The web of connectedness typically reaches to several other schools at least, and in the larger sense, is spread across the entire district. Hence, the superintendent's reputation is on the line...as the appointment vibrates and shifts the larger web. (1983, p. 14)

To complete the selection process, the local board of education's approval of the superintendent's hiring decision is routine. Baltzell and Dentler (1983) reported that out of the 30 appointments they followed, 28 were approved without discussion or reaction from the local board of education.

Preparation for the Principalship

Golanda (1991) states that the way most schools prepare an assistant principal for a principalship is through osmosis of leadership behaviors, requisite knowledge, skills, and leadership practices over time. However, this can be challenging as most assistant principals are socialized in their role to operate autonomously and to complete the responsibilities assigned by the principal. Therefore, assistant principals are trained to act independently to complete tasks, rather than take the time to understand the situation and solve the underlying problems (Mertz, 2000). Considering that most assistant principals are assigned job responsibilities from their principal, it is important to consider the administrative working relationship of assistant principal and principal.

Research on principal preparation programs has found that existing programs are unsuccessful in developing effective principals (Levine, 2005). Levine suggests that the majority of principal preparation programs are designed to assist administrative candidates to meet the criteria for the principalship rather than in leadership development. The key to preparing an assistant principal to be a principal may rely significantly on their current principal. Chan, Webb, and Bowen (2003) suggest that principals empower assistant principals by sharing leadership responsibilities as this would allow for true leadership experiences. Therefore, the preparation to assume a principalship may be dependent upon the experiences and leadership responsibilities of an assistant principal as directed by their current principal (Oleszewski et al., 2012). As Chan et al. (2003) noted, authentic leadership tasks and experiences would allow a current assistant principal the opportunity to make leadership decisions rather than complete the typical managerial responsibilities that have plagued the position.

The professional relationship between an assistant principal and principal can have a positive influence on the preparation for the principalship. As the immediate supervisor of the assistant principal, the current principal can influence the potential hiring and promotion of the assistant principal. Additionally, “principal-makers” are principals that identify the common hindrances that might prevent an assistant principal from attaining the principalship and help guide them into the principalship (Retelle, 2010).

Summary of Principal Selection Processes

Early research by Greene (1954) found that principal selection procedures varied significantly and were influenced by the context of the local school system. Baltzell and Dentler (1983) agree that principal selection practices are not independent of local school issues and transitions of leadership. Local situations can profoundly influence the context of principal

selection (Walker & Kwan, 2012). Schmitt and Schechtman (1990) suggest that local pressures can influence rational decision-making when selecting principals.

Generally, principal selection practices are far from systemic (Schmitt & Schechtman, 1990) and selection methodologies can even vary within the same school district (Roza, 2003). The use of intuition and “hunches” continue to be described in principal selection procedures (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Blackmore et al., 2006; Morgan, Hall, & Mackay, 1983; Parkay & Armstrong, 1987; Rammer, 2007; Wendel & Breed, 1988). Rammer (2007) found that the criteria used to assess candidates were not actually used to select candidates, indicating a reliance on intuition and “fit” (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983). Additionally, Baltzell and Dentler (1983) suggest that the principal selection practices do not differ from interviewing processes for hundreds of American jobs within both the public and private sectors. Additionally, the increasing demands of a school principal may contribute to the shortage of quality applicants applying to be principals (Escalante, 2016; LeFevre & Robinson, 2014).

The continued reliance on “fit” (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983) as well as principal “cloning” (Gronn & Lacey, 2006) may indicate how decision-makers during the hiring process favor maintaining the status quo (Kwan & Walker, 2009) over innovation. Gronn and Lacey (2006) suggested that selection committees may experience groupthink which “puts a premium on concurrence seeking at all costs in decision-making” (p. 119). As selection procedures have yet to be “subject to substantive interrogation by researchers...” (Blackmore, et al., 2006, p. 297), selection procedures continue to rely on “fit” and remain subjective.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to understand current principal selection practices and preparedness of assistant principals as reported by district leaders. Specifically, I sought an understanding of how district leaders viewed the principal selection practices and current assistant principal preparedness for the principal selection criteria and procedures. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of district leaders regarding the principal selection process?
 - 1a: What selection criteria and procedures do district leaders report?
 - 1b: What factors influence selection criteria and procedures as reported by district leaders?
 - 1c: How do district leaders view the preparedness of assistant principals for the principal selection criteria and procedures?

This chapter is organized as follows: (a) research design, (b) data collection methods, (c) interview participants and procedures, (d) data analysis, (e) ethical issues, and (f) role of the researcher.

Research Design

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to investigate current principal selection practices and preparedness of assistant principals for the principal selection processes as reported by district leaders. Therefore, this study is a qualitative design and included in-depth interviews with district leaders with knowledge of current principal selection practices. Plano Clark and Creswell (2009) state that qualitative research and interviewing focuses on exploring “the underlying meaning of the statements to develop themes about and descriptions of the

phenomenon” (p. 239). Furthermore, qualitative inquiry assumes human behavior is context-bound (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2018) and that each individual has a unique perspective of a phenomenon (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2009). Merriam (2002) suggests that a case study is designed to gain a clear understanding of a problem or situation. Specifically, Merriam (1998) describes a qualitative case study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (p. xiii). For this study, I employed the case study design of Merriam (2002) as she complements both Stake’s (1995) characteristics of qualitative research design and Yin’s (2014) well-established case study structure.

I, as the researcher, desired to understand the unique perspective of each district leader interviewed for this study regarding the current principal selection process and preparedness of assistant principals for the selection process. The phenomenon of principal selection practices is under-researched and unpublished (Hooker, 2000); however, case studies are prevalent in educational research (Merriam, 2002).

Data Collection Methods

This case study focused on the lived experiences and views of district leaders who had participated in the principal selection process for a Mid-Atlantic, rural school district. The school district has approximately 42,000 students and 66 school-based principals. I conducted eight face-to-face interviews with purposefully selected participants to gain further insights into questions designed to answer the research questions. I conducted eight interviews as this is within the recommended range for in-depth, detailed accounts of people’s experiences within phenomenological studies (Morse, 2000; Guest, Bruce, & Johnson, 2006).

Additionally, saturation occurs when no new themes emerge from the data which typically occurs between six to twelve interviews (Guest et al., 2006). These participants were selected based on purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2019). This non-probabilistic sampling method was selected to deliberately interview individuals with knowledge of the principal selection process for the organization at the focus of this study.

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe a case study as a “phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25). The phenomenon at the center of this research is principal selection processes and the preparedness of assistant principals for principal selection processes. The concept for the case study methodology is based on Merriam’s (1998) claims about qualitative research design. She claims that “one of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured as in quantitative research” (1998, p. 202). Thus, the data collection for this study aligns with Merriam’s epistemic views of interviewing as the primary source of data gathering/collection for qualitative case studies.

Individuals can describe their views of reality based on their unique perspectives and experiences. By exploring an individual’s view of reality, researchers are better able to understand the participants’ actions in a scenario (Lather, 1992). This information can be extrapolated to understand how an individual experiences or views his/herself within the social context of an organization. Specifically, by focusing on district leaders, I was able to gather unique perspectives concerning the principal selection process and preparedness of assistant principals for the selection process.

Data Collection

I gathered data through eight face-to-face interviews with district leaders including central office staff and school-based administrators. Purposeful sampling with district leaders was used to select interview participants. Semi-structured interviews were scheduled with individuals who had experience participating in principal selection panels for the school district of this case study. Weiss (1994) states, “Interviewing gives us access to the observation of others. Through interviews, we can learn about places we have not been and could not go and about setting in which we have not lived” (p. 1). I have not been involved in any principal selection procedures, and therefore sought the knowledge of participants who had experience with principal selection processes.

The interview questions and survey were piloted by school leaders with knowledge of principal selection practices of the school district at the center of this case study. Additionally, this pilot group provided feedback on the relevance of the questions related to the constructs of this study related to principal selection practices and the preparation of assistant principals for selection practices. The interview questions and survey were submitted to the committee chair for review and feedback before submittal for Institutional Review Board (IRB) processes. The school district IRB also provided feedback on the questions and survey before research was conducted.

Interview Participants and Procedures

Participants for interviews were selected using the following criteria:

- Participant was a district leader (central office staff or school principal).
- Participant had participated in at least one principal selection interview.
- Participant worked within the school district at the center of this case study.

The individuals selected to be interviewed for this study were selected based on accessibility. Before being interviewed, each participant was provided with a written letter of consent, confidentiality agreement, and an explanation of the study. All participants were informed of how the data would be utilized and how they had the right to withdraw from the interview and study at any time. Interview participants were asked semi-structured questions and were provided an opportunity to share their unique perspective about principal selection procedures. Each interview participant signed a confidentiality agreement and was informed that a pseudonym would be assigned to protect his/her identity. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and transcribed.

Demographic data from each participant were collected during the follow-up email communication to determine if the sample generally reflected the overall demographic profile of the district at the center of the case study. Personal demographics included gender, race, and years of experience as a district leader. The demographic data of the interview participants shown in Tables 3-5 was derived from a purposive sample of district leaders with knowledge of principal selection practices. Participant gender data are displayed in Table 3, and the majority of participants were female (62.5% female and 37.5% male), which was representative of the overall gender breakdown of the district (68.6% female and 31.4% male).

Table 3

Interview Participant and Local School District Leaders Gender Data

Staff	Total	Male	%	Female	%
Interview Participants	8	3	37.5	5	62.5
Local District Leaders	220	69	31.4	151	68.6

Note: Local school district leaders include superintendents, deputy superintendents, directors, coordinators, supervisors, other administrators, principals, and principals reported at the central office level. Adapted from “Professional Staff by Assignment, Race/Ethnicity and Gender” by Maryland State Department of Education (2017), Retrieved from <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20172018Staff/2018ProfStaffbyRace.pdf>

Table 4

Interview Participant and Local School District Leaders Demographic Data

Staff	Total	White				Black or African American				Other (Asian, Hispanic, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Two or More races)			
		Total	%	Male	Female	Total	%	Male	Female	Total	%	Male	Female
Interview Participants	8	6	62.5	1	4	2	25.0	2	0	1	12.5	0	1
Local District Leaders	220	194	88.2	59	135	18	8.2	7	11	8	3.6	3	5

Note: Local school district leaders include superintendents, deputy superintendents, directors, coordinators, supervisors, other administrators, principals, and principals reported at the central office level. Adapted from “Professional Staff by Assignment, Race/Ethnicity and Gender” by Maryland State Department of Education (2017), Retrieved from http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20172018Staff/2018_Prof_Staff_by_Race.pdf

The participant demographic data displayed in Table 4 generally reflects that of the district’s demographic data. The majority of participants were White (62.5%) and African-American (25%), with one participant as Other (12.5%). Table 4 also includes the race/ethnicity and gender for both the participants and the local district leaders for the school district at the center of this study.

Demographic data of the years of experience of the participants are shown in Table 5 as compared to the local school district leader’s years of experience. The majority of participants had 21+ years of experience as a district leader (50%) which reflects the district’s overall years of experience for leaders (56.3%). There were no interview participants that had one to five years of experience as a district leader. The interview participants’ years of experience generally reflect the overall years of experience of local district leaders from the case study school district.

Table 5

Interview Participants and Local District Leaders Years of Experience

	Total	1-5 Years		6-10 Years		11- 15 Years		16-20 Years		21+ Years	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Interview Participants	8	0	0.0	1	12.5	1	12.5	2	25.0	4	50.0
Local District Leaders	220	22	10	14	6.4	27	12.3	33	15.0	124	56.3

Note: Local school district leaders include superintendents, deputy superintendents, directors, coordinators, supervisors, other administrators, principals, and principals reported at the central office level. Adapted from “Professional Staff by Type of Degree and Years of Experience” by Maryland State Department of Education (2017), Retrieved from http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20172018Staff/2018_Prof_Staff_by_Race.pdf

Chain-sampling was utilized following the first interview to determine potential participants for additional interviews. The first interviewee and each subsequent interviewee provided names of individuals who would most likely have knowledge of principal selection processes of the school district. The number of assistant principal-to-principal interviews that each participant had been a part of are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6

Interview Participant and Number of Assistant Principal to Principal Interviews

Participant	Number of AP Interviews
Karen	6-10
Arthur	10-15
Elle	15-20
John	21+
Sara	21+
Carlos	21+
Anne	10-15
Mary	21+

Although the interview participants generally reflect the overall demographic data for all district leaders of this case study, the sampling methodology aimed to capture the range of experiences from individuals with knowledge of principal selection practices and the preparedness of assistant principals for principal selection processes.

Data Analysis

Merriam (1998) suggests that “making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning” (p. 178). Using Miles et al. (2014) as a guide, the process of data condensation was utilized to analyze the data. The process involves “selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming the data that appear(s) in the full corpus of...empirical materials. By condensing, we’re making data stronger” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 12). There were three methods of data collection from the participants including: (1) survey questions; (2) semi-structured interview questions; and (3) follow-up email communication with each participant. The purpose of the follow-up emails was to gain the demographic profile of each participant and to determine the influence of implicit bias on principal selection practices.

The survey and the semi-structured interview data were collected through one-on-one interviews with participants. These data were initially analyzed separately according to the research questions. However, these data were brought together in the discussion section of chapter 4 to provide a holistic response to the overall research questions. Survey data were analyzed using magnitude coding for initial opinion mining (Liu, 2012) to add texture to the final pattern codes discussed in chapter 4 and describe a comprehensive account of the participant’s perspectives connecting to the research questions. The semi-structured interview questions were initially analyzed by reading the transcriptions and observation notes as recommended by

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995). This initial reading was part of the preliminary exploratory analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to gain a general understanding of the data.

Following the exploratory analysis, I utilized open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to determine the first categories leading to the emergence of initial themes. As this study focused on understanding the unique perspectives and experiences from district leaders, in vivo coding was employed for the first cycle coding (Miles et al., 2014). This coding process “uses words or short phrases from the participant’s own language in the data record as codes...phrases that are used repeatedly by participants are good leads; they often point to regularities or patterns in the setting” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 74). Digital transcriptions were uploaded to the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12 for coding and data analysis. Relevant sentences, phrases, and words were selected/highlighted and assigned a code using the “code in vivo” function in NVivo 12. I also completed a manual coding of each transcription while listening to the audio recording of each interview. This was an opportunity to explore if I had missed any relevant data based on participant voice inflection or tone while sharing his/her experiences from the initial exploratory analysis. Initial open coding resulted in 229 in vivo codes.

Second cycle coding involves the condensing of larger data sets into smaller analytic units (Miles et al., 2014). As part of the analysis, I employed pattern coding to cluster significant categories and concepts into themes. These codes emerged as the data was condensed and revisited throughout data collection/analysis. This aligns with Merriam’s views on recursive and dynamic data collection and analysis in that the “analysis becomes more intensive as the study progresses, and once all the data are in” (1998, p. 155). I also utilized the auto-coding functionality in NVivo 12 to determine if any themes were missing that needed to be coded. The auto-coding feature analyzed all of the digital interview transcriptions and produced a node

matrix that was then compared to the manually coded theme nodes. The comparative analysis between the condensed manually coded in vivo codes and auto-code matrix resulted in seven key themes and six sub-themes that emerged during the analysis of the interview transcriptions based on patterns discovered in the data.

I also employed local integration of results from the three data sources which brought coherence and meaning to the data. The results were consolidated into a comprehensive description (Weiss, 1994) of the phenomenon of principal selection practices and the preparedness of assistant principals for the selection processes. The data were brought together in the discussion section of chapter 4 to provide a holistic response to the overall research questions. Appendix D shows the preliminary alignment with research questions, data collection methodology, and theoretical framework.

Validity & Reliability

According to Firestone (1987), “a qualitative study provides the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show that the author’s conclusion makes sense” (p. 19). Merriam (1998) states “One of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured as in quantitative research” (p. 202). Internal validity is generally considered a strength in qualitative research as the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis and can present a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998, p. 203). To enhance validity, I used two methods of triangulation to provide a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied. I utilized multiple sources of data and multiple methods of data analysis to confirm the emerging themes from the data (Merriam, 1998).

Merriam (1998) states that in terms of external validity, “generalizability has plagued qualitative investigators for some time” (p. 207). Regarding this research study, the ability to generalize from a small, non-random sample may inhibit the external validity from a traditional purview. However, a reconceptualization of generalizability to align with the underlying assumptions of qualitative inquiry may enhance the findings by transferring to another situation.

Drawing on Stake’s (1978) views on naturalistic generalization, the findings of this study could help guide but not predict a school district’s leadership succession planning in terms of principal selection practices and assistant principal preparation. Specifically, naturalistic generalization can be found “by recognizing similarities of objects and issues in and out of context and by sensing the natural covariations of happenings” (Stake, 1978, p. 6). Another strategy to enhance external validity is the researcher providing rich, thick descriptions so that the reader can determine how closely the research situation matches their situation (Merriam, 1998). Walker (1980) states, “It is the reader who has to ask, what is there in this study that I can apply to my own situation, and what clearly does not apply” (p. 34). About this study, I provided rich, thick descriptions of the principal selection practices of the school district at the center of this case study. Therefore, the reader will be able to draw their own conclusions about how their school district and principal selection practices are similar or dissimilar to that of the case study. This case-to-case transfer (Firestone, 1993) is important to the field of study as researchers continue to note problematic selection practices that school districts are using when hiring for an open principalship position (Anderson, 1991; Baron, 1990; Blackmore et al., 2006; Cornett, 1983; Gronn & Lacey, 2006; Hammond et al., 2001; Kwan & Walker, 2009; Parkay & Armstrong, 1987; Rammer, 2007; White & White, 1998).

Reliability is problematic in qualitative research because “human behavior is never static” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). As the focus of this study was on individual experiences regarding principal selection practices, it is highly contextual and multifaceted. Therefore, in terms of reliability, replication of this qualitative study may not yield the same data or results. However, this does not discredit the results obtained from the data. According to Merriam (1998):

Rather than demanding that outsiders get the same results, a researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense— they are consistent and dependable. The question then is not whether the findings will be found again but, whether the results are consistent with the data collected. (p. 206)

In order to address reliability, I implemented several techniques described by Merriam such as explaining my positionality to the topic, triangulation and providing a thorough explanation of how data was collected and how themes were derived (Merriam, 1998, p. 207).

Ethical Issues

I protected the confidentiality of all participants. Each participant was provided a written letter of consent, a confidentiality agreement, and an explanation of the study before being interviewed. All participants were informed that pseudonyms were used in an effort to protect their identity. Additionally, all participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the interview at any time.

Interviewing is a working partnership between the researcher and the participant (Weiss, 1994). Tolman and Brydon-Miller (2001) suggested that qualitative research should be participatory in nature where knowledge is generated that is useful for both the participant and

researcher, contributing to both personal and social transformation. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) summarize that “relationships that are complex, fluid, symmetric, and reciprocal, that is shaped by both the researchers and actors, reflect a more responsible ethical stance and are likely to yield deeper data and better social science” (p. 137-138). Patton (1990) states that an interviewer’s task is to “gather data, not change people” (p. 354). Ultimately, both the participants and I may benefit from the interviews by gaining a better understanding of current principal selection practices. As a current assistant principal with aspirations of becoming a principal, I attempted to bracket my knowledge of the phenomenon of study as to reduce the possibility of influencing the findings.

Role of the Researcher

According to Mills (1959), “The most admirable scholars within the scholarly community... do not split their work from their lives. They seem to take both too seriously to allow such disassociation, and they want to use each for the enrichment of the other” (p. 195). As an aspiring school administrator, I believe that this research study allowed me to enrich both my scholarly and professional work. Maxwell (2013) distinguishes three goals for a researcher completing a study: (1) personal goals; (2) practical goals; and (3) intellectual goals. Personal goals motivate you to complete the desired task but may not necessarily be important for others. It is a personal goal of mine to become a principal in the future. By exploring principal selection processes, I intended to expand my professional and personal knowledge of how principals are selected for the principalship. The second goal of research design is a practical goal. These goals focus on meeting a need that can benefit others within the organization. I believe that selecting a principal to lead any school is a monumental task that school districts should continually polish. The third goal of research design is the intellectual goal of understanding something— gaining

insight or attempting to answer previous research that has left a topic not adequately addressed (Maxwell, 2013). As principal selection procedures remain unpublished (Hooker, 2000), I sought to add to the limited research on principal selection processes. Additionally, I sought to add to the literature on assistant principals as this role is underrepresented in research (Glanz, 1994; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Ribbins, 1997) .

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to understand current principal selection practices and preparedness of assistant principals for principal selection practices as reported by the lived experiences of district leaders. This study used the framework of System 1 and System 2 thinking (Stanovich & West, 2000) to explore the decision-making processes of district leaders who select assistant principals to principalship positions. System 1 thinking is typically described as fast, effortless, associative, emotionally charged, governed by habit, and can be difficult to control (Kahneman, 2003). System 1 thinking may generate first impressions that are generally monitored or filtered through System 2 thinking. The operations of System 2 are slower, deliberative, controlled, and potentially rule-governed (Evans, 2008).

The following research question and sub-questions focused this study:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of district leaders regarding the principal selection process?
 - 1a: What selection criteria and procedures do district leaders report?
 - 1b: What factors influence selection criteria and procedures as reported by district leaders?
 - 1c: How do district leaders view the preparedness of assistant principals for the principal selection criteria and procedures?

I collected data via one-on-one interviews with eight participants. Verbatim quotes from the interviews are included in this section to allow participants to speak for themselves and the reader an opportunity to gain insight from the participant's lived experiences relating to principal selection practices. The interview questions were semi-structured to allow the participants to

openly share their experiences relating to the research questions. Survey data, semi-structured interview data, and email data were organized based on the research questions.

The first section of this chapter will review the data and analysis from the survey results and semi-structured interview coding. The remainder of this chapter will present the key themes and sub-themes discovered in the survey, interview data, and follow-up emails. The key themes discovered from the survey data, interview transcriptions, and/or follow-up emails included: (a) overview of the application process, (b) the idea of “fit”, (c) local issues, (d) training, (e) internal and external candidates, (f) implicit bias, and (g) recommendations. Additional sub-themes discovered in the interview data included the roles between the principal and assistant principal, the “natural cut-off” phenomenon during the interview stage, the influence of “principal-makers” on assistant principal preparation, the number of candidates, home-grown leaders, and the reliance of intuition during principal selection processes.

Data and Analysis

This chapter contains the results gathered from eight extended face-to-face interviews with district leaders who had knowledge of principal selection practices of the district at the center of this case study. Each district leader participated in a one-hour-long digitally recorded interview. There were three methods of data collection from the participants including: (1) survey questions; (2) semi-structured interview questions; and (3) follow-up email communication with each participant. The purpose of the follow-up emails was to gain additional information from each participant regarding their demographic profile and the influence of implicit bias on principal selection practices.

Survey Results

Although both the survey and the semi-structured interview questions were collected through a one-on-one interview with participants, transcriptions of these data were initially analyzed separately according to the research questions. However, these data were brought together in the discussion section of this chapter to provide a holistic response to the research questions. Survey data were analyzed using magnitude coding for initial opinion mining (Liu, 2012) from the participants relating to principal selection practices and the preparedness of assistant principals for selection processes. The initial opinion mining was important to the study as it added texture to the final pattern codes discussed in this chapter and a more comprehensive account of the participants' perspectives relating to the research questions.

The first four survey questions asked participants to share their demographic data found in Tables 4-7. Survey Question 5 asked participants to rank the top three factors from a list that are most important when selecting a principal. The list of factors was developed from selection characteristics mentioned by Baltzell and Dentler (1983). The majority of participants (75%) ranked communication skills as the most important factor when selecting a principal (Table 7). Other key factors that were reported by participants were the ability to relate to others (62.5%), innovative (62.5%), and similar values to the district (62.5%).

Table 7

Most Important Factor when Selecting a Principal

Factor	Frequency	Percentage
Communication Skills	6	75%
Ability to Relate to Others	5	62.5%
Innovative	5	62.5%
Similar Values to District	5	62.5%
Experience at Multiple Schools	2	25%
Past Accomplishments	1	12.5%

Survey Question 6 asked participants to rate the extent to which they believed being an assistant principal prepares an individual to be a principal. The majority of participants (62.5%) reported that they strongly agreed that being an assistant principal prepares an individual to be a principal. Twenty-five percent (25%) of participants agreed that being an assistant principal prepares an individual to be a principal while one participant (12.5%) disagreed that being an assistant principal prepares an individual to be a principal.

The data reported from Survey Question 7 pertaining to the amount of time that each participant spent reviewing application materials for each candidate prior to interviewing are displayed in Table 8. Over half of the participants reported that they spent minimal to not much time at all reviewing application materials for each candidate before interviewing. Half of the participants (50%) reported that they spent a minimal amount of time reviewing the application and one participant (12.5%) reported spending not much time reviewing application materials. Two participants (25%) reported spending a moderate amount of time reviewing application materials, and one participant (12.5%) reported spending a significant amount of time reviewing application materials prior to an interview.

Table 8

Time Spent Reviewing Application Materials

Estimated Time	Frequency	Percentage
Not Much	1	12.5%
Minimal	4	50%
Moderate	2	25%
Significant	1	12.5%

Survey Question 8 solicited information from participants on how they agreed or disagreed with several statements about principal selection practices. Participants were fairly split on whether they agreed or disagreed that the district provided enough time for principal selection. Three participants (37.5%) agreed that the district provided enough time, three participants (37.5%) disagreed that the district provided enough time, and two participants (25%) neither agreed or disagreed on the amount of time provided. The majority of participants either disagreed (50%) or strongly disagreed (25%) that the district provides enough interviewee training for principal selection practices while one participant (12.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed. The majority of participants agreed (50%) or strongly agreed (25%) that the district provides enough information about candidates for principal selection practices while one participant disagreed (12.5%) and one participant (12.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed. Survey Question 8 also asked participants how they agreed or disagreed that the district reflected on candidates selected for principalships. The participants were fairly split in their responses with one participant agreeing (12.5%), one participant strongly agreeing (12.5%), two participants disagreeing (25%), one participant strongly disagreeing (12.5%), and two participants neither agreeing or disagreeing (25%).

Interview Transcriptions

The preliminary exploratory analysis was conducted after all the interviews were transcribed. The interview transcriptions were first read to gain a general understanding of the data and the perspectives from each participant (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Following the exploratory analysis, the digital transcriptions were uploaded to the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12 for coding and data analysis. Open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to determine the initial concepts and phrases that participants said during the interviews. As

this study focused on understanding the unique perspective of district leaders, in vivo coding was used during the first cycle of open coding (Miles et al., 2014). In vivo coding “uses words or short phrases from the participant’s own language in the data record as codes...phrases that are used repeatedly by participants are good leads; they often point to regularities or patterns in the setting” (p. 74). Relevant sentences, phrases, and words were selected/highlighted and then were assigned a code using the “code in vivo” function in NVivo 12. I also completed a manual coding of each transcription while listening to the audio recording of each interview in order to determine if I had missed any relevant data based on participant voice inflection or tone while sharing his/her experiences related to the research questions.

Initial open coding resulted in 229 in vivo codes. Second cycle coding involved the condensing of larger data sets into smaller analytical units (Miles et al., 2014). In order to condense the 229 in vivo codes into smaller units, I used pattern coding to cluster significant categories and concepts into themes. The pattern coding involved three procedures based on comparative analysis capabilities within the qualitative data analysis software: (1) word count frequency; (2) auto coding; and (3) comparing auto code matrix to a manually coded matrix. An open word count frequency query was run on each digital transcription. The word count frequency was compared to the in vivo codes to determine if words with a high frequency were missed during the first cycle of open coding. Word count frequency and condensing similar in vivo codes into theme nodes within NVivo 12 allowed me to explore patterns in the data.

To further explore patterns in the data, I utilized the auto-coding functionality in NVivo 12 to determine if any themes were missing that needed to be coded. The auto-coding feature analyzed all of the digital interview transcriptions and produced a node matrix that was then compared to the manually coded theme nodes. The comparative analysis between the condensed

manually coded in vivo codes and auto-code matrix resulted in seven key themes and six sub-themes that emerged during the analysis of the interview transcriptions based on patterns discovered in the data. The ability to group in vivo codes into nodes was the basis for exploring patterns in the data that resulted in the development of themes about principal selection practices and the preparedness of assistant principals for principal selection practices. The key themes discovered from the survey data, interview transcriptions, and/or follow-up emails included: (a) overview of the application process, (b) the idea of “fit”, (c) local issues, (d) training, (e) internal and external candidates, (f) implicit bias, and (g) recommendations. Additional sub-themes discovered in the interview data included the roles between the principal and assistant principal, the “natural cut-off” phenomenon during the interview stage, the influence of “principal-makers” on assistant principal preparation, the number of candidates, home-grown leaders, and the reliance of intuition during principal selection processes.

Overview of Application Process

The purpose of this study was to research the perceptions and experiences of district leaders relating the principal selection processes of the district at the center of this case study. All of the participants described an overview of the principal selection procedures and application process. The overviews provided by the participants were very similar in nature. These district leaders reported that the principal selection process include the following steps to the application process: (1) vacancy announcement; (2) screening; (3) forming applicant pool; (4) interview; (5) group discussion; (6) references; and (7) second interview.

Vacancy Announcement

Question 1 from the interview protocol asked participants to describe the methods used by their school district to attract applicants for principal positions. All of the district leaders

shared that the principal selection process begins with a vacancy announcement that is posted online. Seven of the eight district leaders described what the vacancy announcement included and when the school district posted the vacancy announcement. Arthur described the vacancy announcement:

It's a job announcement and links to our website, where people can look up information.

It's typically the requirements and the preferences for principals. [The posting] links back to the website so that people can look at salary scales and different things that they might be interested in before deciding whether or not to apply to be principal.

John summarized the vacancy announcement as an online post that includes “the job description, how to get to the [online] application, that is advertised in a variety of places on social media including our website, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.” The majority of district leaders reported that vacancy announcements were influenced by local issues such as retirements, resignations, and the need to develop a pool of principal candidates who have successfully navigated principal selection processes in anticipation for unforeseen situations.

Several district leaders described the time frame for when the vacancy announcement is typically posted each school year. Two district leaders provided their unique perspectives that converged on the vacancy announcement being posted during December of the school year, interviews occurring in January, and a late spring announcement based on local issues. Sara described that “typically the advertisement goes out in December and the interview process begins in late January however, we usually have to interview in the spring based on unforeseen factors.” Arthur shared that a call for applicants “...happens at least twice a year. It's typically December for winter interviews in preparation for the coming school year and then typically another application sent out in mid-late spring based on the needs of the district.” After the

vacancy announcement is posted, all of the district leaders reported that applications are screened in order to create a list of possible interview candidates.

Screening

District leaders reported that applications are first screened by the department of human resources to ensure that applicants meet the basic requirements for the principalship. Karen shared that human resources will then put together a list of applicants to be screened by a committee. The screeners will then rate each applicant based on his/her resume and application materials. This process is known as “short-listing” as screeners will provide human resources with a rating for each applicant who may be selected for an interview.

One district leader, Elle, summarized the screening process as “...a timeframe to complete a rubric of expectations aligned to the preferred and required qualifications of the job posting. Reading through the documents to make a decision to push through to an initial interview.” Some district leaders shared that screening can be a challenging process and open to subjectivity. This relates to System 1 thinking (Stanovich & West, 2000) whereby screeners may quickly eliminate unsuitable candidates and concentrate efforts on those who remain (Payne et al., 1988; Svenson, 1992). Karen believed that some applications are short and reviewed more quickly than others. Arthur explained that the screening process is difficult as a screener due to the number of candidates:

I think that the sheer volume of candidates sometimes that come through, I mean there have been times when I've screened it's been 18 people or 23 people and other times where it's been like 58 people, and you have a set number of time to get through them and

can I assure that everybody is doing the due diligence in reviewing all those materials? I don't think that you can.

Another district leader stated that “there is no training to be a screener. You're basically just sent an email with a protocol, some guidance on how to rate on a spreadsheet, but the screeners never meet together.” The number of candidates, the timeframe to complete screening, and limited training may explain why screeners rely on mental shortcuts to evaluate candidates to current employees (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). The reliance on System 1 thinking aligns with the concept of “fit” when evaluating candidates during principal screening practices.

Several district leaders shared that the screening process may not always allow the best candidate to make the shortlist. John commented that the best candidate might not be selected “...because really the paper screening comes down to how well the candidate is at writing a resume...but most people are not H.R. people skilled at writing a resume and know what [screeners] are looking for.” Arthur summarized that some candidates might receive higher scores on the screening rubric due to their varied school experiences; however, they might not actually be a strong principal candidate. Karen shared that screeners may be influenced by internal candidates during the screening process because “as a screener, you know a lot of the people that are applying, that leads to the question does screening potentially have a bias when rating? Probably but, you’re supposed to be objective.” District leaders reported that applicants who are rated high on the shortlist tend to be the individuals selected for the principal interview pool. However, a few district leaders shared that it is not required to interview the individuals that scored the highest. Participants described this flexibility in selection as selecting applicants who may be strong candidates and address the needs of the district at the time of the vacancy

announcement. The majority of district leaders shared that the hiring manager in coordination with human resources decides which candidates are selected for the principal interview pool.

Forming Principal Interview Pool

The principal interview pool is comprised of applicants who applied to the vacancy announcement, were screened by human resources for basic requirements, and then made the shortlist from the screening process. Karen summarized that the screeners submit scores for each applicant to a representative from human resources and a list of candidates to interview is created by human resources. She went on to say that “I believe that there are times when an effective candidate does not get through.” Karen explained that an applicant’s references are important during the screening process for the applicant to progress to the interview. Another district leader stated that the applicant’s references hold the most weight for her because “All you have is words on paper... references are what is written about that candidate. The resume is a resume, that’s important to H.R. I’m assuming if your packet is before me, you’ve met the criteria for that to happen.”

Another district leader reported that screening might be influenced by the amount of time allocated for the actual interview portion of the process. John explained that based on the interview day, “we see how many time slots we have and that’s how many people we interview from the screener’s scores. It may be eight selected to interview. But, if someone has a bad reference, they’re removed [from the list].” John also shared that he thinks about the candidates that were not selected for the principal interview pool— “We can’t interview 60 people in one day, sometimes only half a day we can maybe [interview] six to eight people. I think about, what about the rest? Who did we miss?” The majority of district leaders believed that the principal

interview schedule is created between human resources and the hiring manager of the principal position.

Interview

Every district leader reported that the interview panel is usually balanced between school-based administrators and central office staff. All the district leaders commended the school district for ensuring that each panel had diversity on the panel including different genders, races, ethnicities, job roles, and years of experience. Sara shared that “I like the balanced team with people of all different skills because we try to have our administrative team more representative of the community we represent. And we’ve got to make sure the panel is doing that too.”

Another aspect of a balanced panel that was reported by several district leaders was that panels consist of both central office staff and school-based administrators. One district leader explained that this is purposeful for principal selection practices as current principals understand the role and central office staff often work closely with principals or previously were principals.

The majority of district leaders reported that the interview is a structured format with a predetermined set of questions. The structured format was described as the panel asking the interviewee a series of questions with minimal back-and-forth dialogue. Once the panel is done asking questions, the interviewee is typically allowed to ask a few questions regarding the position. District leaders reported various experiences with how the interview questions were developed. Mary believed that the hiring manager and human resources develop the interview questions. She went on to state that “I think that the questions are basic interview questions for a principal position. But, there are certain questions that are created based on the system initiatives that are happening.” John commented that he had experienced a time when human resources

asked for input when developing the questions; however, people were not responding because “they might think it’s [human resources] job to develop the questions.”

Arthur shared a different experience as a panel member, “Sometimes I show up and questions are provided, or other times HR asked for input ahead of time. Then HR determines whether or not they use them on the interview panel. I think that helps with keeping things relevant.” Elle explained that the “best interview panels I’ve been a part of were when the leader has time to post the position, ask the panel about the questions they intend to ask, and request feedback on the questions.” Several district leaders reported that the number of questions varies from panel to panel. However, the majority of district leaders believed that the panel asked approximately six questions to each principal candidate during the interview. Each question has examples or “look fors” that the panel members use when scoring the applicant’s responses.

The majority of district leaders reported that the interview panel typically interviews six to eight applicants in one day for a principal position. Elle recalled that in her experience, the panel would interview a few applicants before lunch and a few applicants after lunch. She shared that she doesn’t score anybody individually, but rather scores all of the applicants at the end of the interview schedule. John described how he sometimes goes back and adjusts his scores for applicants based on his overview of how the group of applicants answered the questions. He shared that “I go back and adjust the score from interview one. Because all six of [the applicants], maybe the way the question was worded, we didn’t really get what we were looking for in terms of the look fors.” Another district leader reported that she would adjust her scores after the last interview based on whom she believed answered the question the most effectively and score each applicant appropriately from the highest scored. This process relates to the

attempt of System 2 thinking to filter initial reactions of System 1 thinking during the interview process (Stanovich & West, 2000).

The majority of district leaders reported that the climate of the interview might influence the applicant's performance. Anne shared it may be an uncomfortable and unfamiliar experience for applicants as there "seems to be an unwritten rule that part of this process is, not only can you answer our questions but also be in an uncomfortable situation and can come out on the other side of it." Elle commented that she thinks the interview climate is important for principal interviewing as "you can really see how the candidates think on their feet. And talk about the resources they would use and how they would solve a problem as a principal." Karen provided an example of her own interview experience for an administrative position and stated:

The process itself is not natural. You walk into a room and at the head of the table, you have all these people around the table looking at you. Many of them are not really looking at you, they're writing as you're talking. It's not a conversational type format. It's not a natural format. I remember my very first administrative interview. I walked in and I wasn't prepared for that.

Another district leader shared that the structured interview format is important as it provides the panelist with an opportunity to observe the applicant during a stressful situation. Carlos described that the interview is not so much about the correct or incorrect answer, but if he can understand how the applicant would think through a scenario as a principal. The majority of district leaders reported that the interview is important to the principal selection process in learning how the applicant would navigate a scenario as the principal instead of as an assistant principal.

After all the interviews are complete, each panelist has the opportunity to review their notes and scores before providing their scores for each applicant to a representative from human resources. Scores are then compiled on a spreadsheet by human resources and reviewed by the interview panel. Every district leader reported that after the computation of scores, the panel has a group discussion about each applicant prior to making a final recommendation for a second interview.

Group Discussion

The “group discussion” was described by each district leader and is the next stage of the principal hiring process following the interviews. One district leader, Karen, summarized that the group discussion is a critical part of the hiring process as it allows each panelist to add context to the applicant’s score that was collected following the interview stage. She continued by stating that “there's not supposed to be any discussion between interviews. Each panel member is reading and writing notes on their own...In the discussion that takes place after, to some extent, it's good because you're checking one another.”

The majority of district leaders reported that the group discussion was an important stage of principal hiring practices. Several factors that may influence a candidate’s selection were shared by district leaders. Every district leader mentioned the concept of internal and external candidates during the group discussion stage. One district leader stated— “If you go just by the interview and you take out all that the background knowledge and if used appropriately and used in a fair manner, background knowledge can be of benefit.” Another district leader explained that he likes the group discussion stage of the principal hiring process because it allows the interview panel to have open conversations about candidates. He shared that if the group discussion portion was removed that, “It potentially sterilizes the ability to have an honest, frank conversation.

There's a happy sweet spot.” The group discussion stage relates to System 1 thinking being filtered through System 2 thinking (Stanovich & West, 2000). The open conversation allows panel members to share their initial impressions and compare their thinking to the thinking of others within the group. Therefore, the group discussion is an attempt for the interview panel to move from individual System 1 thinking to group System 2 decision-making to recommend candidates for a second interview.

A few district leaders described other factors that may influence the selection procedures during the group discussion stage of the principal hiring practices. Karen shared that although she enjoys the balanced panel during interviews, the combination of principals and directors may influence the group discussion. She shared that “principals sometimes are hesitant to really give their opinion one way or the other in front of a director.” This may relate to the concept of groupthink (Janis, 1982) where panel members may refrain from sharing their opinions should they disagree with the group or other group members. Another district leader, Elle, shared that:

Our leaders really do keep their eye to the ground in terms of looking for leaders for positions. They have in mind ideas of people that would be good leaders. I've been in experiences where an interviewer didn't interview well. But, the leader would really like to see them move forward.

Elle continued to share that she is in support of the hiring manager moving a candidate forward through to the second round because ultimately the decision to recommend a candidate to the local board of education rests with the second interview panel. Sara echoed Elle's comments about the influence of the hiring manager on the group discussion. In her experience, she agreed that the hiring manager has some influence on the group discussion because of his/her prior knowledge of a candidate. Sara stated that “quite honestly some of our best principals aren't

necessarily the best interviewers. They're really good thinkers and they're able to organize really well.”

One district leader, John, explained that he does not mind the hiring manager advancing a candidate forward because the decision for a second interview does not have to be a unanimous decision. He shared:

The panel does not unanimously have to say yes move this person forward. And I'll say there have been some times where I've been in disagreement with maybe directors or panelists and they felt strongly about moving a candid forward and I felt strongly about not, and I voiced that disagreement. But they move forward, and I still support that director's decision.

John continued to comment that he supported the director's decision because typically the group discussion is about the top candidates who are above the “natural cut-off” in scoring. Every district leader referenced a natural cut-off score phenomenon that occurs during the interview scoring stage and influences the group discussion stage of the principal hiring practices.

Natural Cut-Off. The “natural cut-off” was described by district leaders as the phenomenon when three to four candidates score or rise above the other candidates. One district leader described the natural cut-off as “there always seems to be around three or four candidates where it's just a natural break. You have two or three candidates that stand out, one at the cut-off and the rest numerically drop off.” The majority of district leaders outlined the natural cut-off as a factor that influences the first interview as the interview panel typically recommends two to three applicants for the second interview stage of the principal hiring process. Mary described that there might not be much discussion from the interview panel about those applicants who scored

the highest on the interview rubric. However, the majority of district leaders reported experiencing discussions about the applicants at the natural cut-off. The theme of a natural cut-off relates to System 1 and System 2 decision-making where the panel may eliminate unsuitable candidates and direct their foci on those candidates who remain (Payne et al., 1988; Svenson, 1992).

District leaders shared different factors that may influence discussions about applicants at the natural cut-off score. Elle described that in her experiences, the interview panel has typically recommended three applicants to advance onto the second interview. She stated that the interview panel might discuss “the fourth and fifth [scoring] applicants that are on the list if their scores are close to the third one. We have to talk about which one of those are going to be moving forward.” Arthur described how the number of applicants selected for the second interview might influence the discussion about the applicants. He commented that based on the scoring, “Where do you make the cut? Do we send three through or do we send four through? I think that personality, their composure, their communication really comes in play which sometimes you can't see just in the regular numbers.”

Another district leader, Mary, shared during the discussion about applicants at the natural cut-off, “then that's a lot of times when, you know, you start talking about, especially with internal candidates, about who you know and your experiences with that applicant.” The majority of district leaders reported that the applicant’s references significantly influence the panel’s recommendation for a second interview. John stated:

There is a natural cutoff, but we don't just base it on those scores. There's a lot of discussion around the candidates because the scores are one thing, but we don't say we have to send the top four forward and not this one because they're not in the top. That's

just part of that. There's the discussion and we look at references...either good or bad, that can come into play.

The reliance on references may be an attempt by panel members to check their initial impressions (Dougherty et al., 1994) and consolidate their decision-making when recommending a candidate (Svenson, 1992). Other factors described by district leaders that may influence the discussion about the candidates for a second interview were the number of anticipated openings, the idea of “fit,” and the belief from the panel that the applicant had improved from prior interviews if the applicant had previously applied.

References

District leaders shared different perspectives relating to how an applicant’s references may influence principal selection practices. District leaders described references as critical to the district’s hiring process for every position including the principal. One district leader, Elle, described that references could greatly influence an external candidate’s selection— “For those who are on the cusp, that come from an outside county, we really have to rely on references.” Karen summarized that outside of the interview, the panel only has references to rely on to make a decision for external candidates.

The majority of district leaders described that a bad reference could influence an interview panel’s recommendation for an applicant who may have had a good interview. One district leader shared that he remembered the first time that he was a part of a principal hiring panel and reflected on references:

You're able to read the references that person has from their current leader. And I remember the first time what struck me was, does this individual know what their current leader is saying about them? Because it's not a great reference.

Several district leaders described how the reference of the applicant's current supervisor is especially important to the principal hiring practices. Assistant principals applying to be principals may have a good interview, but a weak reference from their current principal may influence a panel's decision regarding preparedness for a position. Another district leader shared that individuals completing references may be inadvertently providing a poor reference to a qualified candidate.

District leaders also described an incomplete reference or a reference without any comments by the individual completing the reference as a red flag during the selection process. Sara described that individuals completing references could benefit from training, "I'll tell you one of the weaknesses is the reference. I think we need training on truly how you should fill a reference. Because you get people that will go, oh he's awesome. But, no comments to explain." Sara went on to describe that no comments can be interpreted by the interview panel as a weak reference because the individual did not provide context to the positive remarks. Other district leaders summarized that even if a reference has high marks but no comments, that they may not even consider it during their decision-making process.

Second Interview

District leaders shared that the second interview is typically comprised of the hiring manager, senior leaders (e.g., deputy superintendent, executive directors, directors), and the district superintendent. Arthur described how the second interview is important to the principal

hiring process as the senior district leaders can ask open-ended questions about an applicant's educational philosophies, leadership styles, and capacity to be a school principal. Arthur also shared that the second-round interview has a different feel from the first-round interview in that it is less structured and senior leaders may ask an applicant to expand on an answer which does not occur during the first-round interviews.

Several district leaders commended the district deputy superintendent and superintendent for being a part of the principal hiring process. Carlos stated that "I think the fact that our superintendent and deputy superintendent sits on the finalist interviews of principals is important because ultimately [they are] responsible for the hiring of school leaders. I think that's a role [they] take very seriously." The majority of district leaders commented that they felt pressure during the first-round interview to send quality candidates to the second interview. One district leader commented that she had experienced one interview series where the panel did not agree to send any candidates to the second round of interviews, and the hiring manager decided to re-post the vacancy announcement. The majority of district leaders shared that the hiring managers strive to send three to four quality candidates from the first-round interviews to the second-round interview. Sara stated that during the first round of interviews, "We're screening and that's the purpose because we're taking three or four people to the superintendent and deputy superintendent." One district leader described the second-round interview as allowing senior leadership to determine if an applicant would be a good fit for the district and possibly a certain feeder pattern. Every district leader described the concept of fit and how it is a factor that may influence the principal selection process.

Fit

The concept of “fit” was described by every district leader interviewed for this study. Carlos shared that during the principal selection process “There is this other component of, are you a fit? You may have a lot of great experiences and skills, but are you fit for what we need at this point?” Another district leader described fit as “The person may be a great person. But they're not in the right seat on the bus. They are still a worthy educator, but the principalship is just not a good fit.” District leaders shared the concept of fit for the principalship in different ways and described how fit might influence the selection criteria and procedures during principal selection processes. The concept of fit was described in three different ways: (1) district fit; (2) community fit; and (3) principal fit.

District Fit

Several district leaders described the concept of district fit as the ability of the candidate to demonstrate familiarity with values like those of the district. Additionally, the majority of district leaders shared that a candidate should be an instructional leader who understands the district vision and systemic initiatives. Carlos stated that it is “highly important, if not the most important component [of principal selection] to be an instructional leader... Understanding the systemic initiatives and how all of those blend into being an instructional leader, not just see them as separate entities.” Karen described that a principal candidate must demonstrate a connection between being a building-level administrator and facilitating systemic initiatives that are valued by the district. She continued to share those principal candidates who are selected for principalships will ultimately represent the school district and therefore, should understand their role as a district leader beyond their assigned school.

The concept of district fit was also described as being closely tied to community fit. Specifically, one district leader stated that a principal candidate should be able to demonstrate an understanding of their role in connection to the district vision and needs of a community. Karen stated that the quintessential applicant should show that they understand “the vision and goals of the district and the school to which they'd be entering already has goals and a vision. What are they going to bring to that school community that's going to be an asset to the district?” Several district leaders described the concept of community fit being a factor that may influence principal selection processes.

Community Fit

District leaders described the concept of community fit from the perspective of the first-round and second-round interview panels. The concept of community fit was described as the panelist’s belief in whether an applicant could fit into a specific school or community feeder. Arthur shared that during the group discussion of the first-round interview, the panelists may believe or know of a school that has a potential principal vacancy. He described that “sometimes [the applicant] is interviewing for a community that you might know or think has the opening coming up even though, you know that's not that committee's decision to place people anywhere.” Another district leader summarized that after a candidate is selected for the principalship pool, senior leaders will make a recommendation of placement to the local board of education. Ultimately, the local board of education has the authority to approve placement decisions of school-based administrators and the communities whom they will serve.

Principal Fit

Several district leaders described the concept of principal fit as the capacity to view the candidate as a principal following the interview. One district leader described principal fit as the

belief he had in a candidate to be a principal in the school district at the center of this study. During a candidate's interview, Karen stated that "I'm listening for, would I want to work with this person...would I want my children, friends, and family to be in a school with this person as their principal?" Karen continued to share that her ability to see the candidate as a principal might influence her decision-making during principal selection processes. Another district leader echoed Karen's sentiments about principal fit being related to the interviewer's beliefs in the candidate's leadership abilities at a school. Sara questioned, "would I want this person to be the principal for my kid? If I can't say yes to that, then it's a no... I'm thinking about potentially the openings and can this person do the job [as a principal]?" District leaders described the belief in a candidate's ability to be a principal could be influenced by both verbal and non-verbal communication during an interview. District leaders explained that projection of self-confidence instead of arrogance, communication skills, eye-contact, handshaking, thinking through a question, fully answering the questions, and addressing both male and female panel members with equity as factors that may influence a candidate's fit as a principal in the district.

Local Issues

Every district leader shared that local issues influence the principal selection practices of the district. Local issues were described as events that are anticipated each school year that may cause a ripple effect throughout the district. These events may include principal retirements, resignations, terminations, internal movements such as promotions, or events such as extended leave from work. Elle described local issues as "when an opening occurs in a position maybe because of resignation or retirement or movement...that would cause potentially a ripple effect." Another district leader explained that an unexpected opening might cause a ripple effect across the district as "I don't think they're thinking about filling that position. I think they're thinking

about filling a position... people may need to move.” District leaders described that school-based administrators are typically informed of a transfer to a new school in between May-June of each school year.

The majority of district leaders explained that unexpected local issues could cause internal pressure on interview panels. One district leader shared an experience when an unexpected retirement and internal promotion led to a shortage of qualified candidates in the principal pool. She stated that “there's pressure because you hear we're looking to send up at least three or four people... And so when you feel that pressure to send forward people, it influences your decisions.” Another district leader said that a late vacancy might cause pressure on an interview panel in the spring, as he felt a new principal should have the summer months to prepare for the upcoming school year. According to John, unexpected local issues such as a spring posting may influence his decision-making as “it's not you know, I prefer this [candidate] over the other. It's who's going to be right at that moment to start immediately.” Mary described that unexpected local issues could drain the bench or pool of vetted principal candidates, leading to pressure on an interview panel to select candidates in late spring. She stated that “sometimes they're the best of the candidates you've interviewed, but the candidates were not particularly strong overall...you can't just say, well the people are not good enough and we'll leave the spot open, you can't do that.” When describing local issues, the majority of district leaders also referenced the number of candidates for a panel to interview as a factor that may influence principal selection practices.

Number of Candidates

Several district leaders mentioned the number of candidates available to an interview panel as a factor that may influence principal selection processes. The majority of district leaders

shared that they were concerned about the lack of candidates applying and even more concerned about the quality of candidates applying to be principals. Sara described that:

We're starting to see a shortage in people who are interested in doing the job. This system is based on a large pool, bringing it down to three or four people. When you only have three or four people applying, this process doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

She continued to explain that during certain hiring seasons, there may be upwards of 10-20 applicants applying to be a principal. However, Sara stated that “you have a self-selection process, you get a bunch of people who said, gosh I think I can do that job. And in that range, you may have only a few people that really can and some people who can't.” Another district leader commented that in a reflection of past panels that he has been a part of, “I can't say that I regret the decisions. But I think going back to the panels, that we should have had other options to choose from.” Anne shared that she does not regret any decision that she had made on an interview panel because “in that moment when those were the people we had. Do I regret it? No.”

Karen explained that the lack of candidates applying might influence selection processes as there are times when people are recommended who may need more time to grow. Elle described an interview panel experience when the panel decided that none of the candidates were ready. She stated that “We all agreed nobody was ready to go forward. And it was really powerful that the panel was all willing to come back and re-interview.” Elle shared that interview panels may feel discouraged from not recommending any candidate due to time constraints and local issues of needing to hire for a vacancy.

Sara shared that principal hiring processes are greatly influenced from year to year based on the number of candidates that apply in tandem with the local issues of the district. She recalled that:

Sometimes it's the candidates you have in front of you. Quite honestly some years, the people who've interviewed are better than others and sometimes there are more openings. This past year we had some really great candidates with very few openings. Two years ago, or three years ago, we had lots of openings and we had very few candidates.

She went on to describe that when there are few candidates but still vacancies to fill, the interview panel often discusses the training or experiences that the candidate has which may be reviewed during the group discussion. The combination of local issues and fewer quality candidates may influence principal selection practices depending on the hiring season. The majority of district leaders referenced the importance of training for staff at every stage of the principal selection process to help select quality candidates for principalships.

Training

Several district leaders shared the concept of training as a factor that may influence principal selection practices. Question 8 from the interview questions asked participants to share the training that the district provided to help selection members to assess and evaluate applicants. District leaders responded to this question by sharing the concept of training in three different areas: (1) training for screeners; (2) training for interview panelists; and (3) interviewee training.

Screeners

The majority of district leaders described that there was no formal training for individuals who initially screened application materials during principal selection procedures. Although

there is no formal training, a few district leaders who had previously been screeners shared their experiences of what the district provides to screeners. Karen explained that “there is no training on how to be a screener. You are sent an email asking if you would do it. You get a protocol for it and you're giving guidance on how to do it.” John summarized that the school district provides specific instructions via email on how to score application materials. He stated that:

Applications that meet the required qualifications are generally put on the shortlist of what we call paper screening. There are usually three or four administrators that screen. They have a google doc and they rate each candidate on the required qualifications...there's not an in-person training.

Several district leaders referenced that paper screening being conducted online is an effective practice to help screeners manage their time and to have easy access to application materials. Every district leader described that training for paper screeners might assist with principal selection processes. Specifically, training may help those administrators who screen to become more familiar with human resource practices and how to effectively review a resume. Additionally, several district leaders shared that providing exemplary resumes for screeners to reference may assist with scoring consistency between the screeners.

Interview Panel

Every district leader summarized the need for increased training for interview panelists. The majority of district leaders commended the district for recently providing training on topics such as cultural proficiency and biases. District leaders believed that this type of training is important for the entire school district and relates to hiring practices beyond just principal selection processes.

District leaders shared that training for interview panelists was important as the majority of them had no formal training despite being a part of several interviews. Karen stated that “I remember I was asked to sit on my first interview committee. There was no formal training or professional development or learning on how to be an interviewer.” Anne recalled that she had received some training on interviews from the district’s legal department; however, the training was regarding how to conduct interviews for positions at schools. She stated, “that was years ago and had nothing to do with me being on an interview panel.” Anne summarized that she relies on her experiences as a school-based administrator when participating on an interview panel. Arthur described that training for interview panelists is important because panels typically consist of school-based administrators and central office staff who may hold various perspectives on the role of a principal. He believed that training on what to look for during an interview could be beneficial for the decision-makers selecting the best candidate during principal selection practices.

Carlos described that before candidates enter the room for interviews that the panel is usually on the same page about the interview structure. He stated that “We do have a kind of calibration that occurs before candidates come into the room. But I think that's an area that we need to improve upon because I think we should do training for panelists who are interested.” Several district leaders shared that interview panels are typically well balanced with staff who have various years of experience interviewing at both the school and central office levels. The majority of district leaders reported that they had not received direct training on how to conduct an interview or contribute to an interview panel. District leaders explained that they would recommend training for individuals on the interview panel and opportunities for those interviewing to receive voluntary training on how to interview.

Interviewee Training

The concept of interviewee training emerged during both Question 8 and Question 9 from the interview. District leaders shared that they have observed applicants struggle through the interview stage of the principal selection process despite having strong recommendations and leadership experience. Karen stated that “I don't believe that we prepare applicants well to be interviewed.” Although she was mostly referencing internal candidates, Karen recalled that the majority of applicants that she has interviewed were unprepared for the interview. Sara described her perceptions of bias towards internal candidates in terms of training by stating that “There is really not a lot of training. There's some training for [current] assistant principals but the bias of the system is that their internal candidates.” Another district leader summarized that current assistant principals are typically the individuals interviewing to be principals within the district. Carlos believed that “we need to do a better job of training people to interview as well. I think people get on the job training when they are assistant principals, but they need to hone their skills when interviewing.” The majority of district leaders shared that training on how to interview could benefit internal candidates who could potentially be home-grown leaders by successfully navigating the principal selection process of the district.

Internal and External Candidates

Question 11 from the interview protocol asked district leaders to share their perspectives about internal and external candidates applying to be principals. The concept of being an internal or external applicant was a factor that the majority of district leaders described as influencing principal selection processes. Mary believed that internal candidates have an advantage when applying for any position within the school district, but thought strong external candidates had an equal opportunity for principalships. She stated, “I do think internal candidates have a leg up.

But I've interviewed external candidates that, you know this person will figure it out. They'll figure out the ins and outs of this. I would hire that person in a second." Karen stated that she liked interviewing external candidates because "...you hear their perspective and it's not our perspective. They bring new experiences or ways of building procedures, communities, and things like that, that are not here." District leaders shared that the screening process, local issues, tapping, and an applicant's reputation were factors that may influence internal and external candidate's selection.

Screening Internal and External Candidates

Several district leaders summarized how they had experienced bias when screening both internal and external applicants. Elle shared that "I can be honest that as a screener, I try to be as objective as possible, but I know my subjectivity may come into play because I know candidates who apply, I have to be very thoughtful about my scoring." Another district leader summarized that it could be difficult for him to see internal candidates not make the interview stage due to the rubric scores. He stated that:

I think when you're using the paper screening process, it really is that rubric where some people get higher rubric scores because they have varied experiences. But knowing when they're internal candidates and knowing the actual people who are applying and seeing that they sometimes don't make that cut because they are lacking maybe one experience over somebody else can be difficult.

Other district leaders valued experiences at different schools for both internal and external candidates because they believed it allowed a diverse opportunity for leadership in various settings. It was important to some district leaders for the applicant to demonstrate leadership in

both rural and city schools as a newly hired principal could be placed at any school in the district. The variety of experiences in tandem with strong recommendations was important to district leaders for both internal and external applicants during the screening process. Additionally, district leaders shared mixed responses on whether they held a preference or were motivated to select an internal or external candidate.

John shared that for external candidates, they “need to really do their homework to make sure that they're understanding some of the things that our county does.” He went on to explain that external applicants may be at an advantage in terms of bringing an outside perspective to the district’s initiatives. John believed that external candidates are able to blend their outside perspective with district initiatives and encourage innovation as a principal. Although district leaders believed that having an outside perspective was an advantage for external candidates, the majority of district leaders agreed that being an external candidate may be challenging for a new principal. One district leader commented that “there's that learning curve for external people to learn the system and learn the expectations and maybe learn new policies and procedures.” The local issues of the school district were described as one key factor that may influence selection procedures for internal and external candidates.

Local Issues

Question 11 from the interview protocol asked district leaders to share their perspectives about the strengths or weaknesses of internal and external candidates applying to be principals. Three district leaders summarized the concept of local issues as a factor influencing principal selection practices. Carlos shared that he has experienced times when the principal pool has been depleted due to unexpected local issues such as promotions, leave of absences, or staff leaving to work for another district. These local issues may cause pressure on district leaders to select a

qualified candidate or acting principal quickly in order to fill the open position. Under these circumstances, Carlos believed that internal candidates have an advantage over external candidates. He stated, “There's too much at stake. Absolutely. There is too much at stake. Internal candidates, I think just have a leg up because they know the system. They know people. External [candidates] have to learn so much.” Another district leader believed that internal candidates are able to navigate the local issues due to their connections with other principals. She shared “strengths for internals is that they've developed relationships with people so that when you are a brand new principal you can pick up the phone and call somebody and get some support right away.” The local issues and pressure to select a qualified candidate may relate to the motivational decision-making concept of “fit” and selecting a candidate that meets the “normalized principal identity” (Blackmore & Barty, 2004). Although two district leaders believed that being an internal applicant was a strength when local issues arise, another district leader shared a different perspective.

Arthur believed that although he has interviewed strong internal candidates, local issues may cause pressure on interview panels to select candidates who are not fully prepared. He shared that “sometimes you have internal candidates who have an ignorance about the position. Thinking that they are prepared because they've been exposed to it without having a depth of knowledge.” Arthur shared that internal candidates may have an advantage during the screening process, but that the interview stage of the hiring process evens the playing field for both internal and external candidates. He believed that the interview portion creates an opportunity for district leaders to determine if the applicant has the depth of knowledge or appearance of knowledge in order to recommend the applicant for the second interview stage.

Tapped

Question 9 from the interview protocol asked district leaders to share the strengths and weaknesses of the district's hiring practices. The majority of district leaders believed that candidates self-select when applying to be a principal. However, four district leaders shared that a strength of the district is "tapping" or encouraging current staff to apply for leadership positions including school-based administrators. Carlos stated that "I think a lot of people self-select. I think some of our strongest people need to be tapped because they're humble and they might not know, but they'd be awesome principals." John believed that tapping does occur for internal candidates through an applicant's current principal or systemic leader encouraging them to apply. He believed that tapping might occur "to kind of get people who maybe wouldn't of thought, wouldn't think that they're ready or wouldn't have thought of applying at that time. But they're tapped to apply." District leaders explained that although tapping may influence selection processes that ultimately it is up to the candidate to apply and successfully navigate the stages of the principal selection process in order to be offered a position at the discretion of the local board of education. Tapping is closely related to the concept of a candidate's reputation and it may be a factor that influences principal selection practices.

Reputation. Every district leader described that a candidate's reputation could influence a candidate's selection during principal hiring practices. The majority of district leaders related the concept of reputation towards internal candidates. Sara shared that "if you're an internal candidate, you may already have a reputation and as much as we try to check our bias, we know through cultural proficiency, that the bias is there. So how are we scoring?" It was also shared that both a positive or negative reputation could influence a candidate's selection during the references stage of hiring. One district leader stated that "I think that your prior body of work

when you are applying to be an administrator in any county every single thing that you have done up to that point matters.” Arthur summarized that a candidate’s character, morals, and ethics are important factors that may influence selection practices. He stated that candidates “can't expect to do things, say things, behave in certain ways and then when they're ready to move on to the next step make some changes and then expect people to forget how they previously did business or treated others.” John shared that a candidate’s reputation or body of work might be discussed during the group discussion following the interview. He stated that candidates should:

Treat every interaction that you have with somebody else in the district as part of the interview process. So if you come into the lobby downstairs and you're rude to the secretary at the front desk. That's part of the interview process. Like not officially but it comes up. It comes up in that group discussion.

District leaders agreed that a candidate’s reputation or body of work should be part of the group discussion as it adds additional context about the candidate’s abilities to be an effective instructional leader. Although a candidate’s reputation may come up during the group discussion, district leaders believed that it could be subjective and based on the experience of each interview panel member. One district leader explained that subjectivity could lead to implicit biases being a factor that may influence principal hiring practices of the district.

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias was not part of the original interview protocol or survey as I had not explored this topic during my literature review. However, my committee and I determined that asking the participants about their perceptions and experiences with implicit bias during principal

hiring practices would add another layer of data to the study. Following the initial interviews, I sent follow-up emails to each participant and asked them to summarize the extent to which each of them believed implicit bias (gender, ethnicity, race, age, etc.) influences an applicant's selection during principal hiring practices.

The majority of district leaders believed that implicit bias does influence principal hiring practices. Seven of the eight district leaders shared that implicit bias plays a moderate to a large role in an applicant's selection. Mary shared that implicit bias plays a large role in an applicant's selection during the principal hiring process. She stated that implicit bias is more apparent during the interview rather than the screening process "...because of the lack of clarity, training, and direction given to the interviewer, they are left to draw from their own background and experiences when assisting to select an applicant for a principalship." Arthur stated that "I believe that everyone has biases and makes assumptions about others. I think we all try to listen to people's answers, look at their bodies of work, and try to pick the best candidate for the job." Karen shared that the influence of implicit bias on how an interviewer rates a candidate is a subconscious phenomenon and may vary from person to person. She commented that "I believe the influence of implicit bias on how one rates potential principals is subconscious...for this reason it is difficult for me to say to what extent it influences. If asked to rate, I'd say it has a moderate influence."

Two district leaders responded with similar answers regarding the importance of including human resources staff on the interview panel for principal candidates to mitigate concerns of implicit bias. Sara shared that "an HR representative sits on each interview team and provides training, support, and advice. This person works to ensure a fair process is followed and bias is minimized." John believed that implicit bias is a factor that influences an applicant's

selection during the principal hiring process. He commended the district for having diversity on the interview panel for principals. He stated that in his experience, the interview panels are “diverse not only in race and ethnicity, but also gender, age, and tenure within the system. It’s easy for a panel to favor a candidate who looks like them. I always question panel members when I feel this is evident.” Another district leader shared that implicit bias “... can somewhat impact the hiring process; however, with our cultural proficiency training, members of the interview team are holding each other accountable.” Every district leader summarized that the school district had provided training on cultural proficiency over the past few years which included some training on implicit bias.

Implicit Bias Training. The follow-up email also included a question asking participants to describe how the district provides training on implicit bias and hiring practices. Every district leader shared that the school district has recently provided training on cultural proficiency to central office staff, support staff, and school-based staff. District leaders shared that the cultural proficiency training was created by central office staff. Additionally, the legal department and the human resources department have partnered to provide training on the best practices for hiring processes. About half of the district leaders reported that they had participated in implicit bias training provided by the legal department and/or human resources department. Mary described how she had participated in cultural proficiency training through school-based presentations by staff and premade online modules but believed that the training could be more focused on implicit bias and hiring practices. Elle recalled that “I did experience a training about implicit bias in the spring of 2018 from the school system. I have not received any specific training from human resources related to implicit bias and hiring processes.” Another district leader stated that the “...Chief of Staff facilitated two sessions with district leaders on implicit

bias in hiring practices. The district's work with cultural proficiency also addresses implicit bias with some minor connection during district hiring practices." John commended the school district for providing professional development opportunities such as training on implicit bias and hiring decisions. He also stated that despite the current training, "I think we could do a better job with this and reach out to more individuals regarding implicit bias and hiring as well." The majority of district leaders agreed that cultural proficiency training is important and that additional training focused on implicit bias within the hiring process could be beneficial for principal hiring practices.

Assistant Principal Preparation

Another aspect of this study was to add to the limited research on assistant principals. Specifically, district leaders were asked how they viewed the preparedness of assistant principals for the district's principal selection criteria and procedures. Question 6 from the survey asked district leaders to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that being an assistant principal prepared an individual to be a principal. Question 10 and Question 11 from the interview protocol asked district leaders to share their perceptions and experiences regarding assistant principal preparation for the principalship. District leaders reported several factors that may influence an assistant principal's preparedness for principal selection procedures including differences in roles, current principal, home-grown leaders, and intuition.

Differences in Roles

Every district leader shared that the role of the assistant principal is different from the role of the principal. The role of the principal was described as a visionary, building relationships within the community, serving as an instructional leader, cultivating the tone/climate of a school, and leading the closure of the achievement gap. One district leader described the role of a

principal as “It's a big job. The job gets bigger every year. And I think we have to acknowledge that and I think we have to be candid about that.” The role of the assistant principal was described as managing student discipline, chairing Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, managing school custodians, organizing testing schedules, monitoring lunch/recess duties, conducting teacher observations, and managing daily school operations. One district leader shared that “...to be a good assistant principal, you have to be a very good manager. And to be a good principal you have to be more of a visionary.” Carlos explained that for an assistant principal “...your day to day is more managerial, but you're still up close and personal with that instructional leadership component.” Another district leader stated that “the job is so different from being an assistant principal to principal. And just because you're a good AP doesn't mean you're going to be a great principal.”

Several district leaders shared that it is the responsibility of both the assistant principal and principal to share experiences and leadership opportunities. The opportunity for assistant principals to experience aspects of the principalship was a factor that was described as being important for the preparation of principal selection procedures. Anne believed that she could tell from an interview which candidate had a principal that allowed them to make decisions as an instructional leader. She stated that:

If you have a principal that allows you those experiences, you don't know until you're in that chair, you have no idea how isolating and lonely it is. But at least you've had a taste for solving problems you don't have to solve as an assistant principal. You can easily be an excellent assistant principal, solving assistant principal problems every day but until you become a principal, you don't grapple with the kind of problems they have to solve.

They are different problems. And if you have a good principal that lets you in on what the

problems are, here's what my thinking is, what you're thinking, then you can begin to think about problems that you're not even aware are going on. If you're just out there in assistant principal world, you won't be ready to be a principal.

The majority of district leaders shared that an assistant principal's preparation for a future principalship is largely dependent on their job location, their body of work, and their current principal.

Current Principal

Question 10 from the interview protocol asked district leaders to share the ways in which the assistant principal position prepares individuals and in which ways does it not prepare individuals to be principals. The majority of district leaders reported that the assistant principal's current principal might be the most significant factor in preparing an assistant principal for principal selection practices. Anne stated that "If you have a good principal, it's the biggest factor. It's the biggest factor in whether or not you're prepared to be a principal." John shared that in his experiences, he can determine during the interview if the candidate had a principal that allowed the candidate opportunities for leadership. He stated that some candidates, "They don't have that experience because they were never allowed to have that experience. So you could really tell from an interview which candidates have good principals and what candidates don't."

Karen described that in her own experience as an assistant principal preparing for principal selection processes, that her former principal offered to meet with her before the interview. She recalled that her former principal asked her questions and offered advice about instructional leadership, special education, community relationships, and data-driven decision-making. Karen believed that this type of coaching was a factor that helped to improve her

abilities to navigate the principal selection processes of the district successfully. Another district leader believed that an assistant principal's current principal is essential for career progression throughout the district. She stated:

Your principal is going to make or break you to people outside of your building. So if your principal is speaking highly of you and putting your name out there as someone who should be part of a committee or part of the panel or they would be good at this or that and is saying this person needs to be a principal now versus an AP who needs more experience.

Mary shared a similar description to that of Karen's by stating that an assistant principal's current principal "is the most important factor. Because that's where you learn as an assistant principal to be a principal from your current principal...that's the most important part of the training to be a principal." During the responses from Question 10, several district leaders reported the concept of a "principal-maker" as a factor influences the preparedness of an assistant principal for principal selection criteria and procedures. District leaders also described that principals makers might ultimately influence the career progression of the assistant principal for future administrative roles.

Principal-Makers. Several district leaders reported that the district has "principal-makers" or principals who have had several of their former assistant principals become principals. Mary stated that "I think there are principal-makers. And I think that there are very few principal-makers." She went on to share that although some principals may not be principal-makers, that they still have strong instructional leadership qualities which allow them to lead a school effectively. Karen also believed that some principals in the district are known for

effectively preparing assistant principals to be principals or instructional leaders at the central office level. She stated that:

You do have some principals in the school system who are known for effectively preparing future principals and so you have individuals who are placed with them on purpose because of that, because the assistant principal is viewed as somebody who will soon be ready or supposedly striving toward being a principal.

Several district leaders reported that they believed assistant principals were partnered with certain principals for a purpose. They believed that the purpose could be for preparation to be a principal, additional leadership experiences, working in a different community, or an opportunity to learn from a veteran principal. One district leader summarized the concept of a principal-maker as the leadership legacy of an individual and how their former assistant principals perform as principals.

Sara believed that she knew of three or four current principals who have consistently mentored assistant principals who perform well during principal selection practices and who go forward to be effective instructional leaders. She stated that “It is interesting when you look at who's a part of the legacies of certain principals.” One district leader shared that she believed that principal-makers could talent spot individuals who may be future principals. She explained that “Sometimes the best people out you know, everybody isn’t going to be a diamond right away. Some people still got coal because they’re new and they need help to knock it off, but that diamond is shining through.” The majority of district leaders reported that a structured training program for current assistant principals is a factor that influences a candidate’s preparation for principal selection processes. This topic is discussed in the recommendations section of this chapter.

Home-Grown Leaders

A few district leaders shared that they believed that being a “home-grown leader” was a factor that may influence a candidate’s selection during principal selection processes. A home-grown leader was described as an internal candidate who may have started as a teacher in the district before being promoted to an assistant principal or central office position. One district leader reported that she believed home-grown leaders might have an advantage during principal selection processes due to the candidate’s reputation and body of work. Another district leader believed that loyalty matters within an organization and that an internal, home-grown candidate should have an advantage if they are a strong candidate for the principalship. Arthur stated, “We want the best person in the job. But at the same time, it is my belief that loyalty matters. I want to grow our own leaders... they should have first shot at their professional growth.” The concept of home-grown leadership was usually described in connection to one of the recommendations of creating a leadership development department within the district.

Intuition

The majority of district leaders reported the concept of "intuition" as a factor that influences principal selection practices. Intuition was described by seven of the eight participants as something that they relied on during the interview when deciding to recommend a candidate for the second interview. Elle summarized that the application and interview do not tell her everything about a candidate. She stated that “You can see a blue chipper. Sometimes you interview a candidate. They might not have all the right answers, but you just know. You have an intuition that they're going to be successful.” Elle went on to share that in most of her experiences, she has been very impressed by the candidates that she has recommended for the second interview and feels proud to be a part of the process that allowed that candidate to

become a principal. John described experiences where a candidate has come into the interview and "... they blow me away. There's something about them. It's intuition." Sara stated that "I wish I could tell you what it is, but it's just magical...sometimes someone will come in and they are the last person of the day and you think you've heard it all. But they inspire me." She also went on to summarize that she has relied on her intuition when a candidate is unable to provide examples of his/her leadership that were included on the candidate's application.

A few district leaders reported that they rely on their intuition during the group discussion stage following all of the interviews. Sara described that the answers that candidates provided during the interview are filtered through her intuition when she provides final rubric scores and shares her recommendations during the group discussion. Sara believed that her intuition regarding candidates comes from her experience as a principal and working in the district for her entire career. Mary summarized that she also relies on her intuition during the interview and group discussion as she believed her intuition allowed her to foresee if a candidate would be successful as a principal. Several district leaders reported that intuition should be included during selection processes as recommending a candidate is a very important decision and that they should consider factors outside of the interview when making a recommendation. Karen believed that a balanced interview panel is important and to have members who rely on their intuition. She stated:

Some people are effective at being able to pick up on a person and get a good read on candidates in that setting. So you hope that you have panel members that can do that and kind of balance it out. I hope that there are panel members that use intuition. You need a balance of people.

Karen described that her intuition is based on her experiences as a school-based administrator, central office staff member, and from working closely with current principals in her current position. Several district leaders believed that their intuition stems from their own leadership experiences and is unique to each panel member. Additionally, district leaders were mixed in when they mostly relied on their intuition during principal selection processes. Several district leaders reported that they relied on their intuition and made immediate decisions about not recommending based on how an applicant answered a question. These district leaders reported that if a candidate shared answers that were not “kid first” or not collaborative, then they used their intuition to determine that the candidate may not be an effective principal. Two district leaders shared that even if a candidate responded with all the appropriate answers, that sometimes they just did not have a good feeling about the candidate or that they believed the candidate was not ready. Carlos stated that “There are some people that instinctually, I can tell from the first question. I’ll be honest like, yay or nay. Some people it takes me awhile. But there are some that I can just tell...it’s not going to work.” Anne and Mary both shared that in some interviews, they believed that they could tell from the first question if they were going to recommend or not recommend a candidate. However, Mary described that if a candidate is able to go back and add additional information to a previous answer, and it makes sense, that she has changed her initial reaction of the candidate. This process may relate to the consolidation of thinking (Svenson, 1992) within the System 2 decision-making framework (Stanovich & West, 2000) as panel members may alter their initial scores of candidates.

Analytical Discussion

This section includes an analytical discussion on how the three data sources relate to one another to provide a holistic response to the research questions. The following research question and sub-questions focused this study:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of district leaders regarding the principal selection process?
 - 1a: What selection criteria and procedures do district leaders report?
 - 1b: What factors influence selection criteria and procedures as reported by district leaders?
 - 1c: How do district leaders view the preparedness of assistant principals for the principal selection criteria and procedures?

There were three methods of data collection from the participants including: (1) survey questions; (2) semi-structured interview questions; and (3) follow-up email communication with each participant. These data collection methods allowed each participant to share their unique perspective on his/her perception and experience as a district leader regarding the principal selection process for the district at the center of this case study. Research sub question 1a asked what selection criteria and procedures do district leaders report? This question was addressed in the open-ended interview questions and allowed district leaders to share the criteria and procedures of the school district. All the participants described an overview of the principal selection procedures and application process. The participant's perspectives were very similar to each other and allowed me to codify the selection process for the district. The district leaders reported that the principal selection process includes the following steps for principal selection: (1) vacancy announcement; (2) screening; (3) forming applicant pool; (4) interview; (5) group

discussion; (6) references; and (7) second interview. Although each perspective was unique, the overlapping patterns within the overall data allowed for the principal selection practices of this school district to be codified for what may be the first time in a research study.

Research sub-question 1b asked: What factors influence selection criteria and procedures as reported by district leaders? The analysis of the data to answer this research question came from all three data sources. The amount of data to analyze concerning this question was comprehensive, and the majority of themes/sub-themes of this study were discovered within this research question. The overall analysis of the data related to this sub-question provides evidence that principal selection practices of the school district are prominently contextual. The key themes discovered from the survey data, interview transcriptions, and follow-up emails included: (a) the idea of “fit,” (b) local issues, (c) training, (d) internal and external candidates, (e) implicit bias, and (f) recommendations. Additional sub-themes discovered in the interview data included the “natural cut-off” phenomenon during the interview stage, the number of candidates during a selection cycle, and the reliance of intuition during principal selection processes. Survey Question 5 asked participants to rank the top three factors that are important for selecting a principal (Table 7). The majority of participants (75%) ranked communication skills as the most important factor when selecting a principal. Another factor that was reported by participants was the ability to relate to others (62.5%). Participants ranked communication as the most important factor from Survey Question 5; however, the context was provided during the open-ended interview questions as to the type of communication skills needed to navigate principal selection processes successfully. District leaders described the belief in a candidate’s ability to be a principal can be influenced by both verbal and non-verbal communication during an interview such as the projection of self-confidence instead of arrogance, eye-contact, handshaking,

thinking through a question, fully answering the questions, and addressing both male and female panel members with equity. These concepts relate to System 1 thinking as some district leaders noted these verbal and non-verbal communication skills as either immediate red flags or positive attributes referenced during the group discussion.

Additionally, participants described examples of immediate reactions that they may have to application materials or an applicant during the interview stage. For Survey Question 7, over half of the participants reported that they spent a minimal to not much time at all reviewing application materials for each candidate prior to interviewing (minimal 50%, not much time 12.5%). District leaders shared how they may rely on their perspective of “fit” or rely on their intuition when selecting candidates. Contextual factors such as local issues and pressure to select a qualified candidate may relate to the concept of “fit” and selecting a candidate that meets the “normalized principal identity” of the district (Blackmore & Barty, 2004).

District leaders also commented that their initial perspective of a candidate might be changed during the group discussion portion of the interview. These concepts relate to System 1 and System 2 (Stanovich & West, 2000) thinking as district leaders may use a combination of rapid/low effort and slower/deliberate decision processes when selecting principal candidates. District leaders shared that verbal and non-verbal communication skills were immediate flag reds that may influence their recommendation of the candidate and may be referenced during the group discussion. Initial impressions of a candidate, especially those around the natural cut-off”, may be brought up by panel members during the group discussion. Therefore, the immediate System 1 thinking of panel members may be challenged or filtered through System 2 thinking during the group discussion. However, the group discussion portion of the interview may also be influenced by characteristics of groupthink (Janus, 1982), linking back to challenges of System 1

and System 2 decision-making (Stanovich and West, 2000). One aspect of the study that challenged System 1 and System 2 decision-making was the sub-theme of implicit bias. Although the majority of district leaders shared that implicit bias moderately influences principal selection practices, they commended the district for providing training on cultural proficiency. The majority of district leaders described in the follow-up email that they agreed cultural proficiency training is important and that additional training on implicit bias within principal selection processes may be beneficial for decision makers.

Research sub-question 1c asked: How do district leaders view the preparedness of assistant principals for the principal selection criteria and procedures? The results of Survey Question 6 showed that the majority of participants (62.5%) reported that they strongly agreed that being an assistant principal prepares an individual to be a principal. However, participants shared during the open-ended interview questions that assistant principal preparation was highly contextual. District leaders believed that one of the most important factors for assistant principal preparation was the influence of “principal-makers.” This theme was closely linked to the other sub-themes discovered from the interview data that included the roles between the principal and assistant principal and the idea of home-grown leadership development within the district. Additional contextual factors such as local issues, the number of candidates, and a candidate’s reputation may influence the System 1 and System 2 (Stanovich & West, 2000) decision-making of the interview panel.

Recommendations

Question 12 from the interview protocol asked district leaders to share any recommendations that they believed could improve the principal selection criteria and selection process of the district. The recommendations were predominately focused on assistant principal

preparation and an internal leadership development program. Additional recommendations were ways to modify existing processes within current principal selection practices. The majority of district leaders commented that the current structure for principal selection was effective, but that additional training for screeners and interview panels may be beneficial for the district's overall hiring practices.

Assistant Principal Training

Question 12 from the interview protocol asked district leaders to share how they would change or improve the principal selection practices of the district. Several district leaders recalled how they had observed a difference between internal and external candidates during principal selection processes in terms of training. Internal candidates were typically described as current assistant principals within the district who are applying to be principals. The majority of the internal candidates who are current assistant principals receive professional development at monthly meetings provided by central office staff. Karen stated that “we currently have something in place at monthly meetings to develop assistant principals providing professional learning...we could look at what we are doing to prepare those people to be principals.”

Several district leaders shared that they have observed a difference between internal candidates and external candidates who may have been required to attain additional professional certifications beyond the required qualifications for a principalship. One district leader stated that “with some of our current assistant principals that are coming to the table, I think they are unprepared. Internally we have a problem. External candidates usually have gone through some type of development program.” District leaders reported that creating a leadership development department focused on building the capacity of current administrators would be a way to improve principal selection practices of the district. One aspect of the leadership development

department would focus on the development of an assistant principal to principal pipeline. Carlos shared that at one point the district had a leadership development department but that it was reorganized into another department. He stated, “I would reinstitute a leadership development and allow for more internal internships to have assistant principals work with veteran principals, similar to teachers that we put in yearlong internships.” He also commented that he would like to see more opportunities for assistant principals to be acting principals or placed in a co-principalship with veteran principals in order to better prepare for their own principalship.

Anne believed that current assistant principals may benefit from being a co-principal and that it could be a way for the district to ensure an individual is prepared to be a principal. Arthur described that he would like to see an academy or development program to support assistant principals in preparing to be principals. He would include “having access to system leaders who might come in and speak or lead scenarios and discussions...I think this would be helpful as they moved through the interview process.” Three district leaders believed that an important factor in the development of a leadership department would be talent spotting current assistant principals who may be strong candidates for future principal openings.

Talent Spotting

The concept of “talent spotting” was shared by a few district leaders as a way to improve principal selection practices of the district. One district leader summarized talent spotting as the ability of the organization to identify individuals with the potential for future leadership opportunities. Sara stated that talent spotting for her would be identifying current assistant principals who are “within a year or two of being a principal.” She believed that once an individual is identified as a potential principal that additional training opportunities could be provided. Carlos commented that the district should be using “... a lot of talent spotting and offer

a lot of opportunities for folks to become part of the leadership academy.” He stated that prior to the principalship— “how do we attract our best and brightest into a program that's going to prepare them for a principal interview and subsequently for principalship down the road for our assistant principals?” The concept of talent spotting was connected with the idea of a leadership development program focused on preparing current assistant principals to become principals. One district leader shared that he already believes that central office staff utilizes talent spotting and that the development of a formal leadership pipeline may improve the principal selection of the district. Additionally, talent spotting was described as an opportunity to identify and develop home-grown leaders from the district. Mary stated that “we encourage folks who are interested in being assistant principals. Encouraging assistant principals to jump into the pipeline to be a principal; that's a good place to start.”

Performance-Based Activity

Four district leaders reported that the inclusion of a performance-based activity could be a way to improve principal selection practices. Although a few district leaders reported that they had experienced performance-based activities in a few principal interview panels, that these activities were not consistently required. The concept of a performance-based activity was described as an activity that a principal may have to conduct or complete during a school day. District leaders shared that these performance-based activities may include drafting a letter to the community, designing a professional learning activity, sharing a professional learning activity with the interview panel, writing a teacher evaluation, or presenting a school improvement plan based on predetermined data to the interview panel. These activities were described as opportunities for the interview panel to observe how the candidate responds under pressure and demonstrates his/her capacity for leadership. Sara described that the performance-based activity

is important because “it’s a good simulation of what some of the experiences of being a principal is like.” John summarized that performance-based activities provide opportunities for the panel to glean if the candidate has the experience described on his or her resume. He stated, “it’s harder to make up an answer for an actual task, especially for something that you didn’t really do.” Alternatively, another district leader believed that the performance-based task allowed the panel to learn more about the candidate’s instructional leadership capabilities. Sara believed that understanding the candidate’s thinking process through a performance-based activity was more important than the candidate’s answer to the performance-based activity. She stated that “You have to come up with a coherent, articulate answer. It may not necessarily be the right answer, there are certainly wrong answers. But as a principal, you’re going to have to respond to situations and represent the entire school.” Sara believed that including performance-based activities throughout a leadership development program could be a way for the district to prepare assistant principals for principal selection practices.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to understand current principal selection practices and preparedness of assistant principals as reported by lived experiences of district leaders. I collected data via survey questions, one-on-one interviews with each participant of the eight participants, and follow-up emails. The key themes discovered from the survey data, interview transcriptions, and/or follow-up emails included: (a) overview of the application process, (b) the idea of “fit”, (c) local issues, (d) training, (e) internal and external candidates, (f) implicit bias, and (g) recommendations. Additional sub-themes discovered in the interview data included the roles between the principal and assistant principal, the “natural cut-off” phenomenon during the interview stage, the influence of “principal-makers” on assistant

principal preparation, the number of candidates, home-grown leaders, and the reliance of intuition during principal selection processes. Chapter 5 will be a discussion of the summary of findings, implications for practice, implications for research, and conclusion.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter provides a review and summary of research findings from the analyzed data that were presented in chapter 4. Those summaries were discussed from the analysis of the survey data, one-on-one interview transcriptions, and follow- up email communications. This chapter will also include implications for practice, implications for research, and conclusion.

Restatement of the problem

The phenomenon of principal selection practices is under-researched and unpublished (Hooker, 2000), relating to the “unresolved logical contradiction” as described by Baltzell and Dentler (1983, p.5). Little continues to be known about how or why a candidate for a principalship is selected, and principal selection research is dominated with anecdotal, unpublished procedures (Schmitt & Schechtman, 1990; Hooker, 2000; Blackmore et al., 2006; Kwan & Walker, 2009). Although the assistant principalship is often viewed as a stepping-stone to the principalship (Daresh & Voss, 2001), research has shown that the assistant principalship may not serve as an effective training ground for the principalship (Koru, 1993; Kwan, 2009; Mertz, 2006; Webb & Vulliamy, 1995). Given that the role of the principal has evolved (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Levine, 2005; Rousmaniere, 2013) while the role of the assistant principal has remained stagnant (Hausman et al., 2002; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Reed & Himmler, 1985; Scoggins & Bishop, 1993), this raises questions about the preparedness of assistant principals for the selection and hiring process of becoming a principal and transitioning effectively into the principalship.

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to understand current principal selection practices and preparedness of assistant principals as reported by district leaders of a Mid-Atlantic, suburban school district. As the researcher, I sought to understand the perceptions and experiences of district leaders on how they view the preparedness of assistant principals for principal selection processes. Additionally, I sought to understand current principal selection practices and to discover data to inform leadership development strategies regarding assistant principal preparedness for principal selection processes.

This chapter contains discussion, implications for practice, and research possibilities to help answer the research questions:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of district leaders regarding the principal selection process?
 - 1a: What selection criteria and procedures do district leaders report?
 - 1b: What factors influence selection criteria and procedures as reported by district leaders?
 - 1c: How do district leaders view the preparedness of assistant principals for the principal selection criteria and procedures?

Discussion

The eight participants of this study were district leaders with experience and knowledge of the district's principal selection practices and preparedness of assistant principals. Participants demographics including gender, race, and years of experience were generally reflective to the overall demographic data of the school district (Tables 3-6). Additionally, 50% (4) of the participants had participated in over 21 assistant principal-to-principal interviews, 25% (2)

participated in 10-15 interviews, 12.5% (1) participated in 15-20 interviews, and 12.5% (1) participated in six-ten interviews. Data were collected via survey questions, one-on-one interviews with each participant, and follow-up emails. The key themes discovered from the survey data, interview transcriptions, and/or follow-up emails included: (a) overview of the application process, (b) the idea of “fit”, (c) local issues, (d) training, (e) internal and external candidates, (f) implicit bias, and (g) recommendations. Additional sub-themes discovered in the interview data included the roles between the principal and assistant principal, the “natural cut-off” phenomenon during the interview stage, the influence of “principal-makers” on assistant principal preparation, the number of candidates, home-grown leaders, and the reliance of intuition during principal selection processes

The following three themes were most interesting to me as the researcher as they made me think differently about assistant principal preparation and principal selection practices of a school district:

- 1) The “natural cut-off” phenomenon during the interview stage of principal selection practices.
- 2) The various descriptions of “fit” based on the perceptions and experiences of district leaders.
- 3) The influence of “principal-makers” on the preparedness of assistant principals for principal selection practices.

Natural Cut-off Phenomenon

District leaders described the “natural cut-off” phenomenon as three to four candidates who score and/or rise above all of the other candidates during the interview stage of principal

selection practices. Every district leader referenced a natural cut-off in scoring, and that much of the group discussion is either at the cut-off or about the top three to four candidates. One district leader described the natural cut-off as “there always seems to be around three or four candidates where it's just a natural break. You have two or three candidates that stand out, one at the cut-off and the rest numerically drop off.” The natural cut-off is an important concept to consider during principal selection practices as it may reveal the characteristics of “fit” that school districts are seeking in potential principals. The convergence of scores from individual panel members to around three to four candidates may relate to the decision-making framework of differentiation and consolidation (Svenson, 1992). As panel members are faced with multiple candidates they may rely on mental shortcuts to evaluate candidates compared to current principals, aligning with the concept of “fit” (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Cable & Judge, 1997), the normalized principal identity suggested by Blackmore et al. (2006), and the concept of “cloning” principals through constant selection practices (Gronn & Lacey, 2006). Conversely, one district leader stated that despite the natural cut-off, “There's a lot of discussion around the candidates because the scores are one thing, but we don't say we have to send the top four forward and not this one because they're not in the top.” Another interesting facet of the natural cut-off is the selection of applicants below the cut-off which may be connected to the candidate's reputation, references, and otherwise being “tapped” by a hiring manager for a second-round interview.

Descriptions of Fit

District leaders defined the theme of “fit” in three different ways: (1) district fit; (2) community fit; and (3) principal fit. Baltzell and Dentler (1983) describe fit as the “interpersonal perceptions of a candidate's physical presence, projection of a certain self-confidence and assertiveness, and embodiment of community values and methods of operation” (p. 7). District

fit as described in this study may relate to the “methods of operation” as one district leader stated a future principal should understand “the systemic initiatives and how all of those blend into being an instructional leader, not just see them as separate entities.” Candidates who can articulate the systemic initiatives during an interview may be able to demonstrate fit within the district’s methods of operations.

Aside from district fit, I found the concept of “community fit” to be an interesting slice of the overall theme of “fit” considering the first-round interview panel does not make any recommendations for potential placements. One panel member stated “sometimes [the applicant] is interviewing for a community that you might know or think has the opening coming up even though, you know that's not that committee's decision to place people anywhere.” This may demonstrate that district leaders have a preconceived idea of the type of candidate who may be a good “fit” within a particular community. The idea of “community fit” would be fascinating to explore to understand how panel members develop their ideas/beliefs about who would be a good fit for one community over another? This may relate to the reliance of intuition or “hunches” as described in principal selection procedures (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Blackmore et al., 2006; Morgan, Hall, & Mackay, 1983; Parkay & Armstrong, 1987; Rammer, 2007; Wendel & Breed, 1988). The reliance of intuition for “principal fit” was described by one district leader who asked, “would I want this person to be the principal for my kid? If I can't say yes to that, then it's a no... I'm thinking about potentially the openings and can this person do the job [as a principal]?” The theme of fit from this study relates to previous research on the reliance of fit during principal selection practices (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Blackmore et al., 2006; Cable & Judge, 1997).

Influence of Principal-Makers

Several district leaders shared that an assistant principal's current principal is the most important factor for preparation for the principalship. I found this theme to be interesting as the idea of "principal-makers" was not prevalent in my literature review. One district leader stated that an assistant principal's current principal "is the most important factor. Because that's where you learn as an assistant principal to be a principal from your current principal...that's the most important part of the training to be a principal." Additionally, two district leaders shared that they believed there are only a few principal-makers throughout the school district and that "It is interesting when you look at who's a part of the legacies of certain principals." The theme of principal-makers from this study aligns with Retelle's (2010) understanding of principal-makers when she states, "A principal-maker was influential and well-connected to district leaders. They trained, mentored, guided, and sponsored their APs for promotion to the principalship" (Finding Section, para. 10). Retelle's study focused on the perspective of assistant principals who interviewed for principalships in the Pacific Northwest. The emergence of the principal-maker theme in this study from perceptions and experiences of district leaders in the Mid-Atlantic suggests that this is an area that school districts may want to focus on for the preparation of their assistant principals for principalships.

Implications for Practice

The following implications for practice address the principal selection practices and preparedness of assistant principals:

- 1) Codified Process.** One significant contribution of this study is what may be the first codification of principal selection practices for the school district at the center of this case study. The codified principal selection practices from this study align with recent

research on current principal procedures (Rebore, 2012; Smith, 2009; Spanneut, 2007; Webb & Norton, 2009; Whaley, 2002). Additionally, the principal selection processes of this district demonstrate a strong resemblance to those first codified by Baltzell and Dentler (1983). Research has shown that current principal selection practices may be ineffective, subjective, biased, and actually prevent the best candidates from being selected (Anderson, 1991; Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Blackmore et al., 2006; Parkay & Armstrong, 1987; Walker & Kwan, 2012). The codification of the principal selection process and exploring areas of improvement is significant as principals may “draw their sense of mission in a significant degree from their selection experiences” (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983, p. 16). The recommendations provided by the participants of this study may be a starting point for school districts to examine their current principal selection practices. One of the key recommendations was training for both application screeners and interview panelists. The training provided for principal selection processes differs from other hiring practices as training methods and techniques are not interchangeable or universally applicable (Salas et al., 2008). Training to improve raters’ observational skills and decision-making has increased rater accuracy (Hedge & Kavanagh, 1988). Additionally, training designed to reduce the “halo effect” or leniency of raters has shown to be effective at decreasing rater errors (Latham, Wexley, & Pursell, 1975.) This type of training may be especially suitable for decision-makers who rate internal applicants of whom they have knowledge during the interview process. Another recommendation was additional training on implicit bias and how it may influence the district’s hiring practices. This type of training is important as interviewers often judge applicants using

implicit stereotypes about race, gender, or age (Hitt & Barr, 1989; Reilly, Bockettie, Maser, & Wenet, 2006; Segrest Purkiss, Perrewe, Gillespie, Mayes, & Ferris, 2006).

- 2) **Identification of Principal-Makers.** Schein (1987) indicates that the pace and success rates of socialization within an organization have lasting impacts on the organization's culture. This is especially important to consider within the field of education as assistant principals may be hesitant to apply for principalships (Glanz, 2004; Weller & Weller, 2002). There is no clear definition of the role and responsibilities of an assistant principal (Weller & Weller, 2002). However, the emergence of "principal-makers" in this study suggests that there are principals who have consistently prepared their assistant principals for future leadership positions. This theme highlights the importance of the relationship between an assistant principal and a principal for leadership development. Marshall and Hooley (2006) reported that the principal defines the role of the assistant principal and establishes the relationship between the two. Participants in this study stated that they knew of only a few principal-makers who have a "leadership legacy" of developing future principals or leaders throughout the district. The identification of principal-makers may be the first stage of discovering the tacit knowledge that these principals are passing onto their current assistant principals to be future leaders. This is especially true for new assistant principals who are learning from their principals. The first few years as an assistant principal are critical for leadership development and have a substantial influence on later leadership capabilities (Berlew & Hall, 1966; Buchanan, 1974; Schein, 1987). This type of dyadic relationship between an assistant principal and principal relates to Leader-Member-Exchange (LMX) theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The importance of identifying and utilizing principal-makers is important when viewed through LMX theory

as high-quality leadership exchange produces a higher frequency of promotions, greater organizational commitment, better job attitudes, and faster career progress over 25 years (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993). The discovery of this theme and connection to previous research on “principal-makers” (Retelle, 2010) could be an area that the school district could explore for the development of a home-grown leadership program for assistant principals.

- 3) **Home-Grown Leadership Program.** One recommendation that was consistently shared by all of the participants of this study was the development of a home-grown leadership program. Participants explained that currently, the school district offers formal programming for individuals who aspire to be assistant principals; however, there is no such programming for other leadership positions. Participants shared that district leaders may rely on “tapping” or “talent spotting” current assistant principals who may be strong candidates for the principal selection processes. This aligns with previous research that “assistant principals are usually selected because of their visibility and success as teachers, department heads, counselors, or administrative interns” (Marshall & Hooley, 2006, p.13). The same type of visibility and success is important for current assistant principals who aspire to be future principals. District leaders could tap current assistant principals for a home-grown leadership development program to further prepare internal candidates for principal selection processes and future promotions (Alvoid & Black, 2014).

The development of a home-grown leadership program may encompass both district-level positions and school-based administrators, such as those seeking promotion from assistant principal to principal. A home-grown leadership program is important for

school districts to invest in as leadership preparation programs at institutes of higher education have been criticized for their lack of relevance to current school needs and professors with limited school administrative experience (Davis et al., 2005; Huff et al., 2011; Levine, 2005; Versland, 2013). However, there has been a recent change in professional accreditation of educational leadership programs which may improve some of these criticisms. Recently, the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards were designed to officially replace the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standards in 2018. This is important to note as the NELP standards were aligned to the PSEL. Specifically, “National recognition through NELP also provides external confirmation of program quality to attract applicants to the program and future employers of program graduates” (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2018, p. 3). One key difference from the ELCC standards and NELP standards is that there are two sets of standards— one designed for building-level leaders and one for district-level leaders. Institutes of higher education and school districts could establish partnerships to explore how to improve current educational leadership programs designed around the NELP standards. School districts could benefit from using the NELP standards as a framework when designing a home-grown leadership development program for future principals and district-level leaders.

Implications for Research

This study intended to contribute to the limited body of research about principal selection practices as little continues to be known about how or why a candidate for principalship is selected (Schmitt & Schechtman, 1990; Hooker, 2000; Blackmore et al., 2006; Kwan & Walker, 2009). Additionally, this study intended to add understanding to the preparation of assistant

principals for principalships as this role has been underrepresented in the literature (Glanz, 1994; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Ribbins, 1997). The contributions to the literature from this study may be unique in that the participants were district leaders sharing their perceptions and experiences of the principal selection processes of their district. Future research may want to include additional stakeholders in the exploration of a district's selection processes. These stakeholders may include representatives from the human resources or professional learning departments who are connected with leadership development. Including human resources in talent management and retention processes may be a pathway to explore principal retention. Future research could focus on the reasons for high principal turnover in the first few years of the role as this seems to be when principals are mostly leaving the profession. Additional future research may focus on identification and influence of implicit bias on hiring practices. Several participants identified implicit bias as having an influence on selection processes such as internal and external candidates or having previous knowledge of a candidate.

Another area of future research may want to focus on how principal-makers are identified and utilized within a school district. Finally, the influence of principal-makers was described by several participants in this study. The theme of principal-makers relates to the concepts of LMX theory, specifically leadership development of assistant principals. According to Graen and Uhl-Bien (1991), leadership making promotes partnerships in which the leader creates effective dyads with followers. Future researchers may want to explore the areas of LMX theory that principal-makers are concentrating on when they are developing future leaders within their leadership legacies. Therefore, school districts could utilize this knowledge to develop future principal-makers and provide training focused on the effective exchange between an assistant principal and principal.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a review and summary of research findings as well as implications for practice and for future research. Additionally, I discussed what I thought to be the three most interesting themes from the study that made me think differently about principal selection practices and the preparedness of assistant principals for selection processes. This section includes final thoughts on the overall research study.

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to understand current principal selection practices and preparedness of assistant principals as reported by district leaders. Furthermore, I sought to understand the perceptions and experiences of district leaders about how they view the preparedness of assistant principals for principal selection processes. The primary themes discovered from the survey data, interview transcriptions, and/or follow-up emails included: (a) overview of the application process, (b) the idea of “fit”, (c) local issues, (d) training, (e) internal and external candidates, (f) implicit bias, and (g) recommendations. Additional sub-themes discovered in the interview data included the “natural cut-off” phenomenon during the interview stage, the influence of “principal-makers” on assistant principal preparation, the roles between the principal and assistant principal, the number of candidates, home-grown leaders, and the reliance of intuition during principal selection processes. The codification of principal selection processes of this school district and understanding that assistant principal preparation seems to be highly contextual may be beneficial for school districts. School districts may use the findings from this study to identify areas within the selection processes that may be influenced by implicit bias. Furthermore, school districts may be able to leverage their “principal-makers” in developing or improving current leadership development programs. I hope that the findings of this study will provide insight to

school districts about their principal selection practices and preparedness of assistant principals as we relentlessly pursue the improvement of school environments for all students to achieve.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONS AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Survey Questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study about principal selection practices. I would like to ask you some questions about the processes that you have experienced as a member of an interview panel/committee for assistant principals interviewing for principalships. I will be recording today's interview in order to capture anything I miss while taking notes. Before we start, do you have any questions?

Please complete these initial survey questions:

1. What is your current position in the district?
2. Which position(s) have you held while serving on principal interview/selection panels?
3. How many years have you been in this district?
 - ☐ 1-5
 - ☐ 6-10
 - ☐ 11-15
 - ☐ 16-20
 - ☐ 21+
4. What is the total number of assistant principals that you have interviewed for principal positions?
 - ☐ 1-5
 - ☐ 6-10
 - ☐ 10-15
 - ☐ 15-20
 - ☐ 21+

5. Please rank the top three (3) factors that are the most important when selecting a principal.

Rank them in order from #1 to #3.

___ Similar values and goals to district

___ Communication Skills

___ Experience at multiple schools

___ Experience at multiple levels (primary/secondary)

___ Ability to relate to others

___ Past accomplishments

___ Internal Candidate

___ External Candidate

___ Fiscal Understanding

___ Innovative

6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that being an assistant principal prepares an individual to be a principal?

☐ Strongly Disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Neither agree or disagree

☐ Agree

☐ Strongly Agree

7. Regardless of the reason, how much time do you estimate that you spend reviewing and becoming familiar with the collective packet of application materials (resume, references, transcripts) for each candidate prior to the interview?

- ☐ Not much time at all (scan just prior or during)
- ☐ Spend a minimal amount of time
- ☐ Spend a moderate amount of time
- ☐ Spend a significant amount of time

8. In thinking about what the district provides for principal selection practices, please rate how you agree or disagree with the following statements:

The district provides enough...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Time					
Interviewee Training					
Information about candidates					
Reflection on those selected for principalship					

Interview Questions

1. In your opinion, who is the quintessential applicant to be a principal?
2. Describe the methods used by this school system to attract applicants for principal positions:
3. Describe how candidates are screened prior to the interview:
 - a. How is the screening process evaluated to ensure that the best candidates are selected for interviews?
4. How are interview questions developed?
 - a. Who develops the interview questions?
 - b. How long does it usually take to determine the interview questions?
5. Describe the techniques that you use to narrow down candidates following the interviews:
 - a. Is there a group discussion about all of the candidates?
 - b. Do you feel that you screen out some candidates quickly? If so, why?
 - c. Have there been situations where a panel member's prior knowledge of a candidate has influenced the group's recommendation? Describe.
6. What would be a red flag or an immediate non-recommendation of a candidate?
7. Has there been a time when you agreed to recommend a candidate but later regretted that decision? Why?
 - a. Has there been a time when you disagreed with the panel's recommendation but later changed your opinion of that candidate? Why?
8. How does the district provide training that will help selection committee members assess/evaluate applicants?
9. What are some strengths and weaknesses of the district's hiring practices?

10. In what ways does the assistant principal position prepare individuals to be principals? In what ways does it not?
11. What trends have you noticed in the assistant principals applying for principalships?
 - a. Strengths/Weaknesses?
 - b. Internal/External?
12. If you had unlimited resources, how would you change/improve the principal selection practices of this district?
13. Is there anything I have not asked that would allow me to better understand the selection process of principals and preparedness of assistant principals in this district?

APPENDIX B

HOOD COLLEGE INFORMED CONSENT FORM

IRB Use Only:

A Case Study on Principal Selection Practices and Preparedness of Assistant Principals for Principal Selection Processes Consent Form

1. **INTRODUCTION**

You are invited to be a participant in a research study about principal selection practices and preparedness of assistant principals. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a district leader with experience/knowledge of principal selection. I ask that you read this document and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. The study is being conducted by Joshua Work (Primary Researcher), in affiliation with Hood College, as part of his doctoral program. It is not part of a study for a school district.

2. **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study will investigate the selection procedures and criteria used during the principal selection processes for a Mid-Atlantic, suburban school district. This study will also incorporate the perceptions and experiences of district leaders on how they view the preparedness of assistant principals for their organization's principal selection process.

The intended significance of the study is adding to limited research on principal selection processes and the preparedness of assistant principals for principal selection processes.

3. **DURATION**

The length of time you will be involved with this study is approximately 60 minutes.

4. **PROCEDURES**

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following things:

- Participate in a voluntary, semi-structured interview.

5. **RISKS/BENEFITS**

The research study presents no more than minimal risk of harm to participants. Participants will be asked questions relating to sensitive information from their workplace however, extensive efforts have been made to maintain participant confidentiality. At no point will participants be asked to provide any identifying information, including evaluative, regarding an assistant principal or other employee.

6. **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The records of this study will be kept private. To protect confidentiality:

- Your name will not be collected or used in any aspect of this study
- You will be assigned a pseudonym
- All data will be kept in a locked office and secure computer
- Notes about data collected will all be kept on the researcher's computer which is only accessible through username and password entry.
- All data will be destroyed electronically and shredded after 5 years.

In any sort of report that is published or presentation that is given, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant.

7. **VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Hood College or any of its representatives. If you decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships. All interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder and transcribed.

8. **CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS**

The researcher conducting this study is Joshua Work. You may ask any questions you have right now. If you have questions later, you may contact the researcher at jfw1@hood.edu. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to speak with someone other than the researcher(s), you may contact Dr. Diane Graves, Institutional Review Board Chair, Hood College, 401 Rosemont Ave., Frederick, MD 21701, graves@hood.edu.

9. **STATEMENT OF CONSENT**

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

The procedures of this study have been explained to me and my questions have been addressed. The information that I provide is confidential and will be used for research purposes only. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw anytime without penalty. If I have any concerns about my experience in this study (e.g., that I was treated unfairly or felt unnecessarily threatened), I may contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board or the Chair of the sponsoring department of this research regarding my concerns.

Participant signature

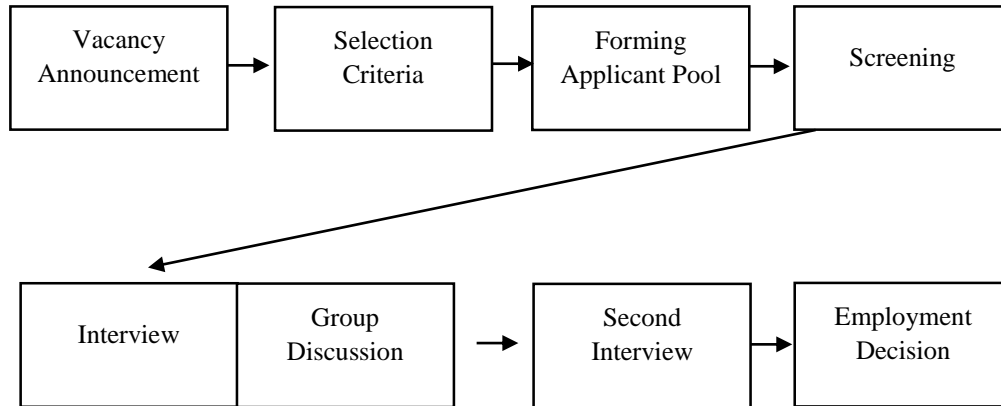
_____ **Date**_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

_____ **Date**_____

APPENDIX C

Principal Selection Flowchart



Note: Adapted from Baltzell and Dentler (1983).

APPENDIX D

Preliminary Research Question Alignment Matrix

Research Question	Methodology	Theoretical Framework (In process)
What are the perceptions and experiences of district leaders regarding the principal selection process?	Survey Question 7 Survey Question 8 Interview Question 2 Interview Question 3 Interview Question 4 Interview Question 5 Interview Question 7 Interview Question 8 Interview Question 9 Interview Question 11 Interview Question 12	Survey Question 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextual decision-making Survey Question 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextual decision-making Interview Question 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cognitive and contextual decision-making Interview Question 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextual, motivational, and cognitive decision-making Interview Question 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextual decision-making Interview Question 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cognitive, contextual, and motivational decision-making Interview Question 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextual and motivational decision-making Interview Question 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cognitive, contextual, and motivational decision-making Interview Question 9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cognitive, contextual, and motivational decision-making Interview Question 11 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cognitive, contextual, and motivational decision-making Interview Question 12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cognitive, contextual, and motivational decision-making
1a: What selection criteria and procedures do district leaders report?	Survey Question 7 Survey Question 8 Interview Question 2 Interview Question 3 Interview Question 4 Interview Question 5	Survey Question 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextual decision-making Survey Question 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextual decision-making Interview Question 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cognitive and contextual decision-making Interview Question 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextual, motivational, and cognitive decision-making

		<p>Interview Question 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextual and motivational decision-making
1b: What factors influence selection criteria and procedures as reported by district leaders?	<p>Survey Question 5 Survey Question 7 Survey Question 8</p> <p>Interview Question 1 Interview Question 4 Interview Question 6 Interview Question 7 Interview Question 8 Interview Question 9</p>	<p>Survey Question 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cognitive and motivational decision-making <p>Survey Question 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextual decision-making <p>Survey Question 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextual decision-making <p>Interview Question 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Motivational decision-making <p>Interview Question 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextual decision-making <p>Interview Question 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextual and motivational decision-making <p>Interview Question 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextual and motivational decision-making <p>Interview Question 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cognitive, contextual, and motivational decision-making <p>Interview Question 9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cognitive, contextual, and motivational decision-making
1c: How do district leaders view the preparedness of assistant principals for the principal selection criteria and procedures?	<p>Survey Question 6 Survey Question 8</p> <p>Interview Question 3 Interview Question 5 Interview Question 6 Interview Question 7 Interview Question 10 Interview Question 11 Interview Question 12</p>	<p>Survey Question 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cognitive and contextual decision-making <p>Survey Question 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextual decision-making <p>Interview Question 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextual, motivational, and cognitive decision-making <p>Interview Question 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cognitive, contextual, and motivational decision-making <p>Interview Question 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextual and motivational decision-making <p>Interview Question 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextual and motivational decision-making <p>Interview Question 10</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive, contextual, and motivational decision-making <p>Interview Question 11</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive, contextual, and motivational decision-making <p>Interview Question 12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive, contextual, and motivational decision-making
Demographic Information	<p>Survey Question 1</p> <p>Survey Question 2</p> <p>Survey Question 3</p> <p>Survey Question 4</p>	