Abstract

Title of Document:    PERCEPTIONS OF THE PREPARATION OF
                      EFFECTIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL
                      PRINCIPALS

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The primary purpose of this quantitative study was to examine middle school

administrators' perceptions of their preparation programs.  The following research

questions were addressed as a part of the study:

1. What skills, behaviors, and attitudes do middle school principals perceive
   to be important to be an effective middle school principal?

2. How do middle school principals perceive their level of preparedness in
   relation to the specific skills, behaviors, and attitudes?

3. To what degree do middle school principals believe that their level of
   preparation has influenced them to stay in their current role?

4. Which components of their preparation program do middle principals
   perceive to be the most valuable?

5. To what extent do middle school principals believe that the school district should design a program specifically to develop middle school principals?

Middle school principals were selected to participate in this study. Quantitative data were gathered via online questionnaires. The research questions were addressed through analysis of the questionnaire data, using descriptive and inferential statistics. This study resulted in recommendations to provide a framework for the development of a principal preparation program designed to train effective middle school principals.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE PREPARATION OF
EFFECTIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS


By


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**Chapter 1: Introduction**

**Problem of Practice Statement**

Can school districts afford to continue placing middle school principals in challenging schools without an appropriate preparation program?  In Chestnut Public School District (CPSD), only 12% of the district's middle schools met the Maryland state standards for annual measurable objectives during the 2012-2013 school year (Maryland State Report Card, 2012).  There are several contributing factors to middle school student achievement.  Previous research has shown that strong school administrators are essential to student achievement (Vanderhaar, Muñoz, & Rodosky, 2006), thereby indicating that a lack of strong administrators may be one of the reasons for the low performance of the district's middle schools.  Researchers have long established positive links among training, effectiveness, and student achievement.  The accepted premise is that principals' training for their jobs positively relates to their effectiveness and ability to improve student achievement. The Wallace Foundation's research, *Districts Developing Leaders: Lessons on Consumer Actions and Program Approaches From Eight Urban Districts*, determined that principals who participated in cohort-based preparation programs generally perform better on the job (Orr, King, & LaPointe, 2010).  These preparation programs included internships and concept-driven instruction.  The research revealed that principals who completed this type of training received high evaluation ratings from their staff and supervisors.

Several studies have suggested that principal quality impacts the level of student achievement.  Knoeppel and Rinehart (2008) conducted a study in which the findings indicated that schools led by principals receiving higher quality ratings displayed higher student achievement scores.  Similarly, it has been found that within

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1 year highly effective principals can increase student scores on standardized tests by 10 percentile points (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008).

It is becoming increasingly more difficult for CPSD and other urban districts to attract and retain effective school leaders.  Over the previous 4 years, the district had acquired 99 new principals, 31 of whom were new middle school leaders (D. Anthony, personal communication, October 2, 2015).  In the fall of 2015, only 5 of the 44 middle school principals in the district had 5 or more years of experience in middle school leadership (J. Campbell, personal communication, August 24, 2015). Several researchers have shown that proper principal preparation provides principals with the skills needed to become effective leaders (Adkins, 2009; Grigsby & Vesey, 2011; Militello, Gajda, & Bowers, 2009; Morrison, 2005; Orr, 2010; Petzko, 2008; Vanderhaar et al., 2006; Williams & Szal, 2011).  It is possible that with proper preparation on how to deal with the challenges of urban school leadership, there will be increased retention of effective leaders at all levels.

Chestnut Public School District had implemented seven different principal preparation programs over the previous 14 years (D. Anthony, personal communication, October 2, 2015).  Despite the availability of these seven programs, CPSD experienced high levels of turnover at the principal level and, thus, had not maintained principals long enough to cultivate a cadre of effective principals, particularly at the middle school level.  Consequently, based on the trended data, the researcher surmised that the district continued to struggle with the problem of principals' programs that failed to yield effective leaders who stayed in the district. With regard to the district's development of effective middle school principals, the purpose of this study was to examine middle school principals' perceptions about the available leadership preparation programs as well as their perceptions about the

necessary skills needed to become effective middle school principals. Analyses of the

data can help school districts, state boards of education, legislators, and university

programs across the nation develop a recommended principal preparation program

designed to develop effective middle school leadership.

**Definitions**

The terms necessary to understand this study are defined in Table 1.

Table 1. *Definition of Terms*

| Term | Definition |
|---|---|
| Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) | A measure by which schools and district are held accountable for student academic progress, as outlined by the federal legislation, No Child Left Behind (Maryland School Report Card, 2012) |
| Adolescent | A young person between the ages of 10 and 15 that is developing into an adult (Association for Middle Level Education, 2012) |
| Alternative governance | Category into which schools in the State of Maryland that fail to make student achievement goals for 5 years are placed (Maryland State Report Card, 2012) |
| Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) | The unique student achievement targets in reading, math, and science for each student demographic subgroup in the State of Maryland (Maryland State Report Card, 2012) |
| Common Core State Standards | National learning standards that indicate what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade level |
| Elementary and Secondary School Act | Federal legislation that provides funding and student achievement requirements for school districts across the country (Association for Middle Level Education, 2012) |
| Maryland School Assessment | A state assessment that meets the federal requirement for No Child Left Behind to test reading, mathematics, and science (Maryland State Report Card, 2012) |
| Maryland State Report Card | Document in which the State of Maryland compiles annual student assessment data for each county, district, and school (Maryland State Report Card, 2012) |
| Middle school | A school configured as Grades 5-8, 5-7, or 7-8, but generally 6-8, which is designed to meet the developmental needs of young adolescents through the organization of flexible structures, interdisciplinary teams, and adolescent instructional practices (Anfara & Mertens, 2007) |
| Middle school principal | An administrator of a school with the configuration of Grades 6-8 or 7-8 (Association for Middle Level Education, 2012) |
| National Assessment of Educational Progress | A national assessment of reading and mathematics that is given to $4^{th}$- and $8^{th}$-grade students. Assessments for mathematics began in 1990 and reading in 1992. Trended data are maintained to analyze the achievement gaps among subgroups (Vanneman, Hamilton, Anderson, & Rahman, 2009). (continued) |

| | |
|---|---|
| No Child Left Behind | Federal legislation that is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary School Act.  It provides federal funding for school districts that adhere to administering annual basic skills tests.  Schools are required to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (Anfara et al., 2006). |
| Principal pipeline | As defined in the article, "Principals in the Pipeline," "local systems ensuring that a large corps of school leaders is properly trained, hired and developed on the job" (Mendels, 2012, p. 48) |
| Priority schools | A designation given to the lowest performing school in CPSD that received additional support and funding under the 1003g Federal grant |
| Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) | An objective assessment of a student's reading comprehension level.  The computer adaptive or paper and pencil assessment can be administered to students in Grades K-12 and is based on The Lexile Framework® for Reading.  The test format supports quick administration in an untimed, low-pressure environment (Knutson, 2006, p. 2). |
| Transformational leader | Those leaders having the ability to bring about significant change, as defined by Daft: "Transformational leaders have the competence and character to lead change in the organization's vision, strategy, and culture as well as promote innovation in products and technologies" (Daft, 2014, p. 153). |

**The Historical Evolution of the Middle School**

The need to provide adolescent students with a different school structure has been a debate since the beginning of the 20th century.  In 1904 Gregory Hall addressed the development needs and characteristics of young adolescents in *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (as cited in Anfara & Mertens, 2007).  In its 1918 annual report, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education recommended the restructuring of school to develop junior high schools:

> We, therefore, recommend a reorganization of the school system whereby the first six years shall be devoted to elementary education designed to meet the needs of pupils approximately 6 to 12 years of age, and the second six to secondary education designed to meet the needs of pupils approximately 12 to 18 years of age.  The six years devoted to secondary education may well be divided into two periods, which may be designed as the junior and senior periods. (as cited in Anfara & Mertens, 2007, p. xi)

Originally, junior high schools were developed to fulfill two goals: provide a richer curriculum than what students received at the elementary level and a more nurturing

environment than that of high schools (George & Alexander, 2003). Junior high schools were also developed in an effort to decrease the dropout rate and train adolescents for industrial jobs (Cuban, not in ref 1992). Hall outlined the need for schools to address the development needs of adolescent students (as cited in Anfara & Mertens, 2007). During the 1960s junior high schools were referred to as "miniature high schools" and were widely criticized for not providing adequate education for adolescent students (Cuban, 1992). There were various school structures for adolescents. At the beginning of the 1970s and nearly half a century after the initial movement to reorganize secondary schools, 31% were either 2- or 3-year junior high schools and 23% were 6-year junior–senior high schools (Cuban, not in ref 2007). The middle school model began to emerge during the 1950s and 1960s (Anfara & Mertens, 2007). In 1971 there were 2298 middle schools and by 1987 the nation had 5,466 middle schools and 4,818 junior high schools (Cuban, 1992). Currently, the structures of middle schools vary across the United States. Chestnut Public School District was employing various models across the district: K-8 academies, 6-8 middle schools, and some 6th graders still in an elementary setting (P. Shetley, personal communication, November 23, 2015).

**The Historical Perspective and Importance of Middle School Leadership**

Researchers and educators have neglected and often ignored the evolution of middle school leadership. In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* was a pivotal report on the need to increase the level of accountability for school leaders; it was the catalyst for the school reform movement (Gardner, 1983). The report provided insight into the state of districts, schools, leadership, and student progress. As a result, school districts began to question the effectiveness of school leadership and increased the urgency to improve schools across the United States.

In addition, the Carnegie Corporation published *Turning Points 2000*, a vital report during the middle school movement, on educating adolescent youth in the 21st century. *Turning Points 2000* described the importance of the influence of middle school principals' leadership on student achievement (Jackson & Davis, 2000). The authors stated, "No single individual is more important to initiating and sustaining improvement in the middle grades student performance than the middle school principal" (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 157).

According to *The Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Principal*, the leadership style needed by effective middle school principals has changed. In particular, middle school principals have moved from being the commanders of their schools to being individuals who are able to collaboratively nurture and develop intrinsic motivation in their staff and students (Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, DuCette, & Gross, 2006). To create an environment conducive for the adolescent learner, leaders will need to be trained to develop and create an effective middle school culture. *Turning Points 2000* outlined the increased urgency to ensure that schools have effective principals (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

Responsibilities of the 21st-century middle school principal are complex and far reaching. Specifically, middle school principals must ensure that their adolescents do not face what *Turning Points 2000* referred to as the possibility of a "diminished future" (Anfara, Brown, Mills, Hartman, & Mahar, 2000, p. 186). Middle school is already a turbulent time in a child's life without the additional burden of attending a school with a poorly prepared administrator.

*This We Believe*, an official position paper of the Association for Middle Level Education, discussed the school structures and staff dispositions needed to provide effective instruction to middle school students (Association for Middle Level

Education, 2010).  The authors presented 16 research-based characteristics of

successful middle schools, based on three overarching categories: (a) curriculum,

instruction, and assessment; (b) leadership and organization; and (c) culture and

community (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010).

Table 2. *The 16 Characteristics of Effective Middle Schools*

| |
|---|
| Category 1: Curriculum, instruction, and assessment characteristics |
| • Educators value young adolescents and are prepared to teach them.<br>• Students and teachers are engaged in active, purposeful learning.<br>• Curriculum is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant.<br>• Educators use multiple learning and teaching approaches.<br>• Varied and ongoing assessments advance learning as well as measure it. |
| Category 2: Leadership and organization characteristics |
| • A shared vision developed by all stakeholders guides every decision.<br>• Leaders are committed to and knowledgeable about this age group, educational research, and best practices.<br>• Leaders demonstrate courage and collaboration.<br>• Ongoing professional development reflects best educational practices.<br>• Organizational structures foster purposeful learning and meaningful relationships. |
| Category 3: Culture and community characteristics |
| • The school environment is inviting, safe, inclusive, and supportive of all.<br>• Every student's academic and personal development is guided by an adult advocate.<br>• Comprehensive guidance and support services meet the needs of young adolescents.<br>• Health and wellness are supported in curricula, school-wide programs, and related policies.<br>• The school actively involves families in the education of their children.<br>• The school includes community and business partners. |

(Association for Middle Level Education, 2010)

The middle school environment is complex.  The complexities of middle

school include four essential attributes, as outlined in *This We Believe*:

developmentally responsive environment, challenging curriculum, providing an

environment and structures to empower students, and equitable learning opportunities

(Association for Middle Level Education, 2010).  In addition, middle school is often a

difficult time for students as they transition from the protected environment of

elementary school to the structured setting of secondary education (Anfara &

Mertens, 2007).  Developmentally, middle school students are in a time of extensive body changes.  Armstrong discussed the unique changes that occur during the middle years, describing adolescent students' emotional mood swings, hormonal imbalance, and neurological and physical changes that impact middle school educators as they work with the students (Armstrong, 2006).  In addition, *The Best Schools* provides 12 key features of developmentally appropriate middle schools: (a) safe school climate, (b) small learning communities, (c) personal adult relationships, (d) engaged learning, (e) positive role models, (f) metacognitive strategies, (g) expressive art activities, (h) health and wellness focus, (i) emotionally meaningful curriculum, (j) student roles in decision making, (k) honoring and respecting student voices, and (l) facilitating social and emotional growth (Armstrong, 2006).  School districts need to ensure that they develop proper organizational structures and build the capacity of middle school staff to meet the unique needs of middle school students.

Furthermore, the National Middle School Association  has asserted that middle school principals must have a deep understanding of the specific needs of the adolescent child and must recognize that they, as leaders, represent the catalyst for changing the school culture to influence student achievement and teacher effectiveness (Association for Middle Level Education, 2012).

Anfara et al. noted that the principal is the key factor in the development of a successful middle school:

> We have heard numerous accounts of exemplary middle schools that changed drastically for the worse because of an appointment of a new principal who knows little about the middle school concept or the nature of young adolescents.  One would think that because of the importance of the person who holds this position that much research has been done on the middle level principal.  Unfortunately, there is a significant lack of research in this area.  Much of what exists is descriptive in nature documenting the characteristics of those holding middle school principalships (e.g., age, gender, degree, and the like) and the programs and practices found in the middle school (e.g., teaming, advisory, transition programs). (Anfara et al., 2006, p. 7)

Attempts have been made to understand completely the distinctive nature of the middle level principalship, but there have been a limited number of research studies. Gale (2011) conducted research involving 24 middle school principals from Vermont to examine their perceptions of the prerequisite skills and knowledge needed to become effective middle school principals. Participants reported that middle school leadership requires principals to understand the adolescent child and the key leadership capacities needed to effectively lead a middle school.

In addition, Bickmore (2011) confirmed through his research with middle school leaders that there are distinct skills and behaviors needed for effective middle school principals. Bickmore replicated a previous study by Anfara et al. (2006), using the Middle Level Leaders Questionnaire to examine the perceptions of middle level leaders regarding whether or not they possessed the behaviors needed to be developmentally responsive leaders.

Because of the complexities, along with the ever-changing role of educational leaders, principal preparation programs have continued to evolve to meet these challenges (Orr, 2010). One preparation program in particular, New Leaders, provides the opportunity for each participant to serve as a resident principal for 1 year to learn the essential skills needed to become an effective principal.

Can school districts afford to continue placing principals in challenging schools without the appropriate training and support? Failure to provide appropriate training for new urban school principals could lead to dismal student achievement, high principal turnover rates, and ineffective leadership. Given the high turnover rate with the current district programs, additional research was needed to examine the current set of programs that provided a generalist approach to middle school principal preparation. Data from this research could be used to create a framework for defining

middle school principal preparation standards for the district, developing a principal preparation program that aligns with the characteristics needed for successful middle school leadership, and assisting with the creation of a pipeline of middle school principals.

Due to the increased level of accountability, educators cannot ignore the importance of a principal's role in increasing student achievement.  Several national studies have noted that half of new middle school principals enter their role with little prior knowledge or experience with middle level leadership (Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petko, 2004).  How well principals are trained for their jobs relates to their effectiveness as leaders and their ability to improve student achievement.

Most university- and district-based educational leadership programs are not providing training that distinguishes among elementary, middle, and high school leadership competencies (Bickmore, 2011).  A study conducted on middle level leadership found that due to the distinctive characteristics of middle level leadership, respondents perceived a need for specific middle school principal preparation.  Most preparation programs, including those in CPSD, have failed to provide a preparation program with a middle school leader focus.

Middle school principals face challenges absent at the elementary or high school level (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2007).  Middle school is a time when administrators must adapt to the unique needs of adolescents: social, emotional, and physical change, as well as uniqueness of schedules, curriculum, psychological needs, and support (Styron & Nyman, 2008).  Middle school is a difficult time for students as they transition from childhood to adolescence. Early adolescence is also a period of tremendous variability in all areas of

development among students of the same gender and chronological age (Association of Middle Level Education, 2010, p. 1).

The Association of Middle Level Education produced a position paper based upon research conducted to develop recommendations regarding middle school instructional programs. The authors of the paper asserted that teachers and administrators must develop goals, curriculum content, and instructional programs to meet the needs of middle school students (Association of Middle Level Education, 2010). *Turning Points 2000* outlined the importance of the middle school principal as a "change agent" and the most important person for sustaining school improvement (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

School districts, state boards of educations, legislators, and university programs must ensure that principals are properly prepared to lead and deal with the stress associated with the job. Principal preparation programs often do not provide leaders with the training needed to deal with the realities of being effective school leaders (Spillane, 2014). Farkas, Johnson, Duffet, Syat, and Vine (2003) found that 67% of principals across all grade levels perceived that their preparation program did not provide them the skills needed to become effective practitioners. Full implementation of Common Core State Standards and increased accountability will require principals to possess the instructional leadership skills needed to produce the outcomes associated with effective leaders.

**The Compelling Need for a Middle School Preparation Program**

Due to the increased level of accountability, it has become difficult to ignore the importance of a principal's role in increasing student achievement. In his research examining principal preparation, Orr stated, "Leadership preparation has become one of this decade's primary approaches to educational reform and improvement of

student achievement" (Orr, 2010, p. 115). Several national studies have noted that 50% of new middle school principals enter their role with little prior knowledge or experience with middle level leadership (Manna, 2015; School Leaders Network, 2014; Valentine et al., 2004). Furthermore, 50% of new principals leave the principalship by their 3rd year (School Leaders Network, 2014). The ability to properly train and retain effective principals has an impact on student achievement. Currently it costs the average school district $75,000 to train each principal (School Leaders Network, 2014). Proper preparation could provide school districts with an optimal return on their investment through the development of preparation programs that produce effective middle school principals.

How well principals are trained for their jobs relates to their effectiveness as leaders and their ability to improve student achievement. A Wallace Foundation publication entitled *The Making of the Principal: Five Lessons in Leadership Training* concluded that principals who participated in preparation programs that implemented a cohort model, internship, and concept-driven instruction received high evaluation ratings from their staff and supervisors (Mitgang, 2012). The high evaluation ratings were correlated with increased principal effectiveness. Further descriptors of effective principals also were established through another Wallace Foundation research study, *The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning* (Harvey & Holland, 2012). According to Harvey and Holland, there are five components of effective principal leadership: (a) shaping a vision of academic success for all students; (b) creating a climate hospitable to education; (c) cultivating leadership in others; (d) improving instruction; and (e) managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement.

According to Bickmore, most university- and district-based educational leadership programs do not provide training that distinguishes among elementary, middle, and high school leadership competencies (Bickmore, 2011). A study conducted on middle level leadership found that due to the distinctive characteristics of middle level leadership, respondents perceived a need for specific middle school principal preparation. Most preparation programs, including those in CPSD, have failed to provide a preparation program with a middle school leader focus.

Middle school principals face challenges that are not observed at the elementary or high school level. Middle school is often viewed as a difficult time for students as they transition from childhood to becoming teenagers. Early adolescence is also a period of tremendous variability in all areas of development among youngsters of the same gender and chronological age (Association of Middle Level Education, 2010, p. 1).

The Association of Middle Level Education produced a position paper based upon research conducted to develop recommendations regarding middle school instructional programs. The authors of the paper asserted that teachers and administrators must develop goals, curriculum content, and instructional programs to meet the needs of middle school students (Association of Middle Level Education, 2010). *Turning Points 2000* outlined the importance of the middle school principal as a "change agent" and the most important person for sustaining school improvement (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

A research study of school principal leadership summarized the distinct differences in skills needed at the various school levels. The research found that type of leadership varies based on the unique qualities of a school. Second, certain schools require a principal that is more than nominally qualified (Hess & Kelly, 2007).

The role of the principal has changed over the years. Provost, Boscardin, and Wells (2010) conducted a study in which 30 principals and assistant principals from Massachusetts perceived that their changing roles, increased accountability, inadequate resources, and lack of proper preparation were tied closely with the current role of the principal and their perceptions of effectiveness in that role. Districts must ensure that principals are properly prepared to lead and deal with the stress associated with the job. Traditional principal preparation programs offered by universities often do not provide leaders with the training needed to deal with the realities of being effective school leaders (Spillane & Lee, 2014).

Research conducted by Farkas et al. (2003) produced evidence that 67% of principals believed their preparation program did not provide them the skills needed to become effective practitioners. Full implementation of Common Core State Standards and increased accountability will require principals to possess the instructional leadership skills needed to produce the outcomes associated with effective leaders.

In addition, Hess and Kelly (2007) reviewed 210 syllabi from university principal preparation programs and found that the programs did not provide participants with the skills needed to meet the demands of the principalship. Many of the courses provided students with theory-based learning but few opportunities to apply their learned strategies.

**Principal Retention Data**

As noted earlier, Chestnut Public School District had implemented seven different principal preparation programs over the previous 14 years. Still, the district continued to grapple with the development and effectiveness of these programs. With proper planning, it is possible that the district could utilize the five components of

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effective principal leadership as described by Harvey and Holland (2012): (a) shaping a vision of academic success for all students; (b) creating a climate hospitable to education; (c) cultivating leadership in others; (d) improving instruction; and (e) managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement.

In addition, based on the recommendations of the Association of Middle Level Education, along with results from the *Turning Points 2000* report, the 16 characteristics of effective middle schools specified previously should be exploited to develop a preparation program to produce effective leaders (Association of Middle Level Education, 2010). At the time of this research, less than 20% of the middle school principals in CPSD had more than 5 years of experience as principals at that level. Nationally, only one third of all newly hired middle school principals remain in the same school for more than 3 years (Fuller, 2012). Research has shown that high principal turnover leads to high teacher turnover, thus affecting student achievement. Although the turnover rate for middle school principals in CPSD was lower than the national average, the question that remained to be answered was whether CPSD principals perceived that they were adequately prepared for their role and whether the perception had an effect on their decision to stay in the current role. Can CPSD provide middle school principals with the skills and competencies needed to become effective, thus increasing the likelihood that they will increase their tenure in middle level leadership and bolster student achievement?

**School achievement data.** The district's school performance data display the need for a new paradigm for principal preparation programs. In 2012, CPSD had 28 schools operating under the Maryland State Department of Education's alternative governance status (Maryland State Report Card, 2012). The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) assigned the status of alternative governance to

schools that failed to make adequate yearly progress for 4 years in a row.

Furthermore, during the 2012 school year, only 3 of 26 middle schools made all of

their adequate measurable objectives (Maryland State Report Card, 2012).  The

Maryland State Department of Education has defined annual measurable objectives as

the following:

> State established performance targets that assess the progress of student
> subgroups, schools, school systems, and the state annually.  This annual
> measurement insures that the non-proficient students will be reduced in half
> (by 50%) in reading/language arts and mathematics by the end of the school
> year in 2016-2017. (Maryland State Report Card, 2014)

Clearly, the district must address the needs of the lower performing schools through

the development of principal preparation programs that will provide a pipeline of

transformational leaders.  Through an effective preparation program, the district can

ensure that the schools have principals equipped to provide strategic leadership.

National, state, and district achievement data substantiate the need to examine

the effectiveness of principal preparation programs.  Eighth-grade students have

continued to display small incremental gains on the National Assessment of

Educational Progress (NAEP).  The national assessment is given to 8th graders to

measure essential reading and mathematics skills.  Data displayed in Table 3 reveal

that students displayed a 1-point gain from 2011 to 2013 in mathematics and a 3-point

gain in reading.  In addition, student scores reflected a 3-point decrease in reading and

mathematics from 2013 to 2015.  Nationally, there is evidence to support the need to

prepare effective middle school leadership.

Table 3. *National Assessment of Educational Progress Data*

| | Math (Range = 0-500) | Reading (Range = 0-500) |
|---|---|---|
| 1990 | 263 | 260 |
| 2011 | 284 | 265 |
| 2013 | 285 | 268 |
| 2015 | 282 | 265 |

(NAEP, 2014)

The Maryland School Assessment (MSA) and Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) data reinforce the need for effective middle school principals. The MSA is an assessment given to help the State of Maryland meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The assessment measures reading and math achievement of students in Grades 3 through 8. The SRI also has been used by CPSD as one of the college and career readiness indicators. The SRI provides the reading comprehension and reading levels of students.

Tables 4, 5, and 6 display trends in the MSA data for the State of Maryland and CPSD. The school district data continue to lag behind the state data. As shown in Table 6, during the 2013-2014 school year, the district's average middle school MSA scores fell below the state average for reading and mathematics. The percentage of middle school students scoring at proficient levels on the MSA in reading was 77.0 %, compared to 77.1% in 2013, whereas mathematics proficient scores were 60.1% in the spring of 2014 and 57.2% the previous year for 7th grade students (Maryland State Report Card, 2014).

Table 4. *2012 MSA Reading and Math Scores: Percentage Advanced or Proficient*

| Grade level | Maryland | | CPSD | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Reading | Math | Reading | Math |
| 7th | 81.0 | 76.3 | 77.0 | 61.0 |
| 8th | 70.7 | 69.3 | 69.6 | 50.4 |

Note*:* Adapted from Maryland State Report Card (2012), retrieved from
http://nces.ed.govtionsreportcard/subject/publications/main2013/pdf/2014451.pdf


Table 5. *2013 MSA Reading and Math Scores: Percentage Advanced or Proficient*

| Grade level | Maryland | | CPSD | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Reading | Math | Reading | Math |
| 7th | 85.0 | 72.6 | 77.1 | 57.2 |
| 8th | 71.4 | 67.0 | 71.4 | 51.8 |

Note*:* Adapted from Maryland State Report Card (2013), retrieved from
http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/main2013/pdf/2014451.pdf


Table 6. *2014 MSA Reading and Math Scores: Percentage Advanced or Proficient*

| Grade level | Maryland | | CPSD | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Reading | Math | Reading | Math |
| 7th | 78.8 | 63.1 | 71.5 | 47.8 |
| 8th | 76.9 | 58.7 | 67.6 | 41.4 |

Note*:* Adapted from Maryland State Report Card (2014), retrieved from
http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/main2013/pdf/2014451.pdf


Table 7 reveals that CPSD middle school students have displayed minimal gains on the SRI, which measures how well students comprehend literary and expository text. Chestnut Public Schools must ensure that students are college and career ready through their ability to comprehend text.

Table 7. *Scholastic Reading Inventory Percentage Reading Above or on Grade Level*

|      | 7th Grade | 8th Grade |
|------|-----------|-----------|
| 2012 | 63.43     | 65.22     |
| 2013 | 64.48     | 66.41     |
| 2014 | 65.67     | 66.27     |
| 2015 | 68.00     | 70.00     |

Note. Adapted from CPSD SRI Data Chart (2015)

**Literature Review**

Research completed in several states has supported the need for CPSD to generate a new program. *Principal Preparation Programs: Perceptions of High School Principals* reported research regarding principals' perceptions of their preparation programs (Styron & LeMire, 2009). Styron and LeMire administered surveys to 374 principals in southeastern states. Principals were asked to gauge whether they felt equipped, based on the skills they had acquired through their preparation programs, to deal with the day-to-day challenges faced by an urban district leader. The results indicated that 50% of the principals perceived that their programs did not equip them with the skills needed to deal with special populations. In addition, 31% thought the program did not properly prepare them to manage the school's accountability plans or student data.

Through the examination of achievement data and perceptions of preparation programs, school districts may want to take a closer look at the frameworks for their programs. Revisions to current programs could lead to the development of new urban school principals that are able to improve student achievement, a decrease in high principal turnover rates, and the development of effective leadership. Additional research and analysis are needed to formulate a preparation program that will ensure the success of a new line of middle school leaders.

This research provides the framework needed to redefine the middle school principal preparation standards, develop a middle school principal preparation program that aligns with the characteristics needed for successful urban school leadership, and assist with the creation of a pipeline of middle school principals.

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) in 2006 conducted a study involving the Providence School Department and University of Rhode Island preparation programs. The authors concluded that there will continue to be a disconnect between such programs and what principals need to know and do if university-based preparation programs continue to operate in isolation: "Many aspiring principals will receive outdated, one-size-fits-all training that is long on management theory but short on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to ensure the academic success of all students" (SREB, 2006, p. 2).

Daft defined transformational leaders as those leaders having the ability to bring about significant change: "Transformational leaders have the competence and character to lead change in the organization's vision, strategy, and culture as well as promote innovation in products and technologies" (Daft, 2014, p. 153). The creation of a pipeline of transformational leaders will enable the district to produce leaders who can facilitate quick academic gains and ensure the success of the entire school community. Mendels's article, "Principals in the Pipeline," defined the pipeline as "local systems ensuring that a large corps of school leaders is properly trained, hired and developed on the job" (Mendels, 2012, p. 48).

**The importance of preparation programs.** Three key points support the importance of the development of a new principal preparation program. First, there has been a renewed interest in principal preparation for urban school districts. The level of accountability has increased for all principals; it is clearly evident that the

onset of No Child Left Behind and Common Core has increased the accountability. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was created as a part of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act (NCLB, 2002). The act required states to create assessments that tested basic skills and held schools to the standard of making adequate yearly progress. A report by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), *Changing Role of the Middle Level and High School Leader: Learning from the Past—Preparing for the Future*, explained how the role of school leaders changed with the onset of No Child Left Behind (NASSP, 2007). The report outlined four ways in which principals must reinvent their role through growth in the following areas: visionary leadership, community-based leadership, instructional leadership, and culturally proficient leadership (NASSP, 2007). In addition, Common Core State Standards were implemented as a way to ensure that schools adhere to rigorous national standards. They were created to ensure that all students are college and career ready upon graduation from high school (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). The standards require students to apply their conceptual and content knowledge through higher order thinking skills (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). Due to the new national mandates, many principals are no longer viewed as building managers; instead, they have been forced to execute a paradigm shift that has required them to become instructional leaders. The high-stakes testing requires principals to develop the capability to increase student achievement through monitoring and modifying the instructional program within their buildings.

*Making Sense of Leading Schools* reflected national research on the principalship. Researchers for the Wallace Foundation interviewed principals from 21 K-8, elementary, middle, and high schools across the country (Portin, Schneider, Dearmond, & Gundlach, 2003). The qualitative research utilized case studies to

determine whether or not current principal preparation programs properly addressed the demands of the role of a principal. Participants perceived that their programs were insufficient because the coursework focused solely on managerial and instructional leadership. The programs did not address the complex strategic, cultural, and political leadership needed to manage the external forces. There is evidence that preparation programs have improved over the years. Novice principals involved in the study indicated, more than did veteran principals, that the preparation programs provided the skills needed for their current roles. It is the public's expectation that principals possess the skills needed to become visionary leaders, budget analysts, data experts, community builders, and disciplinarians, along with the ability to assume an infinite list of responsibilities. The increased pressures that principals face are outlined in the research, *Rolling up Their Sleeves* (Farkas et al., 2003). Farkas et al. surveyed 1,006 public school superintendents and 925 principals regarding issues that school leaders confront. The research report presented findings based on two common challenges: increased accountability and maintaining teacher capacity. Districts must ensure that they adequately equip new principals in their pipeline with the background and capacity needed to deal with the challenges outlined in the study. The creation of a new principal preparation program would provide principals with the skills and strategies needed to deal with their complex role. In addition, it is becoming increasingly more challenging for Chestnut Public School District and other urban districts to attract and retain transformational leaders. Over the previous 4 years, the district had acquired 99 new principals for the 211 schools (D. Anthony, personal communication, October 2, 2015). Similarly, the study *Leadership and Policy in Schools* took a closer look at principal retention in New York (Papa, 2007). The examination of retention of principals hired by public schools between 1991 and

1999 in the State of New York confirmed the need to provide effective principal preparation. Through the research it was found that principals hired within the district with fewer than 5 years of district experience were about 70% less likely to be retained than principals with at least 5 years of district experience.

Evidence from the State of New York and Chestnut Public School District clearly substantiates the need for districts to train prospective principals to increase the likelihood of retention. At the district level, the question needed to be asked if there was a correlation between the lack of proper preparation and the district's inability to retain instructional leaders. Proper preparation in how to deal with the challenges of urban school leadership could assist with the retention of transformational leaders. The need for effective preparation to assist with retention is reinforced by research from the Rand Corporation, *First Year Principals in Urban School Districts*: "A common theme across studies of principal retention is that schools with a high percentage of poor students, minority students, and/or low-performing students experience more principal turnover than their counterparts" (Burkhause, 2012, p. 3). CPSD must frontload its support through the implementation of an effective principal preparation program to ensure that it has a pipeline of principals with the skill set needed for the district's challenges.

**The correlation between principal leadership and student achievement.** The Wallace Foundation's research, *How Leadership Influences Student Learning,* stated that principals heavily influence the leadership and vision of a school (Leithwood, Lewis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Research has found a direct correlation between student achievement and principal leadership. The correlation can be further examined through CPSD data. The Maryland State Department of Education ranks each district based on Maryland School Assessment data, which are

used to assess student achievement for each district in the State of Maryland. Chestnut Public School District had consistently ranked in the bottom fourth of the list for the previous 3 years (Maryland State Report Card, 2012). The research funded by the Wallace Foundation articulated two ways that leadership is linked to student learning: "Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school. Leadership effects are usually largest where and when they are needed most" (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 5).

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) identified 21 leadership responsibilities and calculated an average correlation between each responsibility and the measures of student achievement that were used in original studies. Based on the data, the researchers calculated a 10% increase in student test scores with a principal who scored as average but improved her "demonstrated abilities in all 21 responsibilities by one standard deviation" (Waters et al., 2003, p. 5). Based on the data, it is inferred that with proper support and preparation, CPSD principals could have a positive impact on student achievement across the district. The framework for support could be developed and linked to the leadership responsibilities listed in the study by Waters et al. Through strategic planning, the district could differentiate its preparation to ensure increased leadership capacity of its future pipeline.

This principal preparation research examined the correlation between principals' perceptions of how well their programs prepared them and their trended school data. The selection criteria included the Maryland School Assessment data from the previous 3 years. The MSA data provided the level of student achievement based on mathematics and reading scores for the State of Maryland and the Chestnut Public School District. Students in Grades 3-8 were administered the MSA in the spring of each year. The research determined which components of effective

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principal preparation programs augment student performance, thus improving the overall achievement of students in the district.

**Prior Attempts to Address Middle School Principal Preparation**

Arthur Levine argued that principals are often overlooked in critical research on school principals; most of the research is focused on classroom teachers (Levine, 2015).  A limited number of states have specific certification for middle grade principals: Alaska, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nebraska, and Oklahoma (Hunt, 2014).  For example, the State of Oklahoma simply requires that candidates pass a Middle School Principal Assessment to obtain certification.  Only five of the states require middle level credentials.

Bickmore (2011) conducted a qualitative study of 393 Georgia middle school principals focused on what knowledge middle school principals needed, where they obtained their knowledge, and how professional development should be delivered.  Respondents reported that their educational leadership graduate programs did not specifically focus on middle level leadership.  Respondents perceived that university-based coursework did not provide them with the essential skills needed to become effective leaders.  In addition, in the same study the principals acknowledged the need to develop a middle level certification to ensure that principals obtain the necessary skills and competencies to be effective middle school principals (Bickmore, 2011).

In 2004, the Southern Regional Education Board, in collaboration with 12 universities, created training modules for principal preparation programs (SREB, 2006).  The modules provided information on the skills and dispositions needed for effective secondary school leadership.  Several colleges and universities have adopted the modules.  Numerous districts across the country have attempted to create general principal preparation programs for leaders at all levels.  Although these districts have

created preparation programs that provide global preparation, only a small number of districts have offered modules that focus specifically on the middle school leader.

New York City Public Schools conducted research analyzing the impact of preparation programs on middle school student achievement with New York University and the Institute for Education and Social Policy. The district implemented a 14-month intensive program, the Aspiring Principals Program (APP). Research on the APP program found that middle school principals who had not participated in the program led schools whose graduates' reading and math scores were .29 standard deviations below the grade-level mean as compared to students at schools served by principals prepared through alternative programs (Corcoran, Schwartz, & Weinstein, 2009). This program was different from CPSD programs, which did not train leaders for a specific school level. The researcher hypothesized that if CPSD created a specific program to train middle school principals, the district would observe an increase in student achievement and middle school principal retention.

Principals have transitioned from being building managers to being instructional leaders. Review of the literature revealed that agencies and districts have not created explicit and concise policies outlining how to prepare effective school principals. The lack of a state policy for principal preparation programs has an impact at the local district level. CPSD did not have an administrative procedure regarding the implementation or creation of principal preparation programs (L. Ellis, personal communication, June 24, 2013). The district referred to Maryland's Instructional Leadership Framework to guide the creation of programs for aspiring principals (L. Ellis, personal communication, June 24, 2013). The Office of Talent

Development worked with outside organizations to support the district's principal preparation programs.

Triangulation of the data supports the need for a national, state, and district principal preparation policy.  First, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) did not address the need to provide aspiring principals with effective preparation and support (McGuinn, 2006).  Two attempts to modify the ESEA through the implementation of the School Recruitment and Training Act have failed. Although many states use the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards as a guide, they do not specifically address the effective components of preparation programs.  Second, the State of Maryland produced a framework addressing the competencies needed for an effective principal but has not created a framework to outline the components of a successful preparation program. Furthermore, the State of Maryland has provided no guidelines for traditional principal preparation programs.  The Educational Leader Standards were developed by the Educational Leadership Constituencies Council (ELCC).  ELCC Standard 7 addresses the internship component of principal preparation:

> Standard 7.0**:** Graduates are educational leaders who have the ability and experience to promote the success of all students by completing an internship that provides significant opportunities for synthesizing and applying knowledge and practicing the skills identified in Standards 1-6 through substantial, sustained, standards-based work in real settings, planned and guided cooperatively by the institution and school district personnel for graduate credit. (Educational Leadership Constituencies Council, 2002, p. 6)

Although Standard 7 addresses one component of principal preparation, the skills listed in Standards 1-6 do not address the specific competencies of effective middle school principals.

The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) provides the administrative rules for agencies, including the necessary guidelines to local education agencies

regarding the establishment of principal preparation programs. Although CPSD had not created an administrative procedure for the implementation of principal preparation programs, it had developed plans to create a residency principal program. The State of Maryland has a COMAR regulation that provides an opportunity for school districts to create their own resident principal programs (COMAR, 2005).

The district currently was utilizing the Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework, which has not addressed the components of an effective middle school preparation program. The Maryland regulations address the coursework needed for certification in the State of Maryland as an administrator but not the skills and competencies needed at the middle school level (COMAR, 2005). During an executive leadership training session sponsored by the Maryland State Department of Education, Illene Swinow asserted that the Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework should be revised to reflect the current skills needed by principals (I. Swinow, personal communication, July 6, 2013). CPSD did not have a way to measure the effectiveness of the principals' performance based on preparation or acquired skills (D. Anthony, personal communication, April 18, 2013).

The lack of a district policy for principals' preparation programs hinders the development of effective principals. Over a recent 3-year period, CPSD acquired 107 new principals (D. Anthony, personal communication, January 25, 2013). Can the district correlate the low retention rate to the effectiveness of CPSD's principal preparation programs? An effective principal preparation policy would provide a framework to ensure that the district develops programs that create effective leaders.

**Federal and National Policy Regarding Principal Preparation Programs.**

Several entities have contributed to the change in federal and state initiatives to address principal preparation: national principal organizations (the National

Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP] and the National Association of

Elementary School Principals [NAESP], local school districts, state school boards, the

Council of Chief State School Officers, and principal preparation programs.  The

Council of Chief State School Officers collaborated with the National Policy Board

on Educational Administration to create the Interstate School Leaders Licensure

Consortium Standards (Queen, Peel, & Shipman, 2013).  The standards were

developed in 1996 and revised in 2008 to provide a model for state education

leadership policies (Queen et al., 2013) and to help strengthen principal preparation

programs.

In recent years, NASSP and the School Superintendent Association have been

instrumental in setting the federal agenda for principal preparation reform.  NASSP

has a legislative action center to establish interest group pressure (NASSP, 2013).

NASSP attempted to lobby for the partial revision of the Elementary and Secondary

School Act in December 2009 through the implementation of the School Principal

Recruitment and Training Act of 2009 (HR 4254, 2009).  The bill, providing a

framework for how to prepare, recruit, and support school principals, was introduced

and referred to the House subcommittee (School Principal Recruitment and Training

Act, 2009).  The bill was revised and reintroduced in April 2013 as HR 1736, but it

was not supported in the Senate (School Principal Recruitment and Training Act,

2013).  The revised bill provided stronger language about the level of support needed

for school principal preparation and required a 1-year residency to train aspiring

principals on the use of data to inform instruction, instructional leadership, and

organizational management (School Principal Recruitment and Training Act, 2013).

The new bill clearly outlined how grant-funding priority would be given to

preparation programs that demonstrated the ability to prepare effective leaders:

In awarding grants under this section, the Secretary shall give priority to an eligible entity that has the ability to provide data on principal preparation or a record of developing principals who
- have improved school-level student outcomes;
- have become principals in eligible schools; and
- remain principals in eligible schools for multiple years.

(School Principal Recruitment and Training Act, 2013, p. 1)

Although no federal policy exists regarding principal preparation programs, many states utilize the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards (Queen et al., 2013). The Council of Chief State School Officers collaborated with The National Policy Board of Educational Administration to create the standards, developed in 1996 and revised in 2008, to provide a model of state education leadership policies (Murphy et al., 2000). The standards list the competencies displayed by an effective school leader but do not address the effective components of preparation programs.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) created a national principal certification program (NBPTS, 2013). The national certification was created to provide a consistent and reliable process for developing effective principals. The intended outcome would be to recognize and retain leaders that achieve the national certification status. The process involved the completion of a national testing program; the first field test was completed in December 2012. In April 2014, the NBPTS voted to end the principal certification program (Maxwell, 2014).

**Maryland principal certification requirements.** Furthermore, state policies on how to develop effective school leaders are lacking. Manna pointed out that states should: (a) increase their oversight of principal preparation programs, (b) increase preparation programs and sunset them, and (c) provide programs with incentives if they improve (Manna, 2015). Maryland's certification requirements for school

assistant principals include a master's degree from an approved institution and 18 hours of graduate work with specified coursework (COMAR, 2005). The aforementioned requirement, along with successful completion of the School Leaders Licensure Assessment, is needed to become a principal. The 18 hours of graduate work are needed to obtain an Administration I certification that allows one to become an assistant principal. In alignment with ELCC Standard 7, the State of Maryland requires an internship, which constitutes 3 credit hours of the 18 hours (MSDE, 2003).

The Maryland State Department of Education established a policy to allow principals to become certified through an alternative certification program (COMAR, 2005). Teachers and assistant principals are able to receive Administrative I certification upon completion of the New Leaders program. The program requires rigorous training and a 1-year residency. The state's policy has addressed approval of the program but not the specific certification components (COMAR, 2005). Participants in the program are required to take the School Leaders Licensure Assessment to obtain the Administrative II certification needed to become a principal.

In 1998, a 15-month study conducted by the Maryland Association of Secondary School Principals sought to answer the following questions:

1. Does the state have a shortage of qualified prospective secondary administrators?

2. If this is true, what can the state do about it? (MSDE, 2000, p. 1)

In August 2000, the Maryland Task Force on the principalship provided recommendations for redefining the role of the principal; recruiting, retaining, and rewarding principals; and improving their preparation and development (MSDE, 2000). The document provided recommendations for building effective preparation programs, but the state did not create a policy to support the recommendations.

In addition, in February 2005, the State of Maryland adopted the Maryland Instructional Framework, which described the instructional leadership practices of principals (MSDE, 2005). The framework did not include all of the responsibilities of quality principals, but "focuse[d], instead on the content knowledge needed for school principals to be the leader of teaching-learning in the school" (MSDE, 2005, p. 2). Further, "the Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework will guide instructional leadership professional development for veteran, new, and potential school leaders" (MSDE, 2005, p. 3). The framework has been used to guide the development of principal preparation programs in Chestnut Public School District.

**Chestnut Public School District framework for principal preparation.** At the time of this study, Chestnut Public School District did not have an administrative procedure regarding the implementation or creation of principal preparation programs (L. Ellis, personal communication, June 24, 2013). The district referred to Maryland's Instructional Leadership Framework to guide the creation of programs for aspiring principals (L. Ellis, June 24, 2013). The Office of Talent Development worked with outside organizations to support the district's principal preparation programs.

Although CPSD did not have an administrative procedure for the creation of principal preparation programs, it had implemented several different models of principal preparation. The district utilized the Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework, which did not address the components of an effective middle school principal preparation program. During an executive leadership training session sponsored by the Maryland State Department of Education, Illene Swinow stated that the Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework should be revised to reflect the current skills needed by principals (I. Swinow, personal communication, July 6, 2013).

The district had no way to measure the effectiveness of the principal's performance based on his or her preparation or whether he or she had acquired the skills needed to be successful (D. Anthony, personal communication, April 18, 2013).

The development of a policy to address middle school principal preparation programs could impact the effectiveness of district leaders in establishing a middle school principal pipeline. Over a recent 3-year period, CPSD acquired 107 new principals (D. Anthony, personal communication, January 25, 2013). Can the district correlate its low retention rate to the effectiveness of the principal preparation programs? An effective middle school principal preparation policy would provide a framework to ensure that the district develops programs that create effective middle school leaders.

**Chestnut Public School District preparation models.** Chestnut Public School District did not have a principal preparation program focusing on the development of middle school principals. The district utilized three models to provide its staff with additional training for certification or acquisition of new skills that might lead toward obtaining a principalship. The programs varied in their content, pedagogy, focus, and length. The district also had implemented a Professional Learning Plan outlining bimonthly professional development for current middle school principals and new principals through the New Principal Academy (D. Anthony, personal communication, June 16, 2015). The middle school level professional development sessions provided principals with training modules addressing the specific skills and competencies needed by middle school principals. The New Principal Academy provided participants with the general systemic knowledge needed for a 1$^{st}$-year principal in the district (D. Anthony, personal communication, June 16, 2015).

The district developed new leadership standards as a part of the new principal evaluation system (P. Shetley, personal communication, December 3, 2012). The leadership standards outlined the basic competencies that should be achieved by school leaders. The district did not have a separate set of standards for its principal preparation programs. Programs were selected based on their ability to train district leaders to meet the district's leadership standards.

In the past, Chestnut Public School District partnered with New Leaders (NL) as a part of contracted services. The services provided by NL cost the district approximately 2 million dollars per year (D. Anthony, personal communication, November 2, 2012). The program trained approximately three or four resident principals each year. Prospective candidates completed a rigorous application progress that involved three intensive interviews. The final interview required candidates to participate in a daylong, real-world application interview process that involved gauging their reactions to various scenarios.

NL was involved in the recruitment, training, and internship experience for traditional and nontraditional aspiring principals. Each candidate attended a summer of intensive training and spent a year as a resident principal. The program focused on the development of transformational leaders. Each cohort had the opportunity to read about and listen to nationally recognized leaders of urban school reform. A resident principal shadowed a school principal for a year to receive on-the-job training. Resident principals met weekly to discuss and analyze best practices they had learned as a part of the residency. NL focused on creating principals who would produce rapid student gains through intensive support. Graduates assigned as principals had the opportunity to work with mentors during the 1st year of their new position. The mentor met with the new principal on a monthly basis to provide direct support. The

district had trained more than 30 resident principals since the inception of the NL partnership.

In addition, the district recently developed its own resident principal program during school year 2015-2016. The "home-grown" resident principal program provided an opportunity for district assistant principals to participate in a year of monthly professional development sessions and residency experiences (D. Anthony, personal communication, October 2, 2015). Resident principals were required to develop a problem of practice and an action plan based on their analysis of the district's leadership standards. The model was similar to the NL resident principal program. At the time of this research, the district had three resident principals in the program, and one had been assigned to a middle school.

As part of a second model, which utilized university programs, the district had partnered with The University of Maryland, College Park, John Hopkins University, and McDaniels College to provide school staff with the opportunity to receive certification toward becoming a principal or assistant principal (E. White, personal communication, November 12, 2015). University programs were referred to as "preferred providers" by the Office of Talent Development. This model provided aspiring principals with the traditional leadership coursework needed to obtain the Maryland State Department of Education Administrator I certification. Students attended evening and weekend classes as a part of the program. Guest speakers from the district were invited to present practical and real-life applications for the participants. It was the intention of the district to develop a pipeline of assistant principals and principals. The program supported 20 to 25 candidates per year (M. Brooks, personal communication, November 12, 2012).

A third arrangement involved professional development that was district created and led. The intended outcome was assistance with the development of skills needed to become a successful principal. The district had two programs that fell under this umbrella: Assistant Principal Induction Program (APIP), which required individuals to attend a yearlong monthly training and quarterly consultation visit with an assistant principal development team; and the Aspiring Leaders for Success (ALPSS), which provided monthly, daylong training for aspiring principals (D. Anthony, personal communication, October 2, 2015). ALPSS participants also attended a quarterly consultation and leadership development session with a central office team.

**Investigation**

The study addressed the perceptions of middle school principals in Chestnut Public School District regarding effective middle school leadership practices and the components of the principal preparation programs that prepared them for their current role. A quantitative research design was employed, including the use of an online questionnaire.

**Research Questions**

1. What skills, behaviors, and attitudes do middle school principals perceive to be important to be an effective middle school principal?

2. How do middle school principals perceive their level of preparedness in relation to the specific skills, behaviors, and attitudes?

3. To what degree do middle school principals believe that their level of preparation has influenced them to stay in their current role?

4. Which components of their preparation program do middle principals perceive to be the most valuable?

5. To what extent do middle school principals believe that the school district should design a program specifically to develop middle school principals?

The intent of this research was to provide CPSD and school districts across the country the quantitative data needed to redefine middle school preparation standards, develop programs aligned with the skills and competencies needed to be a middle school principal, and assist with the recruitment and retention of effective middle school principals.

**Chapter 2: Investigation**

**Complexities of Middle School Leadership**

      The Association of Middle Level Education, Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, National Association of Secondary School Principals, and National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform (Association for Middle Level Education, 2012) have produced a large body of research regarding how adolescents learn best. Other organizations also have contributed to understanding effective adolescent learning environments. In particular, the Association of Middle Level Education has developed 16 unique characteristics to assess effective schools for young adolescents, as outlined in Table 2 (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010).

**Purpose of the Study**

      Through this study, the researcher examined the effectiveness of the principal preparation programs in Chestnut Public School District as well as preparation training that had been received by current middle school principals in the district. Specifically, this study involved the use of questionnaire data to examine the need for a preparation program specifically tailored for middle school principals. This study has enhanced a limited body of research on middle school principal preparation programs by attempting to (a) examine the perceived skills and behaviors needed for an effective middle school principal, (b) determine the perceived essential components of an effective preparation program, (c) ascertain the perceptions of middle school principals in CPSD regarding the usefulness of their principal preparation program, (d) determine if the lack of a preparation program will have an influence on retaining middle school leaders, and (e) ascertain middle school principals' perceptions of the essential components of a preparation program. Figure

1 includes a flowchart showing how the research could impact student achievement. The data from the study will facilitate an increased awareness of the skills, competencies, and behaviors needed to be an effective middle school principal. The information can provide additional guidance during the development of federal, state, and district policy, thereby, ultimately, impacting the effectiveness of preparation programs. By properly equipping middle school principals with the skills needed to be effective, the principal retention rate could be increased and student achievement ultimately impacted.
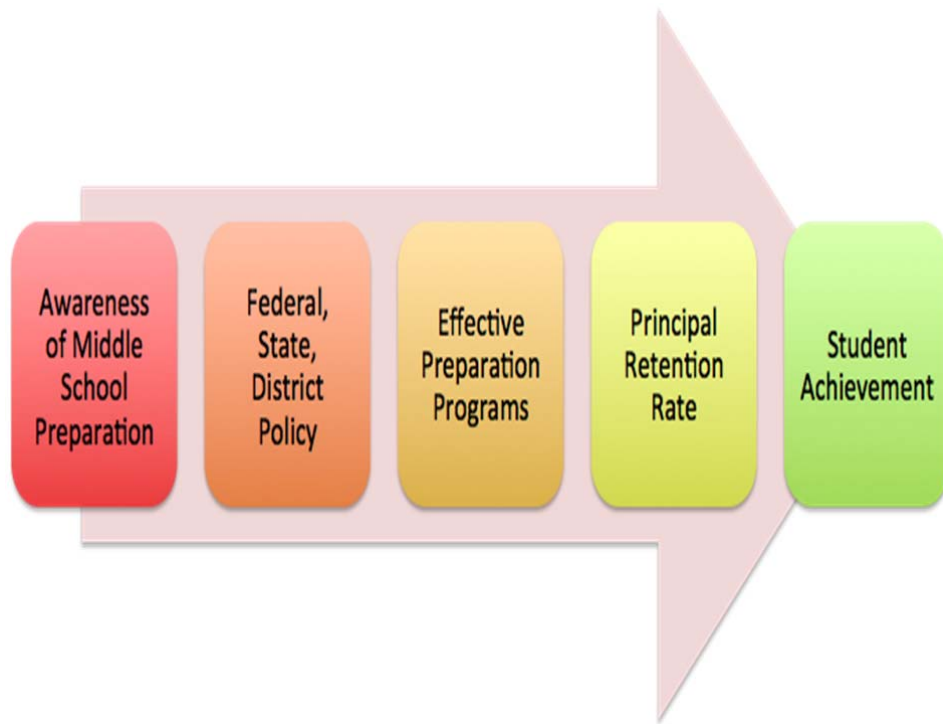


*Figure 1*. Areas likely to be impacted as a result of the findings from this study.

Specifically, the study answered the following research questions:

1. What skills, behaviors, and attitudes do middle school principals perceive to be important to be an effective middle school principal?

2. How do middle school principals perceive their level of preparedness in relation to the specific skills, behaviors, and attitudes?

3. To what degree do middle school principals believe that their level of preparation has influenced them to stay in their current role?

4. Which components of their preparation program do middle principals perceive to be the most valuable?

5. To what extent do middle school principals believe that the school district should design a program specifically to develop middle school principals?

**Research Design**

This study employed a quantitative approach to examine middle school principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of their preparation programs and the competencies needed to become an effective middle school principal, as well as the essential components of a middle school preparation program.  Participants were given a questionnaire including a Likert rating scale and open-ended questions.

To develop the relevant questions about perceptions of effectiveness, this researcher relied heavily on three well-known reports—*Turning Points 2000* (Jackson & Davis, 2000), *This We Believe* (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010), and "Confirming a Middle Grades Leadership Model and Instrument" (Bickmore, 2011) —and *The Maryland Instructional Leadership Framework* (Maryland State Department of Education, 2005).

The authors of *Turning Points 2000* discussed the critical shift needed for middle school principals to move from systems managers to instructional leaders (Jackson & Davis, 2000).  They also addressed leadership skills of an effective middle school principal.

*This We Believe* outlined the 16 characteristics of effective middle schools and the competencies needed to address the social and emotional needs of the adolescent child (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010). The Middle Level Leadership Questionnaire, based upon the confirming middle level leadership model, was developed to address the following actions, skills, competencies, and dispositions of middle school principals: school-community relations, professional development, curriculum, structuring of the school day, and areas related to key stakeholders. Key descriptors from the Middle Level Leadership Questionnaire were modified for the questionnaire used in the study, *The Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Principal* (Anfara et al., 2006).

The conceptual framework for the research questions and questionnaire included the Middle Level Leadership Questionnaire and the 16 characteristics of effective middle schools and middle school leader behaviors (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010). The Middle Level Leadership Questionnaire provided the framework for the development of the survey tool that was used for the research. The researcher revised the tool to reflect the five research questions. Furthermore, the researcher conducted a crosswalk analysis of the survey instrument questions that addressed the skills, behaviors, and attitudes with regard to the 16 characteristics of effective middle schools to ensure congruence. Table 8 displays an alignment between the characteristics of an effective middle school and middle school leadership behaviors addressed in the questionnaire (survey question items).

Table 8. *Alignment of the 16 Characteristics of Effective Middle Schools and the Middle School Leadership Behaviors Addressed in the Questionnaire*

| |
|---|
| Category 1: Curriculum, instruction, and assessment characteristics |
|     a.  Educators value young adolescents and are prepared to teach them. (13,21) |
|     b.  Students and teachers are engaged in active, purposeful learning. (11,21) |
|     c.  Curriculum is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant. (11,19,21) |
|     d.  Educators use multiple learning and teaching approaches. (15) |
|     e.  Varied and ongoing assessments advance learning as well as measure it. (19) |
| Category 2: Leadership and organization characteristics |
|     f.  A shared vision developed by all stakeholders guides every decision. (17,25,26) |
|     g.  Leaders are committed to and knowledgeable about this age group, educational research, and best practices. (11,13,14,25) |
|     h.  Leaders demonstrate courage and collaboration. (17) |
|     i.  Ongoing professional development reflects best educational practices. (20) |
|     j.  Organizational structures foster purposeful learning and meaningful relationships. (15) |
| Category 3: Culture and community characteristics |
|     k.  The school environment is inviting, safe, inclusive, and supportive of all. (12,13,16,22) |
|     l.  Every student's academic and personal development is guided by an adult advocate. (13,16) |
|     m.  Comprehensive guidance and support services meet the needs of young adolescents. (14,23) |
|     n.  Health and wellness are supported in curricula, school-wide programs, and related policies. (14) |
|     o.  The school actively involves families in the education of their children. (24) |
|     p.  The school includes community and business partners. |

(Association for Middle Level Education, 2010)

**Methods and procedures.** Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2011) described content validity as the degree to which a test measures what it is intended to evaluate and item validity as the accuracy of test items in measuring the intended outcome of the research questions. The questionnaire was administered to principal supervisors to determine content, face, and item validity. The principal supervisors ($N = 9$) in the school district were all former principals that were currently supervising middle school principals; three of the principal supervisors were former middle school principals. The principal supervisors were sent an e-mail message asking them to provide feedback. The email had an embedded link to the Qualtrics survey. A reminder e-mail was sent 2 days before the scheduled session. The researcher met with the principal supervisors during a 30-minute session; they were asked to provide

written feedback regarding the items listed on the questionnaire to ensure its validity and alignment to the research questions.  The participants were asked to open the survey through the Qualtrics link; some of the participants requested a hard copy so that they could write notes on the instrument.  The researcher provided each principal supervisor with a rubric to assist with providing feedback (Appendix D); in addition, the participants were provided with the purpose of the research and the research questions (Appendix L).  Based on the feedback from the principal supervisors, the researcher made the following revisions: Question 5 – *years of experience* was changed to *total years of experience*; Questions 6-7 – *or more years* was added to the response options; Questions 11, 16, 26, 27 – the word *is* was changed to *are*; Question 28 – the word *as* was inserted; and Question 32 – a question mark was added.

Upon completion of the necessary revisions, CPSD Office of Research and Evaluation sent an e-mail communication to all middle school principals in CPSD. The e-mail contained an embedded link to the Qualtrics questionnaire.  The questionnaire included the University of Maryland research consent form with the described right of the participant to voluntarily participate in the study, to withdraw from the study at any time, and to ask questions about any aspect of the study.  The consent form also described the level of confidentiality provided throughout the research study.

The first question of the questionnaire contained a copy of the consent form. Middle school principals were directed to read the form and were prompted to provide their consent.  Middle school principals that provided their consent were asked to click "yes" and provide an electronic signature.  Individuals that declined to participate were directed to the end of the survey and asked to close their Web browser.

The researcher sent a reminder e-mail 1 week after the initial e-mail to all participants. An additional reminder e-mail was sent to middle school principals 2 weeks after the initial e-mail. A final reminder e-mail was sent 3 weeks after the initial e-mail.

At the time of the research, the researcher directly supervised some of the participants ($N = 3$). Due to the nature of her role, and to avoid any conflict of interest, the researcher acquired support from a neutral third party: CPSD Office of Research and Evaluation. The Office of Research and Evaluation sent e-mails to all participants; the participants were informed that questions related to the research would be directly addressed by the advisor or third party. The identity of participants was withheld from the researcher.

**Participants.** Chestnut Public School District is a large urban school district on the east coast of the United States. At the time of the research, the district was composed of 44 middle schools and 6 K-8 schools. This study focused on the 44 middle and 6 K-8 schools in the district because the administrators' current role provided them with the necessary perspective to analyze the effectiveness of principal preparation programs, the skill and behaviors needed to be an effective middle school principal, and the components of an effective middle school preparation program.

The research was designed to examine the perceptions of middle school principals. A purposive sample for this quantitative design included middle school principals with experience as middle school administrators in CPSD. The purposive sample included middle school principals because they were able to reflect on their recent experiences as middle level leaders and their perceptions of the preparation program. Individuals actively engaged in work as middle level principals are able to

understand the complexities of the skills and competencies needed to be effective middle school principals.

**Sample.** The sample for this study consisted of middle school principals with experience as middle level administrators who completed a principal preparation program ($N = 44$). The eligible district programs included, but were not limited to, Aspiring Leaders Program for Student Success (ALPSS), New Leaders (NL), Accelerated Principal Preparation Program (APPP), Aspiring Principal Induction Program (APIP), and university-based programs. Some participants, such as individuals that were hired from another district or state, may have received principal leadership training from a program outside the district.

**Instrument.** Participants were provided with an electronic questionnaire that had been adapted from the Middle Level Leaders Questionnaire to address the research questions and outcomes (Anfara et al., 2006). The questionnaire was modified to include only questions with explicit descriptors addressing the behaviors and skills needed to work with the adolescent student. Participants were provided with an electronic questionnaire that included open-ended questions, requests for demographic information, and selected-response and Likert-scale questions. The instrument took approximately 15 minutes to complete.

The district had a large number of individuals completing dissertations; those individuals administered the questionnaires to middle school leaders across the district. The researcher addressed the need to ensure an adequate completion rate of the questionnaire for this research through the use of gift card incentives. Participants were informed that they would have an opportunity to be randomly selected to receive one of three $100 gift cards if they completed the questionnaire. In addition, participants had an opportunity to establish a unique ID through Qualtrics. Use of the

ID provided participants with the flexibility to save their responses and complete the questionnaires at their convenience.

**Data collection timing.** Often, timing is discussed when a researcher creates a plan for the collection of data. Morgan (1998) described timing as the order in which the data are used as a part of the study. In addition, Creswell (2006) stated that timing is associated with the period of time during which data are analyzed and interpreted as opposed to the collection process.

The researcher had a third-party researcher e-mail all of the middle school principals in Chestnut Public School District. The e-mail included the purpose of the research and a link to the Qualtrics survey. The researcher used a third party to ensure that the participants did not feel forced to participate in the research. Principals were informed that their responses would remain anonymous and that the data collector would use a code to hide their identity. In lieu of providing a signed consent form, participants were asked to read a paragraph at the beginning of the questionnaire acknowledging that they had read an embedded consent form. They were asked to provide an electronic signature before they could proceed to complete the questionnaire. Individuals that declined were directed to the end of the survey and asked to close their Web browser.

Participants were provided with an electronic questionnaire that had been adapted from the Middle Level Leaders Questionnaire to address the research questions and outcomes (Anfara et al., 2006). The questionnaire was modified to use only questions with explicit descriptors addressing the behaviors and skills needed to work with the adolescent student. Participants were provided with an electronic questionnaire that included open-ended questions, requests for demographic

information, and selected-response and Likert-scale questions.  The instrument took approximately 15 minutes to complete.

The questionnaire given to participants consisted of rating-scale questions, open-ended questions, and questions designed to collect pertinent demographic information.  The participants were provided a Likert rating scale to measure the following questions:

1.  What skills, behaviors, and attitudes do middle school principals perceive to be important to be an effective middle school principal?

2.  How do middle school principals perceive their level of preparedness in relation to the specific skills, behaviors, and attitudes?

3.  To what degree do middle school principals believe that their level of preparation has influenced them to stay in their current role?

4.  Which components of their preparation program do middle principals perceive to be the most valuable?

5.  To what extent do middle school principals believe that the school district should design a program specifically to develop middle school principals?

Rating scales are used when respondents are asked to provide their perceptions or make judgments (Wiersman & Jurs, 2005).  The questionnaire was aligned with the questionnaire format that was used in the 1992 NASSP Leadership in Middle Schools study (Valentine et al., 2004).  Additional data were gathered regarding the respondent's gender, years of experience at the middle school level, type of administrative certification program, type of leadership role prior to becoming a principal, and highest degree earned, as well as demographics of the student population.

The sections of the questionnaire were aligned with the themes of the research questions: perceptions of principal preparation programs, effectiveness of principal preparation programs, skills and behaviors needed to become an effective middle school principal, and the need for the district to develop a preparation program specifically designed to train middle level leaders.

**Plan of Analysis**

The responses to the questionnaire were collated by Qualtrics and analyzed with the IBM SPSS version 20.0 using the protocols described by Field (2011). Before choosing and using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics it was necessary to define the variables. The five variables collected using questionnaire items corresponding to the five research questions (important skills, behaviors, and attitudes; perceived level of preparedness; influence to stay in current role; essential components of preparation program; belief in preparation program) are defined in Table 9. The eight variables used to describe the demographic characteristics of the participants are defined in Table 10.

Table 9. *Variables Measuring the Perceptions of the Participants*

| Variable | Corresponding research question | Questionnaire | Number of items | Response format (ordinal categories) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Important skills, behaviors, and attitudes | 1. What skills, behaviors, and attitudes do middle school principals perceive to be important to be an effective middle school principal? | Based on your role as a middle school principal please rate the importance... . | 18 | The behaviors/skills are 1 = Very important 2 = Important 3 = Moderately important 4 = Not important |
| Perceived level of preparedness | 2. How do middle school principals perceive their level of preparedness in relation to the specific skills, behaviors, and attitudes? | Based on your role as a middle school principal, please rate your level of preparedness... | 18 | In the following behaviors/skills I consider myself to be 1 = Very prepared 2 = Prepared 3 = Somewhat prepared 4 = Not prepared |
| Influence to stay in current role | 3. To what degree do middle school principals believe that their level of preparation has influenced them to stay in their current role? | How prepared I feel will have an influence on whether or not I will stay in my role as a middle school principal. | 1 | 1 = Agree 2 = Somewhat agree 3 = Somewhat disagree 4 = Disagree |
| Essential components of preparation program | 4. Which components of their preparation program do middle principals perceive to be the most valuable? | What do you consider to be the most essential components of a preparation program that will develop effective middle school principals? | 4 | 1 = Essential 2 = Somewhat essential 3 = Somewhat not essential 4 = Not essential |
| Belief in preparation program | 5. To what extent do middle school principals believe that the school district should design a program specifically to develop middle school principals? | Chestnut Public School District should design a middle school preparation program that is specifically designed to prepare middle school principals. | 1 | 1 = Agree 2 = Somewhat agree 3 = Somewhat disagree 4 = Disagree |

Table 10. *Demographic Variables*

| Variable | Category | Response format |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | Nominal | 1 = Male<br>2 = Female |
| Total years of experience in education in any role | Ordinal | 1 = 1-3 years<br>2 = 4-6 years<br>3 = 7 or more years |
| Total years of experience as a middle school principal in Chestnut Public School District | Ordinal | 1 = 1-3 years<br>2 = 4-6 years<br>3 = 7 or more years |
| Total years of experience as a middle school principal | Ordinal | 1 = 1-3 years<br>2 = 4-6 years<br>3 = 7 or more years |
| Total number of years of experience in a middle school or any role before current | Ordinal | 1 = 1-3 years<br>2 = 4-6 years<br>3 = 7 or more years |
| Current enrollment (middle school students) | Ordinal | 1 < 400 students<br>2 = 401-1000 students<br>3 = 1001-1500 students<br>4 > 1500 students |
| Highest academic degree earned | Nominal | 1 = Master's<br>2 = Advance Graduate Certificate<br>3 = Doctorate |
| Type of administrative preparation program: | Nominal | 1 = University-based<br>2 = Aspiring Leaders for Student Success Program<br>3 = Assistant Principal Induction Program<br>4 = New Leaders for New Schools<br>5 = Leadership Education for Aspiring Principals Program<br>6 = Other, please list |

All of the variables included in this study are defined in terms of nominal or ordinal categories. Because all the variables are categorical, it was impossible to use parametric descriptive statistics (e.g., mean, standard deviation) or parametric inferential statistics (e.g., Pearson's correlation), which assume normally distributed variables measured at the interval level. Only nonparametric descriptive statistics (e.g., mode and median) and nonparametric inferential statistics (e.g., Spearman's rank correlation) are applicable for categorical variables. Because only descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were used to analyze the data, no dependent and independent variables are defined, and no hypothetical cause and effect relationships

are identified or tested.  The plan of analysis for the categorical variables is outlined in the following step-by-step description:

1. The responses to the questionnaire were screened for missing values.  Any participants who failed to complete all the items in the questionnaire were excluded.

2. The frequency distribution of the answers to each question in Table 10 were summarized by computing the numbers and percentages of participants who responded to each category.  A demographic profile of the participants was tabulated.

3. The frequency distributions of the responses to each category in Table 9 were tabulated and analyzed using the mode (for nominal variables) and median (for ordinal variables) as the descriptive statistics.

4. The variable important skills, behaviors, and attitudes was operationalized to address the question: What skills, behaviors, and attitudes do middle school principals perceive to be important to be an effective middle school principal?  This variable consisted of 18 items, each of which specified a different skill, behavior, or attitude; therefore, it was not appropriate to average the scores to create a composite score to construct a scale or index in which all of the items reflect a unidimensional concept.  The 18 items were ranked in order of importance, using the percentages of participants who endorsed either 1 (*very important*) or 2 (*important*) as the criterion for ranking.  The top-ranked item was endorsed by the highest number of participants, and the bottom-ranking item was endorsed by the lowest number of participants.  It was hypothesized that important skills, behaviors, and attitudes might be correlated with (a) total years of experience as a middle school principal and/or (b) current enrollment (middle school students).  This hypothesis was tested using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (*rho*), which is a measure of the strength of the linear relationship between two ordinal variables.  Spearman's *rho* ranges from +1 (perfect

positive correlation) to −1 (perfect negative correlation). The direction and magnitude of the coefficient indicates the strength of the relationship between the two variables. The hypothesis was supported at the 5% level of significance ($p < .05$ for the correlation coefficient), meaning that it can be inferred that Spearman's *rho* reflects a linear relationship between the two variables, with a 5% probability that the correlation could be due to random chance (Field, 2011). To test for the significance of a correlation coefficient at the 5% level, the sample size should be not less than 28 (Cohen, 1992). In this study the expected sample size was 44, hence, large enough for the correlation analysis.

5. The variable perceived level of preparedness was operationalized to address the question: How do middle school principals perceive their level of preparedness in relation to the specific skills, behaviors, and attitudes? This variable consisted of 18 items, each of which specified a different skill, behavior, or attitude, and therefore it was not appropriate to average the items to construct a composite scale. The 18 items were ranked in order of importance, using the percentages of participants who endorsed either 1 (*very prepared*) or 2 (*prepared*) as the criterion for ranking. The top-ranking item was endorsed by the highest number of participants, and the bottom-ranking item was endorsed by the lowest number of participants. It was hypothesized that the variable perceived level of preparedness might be correlated with (a) the total years of experience as a middle school principal and/or (b) current enrollment (middle school students). This hypothesis was tested using Spearman's rank correlation coefficients.

6. The variable influence to stay in current role was operationalized to address the question: To what degree do middle school principals believe that their level of preparation has influenced them to stay in their current role? This variable consisted

of the responses to one item, rated on a scale from 1 (*agree*) to 4 (*disagree*), providing a 4-point scale to reflect the degree to which the participants perceived that their level of preparation had influenced them to stay in their current role. It was hypothesized that the variable degree of influence to stay in current role might be correlated with (a) perceived level of preparedness, (b) total years of experience as a middle school principal, and/or (c) current enrollment (middle school students). This hypothesis was tested using Spearman's rank correlation coefficients.

7. The variable essential components of preparation program was operationalized to address the question: Which components of their preparation program do middle principals perceive to be the most valuable? This variable consisted of four items, each of which defined a different component of the preparation program (coaching and mentoring support, internships, problem-based projects, and theory-based learning). It is not appropriate to average the items to construct a composite scale or index. The four components were ranked in order of perceived value, using the percentages of participants who endorsed either 1 (*very essential*) or 2 (*somewhat essential*) as the criterion for ranking. The top-ranking component was endorsed by the highest number of participants and the bottom-ranking component was endorsed by the lowest number of participants. It was hypothesized that the perceived values of the variable essential components of preparation program might be correlated with (a) perceived level of preparedness, (b) total years of experience as a middle school principal, and/or (c) current enrollment (middle school students). This hypothesis was tested using Spearman's rank correlation coefficients.

8. The variable belief in preparation program was operationalized to address the question: To what extent do middle school principals believe that the school

district should design a program specifically to develop middle school principals?

This variable consisted of the responses to one item, rated on a scale from 1 (*agree*) to

4 (*disagree*), providing a 4-point scale to reflect the extent to which the participants

believed that the school district should design a program specifically to develop

middle school principals.  It was hypothesized that the variable belief in preparation

program might be correlated with (a) perceived level of preparedness, (b) total years

of experience as a middle school principal, and/or (c) current enrollment (middle

school students).  This hypothesis was tested using Spearman's rank correlation

coefficients.

**Human Subject Review**

The research adhered to the standards designated by the Institutional Review

Board (IRB) for the University of Maryland, College Park.  The participants

electronically signed a consent form containing the following information: project

title, name of the researcher, purpose of study, procedures, potential risks and

discomforts, potential benefits, confidentiality, right to withdraw, investigator form,

participant rights, assurance that they could skip questions they did not want to

answer, and statement of consent.

Questionnaire data were stored through the password-secured Qualtrics

website.  The website security firewall required researchers to access data through the

use of a secured password.  The researcher established an account that was password

protected.  The account and information were deleted upon completion of the research

and data analysis.  Participants' confidentiality was maintained through the use of

unique IDs, allowing each participant to have an ID for his or her individual

questionnaire.

**Limitations and Risks**

It was inevitable that, as with any study, there were some limitations. The following limitations were identified:

1. Some of the 1st-year middle school principals may not have believed they had the knowledge necessary to adequately provide responses regarding the skills and behaviors needed to be an effective middle school principal or to evaluate the effectiveness of their preparation.

2. With the questionnaire's being sent to principals that received district training, they may have perceived that the instrument could have a negative impact on the district.

Risks and anxiety are common in research studies; however, there were minimal risks for involvement in this study. Although the questionnaire was confidential, subjects may have been concerned that their responses could be linked to them. Administrators may have been sensitive to the potential for the district to perceive their responses as having a negative impact on the image of the district. To prevent a breach of confidentiality, the researcher maintained sole ownership of the data collected through the Qualtrics platform. Each respondent was provided an individual log-on code, and the researcher was the only person with access to the questionnaire data through her individual Qualtrics log-on.

Respondents may have displayed some level of anxiety in completing a questionnaire that could highlight some of the negative components of the district's efforts to train administrators. In addition, they may have experienced anxiety because of the questionnaire's being administered by a person from executive leadership in the school district, thereby causing them to think they should always portray the district in a positive way.

This research provides school districts across the country with a framework to redefine middle school principal preparation standards, develop programs aligned with the skills and competencies needed to be an effective middle school principal, and assist with the recruitment and retention of middle school principals.

**Chapter 3: Results**

**Results**

The results are presented in the following systematic order: demographic

profile of participants, followed by the statistical evidence to address the research

questions:

1.  What skills, behaviors and attitudes do middle school principals perceive

    to be important to be an effective middle school principal?

2.  How do middle school principals perceive their level of preparedness in

    relation to the specific skills, behaviors and attitudes?

3.  To what degree do middle school principals believe that their level of

    preparation has influenced them to stay in their current role?

4.  Which components of their preparation program do middle school

    principals perceive to be the most valuable?

5.  To what extent do middle school principals believe that the school district

    should design a program specifically to develop middle school principals?

**Demographic Profile of the Participants**

Although a total of 41 principals responded to the survey, 9 of them were

excluded because they did not complete the questionnaire.  Consequently, the sample

size of participants was reduced ($n = 32$).  Table 11 presents a demographic profile of

the participants.  Almost two thirds (20, 62.5%) were female.  All but one (31, 96.9%)

had 7 or more years of experience in an educational role.  Half of the principals (16,

50.0%) had more than 3 years of experience as a middle school principal in Chestnut

Public School District, and a higher proportion (19, 58.4%) had more than 3 years

experience as a middle school principal.  Nearly all (31, 96.8%) had more than 7 years

experience in some role at a middle school.  The current enrollment of middle school

students ranged from 401 to 1000 for most (23, 71.9%) of the principals.  The highest

educational level reported most frequently by the principals was a master's degree

(20, 62.5%).  Half of the principals (16, 50.0%) had attended a university-based

administrative preparation program, whereas the other half had attended other

programs.

Table 11. *Demographic Profile of Participants*

| Variable | Category | *n* | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 12 | 37.5 |
| | Female | 20 | 62.5 |
| Total years experience in education in any role | 1-3 | 1 | 3.1 |
| | 4-6 | 0 | 0.0 |
| | ≥7 | 31 | 96.9 |
| Total years of experience as a middle school principal in Chestnut Public School District | 1-3 | 16 | 50.0 |
| | 4-6 | 11 | 34.4 |
| | ≥7 | 5 | 15.6 |
| Total years of experience as a middle school principal | 1-3 | 13 | 40.6 |
| | 4-6 | 13 | 40.6 |
| | ≥ 7 | 6 | 18.8 |
| Total number of years experience in a middle school (any role) | 1-3 | 1 | 3.1 |
| | 4-6 | 2 | 6.3 |
| | ≥ 7 | 29 | 90.7 |
| Current enrollment in middle school | 100-400 | 7 | 21.9 |
| | 401-1000 | 23 | 71.9 |
| | 1001-1500 | 2 | 6.3 |
| Highest academic degree earned | Master's | 20 | 62.5 |
| | Advanced Graduate Certificate | 9 | 28.1 |
| | Doctorate (EdD or PhD) | 3 | 9.4 |
| Type of administrative preparation program | University-based (i.e., Bowie State University, McDaniel College, etc.) | 16 | 50.0 |
| | Aspiring Leaders for Student Success Program | 3 | 9.4 |
| | Assistant Principal Induction Program | 1 | 3.1 |
| | New Leaders for New Schools | 4 | 12.5 |
| | Leadership Education for Aspiring Principals | 4 | 12.5 |
| | NISL | 1 | 3.1 |
| | MCPS Principal Intern Program | 1 | 3.1 |
| | Principal Preparation Program | 1 | 3.1 |
| | PhD in educational leadership | 1 | 3.1 |

**Skills, Behaviors, and Attitudes Perceived by Middle School Principals as**

**Important for Being an Effective Middle School Principal**

The skills, behaviors, and attitudes that the respondents perceived to be important were measured using 17 questionnaire items, each with a 4-point rating scale. For statistical purposes, this scale was reversed from that used in the questionnaire, so that the higher the score, the greater the level of perceived importance (4 = *very important*, 3 = *important*, 2 = *moderately important*, and 1 = *not important*). The scores for each respondent were averaged, so that the scale ranged from 1 to 4. The most frequently endorsed scores were 3 and 4. Consequently, the histogram in Figure 2 shows that the frequency distribution of the scores was not normally distributed, but strongly skewed toward the upper end of the scale. The mode was 4.0, consistently endorsed by nearly one half (15, 46.8%) of the respondents. The median score was 3.9 (i.e., almost *very important*). Table 12 provides the frequencies for each item as well as the median rating.
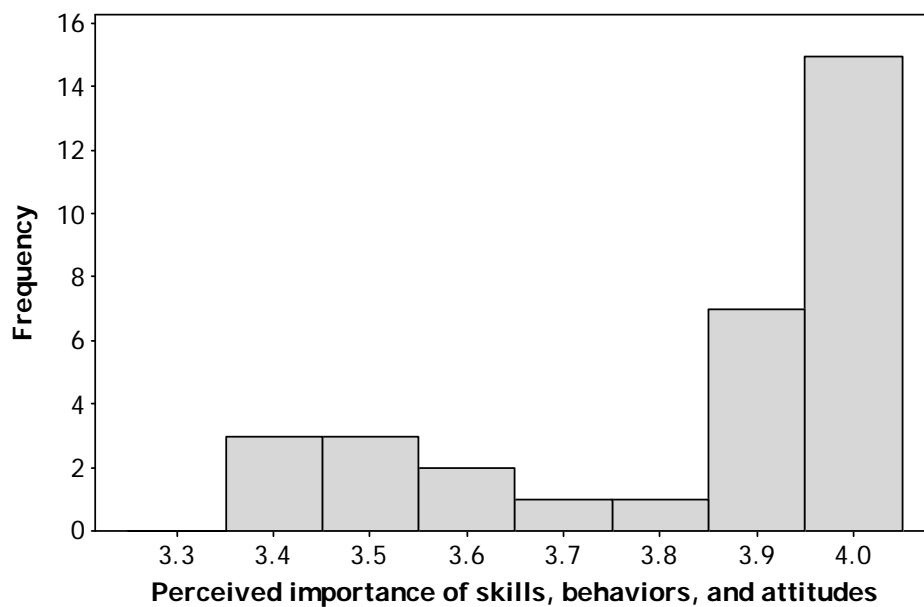


*Figure 2.* Frequency distribution of scores for perceived, skills, behaviors, and attitudes.

Table 12. *What Skills, Behaviors and Attitudes Do Middle School Principals Perceive to Be Important to Be an Effective Middle School Principal?*

| Items | Very important (4) | | Important (3) | | Moderately important (2) | | Median | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | | |
| Create organizational structures that support collaboration between special education teachers to meet the needs of the students | 31 | 96.9 | 1 | 3.1 | | | 3.97 | 1 |
| Ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to teach young adolescent learners. | 29 | 90.6 | 2 | 6.3 | | | 3.94 | 2= |
| Provide an environment that is safe, inviting, inclusive, and addresses the developmental needs of the young adolescent students. | 30 | 93.8 | 2 | 6.3 | | | 3.94 | 2= |
| Ensure that students are provided with a challenging curriculum that is developmentally responsive to young adolescent students. | 23 | 90.6 | 3 | 9.4 | | | 3.91 | 4 |
| Promote the development of relationships between teachers, parents, and staff and young adolescent students. | 28 | 87.5 | 4 | 12.5 | | | 3.87 | 5= |
| Develop organizational structures that ensure that young adolescent children feel cared for and valued. | 28 | 87.5 | 4 | 12.5 | | | 3.87 | 5= |
| Provide professional development to ensure that teachers are trained to develop strategies to meet the social and emotional needs of the students. | 28 | 87.5 | 4 | 12.5 | | | 3.87 | 5= |
| Understand the specific intellectual, physical, social, and psychological characteristics of the young adolescent students. | 27 | 84.4 | 5 | 15.6 | | | 3.84 | 8 = |
| Understand the relationship between the affective and cognitive needs of young adolescents students. | 27 | 84.4 | 5 | 15.6 | | | 3.84 | 8 = |

(continued)

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ensure that teachers implement lessons that address the developmental needs, readiness, interest, and learning profiles. | 27 | 84.4 | 5 | 15.6 | | | 3.84 | 8 = |
| Develop and implement policies and procedures that address the needs of young adolescent students. | 26 | 81.3 | 5 | 15.6 | 1 | 3.1 | 3.84 | 8 = |
| Implement a comprehensive professional school counseling program and wrap around services to meet the needs of young adolescent students. | 27 | 84.4 | 4 | 12.5 | 1 | 3.1 | 3.84 | 8 = |
| Model and encourage teachers to modify their instruction, time, and student grouping to meet the needs of the adolescent students. | 27 | 84.4 | 5 | 15.6 | | | 3.84 | 8 = |
| Provide multiple opportunities for parental engagement. | 26 | 81.3 | 6 | 18.8 | | | 3.81 | 14 |
| Make decisions that are based on the developmental needs of young adolescent students and effective middle school level. | 25 | 78.1 | 7 | 21.9 | | | 3.78 | 15 |
| Provide young adolescent students with opportunities and topics to develop their individual self-image. | 23 | 71.9 | 8 | 25 | 1 | 3.1 | 3.71 | 16 |
| Create small learning communities. | 22 | 68.8 | 9 | 28.1 | 1 | 3.1 | 3.68 | 17 |

Thirteen items were perceived to be *very important* or *important*. No items were perceived to be *not important*. The items were ranked according to their grouped median (*Mdn*) scores, which ranged from 3.68 to 3.97, reflecting the high frequency of *very important* responses ranging from 22, 68.8% to 31, 96.9%. More than 90% of the principals endorsed the top four items. The highest ranked item was "Create organizational structures that support collaboration between special education teachers in order to meet the needs of the students" (*Mdn* = 3.97). Two items were ranked second (*Mdn* = 3.94): "Ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to teach young adolescent learners"; and "Provide an environment that is safe inviting, inclusive, and addresses the developmental needs of the young adolescent students." One item was ranked fourth (*Mdn* = 3.91): "Ensure that students are provided with a challenging curriculum that is developmentally responsive to young adolescent students." Three items were ranked fifth (*Mdn* = 3.87): "Promote the development of relationships between teachers, parents, and staff, and young adolescent students"; "Develop organizational structures that ensure that young adolescent children feel cared for and valued"; and "Provide professional development to ensure that teachers are trained to develop strategies to meet the social and emotional needs of the students." Six items were ranked eighth with a median score of 3.84. The lowest ranking items were "Provide multiple opportunities for parental engagement" (*Mdn* = 3.81); "Make decisions that are based on the developmental needs of young adolescent students and effective middle school level" (*Mdn* = 3.78); "Provide young adolescent students with opportunities and topics in order to develop their individual self-image" (*Mdn* = 3.71); and "Create small learning communities" (*Mdn* = 3.68).

The researcher then completed the next step in analysis, which was to average the individual ratings by item for each respondent. Figure 2 provides the distribution

of individual mean ratings.  The researcher then examined the relationship between the individual's average rating and total years' experience and current enrollment of the individual's school.  There was no statistical evidence at the .05 level to support either the hypothesis that the score for perceived importance of skills, behaviors, and attitudes was significantly correlated with total years of experience as a middle school principal (Spearman's *rho* = .132, *p* = .472) or with current enrollment of each participant's school (Spearman's *rho* = .027, *p* = .883).

**Middle School Principals' Perceptions of Their Level of Preparedness in Relation to the Specific Skills, Behaviors, and Attitudes**

The second research question examined the extent to which the respondents perceived their level of preparedness in relation to specific skills, behaviors, and attitudes through 17 questionnaire items, each with a 4-point rating scale.  For statistical purposes, this scale was reversed from that used in the questionnaire, so that the higher the score, the greater the level of preparedness (4 = *very prepared*; 3 = *prepared*; 2 = *somewhat prepared*, and 1 = *not prepared*).  The scores for each respondent were averaged, so that the scale ranged from 1 to 4.  Consequently, the histogram in Figure 3 shows that the frequency distribution of the scores was not normally distributed, but was skewed toward the upper end of the scale.

63
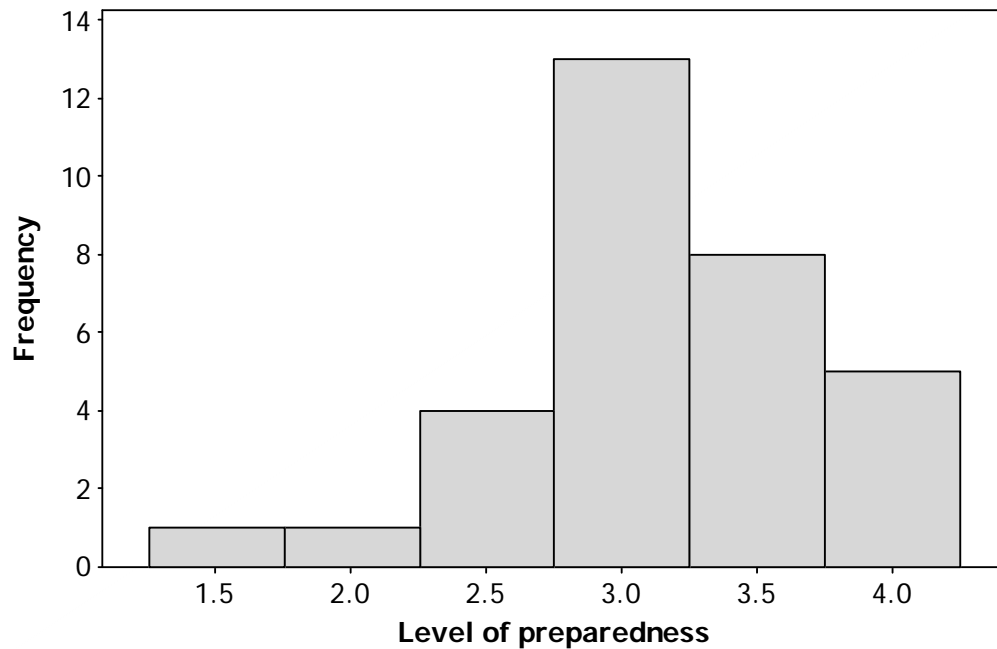
*Figure 3*. Frequency distribution of scores for level of preparedness.

The mode was 3.0, endorsed by nearly one half (13, 40.6%) of the respondents, and

the median score was 3.18, indicating that the most frequently endorsed response was

*prepared.*

Table 13 presents the frequency distribution of the responses for the 17

individual items.  The item ranked first with the highest score (*Mdn* = 3.48) for which

53.1% of the principals perceived they were *very prepared* was "Provide an

environment that is safe, inviting, inclusive, and addresses the developmental needs of

the young adolescent students."

The next four items, for which more than 80% of the principals perceived that

they were *very prepared* or *prepared,* with median scores ranging from 3.26 to 3.41,

were "Promote the development of relationships between teachers, parents, and staff,

and young adolescent students"; "Develop organizational structures that ensure that

young adolescent children feel cared for and valued"; "Ensure that teachers are

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adequately prepared to teach young adolescent learners"; and "Understand the specific intellectual, physical, social, and psychological characteristics of the young adolescent students."

The items for which the principals perceived that they were least prepared, but still endorsed as *very prepared* or *prepared* by about two thirds of the respondents, with median scores ranging from 3.16 to 3.21, were "Create organizational structures that support collaboration between special education teachers in order to meet the needs of the students"; "Model and encourage teachers to modify their instruction, time, and student grouping to meet the needs of the adolescent students"; and "Ensure that teachers implement lessons that address the developmental needs, readiness, interest, and learning profiles."

Table 13. *How do Middle School Principals Perceive Their Level of Preparedness in Relation to the Specific Skills, Behaviors, and Attitudes?*

| Item | Very prepared (4) | | Prepared (3) | | Somewhat prepared (2) | | Not prepared (1) | | Median | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | *%* | *n* | *%* | *n* | *%* | *n* | *%* | | |
| Provide an environment that is safe, inviting, inclusive, and addresses the developmental needs of the young adolescent students. | 17 | 53.1 | 12 | 37.5 | 3 | 9.4 | | | 3.48 | 1 |
| Promote the development of relationships between teachers, parents, staff and young adolescent students. | 15 | 46.9 | 14 | 43.8 | 2 | 6.3 | 1 | 3.1 | 3.41 | 2 |
| Develop organizational structures that ensure that young adolescent children feel cared for and valued. | 13 | 40.6 | 16 | 50 | 2 | 6.3 | 1 | 3.1 | 3.34 | 3 |
| Ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to teach young adolescent learners. | 13 | 40.6 | 14 | 43.8 | 4 | 12.5 | | | 3.33 | 4 |
| Understand the specific intellectual, physical, social, and psychological characteristics of the young adolescent student. | 12 | 37.5 | 15 | 46.9 | 4 | 12.5 | 1 | 3.1 | 3.26 | 5 |
| Develop and implement policies and procedures that address the needs of the young adolescent student. | 10 | 31.3 | 18 | 56.3 | 3 | 9.4 | | | 3.25 | 6 |
| Create organizational structures that support collaboration between special education teachers in order to meet the needs of the students. | 13 | 40.6 | 11 | 34.4 | 8 | 25 | | | 3.21 | 7 |
| Model and encourage teachers to modify their instruction, time, and student grouping to meet the needs of adolescent students. | 11 | 34.4 | 15 | 46.9 | 6 | 18.8 | | | 3.19 | 8 |

| Statement | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | Mean | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ensure that teachers implement lessons that address the developmental needs, readiness, interest, and learning profiles. | 11 | 34.4 | 14 | 43.8 | 7 | 21.9 | | | 3.16 | 9 |
| Understand the relationship between the affective and cognitive needs of the young adolescents students. | 8 | 25 | 20 | 62.5 | 4 | 12.5 | | | 3.14 | 11 |
| Ensure that students are provided with a challenging curriculum that is developmentally responsive to young adolescent students. | 10 | 31.3 | 15 | 46.9 | 6 | 18.1 | 1 | 3.1 | 3.12 | 12 = |
| Provide multiple opportunities for parental engagement. | 11 | 34.4 | 13 | 40.6 | 8 | 25 | | | 3.12 | 12 = |
| Make decisions that are based on the developmental needs of young adolescent students and effective middle school level. | 9 | 28.1 | 16 | 50.0 | 7 | 21.9 | | | 3.08 | 14 |
| Create small learning communities. | 8 | 25 | 17 | 53.1 | 7 | 21.9 | | | 3.04 | 15 |
| Provide young adolescent students with opportunities and topics in order to develop their individual self-image. | 4 | 12.5 | 16 | 50 | 11 | 34.4 | 1 | 3.1 | 2.70 | 16 |
| Implements a comprehensive professional school counseling program and wrap-around services to meet the needs of young adolescent students. | 4 | 12.5 | 14 | 43.8 | 13 | 40.6 | 1 | 3.1 | 2.63 | 17 |

Table 14 presents the responses to the following item*: "My preparation program provided me with the skills and competencies needed to become an effective middle school principal."  More than one third of the respondents (19, 37.9%) agreed with the statement whereas the remainder selected *somewhat agree* (7, 21.9%); *somewhat disagree* (4, 12.5%), or *disagree* (1, 3.1%).

Table 14. *My Preparation Program Provided Me With the Skills and Competencies Needed to Become an Effective Middle School Principal*

| Item | Agree (1) | | Somewhat agree (2) | | Somewhat disagree (3) | | Disagree (4) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | *%* | *n* | *%* | *n* | *%* | *n* | *%* |
| Preparation program | 19 | 37.9 | 7 | 21.9 | 4 | 12.5 | 1 | 3.1 |

There was no statistical evidence to support the hypothesis that the variable perceived level of preparedness was correlated with total years of experience as a middle school principal (Spearman's *rho* = .059, *p* = .747) or with current enrollment (Spearman's *rho* = .027, *p* = .883).

**Rankings of Importance and Preparedness**

Table 15 combines the ranks for perceived importance and preparedness for the 17 items presented in Tables 12 and 13.  Figure 4 provides a visual representation of the ranks for importance and preparedness.  For example, the item "Create organizational structures that support collaboration between special education teachers in order to meet the needs of the students" was ranked first for importance but seventh for preparedness. As noted, there are discrepancies between the rankings of the areas the principals perceived to be important and the areas in which they felt prepared.

Table 15. *Comparison of Ranked Perceived Importance and Ranked Perceived Preparedness in Relation to the Skills, Behaviors, and Attitudes of Middle School Principals*

| Items | Importance | Preparedness |
|---|---|---|
| Create organizational structures that support collaboration between special education teachers in order to meet the needs of the students. | 1 | 7 |
| Ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to teach young adolescent learners. | 2 | 4 |
| Provide an environment that is safe inviting, inclusive, and addresses the developmental needs of the young adolescent students. | 2 | 1 |
| Ensure that students are provided with a challenging curriculum tha is developmentally responsive to young adolescent students | 4 | 12 |
| Promote the development of relationships between teachers, parents, and staff, and young adolescent students. | 5 | 2 |
| Develop organizational structures that ensure that young adolescent children feel cared for and valued. | 5 | 3 |
| Provide professional development to ensure that teachers are trained to develop strategies to meet the social and emotional needs of the students. | 5 | 10 |
| Understand the specific intellectual, physical, social, and psychological characteristics of the young adolescent students | 8 | 5 |
| Understand the relationship between the affective and cognitive needs of young adolescents students. | 8 | 11 |
| Ensure that teachers implement lessons that address the developmental needs, readiness, interest, and learning profiles. | 8 | 9 |
| Develop and implement policies and procedures that address the needs of young adolescent students. | 8 | 6 |
| Implements a comprehensive professional school counseling program and wrap around services to meet the needs of young adolescent students. | 8 | 17 |
| Model and encourage teachers to modify their instruction, time, and student grouping to meet the needs of the adolescent students. | 8 | 8 |
| Provide multiple opportunities for parental engagement. | 14 | 12 |
| Make decisions that are based on the developmental needs of young adolescent students and effective middle school level. | 15 | 14 |
| Provide young adolescent students with opportunities and topics in order to develop their individual self-image. | 16 | 16 |
| Create small learning communities. | 17 | 15 |
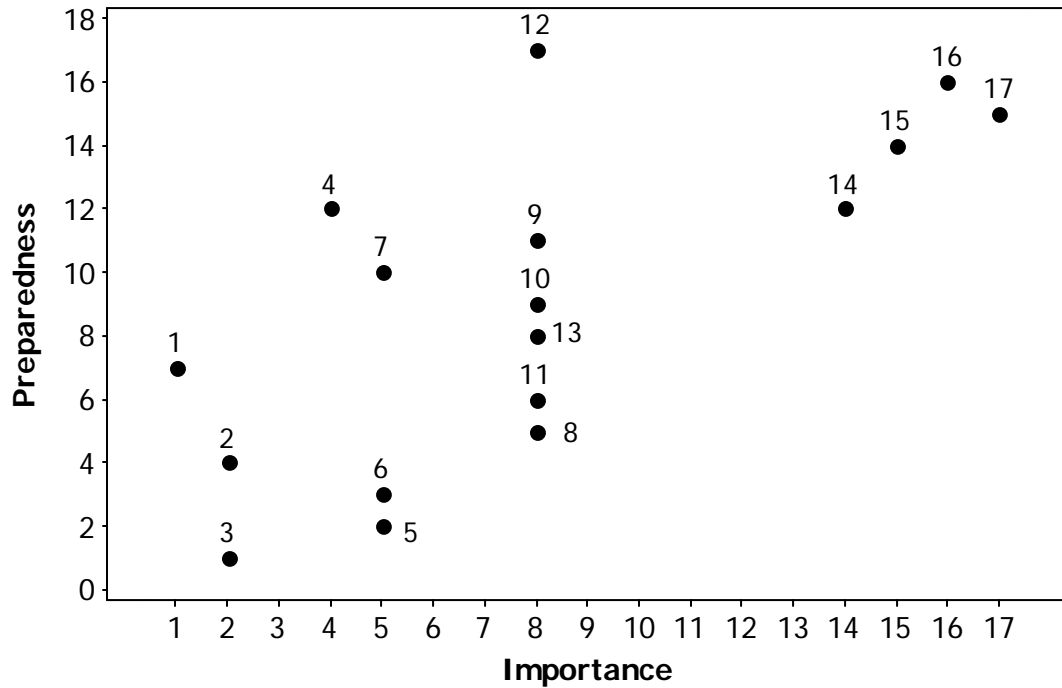
*Figure 4.* Rankings for perceived importance and preparedness.

Furthermore, there were some obvious discrepancies between importance and

preparedness. For example, the statement "Ensure that students are provided with a

challenging curriculum that is developmentally responsive to young adolescent students"

was ranked 4th in importance but 12th for preparedness. "Provide professional

development to ensure that teachers are trained to develop strategies to meet the social

and emotional needs of the students" was ranked 5th in importance but 10th for

preparedness. "Implements a comprehensive professional school counseling program

and wrap around services to meet the needs of young adolescent students" was ranked 8th

in importance but 17th for preparedness.

Some items, however, were equally or closely ranked at the top of the ranking

scale, including "Provide an environment that is safe inviting, inclusive, and addresses

the developmental needs of the young adolescent students" (2nd for importance and 1st for preparedness) and "Ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to teach young adolescent learners" (2nd in importance and 4th for preparedness). "Promote the development of relationships between teachers, parents, and staff and young adolescent students" and "Develop organizational structures that ensure that young adolescent children feel cared for and valued" (ranked 5th in importance and 2nd and 3rd, respectively, for preparedness.). Lower down the scale, several items were equally or closely ranked including "Model and encourage teachers to modify their instruction, time, and student grouping to meet the needs of the adolescent students" (8th in importance and 8th for preparedness); "Provide multiple opportunities for parental engagement" (14th in importance and 12th for preparedness); "Make decisions that are based on the developmental needs of young adolescent students and effective middle school level" (15th in importance and 14th for preparedness); and "Provide young adolescent students with opportunities and topics in order to develop their individual self-image" (16th for both importance and preparedness); and "Create small learning communities" (17th in importance and 15th for preparedness.

**Perceptions of overall preparedness**. The survey contained two questions about the principals' perceptions of their overall preparation. Table 14 presents the responses related to the statement "My preparation program provided me with the skills and competencies needed to become an effective middle school principal." More than one third of the respondents (19, 37.9%) agreed with the statement, whereas the remainder responded *somewhat agree* (7, 21.9%); *somewhat disagree* (4, 12.5%); or *disagree* (1, 3.1%). Table 16 displays the responses to the statement "How prepared I feel will have

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an influence on whether or not I will stay in my role as a middle school principal." More

than one half of the respondents (17, 53.1%) agreed with the statement, whereas the

remainder indicated *somewhat agree* (13, 40.6%) or *somewhat disagree* (1, 3.1%).

Table 16. *To What Degree Do Middle School Principals Believe That Their Level of Preparation Has Influenced Them to Stay in their Current Role?*

| Item | Agree (1) | | Somewhat agree (2) | | Somewhat disagree (3) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | *%* | *n* | *%* | *n* | *%* |
| How prepared I feel will have an influence on whether or not I will stay in my role as a middle school principal. | 17 | 53.1 | 13 | 40.6 | 1 | 3.1 |

There was no statistical evidence to support the hypothesis that the principals'

influence to stay in their current role was significantly correlated at the .05 level with

their total years of experience as a middle school principal (Spearman's *rho* = -.227, *p* =

.131) or with current enrollment (Spearman's *rho* = -.258, *p* = .154); however, there was

statistically significant (*p* < .05) evidence to support the hypothesis that the principals'

influence to stay in their current role was correlated with their perceived level of

preparedness (Spearman's *rho* = .413, *p* = .026).  Principals who scored low (1 = *agree*)

to the question, "How prepared I feel will have an influence on whether or not I will stay

in my role as a middle school principal" tended also to score low (1 = *very prepared*) to

the questions about how they perceived their levels of preparedness in relation to specific

skills, behaviors, and attitudes.  Principals who scored high (3 = *somewhat disagree* or 4

= *disagree*) to this question tended also to score high (3 = *somewhat prepared*) to the

questions about how they perceived their levels of preparedness.  The interpretation of

the significant correlation is that, in general, those principals who were most prepared

tended to agree that they would stay in their role, whereas those principals who were least

prepared tended to disagree that they would stay in their role.

**Which Components of their Preparation Program Do Middle School Principals**

**Perceive to be the Most Valuable?**

The fourth research question addressed principals' perceptions regarding which

components of preparation programs were the most valuable.  This aspect was measured

by providing respondents with four key components of preparation programs about which

they were asked to respond to the following question: "What do you consider to be the

most essential components of a preparation program?"  Coaching and mentoring support

was ranked first, because it was endorsed as *essential* by nearly all of the principals (30,

93.1%).  Internships was ranked second, endorsed as *essential* by more than two thirds

(21, 65.6%) of the principals.  Problem-based learning and theory-based learning were

ranked third and fourth, respectively, as they were endorsed as *essential* by relatively few

of the principals (14, 43.8%; 8, 25.0%).  Table 17 depicts this information.

Table 17. *Which Components of Their Preparation Program Do Middle School*
*Principals Perceive to Be the Most Valuable?*

| Item | Essential (1) | | Somewhat essential (2) | | Somewhat not essential (3) | | Not essential (4) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| Coaching and mentoring support | 30 | 93.1 | 2 | 6.3 | | | | |
| Internships | 21 | 65.6 | 9 | 28.1 | 2 | 6.3 | | |
| Problem based projects | 14 | 43.8 | 12 | 37.5 | 5 | 15.6 | 1 | 3.1 |
| Theory based learning | 8 | 25.0 | 20 | 62.5 | 4 | 12.5 | | |

The researcher examined the relationship between a participant's ratings and total years of experience and current enrollment of the participant's school. Table 18 presents a matrix of Spearman's rank coefficients to test the hypothesis that the scores for the components of preparation programs were correlated with perceived level of preparedness, total years of experience as a middle school principal, and current enrollment. There was no significant evidence to support this hypothesis (indicated by $p > .05$ for all of the Spearman's *rho* coefficients).

Table 18. *Spearman's Rank Correlations Between Components of Preparation Programs, Perceived Level of Preparedness, Total Years of Experience, and Current Enrollment*

| Item | Perceived level of preparedness | | Total years of experience | | Current enrollment | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | rho | p | rho | p | rho | p |
| Coaching and mentoring support | .127 | .487 | .053 | .774 | -.178 | .330 |
| Internships | .051 | .781 | .023 | .899 | -.257 | .156 |
| Problem-based projects | -.210 | .248 | -.065 | .723 | -.093 | .613 |
| Theory-based learning | .056 | .759 | -.149 | .416 | .108 | .555 |

**To What Extent do Middle School Principals Believe That the School District Should Design a Program Specifically to Develop Middle School Principals?**

The final research question pertained to the respondents' perception of whether the school district should design a program specifically to develop middle school principals. Table 19 presents the levels of agreement to the following statement: "Chestnut Public School District should design a middle school preparation program that is specifically designed to prepare middle school principals." More than half of the principals (19, 59.4%) agreed, and the remainder (11, 34.4%) responded *somewhat agree* or *somewhat disagree* (2, 6.3%).

The researcher examined the relationship between a participant's ratings and total years of experience and current enrollment of the participant's school. There was no statistical evidence to support the hypothesis that the principal's belief in the preparation program was significantly correlated at the .05 level with the principal's perceived level of preparedness (Spearman's *rho* = -.079, *p* = .668) or their total years of experience as a middle school principal (Spearman's *rho* = -.043, *p* = .813); however, there was a positive correlation with enrollment (Spearman's *rho* = .404, *p* = .022).

Table 19. *To What Extent Do Middle School Principals Believe That the School District Should Design a Program Specifically to Develop Middle School Principals?*

| Item | Agree (1) | | Somewhat agree (2) | | Somewhat disagree (3) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | *%* | *n* | *%* | *n* | *%* |
| Chestnut Public School District should design a middle school preparation program that is specifically designed to prepare middle school principals. | 19 | 59.4 | 11 | 34.4 | 2 | 6.3 |

**Conclusion**

In an era of high-stakes accountability, middle school principals continue to face many challenges. The effectiveness of principal leadership has a direct correlation to student achievement (Mitgang, 2012). National and state middle school student achievement data indicate a need for the development of a preparation program designed specifically to train middle school principals. This research enhanced a limited body of research on the perception of middle school principals regarding their preparation programs.

**Research Question #1**.  Principals indicated their perceptions of the skills, behaviors, and attitudes needed to be an effective middle school principal.  Principals perceived that all of the skills, behaviors, and attitudes were *very important or important* for an effective middle school principal.  There was a variance in the level of perceived importance for each descriptor.  More than 90% of the principals perceived that the following skills, behaviors, and attitudes were important to be an effective middle school principal:

- Create organizational structures that support collaboration between special education teachers to meet the needs of students.

- Ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to teach young adolescent learners.

- Provide an environment that is safe, inviting, inclusive, and addresses the developmental needs of the young adolescent student

- Ensure that students are provided with a challenging curriculum that is developmentally responsive to young students.

**Research Question #2**.  The study produced findings indicating that 37% of the middle school principals perceived that their individual preparation program provided them with the skills needed to be an effective principal.

Participants were asked to provide their perception of the level of preparedness in relation to the specific skills, behaviors, and attitudes.  Although most participants indicated that their preparation program prepared them for their current role, *very prepared* was not the most frequently endorsed response.  The following skills, behaviors, and attitudes received the highest perceived level of preparedness:

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- Provide an environment that is safe inviting, inclusive, and addresses the developmental needs of the young adolescent.

- Promote the development of relationships between teachers, parents, and staff and young adolescent students.

- Develop organizational structures that ensure that young adolescent children feel cared for and valued.

- Ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to teach young adolescent learners.

Evidence indicated that principals perceived some skills, behaviors, and attitudes as not being fully addressed in their preparation programs. Participants perceived that they were least prepared with regard to the following:

- Create organizational structures that support collaboration between special education teachers to meet the needs of students.

- Model and encourage teachers to modify their instruction, time, and student grouping to meet the needs of the adolescent students.

- Ensure that teachers implement lessons that address the developmental needs, readiness, interest, and learning profiles.

In contrast, there was an interesting correlation between the perceived importance and level of preparedness. Principals perceived that they were least prepared for three of the top four rated skills, behaviors, and attitudes of effective middle school principals: For example, "Ensure that students are provided with a challenging curriculum that is developmentally responsive to young adolescent students" ranked fourth in importance but twelfth in the level of preparedness.

**Research Question #3**.  The researcher asked participants to respond to questions related to the importance of principal preparation programs with regard to principal retention.  More than 50% of the principals stated that their level of preparation had an impact on their decision to stay in their current role.

**Research Question #4**.  The researcher addressed the perception of principals regarding the most essential component of a preparation program.  Principals (93.1%) perceived that coaching and mentoring support was the most essential component of a principal preparation program.  Internships ranked second as an essential component of a preparation program.

**Research Question #5**.  The researcher asked principals if Chestnut Public School District should develop a middle school principal preparation program.  More than half of the principals agreed that the district should develop a preparation program specifically designed to train middle school principals.

**Implications for Chestnut Public School District**

The study conducted by this researcher was developed from a problem of practice for Chestnut Public School District and analyzed through triangulation of data (middle school assessment scores, principal retention rate, and district preparation programs). The research could be used by local school districts, higher education, and government agencies to develop a middle school principal preparation programs and modify existing principal preparation policies.

**Implication #1**.  To cultivate and develop effective middle school principals, Chestnut Public School District could use the data from the research to enhance the district's current preferred university partner, resident principal, and principal pipeline

programs.  Participants could be asked to select a preferred level of preparation

(elementary, middle, or high).  Participants that elect to participate in the middle school

principal pipeline program, preferred partner, or resident principal programs could be

provided with training modules that fully address the skills, behaviors, and attitudes that

research participants perceived to be important for an effective middle school principal.

The university-preferred partner programs could develop graduate level courses or an

Administrator I certification program with a concentration in middle school leadership to

address the skills, attitudes, and behaviors needed to be an effective middle school

principal.  In addition, all of the aforementioned programs could utilize a context that

optimizes the learning experiences through the perceived preferred model of preparation

(coaching, mentoring, and internships).

     ***Brief rationale***.  At the time of this research, Chestnut Public School District did

not have a principal preparation program specifically designed to train middle school

principals.  Data from this research could be used to implement a specialized middle

school principal preparation program.  The participants indicated their perceptions of the

level of preparation they received from their programs.  The data highlight the areas that

should be fully addressed by current preparation programs.  The data from the research

also provide the school district with a framework for the type of effective components of

a preparation program that are needed to ensure that the district develops effective middle

school principals.  An earlier study of principal preparation programs noted that the

strong connection between coursework and internship experience provided participants

with the context needed to actualize effective leadership skills (Darling-Hammond,

LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007).  The district would need to ensure that aspiring

principals are provided with opportunities for coaching, mentoring, and internships as part of their preparation program.

Participants rated their perception of the perceived skills, behaviors, and attitudes needed to become an effective principal. The effectiveness of a principal preparation program has a direct correlation on the effectiveness of principal leadership (Grigsby & Vesey, 2011). During the previous 4 years, 50% of the principals hired by the district had been prepared through one of the district's preferred preparation programs (D. Anthony, personal communication, October 2, 2015). CPSD could use the ratings as a tool to assist with the development of training modules for the preferred principal preparation programs for aspiring middle school principals. A greater emphasis should be placed on the skills, behaviors, and attitudes that received a rating of *very important*.

Most recently, Chestnut Public School District had acquired six new middle school principals for the 2015-2016 school year (S. Holiday, personal communication, September 9, 2015). There were 44 middle school principals in the district. The retention of middle school principals continued to be an issue for the district. More than half (53.1%) of the participants in the research stated that their level of preparation had an influence on whether or not they would stay in their current role. An anticipated outcome would be that the district could increase the middle school principal retention rate by properly preparing principals.

**Implication #2**. The development and implementation of differentiated professional learning experiences provided by Chestnut Public School District could enhance the district's Professional Development Learning Plan modules for current middle school principals and the New Principal Academy. Analysis of the research data

could provide principals with prescriptive training and support to address the skills, behaviors, and attitudes of effective middle school principals.

*Brief rationale*.  At the time of the research study, the district was providing bimonthly professional development for current middle school principals.  In addition, 1st-year principals participated in New Principal Academy monthly meetings.  The New Principal Academy addressed the day-to-day operational skills needed for 1st-year principals.  In addition, the modules provided support regarding the current systemic school improvement and instructional initiatives (D. Anthony, personal communication, July 16, 2015).  The New Principal Academy did not provide professional development that specifically addressed the skills and competencies needed to become an effective middle school principal (D. Anthony, personal communication, November 15, 2015). Furthermore, participants in this research stated that their level of preparation was one of the determining factors for whether or not they would stay in their current role.  In general, data from this research indicated that those principals who were most prepared tended to agree that they would stay in their role, whereas those principals who were least prepared tended to disagree that they would stay in their role.  The development of a program specifically designed to prepare participants with regard to the skills, behaviors, and attitudes of effective middle school principals could increase the retention rate.

The district could use the data to calibrate the bimonthly modules offered to middle school principals as outlined in the Professional Development Learning Plan. Data from the research indicate that 72% of the principals in the district perceived that all of the skills, behaviors, and attitudes listed on the survey were important for an effective middle school principal.  The district could prioritize the modules based on the perceived

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level of importance and preparedness.  Analysis of the data to assist with module

development would ensure that the district was able to address the gaps in middle school

principals' professional practice.

**Implication #3**.  Chestnut Public School District could use the data from this

research to revise the current leadership standards to specifically address the skills,

attitudes, and behaviors of effective middle school principals.  The development of

leadership standards aligned to the competencies outlined by the data would ensure that

CPSD's professional development and evaluation reflect the skills needed to be an

effective middle school principal.

*Brief rationale*.  Chestnut Public School District had developed leadership

standards that were used to guide principal evaluation and professional development

(Chestnut Public School District Principal Appraisal System, 2015).  The leadership

standards provided a global perspective of what principals should know and be able to do

in their role as instructional leaders.  The standards did not specifically address the skills,

behaviors, and attitudes of an effective middle school principal.

Table 20. *Chestnut Public School District Leadership Standards*

| |
|---|
| Standard I: The CPSD Principal sets high expectations for achievement based upon individualized tailoring of instruction, rigorous data analysis and evaluation of the effective instructional practices |
| Standard II: The CPSD Principal sets standards for ensuring school-wide instructional and achievement goals are met based upon implementation of effective pedagogical practices, data analysis and monitoring of research-based instructional practices |
| Standard III: The CPSD Principal monitors effective instructional practices through observation and evaluation |
| Standard IV: The CPSD Principal builds a shared vision, fosters shared goals, and communicates high performance expectations |
| Standard V: The CPSD Principal demonstrates a commitment to excellence, equity, and innovation |
| Standard VI: The CPSD Principal demonstrates human resource and managerial leadership |
| Standard VII: The CPSD Principal demonstrates strong external leadership |
| Standard VIII: The CPSD Principal demonstrates knowledge of the use of Technology and Data (Chestnut Public School District Administrator Evaluation, 2015) |

**Recommendations for Future Research**

  **Recommendation #1**.  Conduct research with middle school principals with fewer than 5 years in their current role.

  *Brief rationale*.  More than half of the principals surveyed had more than 3 years of experience as a middle school principal.  The perceptions of the level of preparedness may have been skewed for principals with more experience in the role.  District resources, professional development, and central office support may have increased their capacity to be effective middle school principals.  Principals with less tenure in the role might have been able to provide a more accurate assessment of their preparation program.

  **Recommendation #2**.  Utilize qualitative data to provide deeper understanding regarding perceptions of the effective components of a middle school principal preparation program.

  *Brief rationale*.  The use of qualitative data could provide a deeper understanding of perceived modules that are needed regarding each effective component to provide aspiring middle school principals with the skills and behaviors necessary to become effective middle school principals.

  **Recommendation #3**.  Administer the research instrument to a cohort of new middle school principals during their 1st year in the principalship and then give the same instrument 3 years later.

  *Brief rationale*.  Administering the research instrument to middle school principals immediately upon completion of their 3rd year as a middle school principal could yield data to determine the essential components of a preparation program and level of preparedness.  Principals would be provided with the time needed to implement

the learned skills, behaviors, and attitudes into their practice and to reflect on the

effectiveness of their preparation program.

Q1 Please read the consent form and respond to the question

| Project Title | PERCEPTIONS OF THE PREPARATION OF EFFECTIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS |
|---|---|
| **Purpose of the Study** | This study attempts to identify perceptions of middle school principals regarding their leadership practices and components of their preparation program and is a part of my doctoral dissertation under the direction of Dr. Margaret McLaughlin and Dr. John Norris. |
| **Procedures** | I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a middle school principal.  The purpose of this research project is to address the perceptions of middle school principals in Chestnut Public School District regarding effective middle school leadership practices and the components of their principal preparation program that prepared them for their current role.  Your participation will include a 15-minute Web-based questionnaire.  The questionnaire will ask you to provide<br>• Your perception of the skills and behaviors needed to be an effective middle school principals<br>• Your perception of whether or not your preparation program provided you with the skills and behaviors needed to be an effective middle school principal<br>• Demographic information<br>• Your perception of whether the district should create a middle school preparation program<br>• Effective components of your preparation program |
| **Potential Risks and Discomforts** | There are minimal known risks to participants.  Every effort will be taken to prevent breach of confidentiality.  Your identity will remain anonymous, and your responses will be coded. |
| **Potential Benefits** | There are no direct benefits from participating in this research; however, possible benefits include providing the school district with a framework for developing a middle school principal preparation program.  We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of how to train effective middle school principals. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Confidentiality** | Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized through the use of Qualtrics, online software program. The program has a log-on feature and a firewall to prevent any type of data breach. |
| **Incentive** | You could receive a $100 gift card if you complete the questionnaire within two weeks and your name is randomly selected to receive compensation. You will be responsible for any taxes assessed on the compensation. |
| **Right to Withdraw** | Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized. *If you decide to stop taking part in the study, please close your Internet browser.* |
| **Participant Rights** | *If you have question, concerns, or complaints or need to report an injury related to the research please contact the investigator:* Melissa McGuire, at 301-452-7701 or melissa.woodard@yahoo.com<br><br>Questions about your Rights as Research Participants<br>If you have questions that you don't feel comfortable asking the researcher, you may contact Dr. John Norris (Mentoring Professor), 301-405-2337, 3119 Benjamin Building, jnorris@umd.edu |
| **Statement of Consent** | *I have read, understood, and printed a copy of, the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.* **As a part of the questionnaire, you will be asked to provide an electronic signature.** |
| | ☐ Yes ☐ No |

○ I am willing to participate in the research. I have read and I understand the mailed consent form. I understand that I may withdraw at any time. Please provide an electronic signature. (1) _____

○ I am not willing to participate in the research. (2)

If I am not willing to participate... Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Q2 Please provide the following background information:

Q3 Gender:
❍ Male (1)
❍ Female (2)
❍

Q4 Total years experience in education in any role
❍ 1-3 years (1)
❍ 4-6 years (2)
❍ 7 or more years (3)

Q5 Total years of experience you have as a middle school principal in Chestnut Public Schools:
❍ 1-3 years (1)
❍ 4-7 years (2)
❍ 7 or more years (3)

Q6 Total years of experience you have as a middle school principal:
❍ 1-3 years (1)
❍ 4-6 years (2)
❍ 7 or more years (3)

Q7 Total number years of experience in a middle school in any role  (teacher, counselor, assistant principal, etc.) before your current role:
❍ 0 (1)
❍ 1-3 years (2)
❍ 4-6 years (3)
❍ 7 or more years (4)

Q8 The current enrollment in your middle school (middle school students):
❍ 100-400 students (1)
❍ 401-1000 students (2)
❍ 1001-1500 students (3)
❍ Over 1500 students (4)

Q9 Highest academic degree earned:
❍ Master's (1)
❍ Advance Graduate Certificate (2)
❍ Doctorate (EdD or PhD) (3)

Q10 Type of administrative preparation program:
- ○ University-based (i.e., Bowie State University, McDaniel College, etc.) (1)
- ○ Aspiring Leaders for Student Success Program (2)
- ○ Assistant Principal Induction Program (3)
- ○ New Leaders for New Schools (4)
- ○ Leadership Education for Aspiring Principals Program (5)
- ○ Other, please list (6) _____

Q11 Based on your role as a middle school principal, please rate the importance and your level of preparedness.

| | The behavior/skill is.. | | | | In the following behavior/skill I consider myself to be... | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very Important (1) | Important (2) | Moderately important (3) | Not Important (4) | Very Prepared (1) | Prepared (2) | Somewhat Prepared (3) | Not Prepared (4) |
| Understand the specific intellectual, physical, social, and psychological characteristics of the young adolescent student. (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q12 Based on your role as a middle school principal, please rate the importance and your level of preparedness.

| | The behavior/skill is.. | | | | In the following behavior/skill I consider myself to be... | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very Important (1) | Important (2) | Moderately Important (3) | Not Important (4) | Very Prepared (1) | Prepared (2) | Somewhat Prepared (3) | Not Prepared (4) |
| Promote the development of relationships between teachers, parents, and staff, and young adolescent students. (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q13 Based on your role as a middle school principal, please rate the importance and your level of preparedness.

| | The behavior/skill is.. | | | | In the following behavior/skill I consider myself to be... | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very Important (1) | Important (2) | Moderately Important (3) | Not Important (4) | Very Prepared (1) | Prepared (2) | Somewhat Prepared (3) | Not Prepared (4) |
| Develop organizational structures that ensure that young adolescent children feel cared for and valued. (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q14 Based on your role as a middle school principal, please rate the importance and your level of preparedness.

| | The behavior/skill is.. | | | | In the following behavior/skill I consider myself to be... | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very Important (1) | Important (2) | Moderately Important (3) | Not Important (4) | Very Prepared (1) | Prepared (2) | Somewhat Prepared (3) | Not Prepared (4) |
| Understand the relationship between the affective and cognitive needs of young adolescents students. (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q15 Based on your role as a middle school principal, please rate the importance and your level of preparedness.

| | The behavior/skill is.. | | | | In the following behavior/skill I consider myself to be... | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very Important (1) | Important (2) | Moderately Important (3) | Not Important (4) | Very Prepared (1) | Prepared (2) | Somewhat Prepared (3) | Not Prepared (4) |
| Create small learning communities (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q16 Based on your role as a middle school principal, please rate the importance and your level of preparedness.

| | The behavior/skill are.. | | | | In the following behavior/skill I consider myself to be... | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very Important (1) | Important (2) | Moderately Important (3) | Not Important (4) | Very Prepared (1) | Prepared (2) | Somewhat Prepared (3) | Not Prepared (4) |
| Provide young adolescent students with opportunities and topics in order to develop their individual self-image and demonstrate their competence. (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q17 Based on your role as a middle school principal, please rate the importance and your level of preparedness.

| | The behavior/skill is.. | | | | In the following behavior/skill I consider myself to be... | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very Important (1) | Important (2) | Moderately Important (3) | Not Important (4) | Very Prepared (1) | Prepared (2) | Somewhat Prepared (3) | Not Prepared (4) |
| Create organizational structures that support collaboration between special education teachers in order to meet the needs of young adolescent students. (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q18 Based on your role as a middle school principal, please rate the importance and your level of preparedness.

| | The behavior/skill is.. | | | | In the following behavior/skill I consider myself to be... | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very Important (1) | Important (2) | Moderately Important (3) | Not Important (4) | Very Prepared (1) | Prepared (2) | Somewhat Prepared (3) | Not Prepared (4) |
| Ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to teach young adolescent learners. (1) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |

Q19 Based on your role as a middle school principal, please rate the importance and your level of preparedness.

| | The behavior/skill is.. | | | | In the following behavior/skill I consider myself to be... | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very Important (1) | Important (2) | Moderately Important (3) | Not Important (4) | Very Prepared (1) | Prepared (2) | Somewhat Prepared (3) | Not Prepared (4) |
| Ensure that teachers implement lessons that address the developmental needs, readiness, interest, and learning profiles of young adolescent students. (1) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |

Q20 Based on your role as a middle school principal, please rate the importance and your level of preparedness.

| | The behavior/skill is.. | | | | In the following behavior/skill I consider myself to be... | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very Important (1) | Important (2) | Moderately Important (3) | Not Important (4) | Very Prepared (1) | Prepared (2) | Somewhat Prepared (3) | Not Prepared (4) |
| Provide resources and professional development to ensure that teachers are trained to develop strategies to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of young adolescent students. (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q21 Based on your role as a middle school principal, please rate the importance and your level of preparedness.

| | The behavior/skill is.. | | | | In the following behavior/skill I consider myself to be... | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very Important (1) | Important (2) | Moderately Important (3) | Not Important (4) | Very Prepared (1) | Prepared (2) | Somewhat Prepared (3) | Not Prepared (4) |
| Ensure that students are provided with a challenging curriculum that is developmentally responsive to young adolescent students and addresses the individual progress of students. (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q22 Based on your role as a middle school principaI, please rate the importance and your level of preparedness.

| | The behavior/skill is.. | | | | In the following behavior/skill I consider myself to be... | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very Important (1) | Important (2) | Moderately Important (3) | Not Important (4) | Very Prepared (1) | Prepared (2) | Somewhat Prepared (3) | Not Prepared (4) |
| Provide an environment that is safe, inviting, inclusive, and addresses the developmental needs of the young adolescent student. (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q23 Based on your role as a middle school principal, please rate the importance and your level of preparedness.

| | The behavior/skill is.. | | | | In the following behavior/skill I consider myself to be... | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very Important (1) | Important (2) | Moderately Important (3) | Not Important (4) | Very Prepared (1) | Prepared (2) | Somewhat Prepared (3) | Not Prepared (4) |
| Implements a comprehensive professional school counseling program and wrap around services to meet the needs of young adolescent students. (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q24 Based on your role as a middle school principal, please rate the importance and your level of preparedness.

|  | The behavior/skill is.. | | | | In the following behavior/skill I consider myself to be... | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Very Important (1) | Important (2) | Moderately Important (3) | Not Important (4) | Very Prepared (1) | Prepared (2) | Somewhat Prepared (3) | Not Prepared (4) |
| Provide multiple opportunities for formal and informal parental engagement (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q25 Based on your role as a middle school principal, please rate the importance and your level of preparedness.

|  | The behavior/skill is.. | | | | In the following behavior/skill I consider myself to be... | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Very Important (1) | Important (2) | Moderately Important (3) | Not Important (4) | Very Prepared (1) | Prepared (2) | Somewhat Prepared (3) | Not Prepared (4) |
| Make decisions that are based on the developmental needs of young adolescent students and effective middle school level practices. (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q26 Based on your role as a middle school principal, please rate the importance and your level of preparedness.

| | The behavior/skill are.. | | | | In the following behavior/skill I consider myself to be... | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very Important (1) | Important (2) | Moderately Important (3) | Not Important (4) | Very Prepared (1) | Prepared (2) | Somewhat Prepared (3) | Not Prepared (4) |
| Develop and implement policies and procedures that address the needs of the young adolescent student. (1) | O | O | O | O | O | O | O | O |

Q27 Based on your role as a middle school principal, please rate the importance and your level of preparedness.

| | The behavior/skill are.. | | | | In the following behavior/skill I consider myself to be... | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very Important (1) | Important (2) | Moderately Important (3) | Not Important (4) | Very Prepared (1) | Prepared (2) | Somewhat Prepared (3) | Not Prepared (4) |
| Model and encourage teachers to modify their instruction, time, and student grouping to meet the needs of the adolescent child. (1) | O | O | O | O | O | O | O | O |

Q28 Please list any other skills/behaviors that you believe are important in your role as a middle school principal:

1.
2.
3
4.

Q29 Please rate the following:

| | Agree (1) | Somewhat Agree (2) | Somewhat Disagree (3) | Disagree (4) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| My preparation program provided me with the skills and competencies needed to become an effective middle school principal. (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q30 Please rate the following:

| | Agree (1) | Somewhat Agree (2) | Somewhat Disagree (3) | Disagree (4) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| How prepared I feel will have an influence on whether or not I will stay in my role as a middle school principal. (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q31 Please rate the following:

| | Agree (1) | Somewhat Agree (2) | Somewhat Disagree (3) | Disagree (4) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chestnut Public School District should design a middle school preparation program that is specifically designed to prepare middle school principals. (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q32 What do you consider to be the most essential components of a preparation program that will develop effective middle school principals?

| | Essential (1) | Somewhat Essential (2) | Somewhat Not Essential (3) | Not Essential (4) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Coaching and mentoring support (1) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Internships (2) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Problem-based projects (3) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Theory-based learning (4) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Revised from Middle Level Leadership Questionnaire (Anfara et al., 2006)

**Appendix B (Principal Supervisor Questionnaire E-mail)**

Dear Principal Supervisor:

My name is Melissa McGuire, and I am an Instructional Director for Chestnut Public School District. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park. For my dissertation, I have chosen to study middle school principals' perceptions of how well they were prepared for their role as a middle school administrator and their preferences regarding future preparation programs. I am conducting my research under the direction of Dr. John Norris and Dr. Margaret McLaughlin. I feel that your role as a supervisor of middle school principals will provide me with the level of expertise needed to provide critical and valuable feedback.

I have developed a questionnaire for my research. As a part of my research I would like for you to review the questionnaire before it is administered to the participants. I am respectfully requesting that you review the questions and provide your feedback. I have attached a rubric for your feedback. I would like to know if you are willing to meet with me after an Instructional Directors' meeting to review the questionnaire and provide your feedback. The meeting will last for approximately 30 minutes.

Please RSVP by email to confirm your willingness to review the questionnaire and provide feedback (melissa.woodard@yahoo.com). Please feel free to contact me via email or by phone, 301-452-7701, if you need additional clarification. Thank you in advance for your assistance and support.

Please click on the link below to review the questionnaire.
https://umdsurvey.umd.edu/jfe/preview/SV_37piriu57dlV3xj

**Appendix C (Supervisor Reminder E-mail)**


Dear Middle School Principal Supervisor:

      I recently contacted you about a brief 15-minute questionnaire for my doctoral research.  Your feedback is needed to ensure the validity of the research questions.  The research could assist our district with the development of a middle school preparation program.  I requested your participation through the consideration of the short questionnaire and participation in a short group meeting to provide feedback.

      I would like to remind you that the meeting will last for approximately 30 minutes after the next Instructional Directors' meeting to review the questionnaire and provide your feedback.

      Please feel free to contact me if you need additional clarification, 301-452-7701. Thank you in advance for your help and timely response to this request.

# Appendix D (Supervisor Rubric)

Using the rubric below, please rate the validity of the questionnaire.

| Category | Rating | | | | Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** | |
| **Purpose** | The purpose of each section is stated clearly. | The purpose of each section is stated somewhat clearly. | The purpose of each section is stated vaguely. | The purpose of each section is not stated. | |
| **Clarity of questions** | Questions are extremely clear and a person would not have to ask for clarification. | Questions are very clear and a person might have to ask for clarification. | Questions are somewhat clear and a person would have to ask for clarification. | Questions are confusing and ambiguous. | |
| **Choice of responses** | Every person would be able to choose from the responses. | Most people would be able to choose from the responses. | Few people would be able to choose from the responses. | No one would be able to choose from the responses. | |
| **Layout** | The selection of graphics, line styles, and arrangement options enhances the layout and meaning of the questionnaire. | The selection of graphics, line styles, and arrangement options mostly enhances the layout of the questionnaire. | The selection of graphics, line styles, and arrangement options sometimes enhances the layout of the questionnaire. | The selection of graphics, line styles, and arrangement options does not enhance the layout of the questionnaire. | |
| **Content** | All of the research questions are properly addressed. | Most of the research questions are properly addressed. | Some of the research questions are properly addressed. | One or fewer of the research questions are addressed. | |
| **Spelling/ Grammar** | All words are properly spelled. Grammar, punctuation, spacing, and word usage are appropriate. | Most words are properly spelled. Grammar, punctuation, spacing, and word usage are mostly appropriate. | Some words are properly spelled. Grammar, punctuation, spacing, and word usage have some errors. | There are many spelling errors. There are numerous grammar, punctuation, spacing, and word usage errors. | |
| **Utility** | The questionnaire is very easy to follow. | The questionnaire is easy to follow. | The questionnaire is somewhat easy to follow. | The questionnaire is not easy to follow. | |
| **Total Score** | | | | | |

Please provide specific feedback regarding individual questions:

**Appendix E (E-mail to Participants - 3<sup>rd</sup> Party)**

**FIRST E-MAIL**

-------------------------------------------------------------------------
This e-mail has been sent on behalf of Mrs. Melissa McGuire, a doctoral candidate with the University of Maryland at College Park, to protect your privacy and to avoid any conflict of interest. Mrs. McGuire is not aware of the number or the names of the principals included in this solicitation.
-------------------------------------------------------------------------


My name is Melissa McGuire, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park under the direction of Dr. John Norris and Dr. Margaret McLaughlin. For my dissertation, I have chosen to study middle school administrators' perceptions of how well they were prepared for their role as middle school administrators as well as their opinions regarding principal preparation programs.

As a current middle school principal, your perceptions and opinions are critical to this study. Therefore, I am respectfully requesting that you complete a short, 15-minute, online survey by clicking on the link provided below. The questionnaire is self-explanatory. Participants that complete the questionnaire within two weeks will be placed in a drawing for one of three $100 Visa gift cards. I will notify all those eligible for the drawing as well as the winner within three weeks after the survey is completed.

Information from your questionnaire will be kept confidential. Benefits to public schools include identifying important topics and features of future principal preparation programs.

Please feel free to contact me or Dr. John Norris if you need additional clarification. I can be reached at 301-452-7701. Dr. John Norris may be contacted at jnorris@umd.edu. Thank you in advance for your help and timely response to this questionnaire.


Melissa McGuire

Click on this link to go to the survey
https://umdsurvey.umd.edu/jfe/preview/SV_37piriu57dlV3xj

**Appendix F (Week 1 Reminder E-mail to Participants - 3<sup>rd</sup> Party)**

## WEEK 1 REMINDER E-MAIL

-------------------------------------------------------------------------
This e-mail has been sent on behalf of Mrs. Melissa McGuire, a doctoral candidate with the University of Maryland at College Park, to protect your privacy and to avoid any conflict of interest. Mrs. McGuire is not aware of the number or the names of the principals included in this solicitation.
-------------------------------------------------------------------------


My name is Melissa McGuire, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park. I recently contacted you about completing a brief 15-minute questionnaire for my doctoral research. The research could assist public school districts with the development of a middle school principal preparation program.

Your perceptions on middle level leadership preparation programs are a valuable part of this research. I am respectfully requesting that you take part in this study by completing the online questionnaire. The questionnaire is self-explanatory. You have one week left to complete the questionnaire if you would like for your name to be entered in a drawing for one of three $100 Visa gift cards. Information from your questionnaire will be kept confidential.

**The last day to complete the survey is**

Please feel free to contact me if you need additional clarification, 301-452-7701. Thank you in advance for your help and timely response to this questionnaire.

Please click on the link below for the questionnaire.
https://umdsurvey.umd.edu/jfe/preview/SV_37piriu57dlV3xj

**Appendix G (Week 2 Principal E-mail Reminder - 3<sup>rd</sup> Party)**

**WEEK 2 REMINDER E-MAIL**

-----------------------------------------------------------------------
This e-mail has been sent on behalf of Mrs. Melissa McGuire, a doctoral candidate with the University of Maryland at College Park, to protect your privacy and to avoid any conflict of interest.  Mrs. McGuire is not aware of the number or the names of the principals included in this solicitation.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------

My name is Melissa McGuire, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park.  I recently contacted you about completing a brief 15-minute questionnaire for my doctoral research.  The research could assist public school districts with the development of a middle school principal preparation program.

Your perceptions on middle level leadership preparation programs are a valuable part of this research.  I am respectfully requesting that you take part in this study by completing the online questionnaire.  The questionnaire is self-explanatory. Information from your questionnaire will be kept confidential.

**The last day to complete the survey is**

Please feel free to contact me if you need additional clarification, 301-452-7701.  Thank you in advance for your help and timely response to this questionnaire.

Please click on the link below for the questionnaire.
https://umdsurvey.umd.edu/jfe/preview/SV_37piriu57dlV3xj

**WEEK 3 REMINDER E-MAIL**

--------------------------------------------------------------------------

This e-mail has been sent on behalf of Mrs. Melissa McGuire, a doctoral candidate with the University of Maryland at College Park, to protect your privacy and to avoid any conflict of interest. Mrs. McGuire is not aware of the number or the names of the principals included in this solicitation.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------

My name is Melissa McGuire, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park. I recently contacted you about completing a brief 15-minute questionnaire for my doctoral research. The research could assist public school districts with the development of a middle school principal preparation program.

Your perceptions on middle level leadership preparation programs are a valuable part of this research. I am respectfully requesting that you take part in this study by completing the online questionnaire. The questionnaire is self-explanatory. Information from your questionnaire will be kept confidential.

> **The last day to complete the survey is**

Please feel free to contact me if you need additional clarification, 301-452-7701. Thank you in advance for your help and timely response to this questionnaire.

Please click on the link below for the questionnaire.
https://umdsurvey.umd.edu/jfe/preview/SV_37piriu57dlV3xj

# Appendix I (Participant Consent Form)

| Project Title | PERCEPTIONS OF THE PREPARATION OF EFFECTIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS |
|---|---|
| Purpose of the Study | This study attempts to identify perceptions of middle school principals regarding their leadership practices and components of their preparation program and is a part of my doctoral dissertation under the direction of Dr. Margaret McLaughlin and Dr. John Norris. |
| Procedures | I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a middle school principal. The purpose of this research project is to address the perceptions of middle school principals in Prince George's County Public Schools regarding effective middle school leadership practices and the components of their principal preparation program that prepared them for their current role. Your participation will include a 15-minute Web-based questionnaire. The questionnaire will ask you to provide<br>• Your perception of the skill and behaviors needed to be an effective middle school principals<br>• Your perception of whether or not your preparation program provided you with the skills and behaviors needed to be an effective middle school principal<br>• Demographic information<br>• Your perception of whether the district should create a middle school preparation program<br>• Effective components of your preparation program |
| Potential Risks and Discomforts | There are minimal known risks to participants. Every effort will be taken to prevent breach of confidentiality. Your identity will remain anonymous, and your responses will be coded. |
| Potential Benefits | There are no direct benefits from participating in this research. However, possible benefits include providing the school district with a framework for developing a middle school principal preparation program. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of how to train effective middle school principals. |
| Confidentiality | Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized through the use of Qualtrics, online software program. The program has a log-on feature and a firewall to prevent any type of data breach. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Incentive** | You could receive a $100 gift card if you complete the questionnaire within two weeks and your name is randomly selected to receive compensation.  You will be responsible for any taxes assessed on the compensation. |
| **Right to Withdraw** | Your participation in this research is completely voluntary.  You may choose not to take part at all.  If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time.  If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized. *If you decide to stop taking part in the study, please close your Internet browser.* |
| **Participant Rights** | *If you have question, concerns, or complaints or need to report an injury related to the research please contact the investigator:* Melissa McGuire, at 301-452-7701 or melissa.woodard@yahoo.com<br><br>Questions about your Rights as Research Participants<br>If you have questions that you don't feel comfortable asking the researcher, you may contact Dr. John Norris (Mentoring Professor), 301-405-2337, 3119 Benjamin Building, jnorris@umd.edu |
| **Statement of Consent** | *I have read, understood, and printed a copy of the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.* ***As a part of the questionnaire, you will be asked to provide an electronic signature.*** |
| | ☐ Yes      ☐ No |

## Appendix J (Consent Form - 3rd Party)

| Project Title | PERCEPTIONS OF THE PREPARATION OF EFFECTIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS |
|---|---|
| Purpose of the Study | This study attempts to identify perceptions of middle school principals regarding their leadership practices and components of their preparation program and is a part of the doctoral dissertation for Melissa McGuire, under the direction of Dr. Margaret McLaughlin and Dr. John Norris. |
| Procedures | I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a middle school principal.  The purpose of this research project is to address the perceptions of middle school principals in Prince George's County Public Schools regarding effective middle school leadership practices and the components of their principal preparation program that prepared them for their current role.  Your participation will include a 15-minute Web-based questionnaire.  The questionnaire will ask you to provide<br>• Your perception of the skill and behaviors needed to be an effective middle school principals<br>• Your perception of whether or not your preparation program provided you with the skills and behaviors needed to be an effective middle school principal<br>• Demographic information<br>• Your perception of whether the district should create a middle school preparation program<br>• Effective components of your preparation program<br>• |
| Potential Risks and Discomforts | There are minimal known risks to participants.  Every effort will be taken to prevent breach of confidentiality.  Only I will know your identity and your responses will be coded.  Each participant will have a unique log-on Qualtrics ID.  The researcher will be able to link your responses to your name. |
| Potential Benefits | There are no direct benefits from participating in this research; however, possible benefits include providing the school district with a framework for developing a middle school principal preparation program.  We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of how to train effective middle school principals. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Confidentiality** | Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized through the use of Qualtrics, online software program. The program has a log-on feature and a firewall to prevent any type of data breach. I am the only person that will have access to your survey responses. The researcher has established a separate survey link for your responses. Your name will be coded so your responses will remain anonymous. |
| **Incentive** | You could receive a $100 gift card if you complete the questionnaire within two weeks if your coded identity is randomly selected to receive compensation. If you are selected I will contact you to provide you with the incentive. You will be responsible for any taxes assessed on the compensation. |
| **Right to Withdraw and Questions** | Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized. *If you decide to stop taking part in the study, please close your internet browser.* |
| **Participant Rights** | *If you have question, concerns, or complaints or need to report an injury related to the research please contact the Mentoring Professor:* Dr. John Norris, 301-405-2337, 3119 Benjamin Building, jnorris@umd.edu<br><br>Questions about your Rights as Research Participants<br>If you have questions that you don't feel comfortable asking the research, you may contact Dr. John Norris (Mentoring Professor), 301-405-2337, 3119 Benjamin Building, jnorris@umd.edu |
| **Statement of Consent** | *I have read, understood, and printed a copy of, the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.* **As a part of the questionnaire, you will be asked to provide an electronic signature.** |
| | ☐ Yes ☐ No |

# Appendix K (Pilot Study Consent Form)

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| **Project Title** | PERCEPTIONS OF THE PREPARATION OF EFFECTIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS |
| **Purpose of the Study** | This study attempts to identify perceptions of middle school principals regarding their leadership practices and components of their preparation program and is a part of my doctoral dissertation under the direction of Dr. Margaret McLaughlin. |
| **Procedures** | I am inviting you to participate in this research pilot project because you are a supervisor of middle school principals. You are being invited to take part in a pilot study to validate the questions on a questionnaire that will be given to middle school principals across the school district.  The purpose of this research project is to address the perceptions of middle school principals in Prince George's County Public Schools regarding effective middle school leadership practices and the components of their principal preparation program that prepared them for their current role.  Your participation will include reviewing a 15-minute Web-based questionnaire.  The questionnaire will ask middle school principals to provide:<br>• Their perception of the skill and behaviors needed to be an effective middle school principals<br>• Their perceptions of whether or not their preparation program provided them with the skills and behaviors needed to be an effective middle school principal<br>• Demographic information<br>• Their perception of whether the district should create a middle school preparation program<br>• Effective components of their preparation program<br><br>You will be provided with a rubric to assist you with your evaluation of the questionnaire.  Your feedback should be written on the rubric. |
| **Potential Risks and Discomforts** | There are minimal known risks to participants.  Every effort will be taken to prevent breach of confidentiality. |
| **Potential Benefits** | There are no direct benefits from participating in this pilot study; however, possible benefits include providing the school district with a framework for developing a middle school principal preparation program.  We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of how to train effective middle school principals. |

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| **Incentive** | There's no incentive for participating in the pilot study. |
| **Confidentiality** | Your feedback will be strictly confidential. Your name will not be placed on the feedback sheet. Only the researcher will have access to your feedback. The feedback sheets will be shredded after the researcher has modified the questionnaire. |
| **Right to Withdraw and Questions** | Your evaluation of the pilot questionnaire is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this pilot study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized. *If you decide to stop taking part in the study, please close your internet browser.* |
| **Participant Rights** | *If you have question, concerns, or complaints or need to report an injury related to the research please contact the investigator:* Melissa McGuire, at 301-452-7701 or melissa.woodard@yahoo.com<br><br>Questions about your Rights as Research Participants<br>If you have questions that you don't feel comfortable asking the research, you may contact Dr. John Norris (Mentoring Professor), 301-405-2337, 3119 Benjamin Building, jnorris@umd.edu |
| **Statement of Consent** | *I have read, understood, and printed a copy of, the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this pilot study.* **As a part of the questionnaire, you will be asked to provide an electronic signature.** |
| | ☐ Yes    ☐ No |

**Appendix L (Purpose and Research Questions)**

**Purpose**

The primary purpose of the descriptive research is to examine middle school administrators' perceptions of their preparation program and the skills needed to be an effective middle school principal. Middle school principals in Chestnut Public School District will be selected to participate in the study. Quantitative data will be gathered via an online questionnaire. The research questions will be addressed through descriptive and inferential analysis of the questionnaire data. The study will add to a limited body of research on middle school principal preparation and the skills needed to become an effective middle school principal. This study will conclude with recommendations that could provide a framework for the development of a principal preparation program designed to train effective middle school principals.

**Research Questions:**

1. What skills, behaviors, and attitudes do middle school principals perceive to be important to be an effective middle school principal?

2. How do middle school principals perceive their level of preparedness in relation to the specific skills, behaviors, and attitudes?

3. To what degree do middle school principals believe that their level of preparation has influenced them to stay in their current role?

4. Which components of their preparation program do middle principals perceive to be the most valuable?

5. To what extent do middle school principals believe that the school district should design a program specifically to develop middle school principals?

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# Glossary

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| Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) | A measure by which schools and districts are held accountable for student academic progress, as outlined by the federal legislation, No Child Left Behind (Maryland State Report Card, 2012) |
| Adolescent | A young person between the ages of 10 and 15 that is developing into an adult (Association for Middle Level Education, 2012) |
| Alternative governance | Category into which schools in the State of Maryland that fail to make student achievement goals for 5 years are placed (Maryland State Report Card, 2012) |
| Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) | The unique student achievement targets in reading, math, and science for each student demographic subgroup in the State of Maryland (Maryland State Report Card, 2012) |
| Common Core State Standards | National learning standards that indicate what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade level |
| Elementary and Secondary School Act | Federal legislation that provides funding and student achievement requirements for school districts across the country (Association for Middle Level Education, 2012) |
| Maryland School Assessment | A state assessment that meets the federal requirement for No Child Left Behind to test reading, mathematics, and science (Maryland State Report Card, 2012) |
| Maryland State Report Card | Document on which the State of Maryland compiles annual student assessment data for each county, district, and school (Maryland State Report Card, 2012) |
| Middle school principal | An administrator of a school with the configuration of Grades 6-8 or 7-8 (Association for Middle Level Education, 2012) |
| National Assessment of Educational Progress | A national assessment of reading and mathematics that is given to 4th- and 8th-grade students. Assessments for mathematics began in 1990 and reading in 1992. Trended data are maintained to analyze the achievement gaps between subgroups (Vanneman et al., 2009). |
| No Child Left Behind | Federal legislation that is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary School Act. It provides federal funding for school districts that adhere to administering annual basic skills tests. Schools are required to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (Anfara et al., 2006). |

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| Principal pipeline | As defined in the article, "Principals in the Pipeline," "local systems ensuring that a large corps of school leaders is properly trained, hired and developed on the job" (Mendels, 2012, p. 48) |
| Priority schools | A designation given to the lowest performing school in CPDS that received additional support and funding under the 1003g Federal grant |
| Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) | An objective assessment of a student's reading comprehension level.  The computer-adaptive or paper-and-pencil assessment can be administered to students in Grades K-12 and is based on The Lexile Framework® for Reading.  The test format supports quick administration in an untimed, low-pressure environment (Knutson, 2006, p. 2). |
| Transformational leader | One of those leaders having the ability to bring about significant change, as defined by Daft: "Transformational leaders have the competence and character to lead change in the organization's vision, strategy, and culture as well as promote innovation in products and technologies" (Daft, 2014, p. 153). |

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